Supplemental Information

Using HELPS with Struggling Readers in Grades 5-8

The HELPS Program Teacher’s Manual thoroughly describes how to implement HELPS, and it provides all needed materials for implementing the program with students in grades 1-4. This supplement offers teachers the most relevant information needed to use HELPS with struggling readers in grades 5-8. (To be more succinct, this document will sometimes refer to students in grades 5-8 as “older students,” which is in contrast to students in grades 1-4). The HELPS Program website provides free downloads to the Student Graphs and Progress Tracking Forms needed to implement HELPS with older students. Teachers should read all sections within this document before using HELPS with older students. By doing so, teachers should better understand when it may and may not be appropriate to use HELPS with older students, as well as how to best implement HELPS with these students.

At the time of publishing the HELPS Program Teacher’s Manual, research with HELPS showed positive effects for struggling readers in first through fourth grades. It was recognized at that time that teachers could potentially benefit from using HELPS with struggling readers in later grades, but there was little evidence to support that hypothesis. Currently (i.e., as of February 2011), systematic research is still needed to examine the extent to which HELPS can benefit older students who struggle with reading. However, during the first year of hosting HELPS workshops throughout the country, it was clear that many teachers had been using (or wanting to use) HELPS with older students with reading difficulties, particularly students in grades 5-8. More importantly, many teachers suggested that older students receiving HELPS seemed to be improving their reading fluency.

For these reasons, supplemental information, Student Graphs, and Progress Tracking Forms were developed to support teachers who want to use HELPS with struggling readers in grades 5-8. Eventually the effects of HELPS with these low-performing readers need to be systematically evaluated, and the HELPS Program team hopes to do so and encourages other educational researchers to do so. In fact, evaluating HELPS with older students can be well facilitated in collaboration with teachers throughout the country. Teachers interested in this possible collaboration should contact the HELPS team at helpsprogram@gmail.com. Even without such collaboration, teachers are encouraged to share their general experiences (e.g., successes, difficulties) using HELPS with older students.

General Considerations for Using HELPS with Older Students

In addition to learning how to implement HELPS (described throughout the HELPS Teacher’s Manual), teachers should also do the following before using HELPS with students in grades 5 and above:

1. Identify whether the student will actually benefit from HELPS (described in detail below).
2. Determine an appropriate Reading Goal for the student (described in detail below).
3. Evaluate each passage in the HELPS Curriculum and identify passages that are clearly age-inappropriate for the student. Although many of the HELPS passages (particularly passages 50-100) were written in ways that would make them age-appropriate for older students, the teacher should identify and possibly exclude age-inappropriate passages.
4. Consider whether the Start Chart reward system is age-appropriate. If teachers do not use the specific Star Chart, they are encouraged to use a reward-based procedure that integrates the same
motivational principles found in the Star Chart system. If the Star Chart is used, select age-appropriate rewards.

5. Explain to the student why he/she is practicing passages repeatedly. There should be plenty of content within the HELPS Teacher’s Manual (e.g., see Chapter 1) to help teachers explain to older students why the HELPS practice strategies are important for reading development.

6. Consider adding other intervention components to the HELPS procedures. Suggestions for this are described on in the HELPS Teacher’s Manual on pages 66-67.

Suggestions for Identifying Students in Grades 5-8 Who May Benefit from HELPS

To understand and use Table A below, the teacher must also read pages 8-10 of the HELPS Program Teacher’s Manual. Those pages will explain how this table is used for students in grades 1-4, and offers important recommendations for how to best use HELPS with struggling readers in later grades.

Table A represents a continuation of Table 1 (page 10) found in the HELPS Program Teacher’s Manual.

Table A

Benchmark Assessment WCPM Scores That May Suggest a Student’s Need for the HELPS Program
(Grades 5-8)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student’s Grade Level</th>
<th>Fall WCPM Benchmark Range</th>
<th>Winter WCPM Benchmark Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fifth</td>
<td>50-110</td>
<td>50-127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sixth</td>
<td>50-127</td>
<td>50-140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seventh</td>
<td>50-128</td>
<td>50-136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eighth</td>
<td>50-133</td>
<td>50-146</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comments about Table A:

1. The upper limit in each of the WCPM ranges reflects the 50th percentile, according to the oral reading fluency norms published by Hasbrouck and Tindal (2006). These upper limits represent approximations that can help teachers determine whether a student may benefit from improving his/her reading fluency. That is, the WCPM ranges should be used in combination with the teacher’s professional judgment about the most appropriate intervention for the student.

2. The lower limit in each of the WCPM ranges (50 WCPM) reflects an approximate number of WCPM to suggest that the student has at least a basic level of decoding, and may therefore need to improve his/her reading fluency. This is a very rudimentary approximation, however. Teachers should use additional methods and information (e.g., assessments to specifically evaluate the student’s decoding and fluency skills) to confirm that the student would benefit from a fluency-based reading intervention.

3. To further understand if a student will benefit most from an intervention that targets reading fluency, the teacher should also consider the student’s reading accuracy during the benchmark assessment. A reading accuracy percentage is determined with the following formula:

\[
(WCPM / \text{Total number of words read per minute}) \times 100
\]

A student with at least 90% accuracy probably has a sufficient level of accuracy to benefit from a fluency-based intervention (all other factors considered). A student with reading accuracy below...
90% might be considered (or assessed) further to ensure that a reading fluency intervention would best target his/her reading difficulties.

At the present time we do not have supplemental materials available for using HELPS with students in ninth grade and above. If a teacher determines that a high school aged student would benefit from a fluency-based intervention such as HELPS, the teacher might want to use the guidelines and materials for students in eighth grade. Teachers may wish to consult the following sources to determine how to best use fluency-based interventions with high school aged students (Fuchs, Fuchs, Hosp, & Jenkins, 2001; Roberts, Torgesen, Boardman, & Scammacca, 2008; Wexler, Vaughn, Roberts, & Denton, 2010).

**Suggestions for Determining the Reading Goal for Students in Grades 5-8**

In this section we offer some suggestions for selecting the student’s Reading Goal, which is used to determine when the student should move on to a new passage in the HELPS Curriculum. Similar to the table of Reading Goals provided in the HELPS Teacher’s Manual for students in grades 1-4, teachers may wish to use the following table for selecting an older student’s Reading Goal.

**Table B**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading Goals according to the Student’s Grade Level</th>
<th>WCPM with Passage A</th>
<th>WIPM with Passage A</th>
<th>Retell Check with Passage A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fifth Grade</td>
<td>155 or more</td>
<td>3 or less</td>
<td>Adequately retells story*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sixth Grade</td>
<td>165 or more</td>
<td>3 or less</td>
<td>Adequately retells story*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seventh Grade</td>
<td>165 or more</td>
<td>3 or less</td>
<td>Adequately retells story*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eighth Grade</td>
<td>170 or more</td>
<td>3 or less</td>
<td>Adequately retells story*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*For example, student retells parts of the story for at least 30 seconds or otherwise correctly states names of characters and major events in the story. Retell of the story in the correct sequential order of major events is encouraged but not required to pass the Retell Check.

**Note: The Progress Tracking Form and Student Graph reflecting the above Reading Goals are provided on the HELPS Website, within the Supplemental Materials page.**

Comments about Table B:
The WCPM values listed in Table B may not be appropriate for all students, as the appropriateness will depend on the severity of each student’s reading difficulty. Also, if a student begins the HELPS Curriculum at a passage that is age-appropriate (but not ability-appropriate), the suggested Goals in Table B may be too high, resulting in the student not meeting the Reading Goal and potentially experiencing frustration. We therefore recommend the following alternative to selecting a Reading Goal for students in grades 5-8:

1. Complete the HELPS Placement Assessment (described in the HELPS Teacher’s Manual) and determine the starting point for the student in the HELPS Curriculum. If that starting point reflects a series of consecutive passages that are age-inappropriate, identify the lowest level passage that would be age-appropriate for the student.
2. Complete a HELPS session using the selected passage and determine (a) the student’s WCPM score on the last Timed Reading of the session, and (b) the amount of WCPM increase the student makes from the first to the last reading of the passage.

3. If the last reading of the passage is within 15 WCPM of the student’s grade level Reading Goal shown in Table B, continue using the Goal shown in Table B—the student is likely to meet that Goal after 2-3 HELPS sessions.

4. If the student’s last reading of the passage is more than 15 WCPM below the student’s grade level Reading Goal shown in Table B, set the Reading Goal to (a) 30 WCPM more than the WCPM score obtained on the first reading of the passage, or (b) the amount of WCPM increase the student made from the first to the last reading of the passage. In considering option a or b, use the larger Goal of the two possibilities.
   a. Once the student meets his Reading Goal across three consecutive HELPS sessions, continue increasing the Goal by 5-8 WCPM until it reflects the suggested Goals shown in Table B.

5. For students who consistently do not meet the selected Reading Goal, use the information and recommendations described in Chapter 5 of the HELPS Teacher’s Manual. The information in that chapter also provides guidance for (a) advancing the student through the HELPS Curriculum at a faster pace, (b) when to stop using HELPS with the student, and (c) modifying the HELPS sessions to target comprehension and/or vocabulary, if needed.

Using the HELPS Placement Assessment for Students in Grades 5-8

In the HELPS Program Teacher’s Manual, Appendices S and T (pp. 125-127) describe how to complete a placement assessment for students in grades 1-4 so that the teacher can start the student at the proper passage in the HELPS Curriculum. The same placement assessment procedures and Placement Assessment Recording Form (i.e., Appendix T) can be used with students in grades 5-8, but the following table will be needed to use the placement assessment with older students. After completing the placement assessment and determining the appropriate place to start the student within the HELPS Curriculum, the teacher should still keep in mind the information presented earlier in “General Considerations for Using HELPS with Older Students.” That is, even if the placement assessment suggests that the students should begin at a particular passage, if it is age-inappropriate to start at that passage, the teacher should use his or her best judgment about an appropriate starting point for the student.

### Starting Point Criteria Table for Students in Grades 5-8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student’s Grade</th>
<th>Target WCPM</th>
<th>Target WIPM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fifth</td>
<td>125-135 WCPM</td>
<td>3 or less</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sixth</td>
<td>135-145 WCPM</td>
<td>3 or less</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seventh</td>
<td>135-145 WCPM</td>
<td>3 or less</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eighth</td>
<td>140-150 WCPM</td>
<td>3 or less</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
References


