

Step Up to Reading

In October, 2005, Supreme Evaluation, Inc. was awarded a multi-million dollar three (3) year federal grant by the United States Department of Education under the Early Reading First program. Early Reading First, part of the President's "Good Start, Grow Smart" initiative, is designed to transform existing early education programs into centers of excellence that provide high-quality, early education to young children, especially those from low-income families. The overall purpose of the Early Reading First Program is to prepare young children to enter kindergarten with the necessary language, cognitive, and early reading skills to prevent reading difficulties and ensure school success.

The US Department of Education identifies the following as the goals of Early Reading First:

- To support local efforts to enhance the early language, literacy, and pre-reading development of preschool-age children, particularly those from low-income families, through strategies and professional development that are based on scientifically based reading research;
- To provide preschool-age children with cognitive learning opportunities in high-quality language and literature-rich environments so that the children can attain the fundamental knowledge and skills necessary for optimal reading development in kindergarten and beyond;
- To demonstrate language and literacy activities based on scientifically based reading research that support the age-appropriate development of

Oral language (vocabulary, expressive language, listening comprehension)

Phonological awareness (rhyming, blending, segmenting)

Print awareness

Alphabetic knowledge

- To use screening assessments to effectively identify preschool-age children who may be at risk for reading failure.

Additional information about Early Reading First can be found at:

<http://www.ed.gov/programs/earlyreading/index.html>

Supreme Evaluation Inc.'s Early Reading First project, *Step Up To Reading*, is a partnership with quality preschool programs: Bedford-Stuyvesant Early Childhood Development, Inc. and Sesame Sprout, Inc. The project serves approximately 200 students, many with disabilities, in eleven classrooms. Program goals target student attainment of the essential early literacy skills identified by scientifically-based reading research (SBRR): oral language (vocabulary, receptive/expressive skills); phonological awareness (rhyming, blending, segmenting, letter/sound connections); alphabet knowledge (letter recognition); awareness of the conventions of print. *Step Up to Reading* promotes high student motivation for early literacy/language activities while expanding the background knowledge of students. The components of *Step Up to Reading* involve: extensive professional development; material enhancements to support high-quality oral language and print-rich environments; SBRR-based activities and instructional strategies in group and individual formats; assessments undertaken to guide and direct instructional interventions; special events and family involvement. Professional development includes intensive coaching of all classroom staff (one day per week per classroom) by Master-level Reading/Literacy Teachers and additional structured training sessions (fifty or more hours annually) so teachers and assistants know exactly why, when and how to use SBRR strategies and interventions. Speech-Language Pathologists and Special Education Teachers are available through *Step Up to Reading* for regular consultations. Assessment tools used by *Step Up to Reading* include: *Get Ready to Read!*, *Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening*, *Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-III*; *Early Literacy Skills Assessment*; *Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation Toolkit*.