



# Stern Center for Language and Learning

## The Vermont Lab School:

### A Tier 3 Intervention for Students with Specific Learning Disabilities

#### Description

Students in middle and high school are expected to use reading as a fundamental tool for learning across the curriculum. Research shows that those with specific learning disabilities (SLD) suffer dramatic social and academic consequences, and are at risk for decreased self-esteem, social problems, drug abuse, delinquency, and school failure. In 2001, the Stern Center for Language and Learning joined in collaboration with the **Vermont Department of Education** to pioneer the Vermont Lab School Program, a program for students with SLD in public schools.

#### Goals

- Provide students with SLD the literacy tools necessary for success.
- Provide professional development for special educators in intensive research-based literacy instruction.
- Support educators' teaching expertise via an on-site mentorship program.

The Stern Center extends appreciation to the Vermont Department of Education for their support.

#### Program

- Special educators received direct instruction over 15 days in best practices for adolescent literacy focusing on: phonology, decoding, encoding, fluency, comprehension, writing methods, and grammar.
- Stern Center master teachers provided two years of on-site mentoring to ensure consistency and fidelity in training and practice.
- Students received 90 minutes of small group instruction daily in two blocks: one on basic systematic phonics and fluency, the other on silent reading, comprehension, vocabulary, grammar, and written expression.



#### Results

##### Teachers

Pre/post tests showed teacher gains in knowledge of sound segmentation, silent letters, blends, letter patterns, graphemes, inflected endings, schwa sounds, and morphemes. All educators noticed improvement in students' motivation and self-esteem over the year.

##### Students

Pre/post tests showed significant gains in sound-symbol decoding, spelling, reading fluency, and vocabulary comprehension. In addition:

- 59% thought their grades had improved as a direct result of participation.
- 63% felt they had a better understanding of how they learn.
- 83% liked the program.
- 86% would recommend the program to other students.

##### Parents

- 92% thought their child learned a lot in Lab Class and had made excellent gains in reading and spelling as a result.
- 75% felt their child's grades had improved as a direct result of Lab Class.
- 100% felt their child had a better understanding of their own learning.

These results demonstrate the effectiveness of the Vermont Lab School as a Tier 3 intervention to address the needs of adolescents with learning disabilities.