

# SRIRaCHA (Study of Reading Intervention Results and Child Achievement): A community-informed evaluation of reading interventions during a pandemic

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## Background

Reading difficulty is a significant problem in education. Those reading below grade level after first grade are unlikely to ever catch up, and compared to grade-level peers, poor readers beyond third grade are four times less likely to graduate from high school.

Early reading measures can identify students who need early intervention, and intensive small group reading instruction has positive effects on reading outcomes. However, the efficacy of reading interventions vary widely, and measuring the outcomes of reading interventions also relies heavily on collaboration between schools, teachers, researchers, and more. Reading intervention research is also seldom conducted in low-income, majority-minority school districts.

## Community Partner

The Peninsula Family Advocacy Program (<http://www.peninsulafap.org/>) is a medical-legal partnership that provides free legal services to children, pregnant women and their families to help address the social determinants of health.

## Project Description

This project took place in a low-income, majority-minority K-8 school district within California's San Francisco Bay Area. The Peninsula Family Advocacy Program identified a lack of appropriate services for public school students with reading disabilities, also known as dyslexia, within this district.

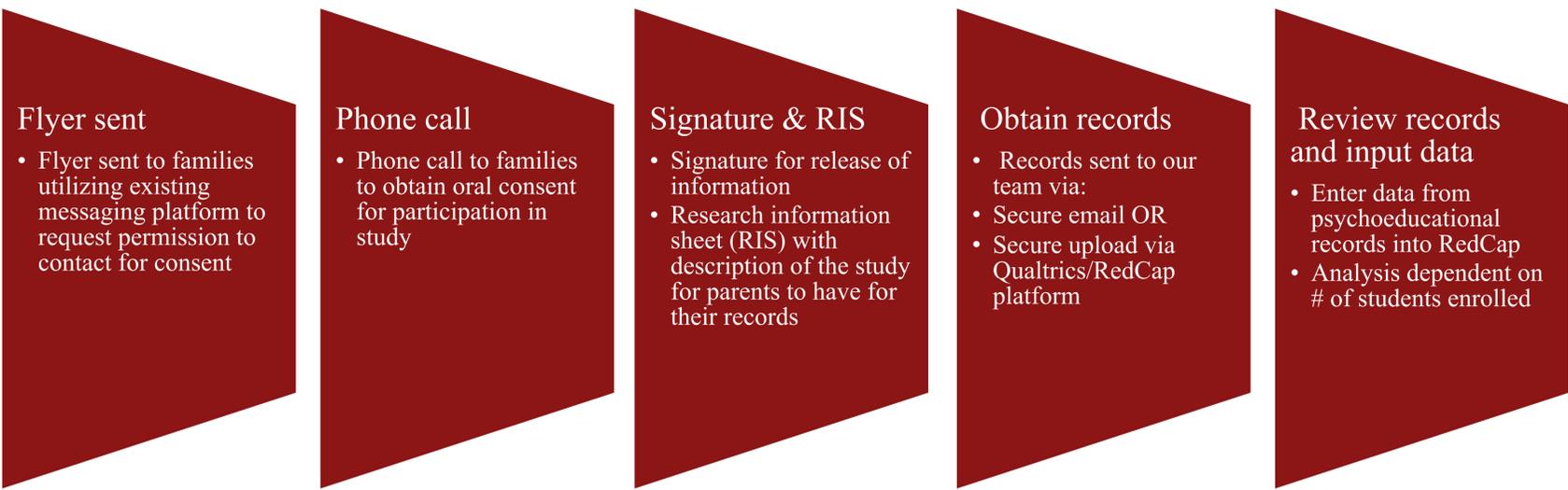
This district serves primarily low-income communities and communities of color; 61% of school district students qualify for free/reduced price meals, and 80% are minorities. The district planned on implementing the Barton Reading & Spelling System reading intervention during the 2020-2021 school year, and the administration expressed interest in measuring the efficacy of their program.

## Process & Outcomes

Over the course of the past year, we were able to develop a deeper understanding of the needs and complications of community-based research during a pandemic. Although the original intent was to gather data on the implementation of Barton, this was challenged by the pandemic. Many school districts faced enormous challenges both during virtual learning and after, and the school district we partnered with was no exception. The district suffered from staffing shortages which caused increasing strain on teachers and administration, as well as difficulty implementing their planned reading intervention.

However, the process of designing this district-wide reading evaluation resulted in the achievement of several goals set along the way, which can be applied both to other, similar evaluations and potentially a renewable of this partnership after circumstances change with the district. As an interdisciplinary team, we assessed the landscape of current district- and school-level reading interventions, determining that although certain fundamentals are crucial to reading intervention success, specific reading interventions are understudied, particularly interventions that take place in high-need and under-served areas.

We developed a protocol for outreach to families for participation in our reading study (see figure below) through collaboration within an interdisciplinary team and feedback from the school district as to best practices in communication. Interdisciplinary relationships across disciplines and communities were built and maintained; throughout the course of this work, we collaborated with the school district, within the medical school, the law school, and a community physician unaffiliated with Stanford, enabling translation of this work to the community post-pandemic, additional insights into our work and generalizability in the community.



**Flyer sent**

- Flyer sent to families utilizing existing messaging platform to request permission to contact for consent

**Phone call**

- Phone call to families to obtain oral consent for participation in study

**Signature & RIS**

- Signature for release of information
- Research information sheet (RIS) with description of the study for parents to have for their records

**Obtain records**

- Records sent to our team via:
- Secure email OR
- Secure upload via Qualtrics/RedCap platform

**Review records and input data**

- Enter data from psychoeducational records into RedCap
- Analysis dependent on # of students enrolled

## Lessons Learned

**Legal advocacy furthers student services:**  
The initiation of this collaboration was made possible by the advocacy of the FAP, and the FAP continues to work with the district to ensure individual students receive services.

**Interdisciplinary teams provide a strong framework for community work:**  
The collaboration between medical and legal professionals enabled a multi-pronged approach to working with the district and developing relevant background and protocol for this work. The medical side was able to study the literature on reading interventions and provide a scientifically-sound research design, while the legal side initiated the collaboration with the district, conducted outreach with learning specialists, and provided important background information about the district.

**Large-scale interventions require flexibility:**  
Perhaps our most important lesson from a project with so many moving parts was the flexibility and adaptability demanded by this collaboration between legal, medical, and education professionals.

## Conclusions

In the setting of the COVID-19 pandemic, one of the most valuable outcomes was an ongoing relationship between disciplines; this collaboration between medicine, law, and education enabled the flow of information and a deeper understanding of the complexities of community work.

The framework for this evaluation is already established, enabling partnerships with other school districts in the local community in order to work toward the shared goal of improving student reading outcomes. In the meantime, the legal side of the Family Advocacy Program continues to work with the district to ensure individual students receive services.