



## Santa and the Grinch

Or, in other words, here's some good news and some bad news to round out the last month of our R.E.A.D. 20th year.

### The Grinchy Part

Let's start with the bad news. On December 3, 2019, the New York Times presented this headline: **"It Just Isn't Working — Test Scores Cast Doubt on U.S. Education Efforts."** Followed by:

*An international exam shows that American 15-year-olds are stagnant in reading and math even though the country has spent billions to close gaps with the rest of the world.*

The performance of American teenagers in reading and math has been stagnant since 2000, according to the latest results of a rigorous international exam, despite a decades-long effort to raise standards and help students compete with peers across the globe.

And the achievement gap in reading between high and low performers is widening...the bottom 10th percentile lost ground, according to an analysis by the National Center for Education Statistics, a federal agency.

The disappointing results from the exam, the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), were announced on Tuesday (12/3) and follow those from the National Assessment of Educational Progress, an American test that recently showed that two-thirds of children were not proficient readers.

Low-performing students have been the focus of decades of bipartisan education overhaul efforts, costing many billions of dollars, that have resulted in a string of national programs—No Child Left Behind, Race to the Top, the

Common Core State Standards, the Every Student Succeeds Act—but uneven results.

There is no consensus on why the performance of struggling students is declining. Education experts argue vociferously about a range of potential causes, including school segregation, limited school choice, funding inequities, family poverty, too much focus on test prep, and a dearth of instruction in basic skills like phonics.

About a fifth of American 15-year-olds scored so low on the PISA test that it appeared they had not mastered reading skills expected of a 10-year-old ... Those students face "pretty grim prospects" on the job market."

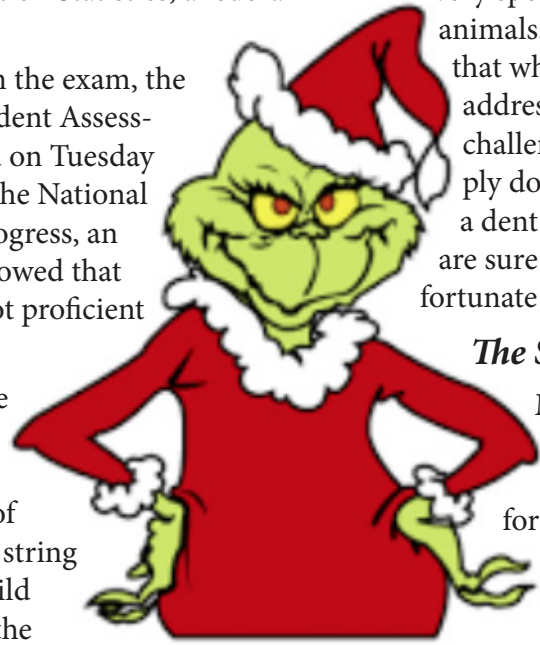
The article goes on, but you get the gist. This very insidious and persistent problem is still well entrenched.

### But we already know this, don't we?

Yes—and it should not for a minute discourage us about the much better results that all our R.E.A.D. kids get with their one-on-one experiences in their very special relationships with you and your animals. The magic of R.E.A.D. teams is that when they are on the blanket, they can address many of the social and intellectual challenges that these children face. We simply don't have enough R.E.A.D. teams to put a dent in that number nationally, but you are sure making a significant difference to the fortunate kids you work with.

### The Santa Part: Here's a New Study

Meaningful research results about the benefits of R.E.A.D. are hard to come by because it's very difficult to control for all the factors in a child's life, and to measure some of the more ineffable qualities of our interactions.



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## ***Santa and the Grinch (page 2)***

But we just got word of a new study whose results are preaching to the choir in our case, but a nice reminder to reinforce what you all know intuitively and experience all the time.

Researchers at the University of British Columbia (UBC) at Okanagan have found that ***reading with a dog, regardless of breed or age, motivates children to read more and stay engaged*** [bold italics added].

Camille Rousseau, one of the study's authors and a doctoral student at UBC Okanagan's school of education, makes a case for the potential of therapy dogs to support reading motivation for young children.

Researchers examined the behavior of 17 children (8 girls and 9 boys) from grades 1 to 3, while reading with and without a dog.

Participants were recruited based on their ability to read independently, and they were tested to determine their reading range. The researchers then chose stories slightly beyond the child's reading level.

During the study's sessions, participants would read aloud to either an observer, the dog handler and their pet, or without the dog. After finishing their first page, they would be offered the option of a second reading task or ending the session. Reading tasks took up to 12 minutes per task, for a maximum of 24 minutes.

Rousseau said that the findings showed that ***children spent significantly more time reading and showed more persistence when a dog was in the room***, as opposed to when they read without them.

For example, about 40% of the children chose to read the second part of the story when there was no dog, compared with about ***70% who chose to continue reading with a dog present***.

The study notes that the children who chose to continue reading



when the therapy dog was not present were more likely to be the stronger readers in the sample group.

“In addition, ***the children reported feeling more interested and more competent***,” Rousseau said.

For most of the children in the study, reading with a therapy dog was a new experience.

Rousseau hopes the research could help to develop a gold standard for canine-assisted strategies for young kids struggling with reading.

“There have been studies that looked at the impact of therapy dogs on enhancing students' reading abilities, but this was the first study that carefully selected and assigned challenging reading to children,” she said.

The study concludes that this type of program might be more relevant among young readers, children with a learning disability in reading, or struggling readers because they often engage with challenging reading tasks to learn to read.

The study was published in September in “Anthrozoos,” a multidisciplinary journal focusing on the interactions of people and animals.

So, no surprises but yet another feather in R.E.A.D.'s cap. No legitimate study debunks the value of R.E.A.D.—also no surprise!

## ***Happy Holidays—and Thank You!***



Please hug your partners and yourselves, from all of us here at R.E.A.D. Headquarters. You are the ones who keep this program thriving, generating magic all year long and changing young lives forever. We are more grateful than we can ever tell you, and we wish you the best of everything in the year ahead.

– Kathy Klotz

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