

The Second Annual National Reading First Conference

From all corners of the nation, teachers, coaches, and administrators came together at the Second Annual National Reading First Conference. The conference, held July 26–28, 2005, in New Orleans, Louisiana, was attended by school, district, and state educators involved in Reading First. Participants learned about professional development, using data, the five components of reading, interventions, and more. Sessions were carefully designed to meet the needs of all experience levels of those implementing Reading First, from beginning to advanced. Local, state, and national Reading First leaders shared their perspectives; LaGaylis Harbuck, a principal from Mount Vernon, Alabama, and James Herman, the Tennessee state program director, spoke on their experiences in the field, while the U.S. Department of Education’s Chris Doherty and Sandi Jacobs gave their views from the national level. Forty-six sessions were offered along with five plenary sessions, including a keynote address from U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings (see story, page 2). This issue of the *Reading First Notebook* offers a sampling of the conference breakout and plenary sessions.

The conference was a resounding success, with attendance approaching 6,000. We hope that grantees will make plans to join us next year in Reno, Nevada. The Third Annual National Reading First Conference will be held July 18–20, 2006. Registration information will be available soon at <http://www.conferencepros.com>.

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Reading First Levels of Participation As of 10/17/05

1,451 district awards representing
4,980 schools have been made.



Secretary Margaret Spellings's Keynote Address

U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings addressed the entire assembly at the plenary session on opening day.

During her keynote address, Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings relayed a personal illustration of the powerful impact reading has had on her life. Growing up, she had an influential teacher, Miss Brown, who introduced her to her favorite book, *Charlotte's Web* by E. B. White. Today, although she mainly reads technical information, she finds time for other reading as well. She recently completed *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini, which was recommended to her by First Lady Laura Bush, and Thomas Friedman's *The World Is Flat*, a book about trends in globalization. "Sometimes I wonder how I got from *Charlotte's Web* to globalization and trading books with the First Lady," she said.

Spellings discussed the nationwide effort to provide quality education to America's students through the nation's most ambitious educational reform effort in history—the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. She stressed Reading First's role in helping bring research to the classroom to ensure that every child is reading at grade level by the end of third grade.

"This is not just an education issue," she said. "It's a human issue, and it's a public health issue. If you can't read, you can't understand the label on a bottle of medicine. If you can't read, you can't keep up with advances in health care for your family. If you can't read, you can't make it in life."



Spellings emphasized her commitment to ensuring the reading achievement of all children, including special education students and English language learners. She acknowledged the 15th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act and thanked the special education teachers in the audience for their part in helping people with disabilities lead more independent lives. She also discussed the U.S. Department of Education's continued investment in research that will provide teachers of students with limited English proficiency with information about best practices for those students.

She also shared good news from the Nation's Report Card: young students are achieving historically high scores in reading, and the achievement gap is narrowing.

After Spellings recounted the story of her teacher, Miss Brown, who taught her to love to read, she thanked all the teachers in the audience for their dedication to making the lives of children better.

"I know many of your students will remember you long after they leave your classrooms," she said. "There are a lot of Miss Browns here today—and Mr. Browns, too—who have seriously improved the quality of children's lives."

To view the entire speech go to <http://www.ed.gov/news/speeches/2005/07/07262005.html>.

Components of Effective Reading Instruction for English Language Learners

What does the research say about reading and English Language Learners? What strategies can be implemented when working with students whose first language is not English?

The number of English Language Learners (ELLs) in the United States continues to increase. Dr. Maria Elena Arguelles of the Central Regional Reading First

Technical Assistance Center in Austin, Texas, discussed reading and ELLs during the Second Annual National Reading First Conference. Dr. Arguelles began her

presentation by sharing some interesting statistics. The Commission for Higher Education found that nearly 5 million Hispanics were enrolled in the country's public schools in 1993–1994. By the 2007–2008 school year, Hispanic public school enrollment is projected to be about 9 million. Dr. Arguelles also discussed the educational attainment and poverty gaps between Hispanics and non-Hispanic whites. For example, 27 percent of Hispanics 25 years old and above have less than a ninth-grade education, compared to only 4 percent of non-Hispanic whites in that age range. Poverty rates for children under 18 are at 28 percent for Hispanics and 9.5 percent for non-Hispanic whites.

In recent years, a passionate debate has erupted on the issue of how best to serve ELLs. The research surrounding this topic has not been rigorous enough to offer a firm resolution. Dr. Arguelles suggested that rather than debating the best setting, we focus on ensuring that every program contains effective reading components.

Dr. Arguelles provided basic characteristics of high-quality instruction and tied the components of reading instruction (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary) to the specific needs of ELLs. Many participants commented on the usefulness of the classroom ideas Dr. Arguelles offered. Some of her ideas are presented below.

Phonemic Awareness

Same and different cards: Children hold up cards to indicate same or different sounds (for example, a green card for “same” and a red card for “different”).

Sound clapping center: Children don gloves and clap out the number of syllables or phonemes in the words the images on picture cards represent.

Phonics

Word building: Children use tiles to build, read, and change words.

Word sorts: Children sort words by patterns.

ai	a_e	ay
rain	plate	stay
	bake	way

Fluency

Repeated reading chart: Children are responsible for recording their own reading rates and tracking their personal progress.

Partner reading: Children get extra reading practice by taking turns reading with a classmate.

Comprehension

Graphic organizers: Children are exposed to a concrete and visual system to process information.

Sentence scramble: Children practice creating sentences that follow the basic structure of the English language.

Vocabulary

Charades: Children are actively involved in learning by acting out a word, phrase, or concept.

Semantic feature analysis: Children build categorical knowledge by identifying characteristics of related items.

Reptiles

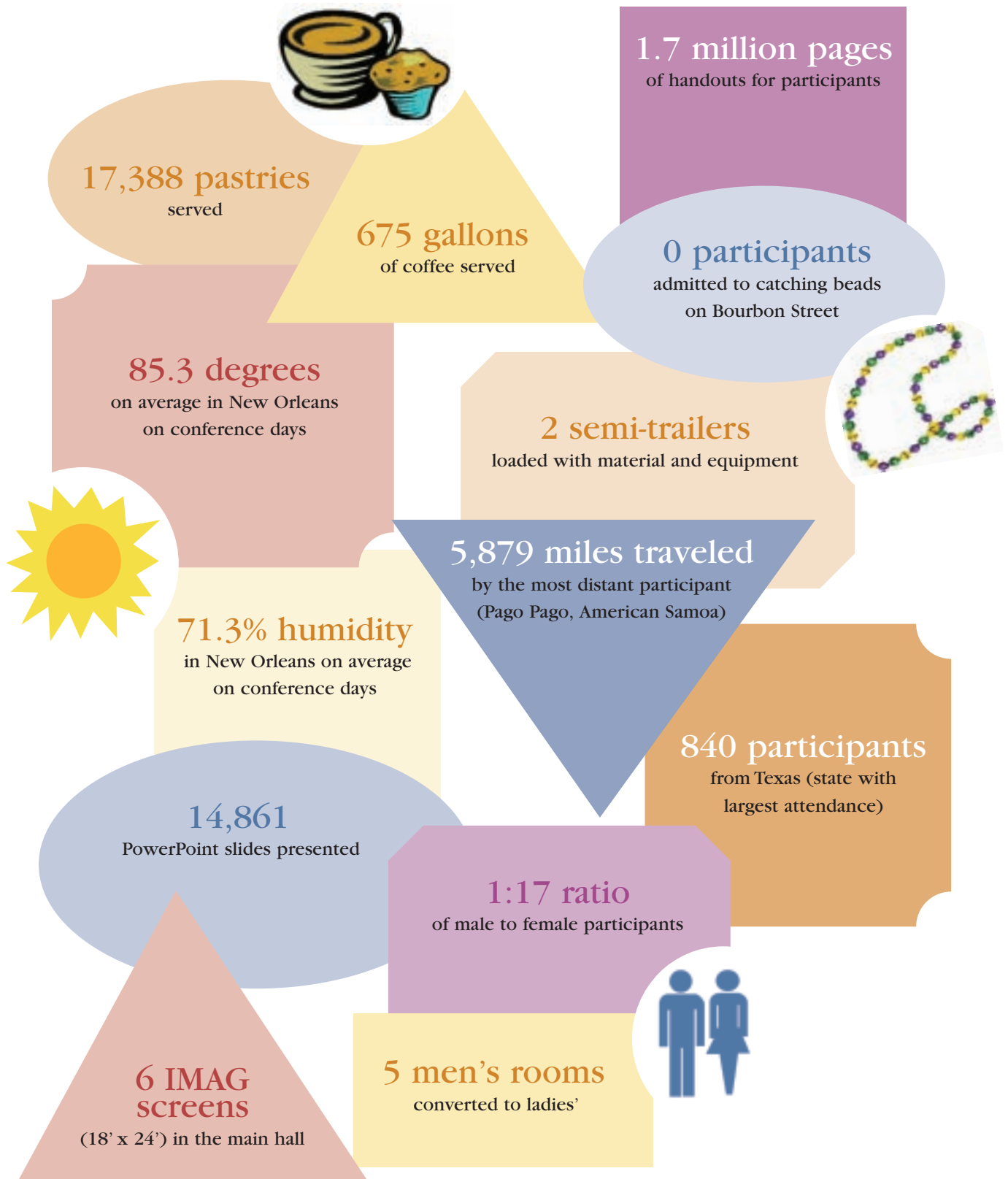
	teeth	scales	legs	eggs
turtle		◆	◆	◆
alligator	◆	◆	◆	◆
anaconda	◆	◆		
lizard	◆	◆	◆	◆

Dr. Arguelles also discussed other important vocabulary issues, including using cognates, choosing words to teach, using dictionaries, discriminating multiple meanings, using context and using knowledge transfer.

Participants departed with a good grasp of demographic data and the issues surrounding research related to ELLs as well as a useful collection of classroom activities that will help close the ELL gap.

Reading First by the Numbers

Second Annual National Reading First Conference Statistics



Walk-Throughs Are on the Move!

Classroom walk-throughs are a trend that is on the move in Reading First schools, where time is a premium for busy principals and coaches.

In her session “Observing in a Reading First Classroom,” retired Washington state Reading First director Mo Anderson highlighted how principals and coaches can make the most of a 5-minute visit to a classroom and discussed what they should look for when observing reading instruction regardless of reading program.

“You need to inspect for what you expect if you want change to happen,” said Anderson. “Purposeful walk-throughs allow principals and coaches to take ‘snapshots’ to build the big picture of learning and change taking place in a classroom and throughout the school. The key to making them work is helping the teacher feel comfortable with the process.”

Anderson suggested that principals and coaches use walk-throughs to monitor research-based instruction and to identify variances in implementation and instructional practices. She said they also can be used to build relationships and help staff deal with the emotions of change.

“Change grinds people down, and individuals must know that you care before they care what you know,” Anderson said.

Anderson explained that at times, the focus of a walk-through may be to answer a teacher’s question or to make a comment and connect with a teacher on a personal level. For example, a principal might connect with a teacher by asking, “I know you weren’t feeling well; how are you now?” These kinds of walk-throughs help alleviate teachers’ fears about

visits and help establish the trust necessary for change to be successful.

Walk-throughs also should focus on instruction and, as Anderson suggested, answer such questions as: Are the children getting the right length (e.g., 120 minutes) of instruction? What are the students doing when they are not with the teacher? What is the quality of the literacy centers and seatwork? What is the teacher doing, and how appropriate is it? Does the teacher have an efficient data system such as a binder that includes a progress monitoring section that is quick and easy to read?

To help principals and coaches answer questions like these, Anderson offered a simple one-page checklist organized around five major areas that impact student achievement: engagement, teaching, time, environment, and results. The checklist is a useful tool that can help assess instructional issues, regardless of the program being used.

For the process to work efficiently, Anderson said that walk-throughs must occur daily in different rooms and grade levels and at different times to ensure seeing different parts of the reading block. Compiling and using the data and providing teachers with feedback in a positive manner are equally important.

“Where attention goes, energy flows and results show,” said Anderson. “The walk-through is a significant step in influencing real change in schools.”



"Attending the National Reading First Conference was a great experience! It was reassuring to see that we are not isolated in our concerns, questions, and the desire to do what it takes to help students read. The opportunity to share ideas, anecdotes, and even challenges with dedicated educators from all over the United States gave me much to think about for the upcoming year and how Reading First can shape our students' future."

LaTRICIA MATHIS, READING FIRST COACH
Bernalillo, New Mexico

Strategies for Advanced Reading First Coaching

Dr. Jan Hasbrouck's much-anticipated session on advanced coaching moved beyond assisting coaches with strategies for observing in classrooms and modeling lessons and tackled some advanced issues ranging from working collaboratively with administrators to coaching different types of teachers confronting complex academic problems. Dr. Hasbrouck, a nationally known reading expert, demystified coaching by acknowledging the role of the coach as new and constantly changing and evolving. The emphasis must be on student-focused coaching in which cooperative and collaborative professional relationships are formed and maintained.

"Coaching is more than just observing in classrooms and modeling lessons," Hasbrouck said. "The focus is student achievement. It's not about you or me. It's about us together that makes a difference in student achievement."

Because coaching is a new concept in schools, conversations between coaches and principals are necessary to help build trusting relationships between both the coach and the principal as well as the coach and the entire faculty. These conversations should promote an understanding of the rationale and role of the reading coach. The key is to delineate tasks a reading coach is responsible for and outline time spent as a reading coach. For example, coaching is not about supervision, which deals with evaluation; it is about helping teachers and students. Confidentiality is essential to building trust.

Hasbrouck described four types of teachers that coaches may be working with: 1) those eager for help and open to trying new ideas; 2) those eager for help but resistant to trying new ideas; 3) those not seeking immediate assistance but not resistant; and 4) those not seeking assistance and resistant. She provided tips for coaches to use that would appropriately encourage each type of teacher.

Hasbrouck defined a coach as a highly trained problem solver with two brains. The first brain is accepting, trusting, acknowledging, sympathetic, and concerned. The second brain is analytical and seeks to question or hypothesize about issues and causes as well as to

collect data to confirm or verify. Hasbrouck introduced a systematic problem-solving plan that enables coaches to work with their peers and address complex academic issues. This method consisted of four traditional phases or stages: 1) identify the problem, 2) develop an intervention plan, 3) implement intervention, and 4) evaluate. The key to a successful problem-solving plan begins with collaboration that involves everyone in each step.

The session ended on a high note as Hasbrouck eloquently summarized, "Together we must help all students to be full participants in learning and growing. We must teach all our students to read!"

Considerations for Successful Implementation

1. It's not giving the assessment that matters; it's what you do with the data.
2. Students at benchmark must continue to develop their skills in order to stay at benchmark.
3. Whether or not the principal serves as the school's instructional leader, principal support and involvement is critical to effective implementation.
4. The five components in and of themselves are not scientifically based reading instruction; explicit and systematic instruction in the five components has been proved effective by scientific research.
5. Effective coaches sometimes have to tell us things we would rather not hear.
6. We must stay focused on the things that are within our control.
7. Professional development should be differentiated to meet teachers' varying needs, particularly as you get further into implementation.
8. Struggling students are unlikely to reach proficiency without additional instruction.
9. Take advantage of all available resources and support—you are not alone.
10. The teacher is the heart—it's all about instruction.

From "The View From Washington" plenary session

When the Principal Leads, the School Succeeds: Leadership for Results in Reading First



Principals forge the path for success of improvement initiatives such as Reading First.

Dr. Stan Paine, interim director of the Center on Teaching & Learning, explained in his session that leaders set the tone for achievement at their schools. They define the culture of success by changing the focus of the conversation about students' struggles from making excuses to making readers. Although leaders don't cause success directly, they are in a position to empower others to make things happen.

Paine outlined the many responsibilities of the principal and explained how they impact the success of Reading First. These responsibilities include sharing the vision, facilitating collaboration, and giving positive feedback.

Paine also introduced several tools that administrators can use to organize their actions that support the reading initiatives. Participants asked many questions and expressed their appreciation for these structured tools.

One of these tools, a document titled Supporting a School-Wide Reading Initiative by Working Within the Structures of Time, outlines a principal's daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly, and annual tasks that can have an impact on student reading outcomes. Some of the daily tasks include making informal classroom visits and providing teachers with praise and encouragement. Monthly tasks include reviewing reading data, updating district administrators, and participating in grade-level meetings. Annual tasks include creating a "reading-friendly" budget and visiting a high-performing school.

Another tool, Supporting a School-Wide Reading Initiative by Working Through Others, outlined approaches to promote reading success through working with teachers, support staff, students, and parents. This document includes actions that administrators can take to influence people involved in the improvement

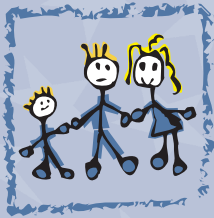
effort. For example, principals can set expectations for teachers, include support staff in reading training, challenge students to meet a reading goal, and hold reading information meetings for parents.

Supporting a School-Wide Reading Initiative by Working With Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment Variables addresses the principal's role in leading the way in reading curriculum, assessment, instruction, and motivation. For instance, it suggests principals study the curriculum along with the staff, learn how to interpret assessment reports to guide instruction, conduct classroom walk-throughs regularly to gauge the strengths and needs of teachers' reading instruction, and facilitate special reading events for kids.

The final tool Paine shared was Supporting a School-wide Reading Initiative Through Basic Administrative Functions. This is a two-page document that lists basic and detailed administrative functions. For example, "Help staff address time stealers (e.g., transitions)" is one component listed under scheduling and time management. The document then provides specific examples of how to carry out these functions, such as "Use staff meeting time to discuss how to get the most learning out of the time scheduled—transition time, sponge activities, etc." The final column is left blank so users can add notes or ideas.

These tools are available online at http://reading.uoregon.edu/appendices/prin_tools.php.

Paine reminded attendees that principals have what it takes to succeed: knowledge and tools for teaching reading; information about what works to get strong reading results; and control over enough of the variables that matter in learning to read. It is up to the leaders to maximize the variables that ensure student success and to continue to lead the way.



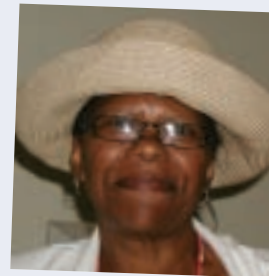
Top 10 Ways You Know You're in a Reading First School

- 10 Data, data, data
- 9 Using explicit language in front of the children is appropriate.
- 8 The person called "Coach" is not the gym teacher.
- 7 People say "DIBELS" without laughing.
- 6 Woe to the unfortunate soul who dares interrupt the reading block.
- 5 More data
- 4 Everyone knows that the 5 Essential Components are NOT phonics, phonics, phonics, phonics AND phonics.
- 3 Kids are not grouped by size.
- 2 Intervention is not when your friends and family tell you to seek help.
- 1 It has a dedicated faculty that is working tirelessly to ensure that every child becomes a proficient reader.



ANDREW STANSBERRY, PRINCIPAL
Benton Harbor, Michigan

"A tremendous learning experience! I am reenergized and upbeat about the future of Reading First. An awesome experience!"



GLORIA CLEVELAND, PRINCIPAL
Benton Harbor, Michigan

"It's been a wonderful presentation of ideas. Going back to school, I'm more knowledgeable and able to help my teachers. There are many sessions I wanted to attend."



**DR. JANET BARNARD, DISTRICT
ELEMENTARY EDUCATION SUPERVISOR**
Claiborne County Schools, Tennessee

"I think it's been a wonderful conference. The presenters are very knowledgeable. They are presenting good information that we can take back to our districts and use. It's been a good mix of research and practical information. I think it's exciting that this many teachers, literacy leaders, principals, and district-level staff are able to come together to make a difference."

Glimpses From the Conference



Panel Responds to Participants' Reading First Questions

How effective can intervention groups be for struggling readers? Do we need to explicitly focus on fluency, or will other components address this? How do we implement the Reading First program with special education students? What's the best way to instruct English Language Learners (ELLs)? Reading First conferees submitted these questions and others in the days leading up to the final plenary session, which featured a panel discussion with distinguished educators Dr. Edward Kame'enui, Dr. Joseph Torgesen, and Dr. Sharon Vaughn.

National Reading First director Chris Doherty moderated the session. Among the highlights of the discussion was the realization that for many of the questions, the answers depended on the specific context of the school. For example, Torgesen said the effectiveness of intervention groups for struggling readers "depends on the grade level and the severity of the reading problem." He believes reducing the number of students requiring intervention is more difficult once they reach the second and third grades. Vaughn feels the core reading program also makes a difference. "Core reading programs are designed for most students, not all students. You must take a careful look at what your program has and what your students need," she said. The panelists agreed that instruction needs to focus on fluency even more explicitly for some children than for others. "Once again, it depends," said Torgesen. "Those who don't have the alphabetic principle need more explicit support to give them the confidence they need to read."



Specially designed instruction is critical to implement the Reading First program with special education students, according to Kame'enui. "Special education should not mean lowered expectations," he said. "The content—the what—would be the same; the how may be different." For example, he suggested that instruction might be altered to include three 15-minute sessions instead of one 45-minute session. As for how to best instruct ELLs, Vaughn and

Kame'enui agreed that more research needs to be done on this topic. "We know that we want to give them good instruction early," Vaughn said. "The issue is that certain elements about instruction vary from state to state, region to region." These elements include the nature of instruction, the nature of grouping, and the type and number of languages represented in schools.

The answer to the final question drew much applause from the audience. Doherty asked the panelists to provide their honest assessment: Is Reading First working? Vaughn responded to the audience on behalf of her peers, "The answer is in your hands—the teachers who have the most extraordinary jobs. You're examining the data, and we're taking stock everyday as to whether Reading First is working and making adjustments if necessary. We'll have more converging knowledge about this in the coming year." Stay tuned!

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