

The Third Annual National Reading First Conference

Thousands of enthusiastic and dedicated Reading First teachers, coaches, and administrators gathered for the Third Annual National Reading First Conference in Reno, Nevada. From July 18 through July 20, 2006, attendees were immersed in 45 different breakout sessions covering a variety of topics, including leadership, instruction, planning, and sustainability. Attendees had an opportunity to meet with their state teams as well as to network with professionals from across the nation. Plenary sessions included a welcome from Kenny Guinn, governor of Nevada, and Darrin Hardman, Nevada Department of Education's Reading First director. Alice Smith Elementary School from Reno, Nevada, led the Pledge of Allegiance and delivered a salute to Reading First. Chris Doherty and Sandi Jacobs from the U.S. Department of Education's Reading First Program office offered a national update that included program performance data and an overview of the Reading First implementation evaluation. Washington State's Reading First administrators presented a synopsis of their Reading First implementation accomplishments. Practitioner presentations were a new feature to this year's conference. Schools and districts implementing Reading First had the opportunity to share their tools, strategies, and successes. This edition of the *Reading First Notebook* offers a summary of a few of the conference breakout sessions.

Over 6,000 educators attended the 2006 conference, and we are already looking forward to next year's conference, which will be held July 18-20, 2007, in St. Louis, Missouri. Registration information will be sent to Reading First districts and schools soon.

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Reading First Levels of Participation As of 10/11/06

1,734 district awards representing
5,720 schools have been made.



The More You Read, the Smarter You Grow at Chief Leschi School

Erika Hope and Abigail Chandler, reading coaches at the Bureau of Indian Affairs' Chief Leschi School, eagerly shared the noteworthy literacy achievement of their students and revealed the keys to their success.

Chief Leschi School, located in Puyallup, Washington, is one of the largest American Indian schools in the country, attended by more than 700 American Indian students from birth to grade 12. The school population represents over 65 different tribes, clans, and independent nations. Regrettably, in 1997, the school's scores on the state assessment were the lowest in the state. Only 12.1% of students met the state benchmark in reading. Since then, however, due to a dedicated and enthusiastic staff, Reading First funding, and the implementation of scientifically based research strategies, the school's student achievement scores have dramatically increased.

Important features of the school's approach include the following:

- An informed and supportive administration
- Reading coaches
- Buy-in
- Data-driven decision making
- Differentiated instruction
- Support and accountability

An Informed and Supportive Administration

Chief Leschi's school administration is made up of knowledgeable instructional leaders who frequently visit classrooms. The administration is supportive of both the school staff and the reading coaches and is directly involved in decision making. "Our principal has a solid, data-based justification for every decision he makes," says Chandler.

Reading Coaches

The Reading First coaches at Chief Leschi are experienced classroom teachers who are well-trained and knowledgeable about scientifically based reading research and highly trained in their core curriculum thanks to Reading First professional development received at the



district, state, and national levels. They have a deep understanding of not only the students, but also the school, staff, and community, which aids in effective planning, placement, and communication. They have taken time to build relationships and enjoy an easy rapport with key stakeholders. The coaches work closely with the principal to analyze data, plan, and make programmatic suggestions.

Buy-in

"We understand that change is difficult," says Hope, "but the faculty at Chief Leschi School is dedicated. They are willing to confront the hard work that change entails." The teachers benefit from appropriate support as they continue to learn and grow. They receive sound training,

Chief Leschi School Motto

The more you read,
The more you know.
The more you know,
The smarter you grow.
The smarter you grow,
The stronger your voice,
When speaking your mind,
Or making a choice.

WonderStorms

and each teacher is recognized for his or her individual strengths and contributions, which makes the teachers feel like valuable members of the team. Academic successes are celebrated not just among school staff, but also with the entire school community.

Data-Driven Decision Making

The Reading First coaches at the school have developed tools and strategies to coordinate and maximize the implementation of their reading program and to organize their progress monitoring data. For example, one tool helps teachers keep track of students who were absent for a particular lesson, students who did not pass the story quiz, and students who did not complete independent work. In addition, teachers record their remediation plan for each of these circumstances. These tools and strategies help the coaches, along with the teachers and administration, make placement and programmatic decisions for students and staffing.

Differentiated Instruction

The school employs flexible grouping with various levels of support provided for students with varying needs. Groups are instructed by both general education and special education teachers as well as paraprofessionals and physical education, music, and library teachers, all of whom have been trained in effective reading instruction.

Students in need of intensive instructional support at the school receive instruction from a replacement core reading program in which interventionists have been well-trained. Double and triple dosing sessions are instructed by teachers, highly trained paraprofessionals, and AmeriCorps tutors. These sessions take place both during and after the school day.

Support and Accountability

Leaders at Chief Leschi follow the maxim “Inspect what you expect.” The principal conducts regular classroom walk-throughs and teachers are provided—and expected to utilize—pacing guides and lesson plans. Teachers also attend regularly scheduled grade-band meetings. Reading First coaches provide training, conduct observations, and offer consistent, constructive feedback.

The framework and funding provided by the Reading First program coupled with a skilled and devoted staff have been instrumental in helping Chief Leschi School’s staff address the substantial needs of their students. The most recent state assessment scores prove their hard work is yielding considerable results. In the 2003–2004 school year the percentage of students meeting state benchmark in reading was 36.7%; that rate climbed to 53.5% in 2004–2005 and to an impressive 64.2% in 2005–2006. Their efforts are paying off in a big way!

Tips for Teaching English Language Learners

Multiple approaches to reading instruction are especially important in Reading First schools, where English Language Learners (ELLs) come from varied backgrounds and with different prior knowledge.

In her session on highlighting reading instruction for ELLs, Reading First consultant Lupina Vela reminded us of the importance to be responsive to their needs and assets. “English language learners come to us with special knowledge of other places, languages, literacies, and cultures, so you have to begin with where the students are and not where you would like them to be—you have to differentiate instruction,” said Vela.

Differentiating Instruction

“Differentiating instruction is not the same as individualized instruction,” Vela said. “Every student is not learning something different; they are all learning the same thing but in different ways.”

Although the theory behind differentiating instruction seems quite simple, in practice it can be difficult to do.



“This is my third year attending the Reading First Conference. It is, without a doubt, the only place that I consistently gather information that I can use at the school level.”

LYNN SMITH
Reading First Coach
Richmond, Virginia

Vela offered practical advice and activities to help teachers adjust instruction to accommodate different levels of English language proficiency.

First and foremost, Vela emphasized the importance of knowing the students, especially their language proficiency levels and where they are in the process of achieving grade-level reading skills.

Moreover, she advised teachers to be aware of the language transfer difficulties young children may face when learning to read in a new language. In particular, ELLs may find it difficult to differentiate certain phonemes of English.

“Teachers who familiarize themselves with the similarities and differences between the children’s primary languages and English will be better able to anticipate and address areas of potential confusion,” she said.

For example, if teachers are aware that the consonant sounds /p/, /b/, /t/, /d/, /k/, /g/, /m/, /n/, /f/, /s/, and /l/ are found at the beginnings of words in both English and Spanish, they may expect Spanish-speaking children to be successful in recognizing and distinguishing them. Understanding that most Spanish words end with a vowel, not a consonant, teachers can provide extra practice to help Spanish speakers distinguish and pronounce consonants at the ends of words.

Similarly, understanding that in Korean /p/ and /f/ are not distinct phonemes, teachers can provide extra practice distinguishing between words such as *pan/fan* and *pin/fin*.

Variety of Activities, Discussion Opportunities Support Literacy Success

While research does not confirm one best way to teach all ELL students, it does emphasize the importance of classroom teachers using a variety of effective instructional activities to flexibly support ELL students’ literacy success.

“Interactive activities that build background knowledge, develop vocabulary, and increase content learning and comprehension should be at the core,” explained Vela. “Every lesson should take into account what students bring to the lesson and build on that existing knowledge and prior language skills.”



Vela suggested using graphic organizers such as KWL (which stands for “What do I Know? What do I Want to know? What did I Learn?”) and semantic mapping to determine where the students stand in relation to the content of the upcoming lesson. Likewise, she encouraged the use of photographs, illustrations, graphs, concept and story maps, and word banks to give ELLs the visual tools to process, reflect on, and organize critical information.

The use of *realia*, a term for any real concrete object used in the classroom to create connections with vocabulary words, stimulate conversation, and build background knowledge, can also be an ideal way to incorporate cultural content into a lesson. For example, eating utensils and kitchen appliances—chopsticks, a tortilla press, a tea set, a wok—can build vocabulary and increase comprehension while also providing

insight on different cultures. Clothing items from different cultures may also stimulate conversation.

“Discussion opportunities can be powerful learning experiences for English language learners, but only if such learners feel comfortable and safe in the group and are able to take risks with their developing language,” said Vela.

Vela commented that ELLs can be insecure about making errors when they speak. She suggested providing sentence starters to these students. “Sentence starters are a great way to encourage risk taking and creativity while also teaching sentence structure. They give students the language they need to start, which makes it easier for them to continue.”

For example, if the focus is on persuasion and students are given a sentence starter like, “I believe . . .” or “According to . . .” they can generally fill it in with something they think or feel.

Vela reiterated that the important point to remember is that ELLs need many opportunities to use language and to interact with native speakers of the new language if they are to build their oral English skills, acquire reading and writing skills in English, and continue to learn in many different content areas.

“Adjusting to a new language and culture is a challenging and difficult process that takes several years,” concluded Vela. “The more you know about your ELL students and their backgrounds, the more you will be able to help them.”

Running Effective Grade-Level Team Meetings: What Makes Them Tick?

Grade-level meetings are a fact of life in Reading First schools, where teamwork is a vital aspect of the school culture. But what are the attributes of an effective grade-level team meeting? And how do you know if your grade-level team meetings work?

According to Reading First consultants Linda Carnine and Jan Silverstein, successful grade-level team meetings occur when attention is paid to three big ideas that impact student achievement: (1) data-driven decisions, (2) action planning, and (3) powerful procedures.

Data-Driven Decisions Bring Students to Benchmark

“Data-driven decisions bring all students to benchmark,” said Carnine. Teachers begin this process early in the school year by taking a close look at all K-3 performance data, including the previous year’s end-of-year benchmark data, end-of-year outcome data, and content coverage and reading curriculum mastery data. Teachers then use this information to create a summary of effectiveness and to determine priorities.



“The first priority should be to reduce the number of intensive kids, or students who are reading significantly below grade level, and a second priority

[should be] to increase the number of students at benchmark,” Carnine said.

“It’s important not to overlook the students at benchmark so you can make sure you keep them there,” said Carnine. “Many times we are so focused on moving students from intensive to strategic and strategic to benchmark that we miss the students at benchmark.”

Action Planning Helps Teachers Think

Action planning involves grade-level teachers regularly looking together at two important types of data for placement decisions: (1) progress monitoring data and (2) curriculum data with anecdotal notes that describe individual progress.

Grade-level teachers use these data to answer two key questions: Are the students appropriately grouped? Are better placements possible? “These questions allow teachers to put their thinking caps on and figure it out together. It’s an integral part of the action planning process,” Carnine said.

The questions also spark the teachers’ thinking and rethinking about whether they need to improve the instructional strategies and program materials, increase the amount of instructional time, refine the grouping levels, and reassess the progress monitoring aimline.

Teachers will most likely question the aimline between December and January when student performance tends to drop due to a variety of external factors. Carnine advised teachers, “Do what you can to prevent the fall off. Plan for it to happen because it’s going to happen. And squeeze out every minute of your time to plan effectively as a team.”

Powerful Procedures, Powerful Teams

“Powerful procedures help; they make team meetings work,” said Silverstein.



“The sessions were really beneficial to a wide range of participants. They balanced the needs of new grantees and experienced grantees.”

HEATHER LESKO
District Grants Evaluator
Fairbanks, Alaska



In particular, teachers must work together. “Students will not succeed if faced with a group of teachers whose work together is disjointed, disconnected, or, in some cases, dysfunctional,” Silverstein said. “Good teachers, like good leaders, have high respect for the task at hand and the people in the room. They work together to see all students as our students rather than my students and your students.”

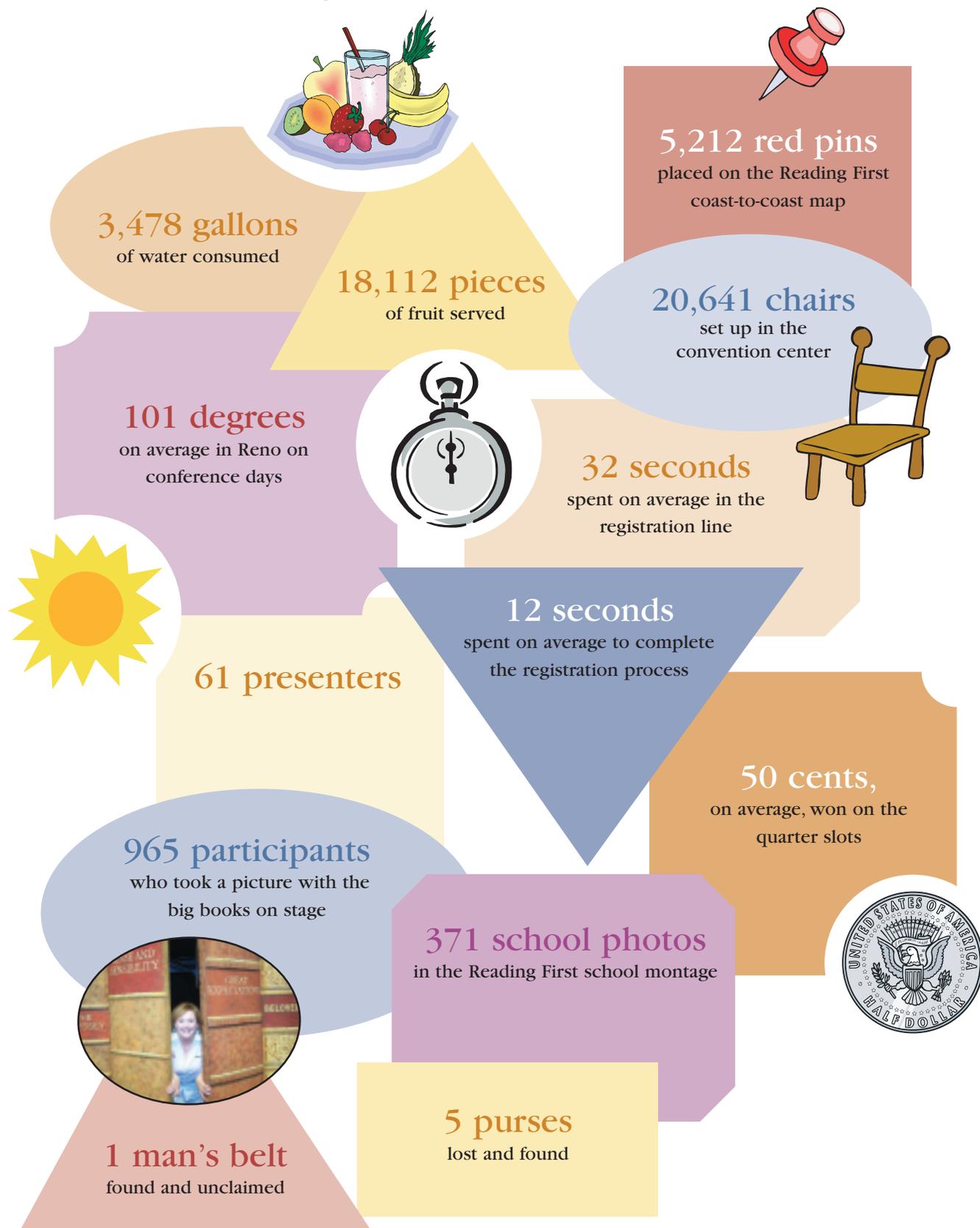
To help grade-level teams monitor the effectiveness of meetings, Silverstein describes a simple self-assessment organized around eight key procedures: (1) purpose, (2) meeting structure, (3) group process, (4) planning, (5) communication, (6) research base, (7) professional development, and (8) motivation. Using a tool that gives grade-level teams immediate feedback on things they have in place and things they need to improve can help teams stay organized and focused.

Carnine and Silverstein have long seen the value and benefits of data-driven decisions, action planning, and powerful procedures in Reading First schools.

“You can feel it when you walk into a school,” said Silverstein. “The building buzzes with the energy of eager teachers and students. The buzz is an indicator that there’s a whole lot of learning going on—and a whole lot of good teaming going on, too.”

Reading First by the Numbers

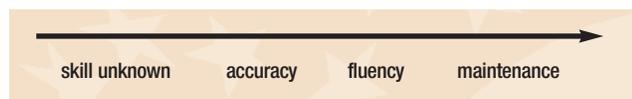
Third Annual National Reading First Conference Statistics



Using Effective Teaching Strategies to Increase Intensity of Instruction

How do you bring struggling readers up to grade level? This engaging session, presented by David Howe of the Western Regional Reading First Technical Assistance Center, focused on using effective teaching strategies and intensity of instruction to accelerate learning.

To accelerate learning, one must first consider the nature of learning itself. A simple model of learning can be viewed as a continuum from not knowing a skill, to gaining accuracy with the skill, to repetitions with the skill (perfect practice) until it gets stored in the brain where it can be retrieved effortlessly (fluency). The skill must be used in order to maintain it. David Howe illustrates the stages in skill development as follows:



The number of repetitions needed to facilitate skill mastery varies by type of learner. A struggling reader may need more than 20 repetitions. What really matters, however, is that our least able learners take more time. We have often heard that practice makes perfect. This can be a fallacy because if you practice a skill incorrectly, you learn it incorrectly. It is more accurate to say practice makes permanence. One learns a new skill by practicing it correctly and repeatedly until it is mastered.

To accelerate learning, we must also have a working understanding of the characteristics of students with reading difficulties. Students with reading difficulties represent diverse learners who enter school lacking important skills and knowledge. Many of them come to school with lack of exposure to language or deficits in phonemic awareness. Edward Kame'enui, a prominent reading researcher



and author of *Effective Teaching Strategies That Accommodate Diverse Learners* (2007), believes that we have underestimated the redundancy necessary for some learners to pick up skills. When students fall behind, research has shown that they often fall further behind and generally do not catch up without proper intervention. Persistent reading failure results in decreases in self-esteem and motivation and an increase in off-task behaviors and avoidance behaviors.

David Howe emphasized that if struggling students are to catch up, they must learn to read at a faster rate than their peers. This can be accomplished through instructional design that acknowledges that there are learning requirements for students who are behind. Learning and instruction can be viewed as two sides of the same coin. On the learning side, students must practice skills correctly and repeatedly to perform those new skills fluently. On the instruction side, teachers must design instruction for correct practice and instruction that supports struggling learners. They must also provide many opportunities to practice so that students can develop fluency. For struggling readers to catch up, they must increase their rate of learning, meaning teachers must increase the effectiveness of their teaching. This can be done by increasing the intensity of instruction.





“I’ve learned that everyone is a change agent. Change can’t be mandated, but careful strategies can help us change our belief systems and reach the goals of Reading First.”

LISA STACK
Literacy Coach
Columbus, Ohio

First, a student needs to practice a skill correctly. Each time a student practices a skill correctly it is called a Positive Instructional Interaction (Pii), a term coined by Joseph Torgesen (2006).

Using Pii, there is opportunity for students to practice on their own. If the student performs the skill correctly, then it is positive. If not, then it is not a positive interaction.

Torgesen describes intensity of instruction as the number of Pii per minute. Effective teachers populate their instruction with many Pii.

Ten Pii during 10 minutes of instruction is more intensive than 10 minutes of instruction with only five Pii. To accelerate skills, students have to experience more Pii per minute, per hour, per day, and per year. Increasing intensity of instruction means that we design and deliver instruction that promotes success the first time. This instructional design and delivery provides extra support to practice new skills correctly the first time along with extra opportunities to practice new skills to fluency.

Howe suggests that the skills embedded in Pii strategies should be grounded in the essential components of reading instruction (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension). Effective instruction is

direct instruction that includes teaching that is at students’ instructional levels, is explicit, is systematic, offers many opportunities to respond, and provides immediate error correction. Explicit instruction means explaining and demonstrating or modeling all necessary steps in a task and making sure students know exactly what to do. Systematic instruction involves presenting important skills in a logical order, from simple to complex.

Direct instruction provides many opportunities to respond through a more rapid pacing of instruction, choral responding, and calling on low performers more often. It is equally important to provide lots of practice that is distributed over time. To maximize engagement, teachers may need to change the way they obtain individual responses. They should not simply call on students who have their hands raised or ask a question and then call on a student. Instead, they should design instruction to call on low performers more often, ensuring that it is highly probable that these students will give a correct response. Pacing needs to be brisk to keep students engaged. The teacher should use short, simple explanations with minimal teacher talk, maximize student responding, and use signaling to keep up the pace. Immediate error correction will help ensure students do not practice their mistakes.

In closing, David Howe discussed three ways to increase instructional intensity: (1) add more effective teaching strategies into the instruction, (2) provide more instructional time, and (3) reduce instructional group size. Through planning, monitoring, and observing in classrooms, questions about whether instructional intensity is sufficient can be answered.

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Torgesen, J. K. (2006, February). *Teaching all children to read: Critical elements at the school and classroom level*. Paper presented at the K-3 and Adolescent Literacy Workshop of the Center on Instruction at RMC Research Corporation, Boston, MA.

Positive Instructional Interaction (Pii)

A Pii consists of these instructional interactions:

1. The teacher explicitly explains and models a skill while students are engaged. There is no guess work.
2. The teacher guides students while they practice the skill and, if needed, provides immediate corrective feedback.
3. The teacher provides opportunities for students to perform the skill themselves and reinforces their correct responses.

Reading First Implementation Beyond Year 4: Moving Toward Sustainability at the School and District Levels

School systems currently implementing Reading First programs are interested in finding ways to sustain their efforts beyond their grant periods. Shari Levy Butler and Denise Bradley presented strategies that will ensure the longevity of the critical components of Reading First.

During their session, Shari Levy Butler and Denise Bradley of the Central Regional Reading First Technical Assistance Center discussed the sustainability of Reading First programs. Specifically, they identified factors that inhibit and factors that promote sustainability; described the path to sustainability; outlined key elements of institutionalization at the school and district levels; and specified areas in which to build capacity.



Moving Toward Sustainability

What do Reading First schools and districts need to focus on in order to maintain the successes they have achieved throughout their Reading First implementation? Research indicates that certain factors either inhibit or facilitate sustainability of reforms. Factors such as unstable leadership, competing reforms, teacher turnover, poor student outcomes, and faculty indifference can hinder a school's attempts to sustain reforms. On the other hand, factors like interest in change, teacher and administrator support, a critical mass of involvement, sustained professional development, a solid implementation plan, and proper monitoring can promote sustainability (Datnow, 2005). Schools and school systems should focus on overcoming the obstructions and building on those features that will support lasting reform.

“In order to achieve sustainability, school systems must follow a path from building capacity to institutionalization and sustainability,” says Bradley. Capacity is built with strong leadership, coaching, and support through ongoing professional development. Strong leaders build buy-in and depth at all levels (including central office), commit to analyzing and using data, support staff through the change process, facilitate and provide resources, foster motivation and a sense of ownership and pride, and finally, celebrate successes. Providing for coaching and support involves allocating time for collaboration among horizontal and vertical teams and may include peer and/or collegial coaching.

“Sustainability occurs on a continuum from a point where it is referred to as ‘their reform’ to a point where it is considered ‘our initiative,’” Levy Butler explains. Institutionalization is a process in which, after implementation, the innovation loses its “special project” status and becomes a conventional routine (Berman & McLaughlin, 1974). Institutionalization ensures sustainability.

Institutionalization

Institutionalization of Reading First at the school level requires the following four key elements:

1. A dedicated instructional leader
2. Research-based instructional strategies and programs
3. Valid and reliable instructional assessments and data-based decision making
4. Ongoing professional development and coaching

Additionally, schools must put into place a system that provides training and assistance to new teachers, reviews and renews what is known about scientifically based reading research and instruction, and prevents slippage back to previous routines.

Institutionalization of Reading First at the district level requires the following three key elements:

1. Incorporation of Reading First elements throughout district offices
2. Expansion of Reading First implementation practices to
 - other grade levels and
 - other (non-funded) schools
3. Development of knowledgeable leaders who can influence policy, procedures, and values

Building Capacity

It is important to build capacity in high-leverage areas such as alignment of curriculum and instruction, interpreting and using data, and targeting interventions on low-performing students/schools (Massell, 2000).

Curriculum and Instruction Alignment

The process of developing curriculum documents, supported by professional development, oversight, and assessment, is a means to align curriculum.

Additionally, school systems should create an abbreviated set of outcomes that are directly linked to state standards and use performance standards to align instructional practices and curriculum.

Interpreting and Using Data

In order to interpret and use data effectively, schools and school systems must develop wide, in-house expertise so the knowledge and skills are not lost with inevitable turnover. Also, systems should set aside time to scrutinize and discuss data and use data to make decisions regarding professional development. Data should be used to actively identify achievement gaps, assign and evaluate personnel, and plan for special services for students.



Targeting Interventions

Targeting interventions requires not only interpreting and using performance data for improvement planning but also allocating resources and support and increasing oversight and support to schools and students with the greatest needs.

The presenters used the following quote from Rosa Parks to exemplify the situation of many school systems as they begin to consider sustainability issues:

“We are not where we want to be,
We are not where we are going to be,
But we are not where we were.”

Schools and districts interested in sustaining their Reading First efforts have many options and strategies to ensure longevity of the critical components of the program in order to realize their goal of student success—for good.

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“All of the sessions have a theme and clear goal. They will help us achieve our goal of increasing student achievement.”

MAYA MARLOWE
District Literacy Specialist Coordinator
Columbus, Ohio

Reading First Implementation Evaluation: Interim Report



The enabling legislation for Reading First requires the U.S. Department of Education to contract with an outside entity to evaluate the program's progress. One part of the national evaluation is an implementation study, which will address the following questions:

1. How is the Reading First program implemented in districts and schools?
2. How does reading instruction differ between Reading First schools and non-Reading First Title I schools?
3. How does reading instruction differ between Reading First schools and non-Reading First Title I schools as Reading First schools' implementation efforts mature over time?
4. Does student achievement improve in schools with Reading First funds?
5. Is there any relationship between how schools implement Reading First and changes in reading achievement?

The *Reading First Implementation Evaluation: Interim Report* released on July 24, 2006, addresses questions 1 and 2. Questions 3, 4, and 5 will be addressed in a later report.

Highlights of the report include the following:

- Teachers in Reading First schools reported, on average, they spent significantly more time on reading than did teachers in non-Reading

First Title I schools—a difference of about 19 minutes per day, or about 100 minutes per week.

- Reading First teachers were significantly more likely than their counterparts in non-Reading First Title I schools to place their struggling students in intervention programs.
- Reading First schools were significantly more likely to have a reading coach to support teachers in the implementation of their reading programs than were non-Reading First Title I schools.
- Teachers in Reading First schools were more likely to report applying assessment results for varied instructional purposes (e.g., for planning, grouping, progress monitoring, and identifying struggling readers) than their non-Reading First Title I counterparts.
- Teachers in Reading First schools participated in more professional development and professional development that was more likely to address the components of scientifically based reading research than teachers in non-Reading First Title I schools.

The full text of the *Reading First Implementation Evaluation: Interim Report* is available online at <http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/opepd/ppss/reports.html#reading>. A copy of the report can be ordered by calling 877-4ED-PUBS (877-433-7827) or e-mailing edpubs@inet.ed.gov.

This newsletter was created by:



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Copyright ©2006 by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory. This newsletter was produced in whole or in part with funds from the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, U.S. Department of Education, under contract number ED-01-CO-0057/0001.

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