

Reading Improvement Programs (Grades 7-9): 2003-04

REIS04-157-04

At a Glance

The Reading Improvement program was designed to remove the reading deficiencies of Grades 7-9 students scoring below the 40th percentile in reading comprehension on a norm-referenced test. Eligible students were required to take a Reading Improvement course, with a teacher-pupil ratio of 1:20, in addition to the State-required English Language Arts courses. For each grade, there were a variety of Reading Improvement programs offered. Reading Mastery or Reading I, using *Corrective Reading*, was recommended for students who scored below the 25th percentile. Reading Mastery, using *Read XL*, was recommended for Grades 7-8 students scoring between the 25th and 39th percentile. Ten schools used Read 180, a computer-based intervention program for students scoring below the 25th percentile.

Implementation of the Reading Improvement Program

Of students who were eligible for Reading Improvement across all grade levels, 62% were enrolled in Reading Improvement for both semesters, 6% were enrolled in Reading Improvement one semester, 13% were enrolled in Reading 7 or 8, and 18% were not enrolled in any reading course. However, a large proportion of eligible students was not served, while ineligible students were enrolled in the program, particularly students with no pretest score or limited English proficiency.

Corrective Reading was used by 43%, 40%, and 23% of the Grades 7, 8, and 9 students, respectively. Over half (55%, Grade 7; 60%, Grade 8) of the Grades 7 and 8 students was enrolled in Reading Mastery, using *Read XL*. Reading I was the corresponding course for Grade 9 students (67%). Read 180 was used in one Grade 7 school and 9 high schools. Ten percent of Grade 9 Reading Improvement students used Read 180.

Observations of Reading Classes

Observations were conducted of *Corrective Reading*, Reading Mastery with *Read XL*, Read 180, Reading I and Reading 8 classes. There were significant differences in the amount of time spent in reading activities, particularly Phonics. No observed Reading Mastery 7 classes used *Read XL* materials. Most used workbooks and one was reading a novel. However, one Reading 8 class did use the *Read XL* text. No Reading 7 classes were observed using the State-adopted text, *Interactive Reader*. Instead, teachers used worksheets or novels.

Use of materials other than those recommended suggested a lack of fidelity to the recommended programs. All *Corrective Reading* classes used the *Corrective Reading* textbook and four of the five used the accompanying workbook. Students in two of the three Read 180 classes were observed using the program software, however, the teacher rarely worked with one group individually, preferring to have all students working in groups and monitoring all groups' activities. Several Read 180 classes were not observed because the computers or software required for the program were not functional.

The most important difference in teacher-student activities among the five programs was the amount of time spent at various thinking levels, where *Corrective Reading*, Reading I and Reading Mastery 7 classes spent half of the time at Level 1 thinking. In contrast, Reading 8 classes spent 26% of their time at Level 3. It is of great concern when students are rarely challenged past a Knowledge level of thinking, regardless of their reading ability. Even though teachers were provided materials to use during additional reading time, Level 3 thinking occurred for short periods of time only in Read 180 and Reading I. Level 4 thinking was not observed in any class.

Effect of Participation on Student Outcomes in Reading

At Grades 7 and 8, students who had previously scored above the 40th percentile, but were misplaced in Reading Improvement, had the lowest mean adjusted NCE scores. Students who were eligible, but enrolled in Reading 7 or 8, had similar mean adjusted NCE scores as ineligible students enrolled in Reading 7 or 8. At Grade 9, only ineligible students placed in Reading Improvement scored lower than each of the other evaluation groups.

At Grade 7, ineligible students enrolled in Reading Improvement, had significant negative NCE gains. All other student groups had losses or gains within the expected range. At Grade 8, most groups functioned in the expected -3 to +3 range. At Grade 9, only ineligible students placed in Reading Improvement had a significant negative gain.

A greater percentage (74%) of Grade 7 eligible students enrolled in Reading 7 passed TAKS Reading than those enrolled in Reading Improvement (51%) or not enrolled in any reading class (58%). Eligible Grade 8 students enrolled in Reading 8 (83%) were more likely to pass TAKS than those enrolled in Reading Improvement (67%) or not enrolled in a reading class (70%). Differences were less evident at Grade 9, where eligible students enrolled in Reading I (58%) or no reading class (61%) had similar passing rates.

In Grades 7 and 9, there were no significant differences in mean adjusted reading comprehension NCE scores between eligible students in *Corrective Reading*, *Read XL* or Reading I. Confidence intervals showed that the possible ranges of means at Grade 7 for students in *Corrective Reading* or *Read XL* were well below the mean for the grade. At Grade 8, students enrolled in Reading Mastery, using *Read XL*, had higher mean adjusted NCE scores than students using *Corrective Reading*. Effect sizes showed the differences were of little practical significance.

Of the three Reading Improvement courses offered at Grade 7, there were higher percentages of eligible students passing TAKS Reading in courses using *Read XL* and *Read 180*. Yet, there was a 74% passing rate

for eligible students in Reading 7, the course designed for students above the 40th percentile. The lowest passing rate for eligible Grade 8 students was for those using *Corrective Reading* and the highest passing rate was for those enrolled in Reading 8. Similar percentages of Grade 9 students passed TAKS Reading, regardless of whether they enrolled in Reading Improvement.

Misplacement in Reading 7 or 8 was actually beneficial to students who read below grade level. However, for students pretesting on or above grade level who were misplaced in Reading Improvement, the effects were detrimental. These students actually lost ground throughout the year rather than maintaining or increasing their academic achievement levels on the *ITBS*.

TAKS results were similar to the *ITBS* results in that misplacement played the same role. Grades 7 and 8 students pretesting below the 40th percentile misplaced in Reading had much higher passing rates than those appropriately placed in Reading Improvement courses, and students pretesting above the 40th percentile misplaced in Reading Improvement courses had somewhat lower passing rates than those appropriately placed in Reading. At Grade 9, students in each pretest percentile band had similar passing rates, regardless of Reading class placement, including no Reading class.

Differences Due to Ethnicity

The mean adjusted NCE score for Grade 7 White students roughly corresponded to a grade equivalent (GE) of 7.8, while the adjusted mean for African American and Hispanic students was equivalent to a GE of 6.5, still below grade level for students at the end of Grade 7. At Grade 8 means ranged from 49.7 (GE = 8.7) for White students to 43.2 (GE = 7.5) for African American and Hispanic students. Although Grade 9 White students scored higher than other students, the GE corresponding to their mean adjusted NCE was only a 9.1, well below the expected end of year grade equivalent of 9.8.

Passing rates for TAKS Reading varied mostly by reading class participation and eligibility, regardless of ethnicity.