

Reading Improvement Programs (Grades 7-9): 2004-05

REIS05-157-3

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. Six high schools used Read 180, a computer-based intervention program for students scoring below the 25th percentile. Reading 7 or 8 was available for students scoring above the 39th percentile.

Implementation of the Reading Improvement Program

Of students who were eligible for Reading Improvement across all grade levels, 77% were enrolled in Reading Improvement for both semesters, 4% were enrolled in Reading Improvement one semester, 7% were enrolled in Reading 7 or 8, and 6% 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 28%, 24%, and 16% of Grades 7, 8, and 9 students, respectively. Over half (72%, Grade 7; 76%, Grade 8) of Grades 7 and 8 students was enrolled in Reading Mastery, using *Read XL*. Reading I was the corresponding course for Grade 9 students (77%). Seven percent of

Grade 9 Reading Improvement students used Read 180.

Principals' Perceptions

Thirty-one middle and high school principals responded to survey questions (5-point scale where 1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree) regarding the Reading Improvement program. Many principals thought that the curricula available at their schools met the needs of their students (mean = 3.6). There was some agreement that the best and most qualified teachers should be assigned to Reading Improvement (mean = 3.5) and that it did occur at their schools (mean = 3.4). High school principals were more confident that Reading Improvement could effectively increase reading achievement (mean = 4.1) than middle school principals (mean = 3.1).

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 higher mean adjusted NCE scores than 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. Reading Improvement students appropriately placed made gains, but not as high as those placed in Reading 7 or 8.

At Grade 7, ineligible students enrolled in Reading Improvement had significant negative NCE gains, as did ineligible students that were not in any reading class. 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 (48%) or not enrolled in any reading class (35%). Eligible Grade 8 students enrolled in Reading 8 (72%) were more likely to pass TAKS than those enrolled in Reading Improvement (51%) or not enrolled in a reading class (55%). Differences were less evident at Grade 9, where eligible students enrolled in Reading I (50%) or no reading class (55%) had similar passing rates.

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. Lowest passing rates were for students enrolled in no reading class. 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 gain score for Grade 7 White students roughly corresponded to a grade equivalent (GE) of 6.2, while the adjusted means for African American (G.E. = 4.3) and Hispanic (G.E. = 5.7) students were well below grade level for students at the end of Grade 7. At Grade 8 mean gains ranged from 2.6 (GE = 8.1) for White students to -1.2 (GE = 4.0) for African American and 0.1 (G.E. = 5.7) for Hispanic students. Although Grade 9 White students scored

higher than other students, the GE corresponding to their mean adjusted NCE was 8.3, 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.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this evaluation, the following recommendations are made for the Reading Improvement program:

- Discontinue the Reading Improvement program with the current choice of curricula. Regardless of previous academic ability, students need a more challenging, rigorous reading class that provides interesting reading material and teachers who provide activities that promote higher order thinking.
- Accuracy in placing students in the program. Students who were eligible for Reading Improvement made academic progress when they were enrolled in Reading or Reading Improvement for a full year. Generally, enrollment of ineligible students in Reading Improvement may be detrimental to their educational progress.
- Assigning a reading course to all Grade 7 and 8 students. Students who pretested above the 40th percentile made better progress on both norm- and criterion-referenced assessments if they were enrolled in Reading 7 or 8.
- Qualifications of teachers. School administrators should assign program courses to teachers that are certified in reading instruction and have proven to be effective in working with students with academic deficiencies.
- Providing challenging curriculum and activities. Regardless of the reading course in which students are enrolled, activities should provide students with the opportunity to use higher order thinking skills, as well as instruction on the TEKS.