

At a Glance

The primary goal of the Reading First grant was to ensure each student was reading on or above grade-level by the end of third grade. Across the five years of the grant this was to be accomplished by the implementation of: (a) a comprehensive Scientifically Based Reading Research (SBRR) program with direct, explicit instruction, (b) a professional development program for all K-3 teachers and administrators, (c) a screening, diagnostic, progress monitoring and outcome measurement assessment battery designed to identify students who need additional reading intervention and (d) a three-tier classification system for identifying students in need of increasingly intense reading intervention. The Reading First program was evaluated to provide context, implementation, and outcome data for decision-making purposes. This evaluation was designed to act both as a record of program implementation and as a resource for future program planning.

Demographics

The Reading First program was implemented in 30 schools, mobilizing 707 teachers and serving 13,562 students. Targeted students tended to be male (51.9%), Hispanic (73.2%), economically disadvantaged (89.8%) and limited English proficient (LEP) (52.9%).

The overwhelming majority of teachers were female (81.2%). Teachers were primarily Hispanic (38.0%), White (31.4%) and Black (27.4%). Across all grades a majority (70.3%) of teachers had five years or fewer experience in the district. Only 9.6% of the teachers were certified through alternative certification, which is a decrease from 15% the previous year. Nearly a fifth of the teachers had earned a graduate degree (Masters, 18.4%; Doctorate, 0.8%).

The Reading First grant had a budget of \$6,898,629 in 2004-2005. Grades K-3 were the primary constituents of the grant, although special education students and teachers in all

grades in these schools were to receive service.

Implementation of Reading First

The district had already implemented approved SBRR core programs, Open Court and McGraw-Hill, prior to the commencement of the Reading First grant. Teacher surveys indicated that only 69% of teachers gave a 90-minute reading lesson at least four times a week. Classroom observations indicated that teachers were using the core curricula in their lessons.

Reading First teachers received, on average, 38.9 hours of training beyond the regular district training. Campus coaches, hired for each school to help implement the program and train staff, conducted most of the training. A plurality (45%) of the training was on instructional topics such as the fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, graphophonemic knowledge or phonemic awareness. Other training topics were on mechanical elements of implementing the program (22%), Tier II materials (16%), and data analysis to drive instruction (11%). Teacher, principal and campus coach surveys indicated teachers have begun to apply their training to a moderate extent.

For Grades K-2, the screening and diagnostic assessment of *Texas Primary Reading Inventory (TPRI)* and the *El Inventario de Lectura en Español de Tejas (Tejas LEE)* were administered three times in the year. For Grade 3, only the *TPRI* was available. The Grade 3 *Tejas LEE* was not available until the winter assessment and was not used by Reading First schools. For all grades, the progress monitoring assessments *Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS)* and *Indicadores Dinámicos del Éxito en la Lectura 6ta Edición (IDEL)* were administered. The *TPRI*, *Tejas LEE*, *DIBELS* and *IDEL* were all administered using an electronic personal desk assistant. Teachers,

principals and campus coaches all indicated this was a superior form of testing. All grades were also administered outcome measures in the form of the *Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS)* and the *Logramos*. In Grade 3, students took the *Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS)* as well.

Students were served in two of three potential tiers of student intervention. All 13,562 students received Tier I intervention, which consisted of 90 minutes a day of reading using an SBRR curriculum. Of these 8,190 (60.4%) also received Tier II intervention, which consisted of an extra 30 minutes of intervention during the school day. Tier III, in which students received an additional 30 minutes of after-school reading instruction was not due to be implemented until the fall of 2005-2006 school year.

Classroom Observations

Teachers did a good job of fostering student engagement and the students responded with high levels of interest. Teachers were fairly effective at managing transitions in the classrooms, their pedagogical skills were fairly good, and their classroom environments were conducive to learning. The level of thinking as measured by Bloom's Taxonomy indicates that teachers and students tend to operate at the knowledge and comprehension levels, but do not often venture in to higher order thinking. The standard Reading First classroom tended to be one of whole group, guided practice instruction. Nearly one-fifth of the instructional time was taken up by transitions between activities. Phonemic Awareness and Graphophonemic Knowledge were highly prevalent in Kindergarten, but gave way to the other components of reading in the later grades. Comprehension was the most actively taught component across all the grades.

Reading First Outcomes

Outcomes reflect the first year of school-level implementation. Overall, 59.6% of the K-3 students who took the *ITBS* were above the 40th percentile mark. Most (91.6%) Kindergarten students were reading on grade-level or above. This percentage decreased in Grade 1 (61.2%) and Grade 2 (52.5%). For Grade 3, only 46.0% of students were on grade-level using the *ITBS* 40th percentile mark as the criterion. Overall, 80.3% of K-3 students who took the *Logramos* scored

on grade-level. Most (75.5%) Kindergarten students tested on the *Logramos* were reading on grade-level or above. Grade 1 (80.7%), Grade 2 (93.4%) and Grade 3 (85.7%) had over 80% of students above the 40th percentile.

Overall, the Reading First schools had an average Grade 3 *TAKS* Reading passing rate of 87.2%. This represented a decline of 3.5% from the previous year. The Grade 3 *TAKS* Reading mastery rate was 17.1%, dropping 3.3% from the 2003-2004 rate. In an attempt to focus on success rather than simply passing, an intermediate rate was examined using a cutoff score of 7 above the passing rate on the English language Grade 3 *TAKS* Reading and the mastery score for the Spanish language Grade 3 *TAKS* Reading. Only 38% of the Reading First Grade 3 students met the intermediate rate.

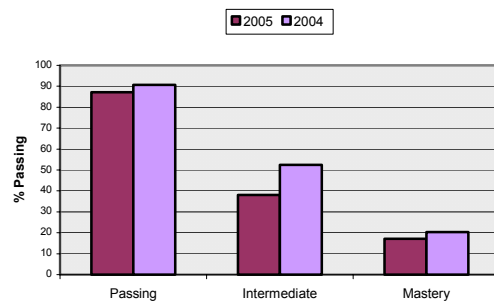


Figure 1. Reading First *TAKS* passing, intermediate and mastery rates for 2004 and 2005.

No meaningful differences were found between the Reading First schools and a similar set of control schools. For the *TPRI/Tejas LEE*, in Kindergarten the control group had slightly more students on grade level than in Reading First, but for Grades 1 and 2 the opposite result was found. The variance accounted for was very small and did not represent a real world difference.

Similarly, on the *ITBS/Logramos* Reading First had slightly lower adjusted NCE scores in Kindergarten and Grade 2 compared to the control schools, but had slightly higher scores in Grade 1. These differences were statistically significant, but represent negligible real world effects. No differences were found between Reading First schools and control schools on passing, mastery and the proposed intermediate rate for *TAKS*.