At a Glance

The two major goals of the Reading First grant were to ensure each student was reading on or above grade level by the end of third grade and to implement a comprehensive Scientifically Based Reading Research (SBRR) program with direct, explicit instruction that included phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary development, and text comprehension. 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. The program was in 30 schools and served Grades K-3 and special education students in Grades K-6.

Implementation of Reading First

Full implementation of the grant was delayed until the start of the 2004-2005 school year due to the grant being awarded in December, and staff not hired until March. This year’s implementation focused on thoroughly training Reading First personnel so that implementation would run smoothly next year.

The grant promoted three strategies for ensuring student reading success by Grade 3: (1) the formation of a three tiered intervention system designed to give increasing instructional support for students displaying reading difficulties; (2) an extensive training program for teachers focusing on established reading research and effective classroom practices; and (3) implementation of a comprehensive assessment system that encompasses screening, diagnostic, progress monitoring and outcome measures to identify and track students in need of service and to provide timely and useful data that can inform classroom instruction.

Three tiers of student intervention were developed. All students were to receive at least 3 months of Tier I intervention, which consisted of 90 minutes a day of reading using an SBRR curriculum. Tiers II and III were designed for students that needed additional help after the Tier I intervention and were not due to be implemented until the 2004-2005 school year. Since the district already used curricula appropriate for Reading First, all students received Tier I services starting in March. By the end of the school year, 12,912 students were served. Targeted students tended to be male (51.2%), Hispanic (73.9%), economically disadvantaged (89.8%) and were limited English proficient (LEP) (55.3%).

A trainer-of-trainers model was adopted for the Reading First program. For each school, a campus coach was hired to conduct the training for that school. Twenty-nine of the 30 campus coaches were hired by the end of the school year. These campus coaches received thorough training in May and throughout the summer. Training topics included study of the basic components of reading, administration of the assessment measures, computer skills relevant to the administration of the program, working with bilingual and ESL students, and evaluation. For the most part, campus coaches rated these trainings as useful and felt that they were prepared to train others.

Outcome measures such as the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS) and Logramos were collected this year to serve as baselines for comparison of outcome measures in future years. In addition, scores from the Texas Primary Reading Inventory (TPRI) and the El Inventario de Lectura en Espanol de Tejas (Tejas LEE) were collected to serve as screening, diagnostic and progress monitoring measures.

A New Standard for TAKS Success

In an effort to improve the identification of students at-risk for reading difficulty, a new intermediate standard for interpreting success on the TAKS was introduced. A longitudinal study was conducted examining all district
students who passed the 2003 Grade 3 TAKS and their subsequent performance on the 2004 Grade 4 TAKS. Only district students who had a TAKS Reading score for Grade 3 in 2003 and a TAKS Reading score for Grade 4 in 2004 were included in the study. Grade 3 students whose score was just enough to pass – they answered the number of correct items needed to pass or one or two above of the correct number – were examined to see how they fared the following year on the Grade 4 TAKS. Of the students that correctly answered 20, 21 or 22 questions on the English Grade 3 TAKS (20 was passing), 52.8% did not pass the English Grade 4 TAKS the following year. For students taking the Spanish Grade 3 TAKS, 71.6% failed the English Grade 4 TAKS. These data demonstrate that students that barely met the passing mark on the Grade 3 TAKS are still at risk of reading failure (Figure 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students Who Barely Passed the Grade 3 English TAKS Reading in 2003</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Passed Grade 4 TAKS Reading in 2004</td>
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<tr>
<td>Failed Grade 4 TAKS Reading in 2004</td>
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<tr>
<th>Students Who Barely Passed the Grade 3 Spanish TAKS Reading in 2003</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Passed Grade 4 TAKS Reading in 2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failed Grade 4 TAKS Reading in 2004</td>
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</tbody>
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Figure 1. Grade 4 English TAKS Reading passing rates for students who barely passed (scored the number of correct answers needed to pass or one or two above the passing mark) the Grade 3 English and Spanish TAKS Reading.

Reading First Outcomes

Due to the decision to withhold implementation of the campus based training until the 2004-2005 school year, the outcome results were not a reflection of the success of the Reading First program, but instead will serve as a baseline by which future progress will be measured.

Kindergarten students had the highest percentage (83.8%) of students that were on grade-level when tested with the TPRI or Tejas LEE. Only 68.2% of Grade 1 students tested on grade-level. For Grade 2 this percentage increased to 78.7%. Overall, 69.6% of Grade 3 students were considered on grade-level using the TPRI as a measure.

Overall, 59.0% of the K-3 students who took the ITBS were above the 40th percentile mark. Most (91.1%) Kindergarten students were reading on grade-level or above. This percentage decreased in Grade 1 (64.6%) and Grade 2 (49.3%). For Grade 3, only 43.7% of students were on grade-level using the ITBS 40th percentile mark as the criterion.

Overall, 77.8% of K-3 students who took the Logramos scored on grade-level. Similar to ITBS, most (83.9%) Kindergarten students tested on the Logramos were reading on grade-level or above. Grade 1 (83.8%) and Grade 2 (88.0%) had over 80% of students above the 40th percentile. For Grade 3, 79.2% of students were on grade-level. In Grade 3, only 24 students were assessed on Logramos.

The Reading First schools had an average passing rate of 90.7% on the TAKS. The passing rates spread from 77.4% to a perfect 100%. The range was 22.6 percentage points. Of the 30 schools, 18 had passing rates of 90% or above, 11 had passing rates between 80% and 90%, and one school was below 80%.

The TAKS scores were also examined using the proposed intermediate rate predicting a 75% passing rate on Grade 4 Reading. The average intermediate rate for the Reading First schools was 52.5% on the TAKS. The intermediate rates spread from 33.0% to 81.1% with a range 48.1 percentage points. Two schools had mastery rates above 70%, 7 schools had rates between 60% and 70%, 8 had rates between 50% and 60%, 7 had rates between 40% and 50%, and 6 were below 40%.