Reading First: 2007-08

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At-a-Glance

The major goal of the Reading First grant is to ensure each student is 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 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.

Demographics

The Reading First program was implemented in 40 schools, utilizing 766 teachers and serving 14,997 students. This total included 172 kindergarten, 192 first grade teachers, 181 second grade teachers, 165 third grade teachers, and 56 special education teachers. The overwhelming majority of teachers were female (79.8%). Teachers were primarily Hispanic (48.2%), African American (29.1%), and White (20.3%). Thirty-six percent (36%) of the teachers were certified through alternative certification, which is an increase of 9% from when the program began. More than a fifth of the teachers had earned a graduate degree (Masters, 20.6%; Doctorate, 1.6%). The rest of the teachers (77.8%) had earned bachelor’s degrees or did not have a degree listed in the personnel file.

Targeted students tended to be Hispanic (71.6%) and economically disadvantaged (68.6%). Approximately half were limited English proficient (LEP) (52.3%). Approximately one-tenth of the Reading First students (9.4%) were considered special education students.

Budget

Forty schools were funded through the Reading First grant, which had a budget of $5,558,461. 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.

Training

Reading First teachers received, on average, approximately 40 hours of training beyond the regular district training. Most of the training was conducted by campus coaches hired to help implement the program and train staff. The majority of training was on instructional topics such as fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, graphophonemic knowledge or phonemic awareness. Other training topics were on mechanical elements of implementing the program, Tier II materials, and data analysis.

Organization

Students were served in two of three potential tiers of student intervention. All 14,997 students received Tier I intervention, which consisted of 90 minutes a day of reading instruction. Of these, 7,637 (51%) also received Tier II intervention, which consisted of an extra 30 minutes of intervention during the school day. In addition, 3,029 (20%) students received Tier III intervention, in which students received an additional 30 minutes of after-school reading instruction.

Class Size

Mean class size for Reading First schools was 18 students per class. The largest average class size was kindergarten (mean = 19), while grades one through three had a mean of 18 students. Conner had the highest overall mean class size of 23 students per class, with Blair (mean = 21) and Arcadia Park and Cailet (mean = 20), also having large class means. Smallest overall class sizes were for Preston Hollow (mean = 13) and Houston (mean = 14). Fourteen schools had mean kindergarten classes of 20 or more students, while Conner averaged 27 students per class in kindergarten. District mean class sizes were: kindergarten through grade two, 19 students per class, and grade three, 18 students per class (2006-07 AEIS Report).

Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills

Sixty percent (60%) of the Reading First schools had a higher percent of students who met standard on TAKS Reading than the district’s average. Overall, Reading First students showed a gain of 3.7% over 2007 testing, while district students showed a 1.6% gain during the same time period. Sixteen Reading First schools had more than 90% of the students who met standard on TAKS Reading. Twenty-six or 65% of the Reading First schools showed gains on TAKS Reading over last year’s testing. Reading First and district students had similar passing rates of approximately 86% (Figure 1).
Iowa Test of Basic Skills and Logramos

First and second grade Reading First students were outperformed by district students on *ITBS* Reading Comprehension; however, Reading First students outperformed district students on *Logramos* Reading Comprehension. Combining the number of students at or above the 40th percentile on Reading Comprehension, for *ITBS* and *Logramos*, Reading First students (76.4%) performed at a higher level than district students (72.1%).

First grade students across the district showed growth in on-grade level performance. As shown in Figure 2, district students improved from 63% on-grade level to 77% over the past four school years, with no growth from 2005-06 to 2006-07. At the same time, Reading First students exhibited consistent increases from 63% on-grade level to 78%.

Second grade Reading First and district students demonstrated inconsistent results over the four year period. In 2004-05, 59% of district students were on grade level, with a two percentage point decline the following year, and returning to 59% on-grade level in 2006-07. A 13% increase was seen for 2007-08. Reading First students followed the same pattern, moving from 55% to 60% with a decline in 2005-06. A 16% increase was seen for 2007-08. In 2007-08 Reading First second grade students outperformed district students.

Recommendation

The 2008-09 school year is the last year of the Reading First grant. The campus coaches should continue teacher training to build capacity on the campuses, which could leave a legacy long after the project is finished.