

READING FIRST: YEAR 2 EVALUATION RESULTS

ANNA W. GREHAN
STEVEN M. ROSS
YING HUANG
GULER BOYRAZ
The University of Memphis

JOHN A. NUNNERY
Old Dominion University

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INTRODUCTION

The Reading First Grant is a U. S. Department of Education program that provides funds to state agencies for distribution to districts and/or schools to improve K-3 classroom reading instruction. Reading First, the academic cornerstone of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), recognizes the importance of both improving student reading achievement and implementing programs and strategies scientifically proven to be effective. Reading First, along with the programs authorized under Title I, focuses on improving student achievement for all students, especially children in the nation's most disadvantaged schools and communities.

All 50 states have approved Reading First plans and have received awards. The 2005 Federal budget included \$1.1 billion for Reading First with an additional \$1.1 billion to be part of the administration's 2006 budget request. Nationally, Reading First grants currently benefit more than 100,000 teachers and 1.5 million students. Tennessee has received approximately \$20 million annually and is projected to receive approximately \$115 million over the six years of the program.

States are responsible for the quality of the local programs they fund, for ensuring that these programs are based on scientifically-based reading research, for statewide initiatives, and for professional development to improve K-3 reading instruction. States competitively award subgrants to eligible Local Education Agencies (LEAs). The total number of LEAs in Tennessee is 138 of which 40, or 29%, were eligible for Reading First subgrants. In January 2004, Tennessee awarded 16 LEAs and 56 schools (referred to as Round I schools) subgrants of approximately \$200,000 for three years. In 2005, an additional 19 schools (Round II) received funding, bringing the total number of schools participating in the program to 75. Tennessee plans to have two three-year grant cycles during the six-year term of the Reading First program. LEAs that have shown strong reading gains each year and have significantly increased student achievement at the end of the initial three years will be eligible to participate in the second three-year grant term.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The overall purpose of the formative evaluation was twofold: (a) to obtain a broad-scale perspective of schools' progress and outcomes relative to Reading First goals and (b) to engage participating schools in operationalizing, documenting, evaluating, and improving their reading programs, in order to increase ownership, quality, and sustainability during and following the funding period. The Reading First formative evaluation was structured around the following five primary research questions:

- To what extent have the reading skills of students been improved?
- To what extent has the Reading First initiative reduced the number of students in grades 1 through 3 reading below grade level? Has the program increased the number of students reading at grade level or above?
- To what degree have teachers implemented the five scientifically-based components of reading instruction in the classroom?
- To what extent have all teachers been provided with the training and support they need to help improve students' reading skills?
- To what degree do the schools' reading programs align with the Reading First purposes?

DESIGN

The formative evaluation period extended from August 2004 through June 2005. The evaluation design was based on both quantitative and qualitative data collected from classroom observations, teacher and Literacy Leader questionnaires, and school-developed Reading First program implementation benchmarks. Reading First school level achievement/outcome data on the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) was received in Fall 2005 and results were also incorporated in this report.

Participants

Fifty-six Round I schools that were awarded Reading First grants for the 2003-2004 academic year and the 19 Round II schools receiving funding in the 2004-2005 academic year participated in the formative evaluation. Approximately half of the Reading First Round I schools had received Reading Excellence Act (REA) grants in 2002-2003. The REA grant was a two-year U.S. Department of Education program that also provided funding for reading in K-3 classrooms.

Fifty-one of the funded schools are located in urban areas while the remaining 24 are located in rural counties or small towns. Collectively, the schools had approximately 17,016 students in kindergarten through grade 3 and 850 K-3 regular classroom teachers. Specific distribution of the grades, number of K-3 classroom teachers, and the number of students is shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Reading First participants – Round I and Round II*

Grades	Total Students	Total Teachers
Kindergarten	4,544	227
Grade 1	4,404	220
Grade 2	4,128	206
Grade 3	3,940	197
Total	17,016	850

*Note: The number of Reading First participants is an estimate.

INSTRUMENTATION

Four instruments were used to collect the formative evaluation data: a classroom observation measure specifically developed for literacy instruction (LOT), one teacher (RFTQ) and one Literacy Leader (RFLQ) questionnaire, and the Reading First program implementation benchmark tool.

Classroom Observation Measures

Literacy Observation Tool (LOT[®])

The LOT was developed by researchers at the Center for Research in Educational Policy, College of Education, The University of Memphis (CREP) and is an instrument for observing in elementary classrooms where teachers are engaged in teaching reading and other reading practices (Smith, Ross, & Grehan, 2002). The LOT was designed to assist schools in evaluating the effectiveness of teacher implementation of research-based reading strategies. The LOT has been aligned to the National Reading Panel and National Research Council findings and captures all five essential components of the Reading First program.

Surveys

Reading First Teacher Questionnaire (RFTQ)

All K-3 teachers who taught reading classes and special education teachers were asked to complete the RFTQ, which contains 27 items to which teachers respond using a five-point Likert-type scale that ranges from (1) Strongly Disagree to (5) Strongly Agree. Items assessed the specific program elements of Reading First such as: general impressions of professional development, support provided by the Literacy Leader and the Reading Cadre, teacher support for the program, impacts on student achievement, changes in teaching and assessment, and understanding of the Reading First program.

Reading First Literacy Leader Questionnaire (RFLQ)

The RFLQ was created specifically for the present study. The questionnaire is divided into three sections. One section asks questions related to the Reading First goals. Specifically, respondents were asked to (a) rate the degree to which the school has achieved each goal, (b) rate the degree to which they were involved with the achievement of the goal, and (c) list key supporting factors and barriers to achieving the different goals. In another section, the respondents were presented with 21 tasks for which a Literacy Leader may be responsible and asked to indicate how frequently they were involved in each task.

Implementation Benchmarking Tool

The Implementation Benchmarking Tool was developed by CREP. In CREP's work in over 700 schools in multiple states, it was found that a highly critical component of formative evaluation and improvement planning is the development of individualized "Implementation Benchmarks." Generic RF benchmarks were developed by CREP to assist schools in refining and further developing each school's individual benchmarks directly geared to their school's implementation of the RF grant. The five components of effective reading instruction and RF assessments were included in the generic model.

As part of the benchmark development process, the Literacy Leader and a designated school benchmark team developed statements or goals for each major program component. Each statement was then elaborated by specific *indicator* and *evidence* for implementation phases (Phase I = Beginning; Phase II = Intermediate, and Phase III = Full Implementation). Typical timelines are to complete the implementation benchmarks by mid-October, refine them if needed during the year, and then, by early May, engage the benchmark team in evaluating progress and specifying program goals for the following year. Based on those goals, the benchmarks are continually revised and refined. Consequently, participating schools are continually aware of all program components, implementation progress, directions for school improvement directed by data, and shared faculty-administrator decision-making.

Student Achievement Results

In addition to the survey and observation tools cited above, reading achievement data will also be derived from scores on the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP). The TCAP is the basis of Tennessee's criterion-referenced testing program and is administered to 3rd and 8th grade students each spring. The TCAP test is aligned with the state's content standards and provides distinct categories for levels of achievement. The achievement test is a timed, multiple choice assessment that measures skills in Reading, Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies. Student-level Reading scores for third and fourth grade students are used in this evaluation.

PROCEDURE

Data for the evaluation were collected August-June for the 2004-2005 school year. In January (Round I) and September (Round II) 2004, Literacy Leaders and Reading Cadre members were trained in the procedures for collecting the evaluation data. In fall 2004 schools made revisions to and customized the generic RF benchmarks and conducted three *LOT* observations. Spring 2005 data collection included three *LOT* observations by the Literacy Leader and Reading Cadre, teacher completion of the RFTQ, Literacy Leader completion of the RFLQ, and the rating of RF implementation benchmarks. The Tennessee RF State Director, principals, and Literacy Leaders received Data Summary Reports and planning guides for use in interpreting and planning for the 2005-2006 school year at the state RF conferences in July. Final school reports were sent to each school in the fall.

DATA COLLECTION

Table 2 provides the type of measures, instrument names, administration timeline, and a brief data collection description for each of the instruments.

Table 2

Data Collection Summary

Type of Measure	Instrument	Timeline	Description
Classroom Observations	LOT	Fall 2004 Spring 2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 235 reading observations • 212 reading observations • Conducted by Literacy Leaders and Reading Cadre
Surveys	RF Teacher Questionnaire RF Literacy Leader Questionnaire	Spring 2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1,143 received • 75 received
Benchmarks	RF Implementation Benchmarking Tool	Spring 2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 74 received
Data Analysis and Reporting	Individual School Reports	Summer 2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 75 individual school data reports – July 2005 • 75 individual school final reports – Fall 2005

Tennessee RF Formative Evaluation Aggregate Report	October 2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide guidebooks for planning • Final Report
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RESULTS

Classroom Observation Results

Literacy Observation Tool (LOT[®])

As indicated in the description of the LOT, the observation procedure primarily focuses on six categories of the basic elements of literacy instruction: Instructional Orientation, Instructional Components, Student Activities, Learning Environment, Visible Print Environment, and Materials Used. Trained observers use a five-point rubric (0 = not observed, 1 = rarely, 2 = occasionally, 3 = frequently, and 4 = extensively) to rate the frequency of strategies within the six categories of instruction.

Round I Descriptive Results

Instructional Orientation

The primary Instructional Orientation utilized in Round I RF classrooms was direct instruction with the small group (59.8% frequently and extensively). This represents an increase from 2003-2004 when small group instruction was observed 37.1%. Direct instruction with the whole class was observed in 55.3% of classroom observations, which was a decrease (73.7%) from 2003-2004.

Instructional Components

All explicit teaching activities were observed more frequently in 2004-2005 than 2003-2004. The beginning reading and readiness activities most often observed in 2004-2005 were explicit phonics instruction (27.8%) and explicit phonemic awareness instruction (16.9%). Concepts of print and letter naming/knowledge were observed less often (frequently and extensively) in 15.7% and 12.4%, respectively, of classroom observations. Fluency activities were observed more frequently, with teacher modeling of fluent oral reading in 32.4% of classroom observations and students reading/rereading together observed 39.6% of the time. A variety of text comprehension activities

were observed, including explicit comprehension strategy instruction (24.4%), makes connection to prior knowledge (36.3%), asks students for predictions (26.6%) and guides interactive discussion (47.5%). Explicit vocabulary instruction, guides visual imaging, and uses higher level questioning were observed less often (frequently and extensively) in 16.6%, 17.8%, and 21.4%, respectively, of observations.

Student Activities

Consistent with 2003-2004 observations, students reading self-selected materials, writing independently in response to reading, and engaging in formal testing were rarely observed in the reading block during 2004-2005. Less than 12% of these observations were characterized as frequently and extensively occurring.

Learning Environment

The observation data suggest a positive learning environment in most RF classrooms. Students were rated as being actively engaged during 97.0% of the visits, and effective classroom management was observed in 97.6% of school observations.

Visible Print Environment

Also consistent with 2003-2004, Literacy Leaders and Reading Cadre observed a print-rich environment in many RF classrooms in 2004-2005. Over 95% of classrooms visited had classroom libraries and displayed the alphabet so that it was readily available to students. Word walls were noted in 97% of classroom observations and evidence of student writing/work products were found in 76.1% of RF classrooms.

Materials Used

Materials most often utilized during classroom observations were basal texts (43.5%), word/vocabulary materials (42.39%), chart tablets/white boards (35.4%) and fiction books (25.6%). Basal texts were used less often in 2003-2004, observed 34.7% frequently and extensively. Materials used less than 15% (frequently and extensively) were big books, books on tape, computers, poetry, newspaper/magazines, student notebooks/journals, and non-fiction books.

Round I Inferential Results

The LOT observations from the 2003-2004 (Year 1) and 2004-2005 (Year 2) academic years were compared using a Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) using Years (2003-2004 and 2004-2005) as the independent variable and each item of the LOT for the dependent variables. A total of 450 LOT observations were included in the analysis, with 193 from Year 1 and 257 from Year 2. At the multivariate level, there were significant differences [$F(41, 408)=6.528, p<.001$] between years. At the univariate level, there were significant differences for 36 items. All of the significant items (with the exception of one) indicated that in Year 2, Reading First teachers were more likely to use the practices measured on the LOT than they were in Year 1.

Round II Descriptive Results

Instructional Orientation

The primary Instructional Orientation utilized in RF classrooms was direct instruction with the whole class (64.3% frequently and extensively). Direct instruction with small group was observed in 47.8% of classroom observations while learning centers and cooperative/collaborative learning were utilized less often at 32.1% and 27.8% respectively.

Instructional Components

The beginning reading and readiness activities most often observed were explicit phonics instruction (34.8%) and explicit phonemic awareness instruction (23.5%). As would be expected, letter naming/knowledge were observed less often (20% frequently and extensively). Fluency activities were observed more frequently, with teacher modeling of fluent oral reading in 31.3% of classroom observations and students reading/rereading together observed 35.7% of the time. The most prevalent comprehension activities observed were introduces/reviews key vocabulary (42.6%), makes connection to prior knowledge (35.7%) and guides interactive discussion (33.9%).

Student Activities

Students reading self-selected materials, writing independently in response to reading, and engaging in formal testing were rarely observed in the reading block. Less than 12% of these observations were characterized as frequently and extensively occurring.

Learning Environment

The observation data suggested a positive learning environment in most RF classrooms. Students were rated as being actively engaged during 93.0% of the visits, and effective classroom management was observed in 96.5% of school observations.

Visible Print Environment

Literacy Leaders and Reading Cadre observed a print-rich environment in many classrooms. Almost all classrooms visited had classroom libraries (96.5%) and displayed word walls (98.3%) so that they were readily available to students. Alphabets were noted in 100% of classroom observations and evidence of student writing/work products were found in 75.6% of RF classrooms.

Materials Used

Materials most often utilized during classroom observations were basal texts (54.8%), word/vocabulary materials (48.7%), chart tablets/white boards (42.6%) and worksheets/workbooks (29.5%). Materials used less than 10% (frequently and extensively) were big books, books on tape, computers, poetry, newspapers/magazines and student notebooks/journals.

Survey Results

Reading First Teacher Questionnaire (RFTQ)

Round I Descriptive results

The RFTQ was administered in Spring of 2005. Generally, teachers had more favorable attitudes toward the RF program at their schools during the second year of implementation. Year 2 results show a much more positive trend when compared to Year 1. All of the 27 items had an increase in the percentage of teachers agreeing or strongly agreeing. Over 90% of the Year 2 RF

teachers indicated that they had a thorough understanding of the program. Approximately 95% of the respondents indicated that they had received adequate professional development and training and that the RF instructional elements at their school were based on scientifically-based reading research. More than 90% of the teachers reported that the efforts of their school's Literacy Leader supported program implementation, that because of the RF program systematic and explicit instruction occurred daily in their schools, and that scientifically-based instructional materials were readily available.

Negative responses by RF teachers in the second year were limited to just two areas, parental involvement and student misbehavior. Unlike the results from Year 1, in Year 2 close to half (45.6%) of the teachers responding felt that they were given sufficient planning time.

Round I Inferential Results

Teachers at Reading First schools completed the RFTQ during the 2003-04 and 2004-05 academic years. Approximately 700 (692) completed it during Year 1 and approximately the same number (702) completed it in Year 2. A Multivariate Analysis of Variance was conducted on the RFTQ, with Years (Year 1 and Year 2) as the independent variable and all RFTQ items as the dependent variables. At the multivariate level, there were significant differences [$F(27,1366)=46.7, p=.001$] between years. At the univariate level, there were significant differences between Years on all 27 items, with teacher responses to all items being significantly higher in Year 2 than in Year 1.

Round II Descriptive results

The RF Teacher Questionnaire for Round II schools was administered in Spring 2005. Over 70% of teachers strongly agreed or agreed that they had a thorough understanding of the school's RF program and 61.3% of teachers were generally supportive of the school's RF program. Over 60% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that their school was effectively implementing the 3-Tier Reading Model and that the RF program increased student achievement. They also characterized (strongly agreed and agreed) that professional development provided by the school, the Reading Cadre, and the state was valuable at 77.7%, 64.9%, and 60.0%, respectively.

Teachers had generally favorable attitudes toward their school's reading programs. A majority of the teachers (91.1%) reported that all instructional elements, including assessments

and materials, are based on scientifically-based reading research and that the administration protects a daily uninterrupted 90-minute block of reading instruction (82.6%).

Reading First Literacy Leader Questionnaire (RFLQ)

Round I Descriptive Results.

The Literacy Leader Questionnaire was administered in Spring 2005. Of the 56 Round I Literacy Leaders statewide, 56 completed the questionnaire.

Goal attainment and involvement

Literacy Leaders were asked to rate the degree to which each of the two RF goals were achieved at their school and their degree of involvement in achieving the goals. For the two goals, none (0%) reported that the goal of ensuring that all children can read at grade level or above by the end of third grade was achieved and 21.4% of the Literacy Leaders reported that applying scientifically-based reading research and the proven instructional assessment tools consistent with this research have been fully met. However, over 95% of the Literacy Leaders rated each goal as at least somewhat achieved or greater, thus indicating an impression of at least a moderate degree of implementation progress and greater than Year 1 results. Literacy Leaders reported being fully involved in achieving the two goals at 66.1% and 57.1%, respectively.

Roles and responsibilities

The next series of questions in the RFLQ listed 21 different responsibilities that a Literacy Leader might be asked to assume. The Literacy Leaders were asked to rate the *frequency* of their involvement. Increases in Year 2 from Year 1 involvement were found on every item for Literacy Leaders in Round 1. Those items on which 90% or more of the Literacy Leaders responded "4" (Frequently) or "5" (Extensively) were: monitor reading program implementation (94.7%), organize and distribute reading materials (96.4%), use DIBELS assessments to make instructional decisions (98.2%), monitor student achievement (96.4%), communicate and coordinate professional development (92.8%), assist in the development of visions, goals, and benchmarks for the school's reading program (92.9%), conduct literacy observations, surveys, and benchmarking activities required by the project evaluation plan

(94.61%), ensure the reading instructional team has high expectations (92.8%), coordinate and implement the 3-Tier Reading Model (98.2%), and work with teachers to ensure that K-3 curriculum and programs are centered around the 5 essential elements of reading (94.7%).

Support and resources

The final set of items asked respondents to rate the level of support received as a Literacy Leader. Similar to Year 1, as shown in the summary table, there was strong agreement that support was received from the administration, with 87.5% of the Literacy Leaders reporting that the administration supported their efforts as a Literacy Leader and 85.7% reporting that the administration supported overall RF efforts at their school. Additionally, using the 4 or 5 rating, only 7.1% of Literacy Leaders indicated that teachers were resistant to RF instructional changes and assessment requirements, and 17.9% reported that the number of teachers in their school negatively impacted their ability to coach, mentor, and provide training. Of concern to Literacy Leaders was the time to routinely provide follow-up assistance to teachers after they participated in RF training and teachers' involvement in selecting the type of training or making decisions regarding the overall RF efforts at their school.

Inferential Results

A total of 111 responses were obtained from Literacy Leaders on the LLQ, with 55 responses in Year 1 and 56 responses in Year 2. For the goal section of the LLQ, a series of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) procedures were conducted with Years (Year 1 and Year 2) as the independent variable and the four goal items as the dependent variables. There were significant differences between Years on all four items, with Literacy Leader responses to all items being significantly higher in Year 2 than in Year 1. For the responsibilities section of the LLQ, a MANOVA was conducted with Years as the independent variable and the 21 responsibility items as the dependent variables. At the multivariate level, there was a significant difference between Years [$F(21,75)=8.2, p <.001$]. At the univariate level, there were significant differences on 20 items, indicating significantly greater frequency of tasks in Year 2 compared to Year 1. The final section of the LLQ contained seven items, which were included in a MANOVA as dependent variables, with Years as the independent variable. There were significant differences between Years at the multivariate level [$F(7,99) = 2.55, p = .019$]. At the univariate level, there were significant differences for only three items.

Round II

Descriptive Results.

The Literacy Leader Questionnaire was administered in Spring 2005. Of the 19 Round II Literacy Leaders statewide, 19 completed the questionnaire.

Goal attainment and involvement

Literacy Leaders were asked to rate the degree to which each of the two RF goals were achieved at their school and their degree of involvement in achieving the goals. For the two goals, none (0%) reported that the goal of ensuring that all children can read at grade level or above by the end of third grade was fully achieved and 15.8% of the Literacy Leaders reported that applying scientifically-based reading research and the proven instructional assessment tools consistent with this research have been fully met. Literacy Leaders reported being fully involved in achieving the two goals at 73.7% and 36.8%, respectively.

Roles and responsibilities

The Literacy Leaders were asked to rate the *frequency* of their involvement. The items with 90% or more of the Literacy Leaders responding “4” (Frequently) or “5” (Extensively) were: monitor reading program implementation (100%), give teachers supportive feedback (94.8%), use assessments to make instructional decisions (100%), ensure the reading instructional team has high expectations for all learners (100%), work with teachers to ensure that K-3 curriculum and programs are centered around the five essential elements of reading (100%), and conduct literacy observations, surveys, and benchmarking activities required by the project evaluation plan (100%). Areas of responsibility in which less than 50% of the Literacy Leaders responded Frequently or Extensively were: model instruction for teachers and tutors (42.1%), mentor classroom teachers and tutors (42.1%), participate in the special education referral process to provide early literacy intervention (31.6%), and work with the school district to facilitate collaboration and communication about literacy to parents and the community (31.6%).

Support and resources

The final set of items asked respondents to rate the level of support received as a Literacy Leader. There was strong agreement that extensive support was received from the administration, with 84.2% of the Literacy Leaders reporting that the administration supported their efforts as a Literacy Leader and 78.9% reporting administration support for overall RF efforts at their school. Additionally, using the 4 or 5 rating, 0% of Literacy Leaders indicated that teachers were resistant to the instructional changes and assessment requirements of RF, and 0% reported that the number of teachers in their school negatively impacted their ability to coach, mentor, and provide training.

Reading First Benchmarks

Round I Schools

Teams from each Round I school rated their school's progress toward RF Benchmark goals in the spring using either the generic model provided to them or a customized version developed by the individual schools in Fall 2003. Fifty-five schools chose to develop their own benchmarks using the generic model as a guide, although some schools chose not to rate each

category. The results show considerably more frequent Phase II and III status for all Categories in Spring 2005 for Round I schools.

Inferential Results

To corroborate this impression statistically, a Multivariate Analysis of Variance was conducted to maintain continuity with the previous year's analysis. The independent variable was Years (Year 1 and Year 2) and the dependent variables consisted of the 17 Benchmark items. At the multivariate level, significant differences were obtained for Years [$F(17,64)=17.89, p < .001$]. At the univariate level, significant differences were obtained for all dependent variables, with Year 2 levels of implementation being rated significantly higher than Year 1 levels of implementation on all Benchmark items.

Round II Schools

Teams from each school rated their school progress toward benchmark goals in Spring 2005 on benchmarks developed in Fall 2004. All 19 Round II schools submitted benchmarks to CREP, although some schools chose not to rate each Category. As expected, in Year 1 of the RF program for Round II schools implementation results show generally more frequent Phase I status and less Phase II and III status for most categories.

Round I and Round II Student Achievement Results

Cross-sectional Descriptive Analyses

Round I, Grade 3. For the Round I sample, the percentage of third grade students scoring "Below Proficient" decreased by 12.1%, from 27.5% in 2004 to 15.4% in 2005, while the percentage of students scoring at "Advanced Proficiency" increased from 16.5% to 23.4%. The performance of successive cohorts of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch also improved, with a decrease of 11.5% scoring "Below Proficient," from 29.0% to 17.5%. Marked decreases in the percentages of students scoring "Below Proficient" also occurred for special education students (-28.6%) and African American students (-12.8%).

Round II, Grade 3. Round II sample results mirrored those of Round I. The percentage of third grade students scoring "Below Proficient" decreased by 9.3%, from 26.6% in 2004 to

17.3% in 2005, while the percentage of students scoring at “Advanced Proficiency” increased from 15.5% to 22.6%. The performance of successive cohorts of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch also improved, with a decrease of 11.2% scoring “Below Proficient,” from 29.2% to 18.0%. Marked decreases in the percentages of students scoring “Below Proficient” also occurred for special education students (-22.5%) and African American students (-11.0%).

Round I, Grade 4. For the Round I sample, the percentage of fourth grade students scoring “Below Proficient” decreased by 9.8%, from 35.5% in 2004 to 25.7% in 2005, while the percentage of students scoring at “Advanced Proficiency” increased from 12.4% to 14.8%. The performance of successive cohorts of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch also improved, with a decrease of 9.9% scoring “Below Proficient,” from 38.3% to 28.4%. Decreases in the percentages of students scoring “Below Proficient” also occurred for special education students (-10.1%) and African American students (-9.1%).

Round II, Grade 4. As with third grade Round II results, fourth grade Round II results mirrored those of fourth grade Round I. The percentage of fourth grade students scoring “Below Proficient” decreased by 7.3%, from 35.5% in 2004 to 28.2% in 2005, while the percentage of students scoring at “Advanced Proficiency” increased from 13.2% to 14.1%. The performance of successive cohorts of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch also improved, with a decrease of 7.2% scoring “Below Proficient,” from 38.1% to 30.9%. Decreases in the percentages of students scoring “Below Proficient” also occurred for special education students (-6.3%) and African American students (-6.7%).

Longitudinal Cohort Analyses

Round I, Total Sample. The percentage of students increasing in proficiency relative to those who did not change proficiency levels was 9.50% ($n = 190$), versus 8.25% ($n = 165$) who decreased in proficiency, yielding a difference of +1.25%. McNemar’s test yielded a p-value of 0.20, indicating no significant change in reading proficiency for 2005 fourth graders. The percentage who were “Below Proficient” declined from 25.3% in 2004 to 24.1% in 2005 (-1.2%), while the percentage “Proficient” increased by 3.9% and the percentage “Advanced” declined 2.8%.

Round II, Total Sample. For the Round II longitudinal cohort, the percentage of students decreasing in proficiency (12.0%, $n = 84$) was larger than the percentage increasing (8.71%, $n = 61$). McNemar's test yielded a p-value of 0.07, suggesting a difference in the ratio of increasers to decreasers that approached statistical significance. Overall, 2.7% shifted from Proficient or Advanced to "Below Proficient," with a 2.5% decline in the number of students who were "Proficient" in third grade, and a 0.2% decline in the number who were "Advanced".

Round I, Students Eligible for Free or Reduced-price Lunch. The percentage of impoverished students increasing in proficiency relative to those who did not change proficiency levels was 10.5% ($n = 154$), versus 10.3% ($n = 150$) who decreased in proficiency, yielding a difference of +0.27%. McNemar's test yielded a p-value of 0.86, indicating no significant change in reading proficiency for 2005 fourth graders. The percentage who were "Below Proficient" declined from 27.1% in 2004 to 26.9% in 2005 (-0.2%), while the percentage "Proficient" increased by 3.2% and the percentage "Advanced" declined 2.9%.

Round II, Eligible for Free or Reduced-price Lunch. For the Round II longitudinal cohort, the percentage of impoverished students decreasing in proficiency (13.46%, $n = 75$) was larger than the percentage increasing (10.23%, $n = 57$). McNemar's test yielded a p-value of 0.14, indicating the change was not statistically significant. Overall, 2.6% shifted from Proficient or Advanced to "Below Proficient," with a 1.7% decline in the number of students who were "Proficient" in third grade, and a 0.9% decline in the number who were "Advanced".

Round I, Special Education Students. The percentage of special education students increasing in proficiency relative to those who did not change proficiency levels was 20.6% ($n = 47$), versus 9.7% ($n = 22$) who decreased in proficiency, yielding a difference of +0.27%. McNemar's test yielded a p-value of less than 0.01, indicating a significant, positive change in reading proficiency for 2005 fourth graders who received special education services. The percentage who were "Below Proficient" declined by 8.4%, while the percentage "Proficient" increased by 8.1% and the percentage "Advanced" increased 0.3%.

Round II, Special Education Students. For the Round II longitudinal cohort, the percentage of special education students increasing in proficiency relative to those who did not change proficiency levels was 12.5% ($n = 10$), versus 28.8% ($n = 23$) who decreased in proficiency, yielding a difference of -16.3%. McNemar's test yielded a p-value of 0.04, indicating a significant, negative change in reading proficiency for 2005 fourth graders who received special education services. The percentage who were "Below Proficient" increased by 11.5%, while the percentage "Proficient" decreased by 8.0% and the percentage "Advanced" decreased by 3.5%.

School-level results

For Round I schools, 30 (54.5%) showed improved performance, 6 (10.9%) showed stable performance, and 19 (34.5%) were identified as underperforming. Across schools, the difference between the ratio of improving to declining students ranged from -40% to +40%. For Round II schools, 6 (31.6%) showed improved performance, 3 (15.8%) showed stable performance, and 10 (52.6%) were identified as underperforming. The difference between the ratio of improving to declining students in Round II schools ranged from -35% to +24%.

CONCLUSIONS

To what extent have the reading skills of students been improved?

The late implementation of the RF program in 2003-2004 clearly impacted teacher and Literacy Leader perceptions regarding results and benefits in student achievement. However, by Year 2 Literacy Leader perceptions improved significantly. For example, in Year 1 only 25.5% of the Literacy Leaders rated coordination and implementation of the 3-Tier Reading model as occurring frequently or extensively. By Year 2, the percentage of Literacy Leaders responding frequently or extensively to this item rose to 98.2%.

Teacher perceptions also improved between Years 1 and 2. While 40.2% of Year 1 teachers strongly agreed or agreed that student achievement had been positively impacted by the RF program, 81.1% of teachers in Year 2 strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. The perceptions of the Round II teachers and Literacy Leaders more closely parallel those of the Round I teachers in the second year than the first.

TCAP results provided a mixed view of reading improvement in Reading First schools. The cross-sectional analyses showed striking improvements between successive cohorts for both Rounds I and II in third grade, with overall decreases in the percentages of students scoring “Below Proficient” and increases of +6.9% and +7.1% scoring “Advanced” for each Round, respectively. Fourth grade cross-sectional results showed an identical pattern of improvement, albeit somewhat less pronounced. In the longitudinal analyses, which only reflect school effectiveness in fourth grade, a small increase was observed in the proportion of students who were proficient in Round I schools, but the increase was not statistically significant. In the Round II longitudinal analyses, a more substantial decrease in the percentage of students reading at proficiency was observed (-3.2%), although the decrease was not statistically significant.

To what extent has the Reading First initiative reduced the number of students in grades 1 through 3 reading below grade level? Has the program increased the number of students reading at grade level or above?

In the second year of program implementation, Round I schools showed a strong pattern of improvement on TCAP, with the majority (54.5%) having a greater proportion of students improving in reading proficiency than declining in proficiency. The reverse was true of Round II schools, of which a majority (52.6%) had a greater proportion of students declining in proficiency than improving.

Cross-sectional analyses showed very strong improvements for students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, with decreases of about 11% scoring “Below Proficient” in grade three for both rounds, and decreases of 9.9% and 7.2% in fourth grade for Round I and Round II, respectively. Likewise, successive cohort performance improved dramatically for special education students, with decreases in the percentages scoring “Below Proficient” of 28.6% and 22.5% in grade three, and 10.1% and 6.3% in grade four, for each Round respectively. These results are somewhat in contrast to those from the longitudinal analyses, which showed small or no changes for students who were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. For special education students, the longitudinal analyses showed strong, significant increases for Round I students (+11.0%, $p < .01$) and strong, significant decreases for Round II students (-16.3%, $p < .05$).

To what degree have teachers implemented the five scientifically-based components of reading instruction in the classroom?

Classroom observations, particularly in Round I schools, indicated that teachers are changing instructional practices to conform to recommendations and requirements of the Reading First initiative. Changes in instruction from Year 1 to Year 2 included a shift from traditional lecture/whole group instructional orientation to an increased use of small group instruction that allows for more individualization, and an increase in the use of various cooperative learning activities. There was also evidence that teachers are moving toward more explicit teaching in the areas of phonemic awareness, phonics, and fluency. The results were more mixed for vocabulary instruction and text comprehension. Although most elements of these two areas were more frequently observed in Year 2, the differences were smaller, particularly for explicit vocabulary instruction, guiding visual imaging, and use of higher level questions.

Round II schools were more reflective of direct instruction with the whole class, with less than one-half of the observations indicating small group instructional orientations. Within the five components of reading instruction, teachers were most frequently observed using explicit phonics instruction, emphasizing fluency by having students read/reread orally together, and introducing/reviewing key vocabulary. Explicit vocabulary instruction and text comprehension strategies (with the exception of making connections to prior knowledge and guiding interactive discussion) were observed in less than 25% of the observations, however. A comparison of the Round I schools (in their second year of implementation) with Round II schools (Year 1) revealed that the RF components, phonemic awareness instruction, explicit phonics instruction, introduction and review of key vocabulary, and explicit vocabulary instruction, were observed frequently and extensively more often in the newest RF schools, while modeling of fluent oral reading, having students practice fluency by reading orally together, and explicit comprehension instruction were observed at the same (or only slightly less) frequencies. These results seem to imply that the newest schools have not been standing still while RF grants have been cycled through staggered stages. This more advanced readiness stage probably accounts for the more

positive attitudes of Round II schools when compared to Round I at the end of the first year as well as their heightened implementation progress.

According to Literacy Leaders, progress in attaining RF goals has also had mixed results. As in Year 1, less than one-fourth of the Round 1 Literacy Leaders (21.4%) reported that the goal to apply scientifically-based reading research and the proven instructional and assessment tools consistent with this research had been fully met in their schools in Year 2. However, this percentage was significantly higher than the 5.5% reported in Year 1. In Year 2, almost all (94.7%) Literacy Leaders continued to report frequently or extensively devoting time to working with teachers to ensure that K-3 curriculum and programs were centered in the five essential elements of reading, again a significant increase over Year 1 (70.9%). Year 2 teachers concurred with the Literacy Leaders with almost 95% strongly agreeing or agreeing that all instructional elements of RF at their schools were based on scientifically-based research.

To what extent have all teachers been provided with the training and support they need to help improve students' reading skills?

A review of the responses on the questionnaire for Round I teachers suggests that, in Year 2, the teachers felt they had received adequate levels of professional development and support. For example, almost 95% of teachers in Year 2 strongly agreed or agreed that they had received adequate initial and ongoing professional development. Over 94% of teachers in Year 2, as compared to 77.4% of teachers in Year 1, strongly agreed or agreed that the Literacy Leaders had provided helpful guidance and support. In addition, 81% of Year 2 teachers reported that the training provided by the Reading Cadre was helpful while 71% suggested that the training from the TN Department of Education was valuable. The responses of Round II teachers also suggest that a majority strongly agreed or agreed that they had received necessary levels of training and support.

Results of the Round I Literacy Leaders questionnaire suggest that, in Year 2, Literacy Leaders were playing an active role in providing training and support to teachers. Almost 95% of the Literacy Leaders reported that they monitored the reading program implementation on a frequent or extensive basis. However, Literacy Leaders reported little time for modeling instruction for teachers and tutors and follow-up assistance to teachers after they participated in Reading First training.

To what degree does the school's reading program align with the Reading First purposes?

Results from 2004-2005 suggest that, as the RF program has matured, schools and districts made significant improvements in alignment. The examination of benchmarks for Round I schools shows significant improvements in Year 2 compared to Year 1.

The responses from Round I teachers and Literacy Leaders in Year 2 also suggests that they are more comfortable with the RF program and can focus more of their time and attention on implementation. Over 90% of the teachers in Year 2 strongly agreed or agreed that they had a thorough understanding of RF. Almost 65% of the Literacy Leaders in Year 2, compared to 45% in Year 1, reported frequent or extensive involvement in assisting teachers in the alignment of reading instruction with grade level standards and TCAP results.

As would be expected, Round II school Benchmarks indicate more frequent phase I status. However, significant majorities of Round II teachers and Literacy Leaders reported that they understood the RF program and were actively participating in implementation of the 3-Tier model. This suggests that Round II schools may move more rapidly to phase II and III of implementation than Round I schools.

In summary, as would be expected as the program matures, Round I schools in their second year of program implementation showed significant improvement in reading achievement. In the longitudinal comparison of matched TCAP reading proficiency in 2004-2005 RF schools decreased below proficient by -1.2% and increased proficient and advanced by +1.1% for fourth grade students, while the overall state decreased below proficient by -3.7% and increased proficient and advanced by +3.7%. In addition, as might also be expected, Round II schools in their first year of program implementation showed limited improvement in reading achievement. Given the positive teacher and Literacy Leader attitudes and understanding of RF, Round II schools should begin to see improvements in their second year, as did the Round I schools, if they continue to successfully implement the program.

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