

NEW MEXICO READING FIRST

JANUARY 2007



Reading First Implementation Evaluation: Interim Report U.S. Department of Education

Note from the Director:

This evaluation report addresses the following questions:

1. **How is the Reading First program implemented in districts and schools?**
2. **How does reading instruction differ between Reading First schools and non-Reading First Title I Schools?**

This issue is dedicated to presenting some of the findings of this report specifically some comparisons between Reading First and Title I schools. At this time of year when districts are developing their budget for next year this information may help decision makers realize that Reading First can be sustained with Title I funds and that use of Title I funds to implement the tenets of Reading First would be money well spent.

The Reading First Implementation Evaluation Interim Report draws on the following data sources:

- Surveys completed in Spring 2005 by 6,185 K-3 teachers, 1,574 principals, and 1,318 reading coaches in nationally-representative samples of 1,092 Reading First schools and 541 non-Reading First Title I schools; and
- Interviews with 52 Reading First state directors and reviews of states' application for Reading First awards.

The major findings from the report are:

Reading First schools appear to be implementing the major elements of the program as intended by the legislation, such as providing scientifically based reading instruction in grades K-3, increased amounts of time for reading instruction, interventions for struggling readers, wider use of classroom-based reading assessments, and more professional development activities.

Classroom reading instruction in Reading First schools is significantly more likely to adhere to the intentions of the Reading First legislation than that in Title I schools. These include the amount of instructional time, use of appropriate reading materials, and implementing reading activities and strategies supported by scientifically-based reading research.

Although significantly more Reading First teachers reported receiving professional development in helping struggling readers, than did Title I teachers, teachers in both Reading First and Title I schools recognize the challenge of providing effective instruction to struggling readers;

80% of teachers in both groups reported that they need additional professional development on this topic.

Teachers in Reading First schools are more likely to report applying assessment results for varied instructional purposes (e.g., for planning the grouping of students, progress monitoring and identifying struggling readers) than their Title I counterparts.

Reading First schools were significantly more likely to have a reading coach to support teachers in the implementation of their reading programs than were non-Reading First Title I schools.

Reading First staff received significantly more professional development than did Title I staff.

Reading First teachers were more likely to have received professional development in the five dimensions of reading instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary development, reading fluency, and reading comprehension, as well as in overall teaching strategies. Indeed, Reading First teachers reported feeling better prepared to teach the five dimensions of reading than did their Title I counterparts.

Major questions to be addressed in the final report due out in late 2007:

1. How does reading instruction differ in Reading First schools and non-grantee Title I schools as RF schools' implementation efforts mature over time?
2. Does student's achievement improve in schools with Reading First funds?
3. Is there any relationship between how schools implement Reading First and changes in reading achievement

Beyond financial support, Reading First principals were significantly more likely to report receiving substantially more external, nonfinancial assistance than Title I principals, in a variety of areas including selecting instructional programs, diagnosing needs of struggling readers, conducting demonstrations lessons, and reviewing the effectiveness of reading programs.

Characteristics of Reading First and Title 1 Schools

The demographic characteristics of Reading First and Title I schools are similar in several areas including attendance rates, mobility, and stability of enrollment. In general, the patterns of staff experience are similar for the two groups of schools. About half of the principals and one-third of the teachers have been in their current schools for three years or less. Reading First schools however, on average have larger enrollments and are more likely to be located in urban areas.

The K-3 student populations of RF and Title I schools are similar in terms of the proportions of students receiving special education services and instruction in a language other than English. However, these schools differ in their proportions of students receiving ESL instruction; about 1/5 of K-3 students in RF schools receive such services, compared with about 10% in Title I schools.

The median school in the total Reading First population received \$138,000 in federal Reading First funds for school year 2004-05; about 80% of the awards were between \$50,000 and \$299,999 in size. Student populations in these schools were between 470 and 511. In addition to these funds, most schools in the total population of RF schools received support for reading programs from Title I (91%) and from district general funds (79%). Reading First schools also received many different kinds of non-financial assistance for their K-3 reading programs in the form of assistance with planning professional development, interpreting assessment results, implementing the core reading program, and conducting classroom observations. Finally, across a variety of types of nonfinancial assistance, Reading First schools were much more likely to receive such assistance than were Title I schools.

Exhibit 1: Non-financial External Assistance for K-3 Reading Program Activities in Reading First and Non-RF Title I Schools, 2004-05 School Year

| Type of Assistance | Reading First Schools Percent | Title I Schools Percent |
|--|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Planning professional development | 84%* | 73% |
| Interpreting assessment results | 84* | 70 |
| Conducting classroom observations | 80* | 49 |
| Providing technical assistance in implementing core reading programs | 81* | 50 |
| Selecting professional development providers | 77* | 57 |
| Selecting assessment instruments | 76* | 56 |
| Selecting instructional programs/materials | 76* | 56 |
| Reviewing reading program effectiveness | 71* | 47 |
| Conducting demonstration lessons | 71* | 48 |
| Diagnosing needs of struggling readers | 70* | 50 |
| Setting up intervention programs for struggling readers | 70* | 51 |
| Providing technical assistance for using supplementary reading materials | 69* | 48 |
| Conducting needs assessment for professional development | 57* | 43 |
| Leading teacher study groups | 49* | 33 |
| Recruiting staff with reading expertise | 40* | 25 |

(Source: Principal Survey, Questions B7.

The stars (*) indicate that there is a statistically significant difference (p-value < .05) between Reading First and Title I schools.)

Reading First teachers in three grades (kindergarten, second, and third) were significantly more likely than their counterparts in Title I schools to place their struggling students in intervention programs.

Reading Instruction:

The Reading First legislation requires all aspects of reading instruction in RF schools to be scientifically based, and the RF guidance recommends considering the allocation of time for reading instruction, as well as carefully selecting scientifically based materials, activities, and strategies for reading instruction.

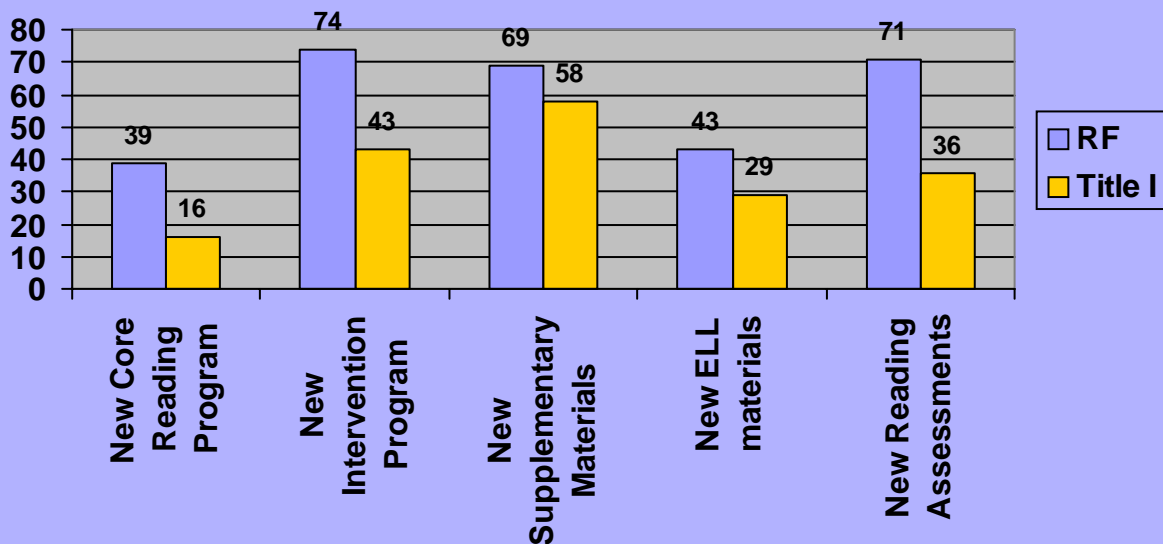
- Reading coaches in RF and Title I schools agreed that there is sufficient time during the school day allotted for reading instruction. And, a great majority of reading coaches and principals (88-98%) reported that their schools had a scheduled reading block for grades 1-3.
- However, mature Reading First schools were significantly more likely than Title I schools to have a scheduled reading block (98% vs. 92%), and on average, a 15-minute longer scheduled reading block.
- Kindergartens in RF schools were also significantly more likely to have a scheduled reading block (98% vs. 88%).
- Although nearly 12% of RF Kindergartens had scheduled reading blocks less than 90 minutes long, nearly 33% of Title I Kindergartens had reading blocks of less than 90 minutes.
- About 60% of teachers in new Reading First schools reported that they increased the amount of time spent on reading compared to the previous year. In comparison about 33% of Title I teachers reported increasing the amount of time spent on reading instruction.

Instructional Materials:

The Reading First legislation provides states and districts with specific guidelines about the selection of instructional materials for teaching reading. In their grant applications, states were required to demonstrate how they would support districts' efforts to identify instructional materials based on scientifically based reading research. The guidance further specifies that a high-quality reading program must have a coherent design and address the five essential elements of reading instruction.

New Reading First schools were significantly more likely than their Title I counterparts to have adopted a new core reading program at the beginning of the school year. They were also much more likely to have added new intervention programs for struggling readers, new supplementary materials, new ELL materials and new reading assessments.

Exhibit 2. Changes to Reading Program Materials for New Reading First and Title I Schools, 2004-05 School Year: Percent adopting or adding new programs, materials and assessments.

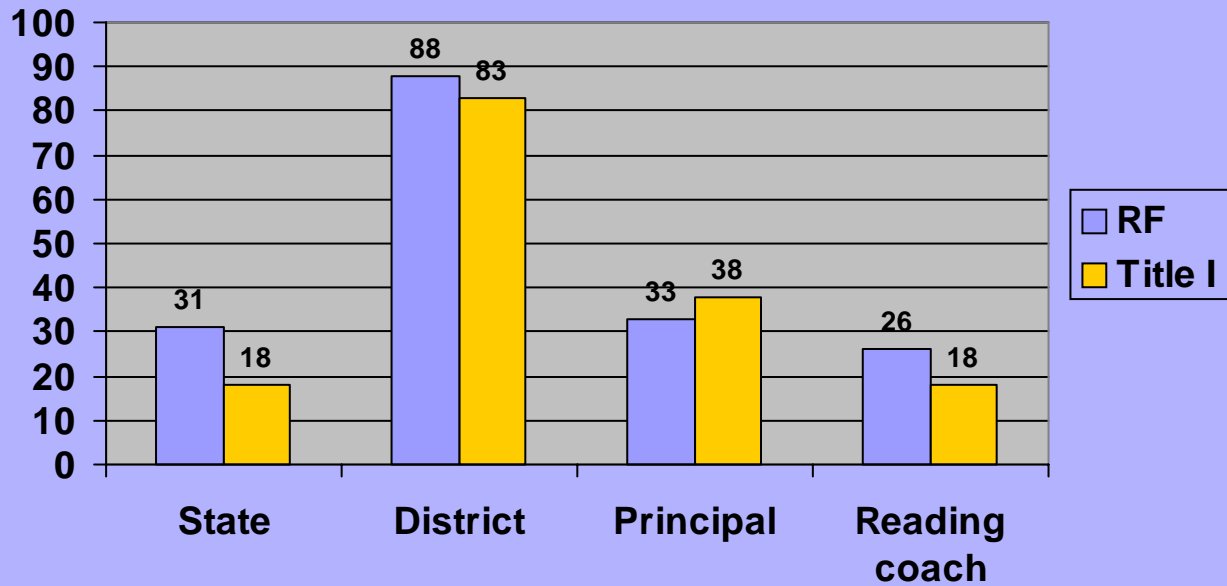


Responsibility for Selection of Materials:

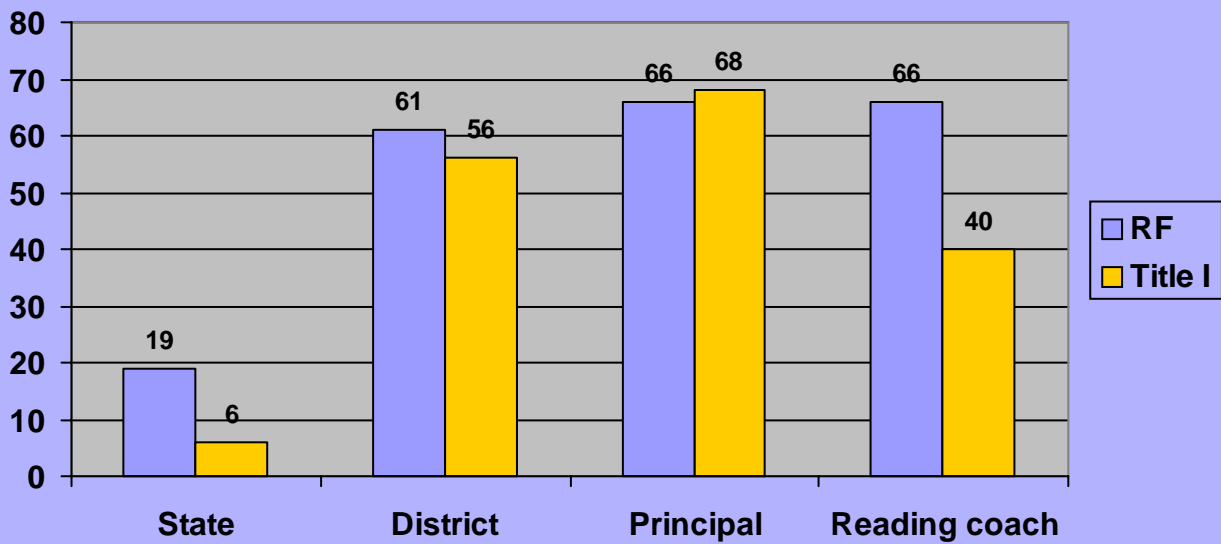
Interviews with state Reading First directors indicated that virtually all states were involved in the selection of core reading programs for Reading First schools, either by developing a list of recommended reading programs (37 states), or by referring districts to *A Consumer's Guide for Evaluating a Core Program Grades K-3* (15 states). Although most state agencies were involved in choosing programs, much flexibility existed for districts and schools.

Principals were also asked about who was involved in selecting instructional materials. 86% of principals reported the selection of core reading programs involved the district. Approximately 1/3 of principals in RF schools reported that they or their reading coach had participated in the selection of the core reading program, and 30% reported that the state was involved. Very few schools 7% reported that they were able to select core programs without any state or district input. This suggests that the RF guidelines that encourage state and district participation in key instructional decisions are largely being followed.

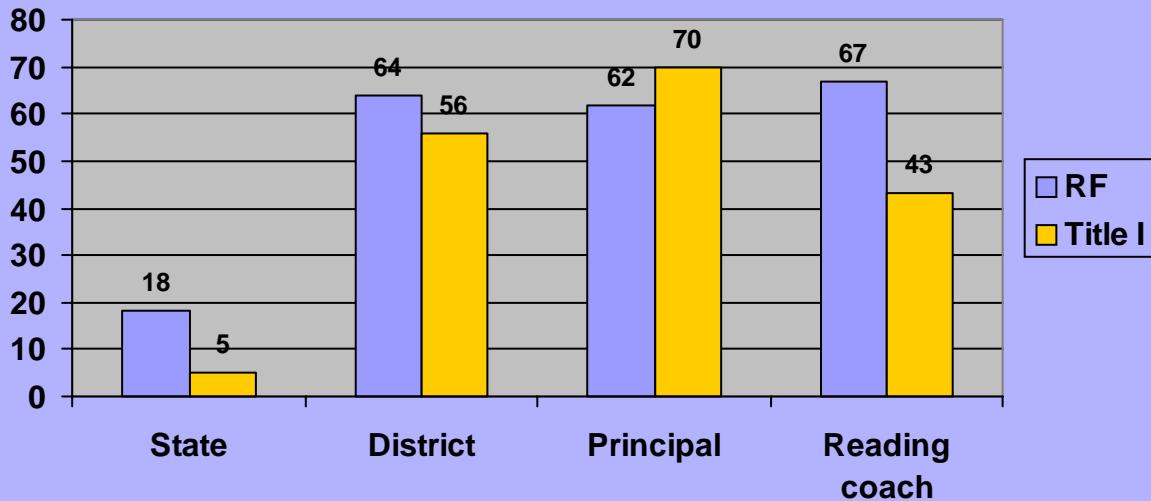
Exhibit 3: Responsibility for Selection of Reading Materials in Mature Reading First and Title I Schools, 2004-05 School Year, Percents



Selection of Supplemental Reading Program Materials



Selection of Intervention Reading Program Materials for use with Struggling Readers



(Source: Principal Survey, Question D4 The stars (*) indicate that there is a statistically significant difference (i.e., p-value <.05) between RF and Title I schools.)

Instructional Activities:

Six composites were created to summarize teachers' self-ratings of the centrality of a series of instructional activities associated with the following reading dimensions and other instructional features:

- Phonemic awareness and decoding
- Vocabulary
- Comprehension
- Fluency
- Use of scientifically based instructional strategies and materials in their classroom; and
- Negative alignment with scientifically based reading research.

Scores were computed for each composite based on the percentage of instructional activities specified in that composite that a teacher rated as "central to their instruction."

Principals in Reading First schools were significantly more likely to report having a reading coach than were principals on non-Reading First Title I schools. Coaches in Reading First schools were significantly more likely to provide teachers with various supports for their reading instruction than were coaches in non-Reading First Title I schools.

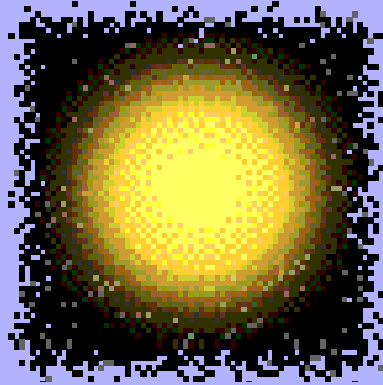
Exhibit 4: Teacher Ratings of the Centrality of SBRR aligned instructional Activities in Mature Reading First and Title I schools, 2004-05 School Year

| | Reading First Teachers Mean Percent | Title I Teachers Mean Percent |
|--|---|-------------------------------------|
| Phonemic Awareness and Decoding | | |
| Kindergarten | 91% * | 86% |
| 1 st grade | 85 | 81 |
| 2 nd grade | 63 | 59 |
| 3 rd grade | 58 | 54 |
| Comprehension | | |
| Kindergarten | 71 | 69 |
| 1 st grade | 74 | 72 |
| 2 nd grade | 67 | 70 |
| 3 rd grade | 72 | 70 |
| Vocabulary | | |
| Kindergarten | 62 | 60 |
| 1 st grade | 88 | 87 |
| 2 nd grade | 71 | 72 |
| 3 rd grade | 81 * | 75 |
| Fluency | | |
| Kindergarten | | |
| 1 st grade | 87 * | 83 |
| 2 nd grade | 57 | 58 |
| 3 rd grade | 56 * | 47 |
| Overall Composite SBRR | | |
| Kindergarten | 77 * | 68 |
| 1 st grade | 79 * | 76 |
| 2 nd grade | 76 * | 72 |
| 3 rd grade | 75 * | 70 |
| Overall Composite Non-SBRR | | |
| Kindergarten | 66 | 67 |
| 1 st grade | 68 | 70 |
| 2 nd grade | 66 | 64 |
| 3 rd grade | 66 | 64 |

(Source: Teacher Survey, Questions C.4

The stars (*) indicate that there is a statistically significant difference (i.e., p-value <.05) between RF and Title I schools.)

Reading instructional activities and strategies also appear to be aligned with the tenets of the Reading First program. Teachers in Reading First schools were more likely to report instruction that aligned with SBRR is central to their instruction than were teachers in Title I schools. Specifically, kindergarten, first- and second-grade teachers in RF schools were significantly more likely to report using scientifically based practices to teach decoding and phonemic practices to teach comprehension; and third-grade teachers were more likely to use scientifically based practices to teach vocabulary and fluency than were Title I teachers. In addition, RF kindergarten, first- and second-grade teachers were significantly less likely than Title I teachers to use activities not aligned with SBRR as a central part of their reading instruction. Reading First teachers across all four grades were more likely than Title I teachers



Assessment:

Assessment plays an important role in reading programs in both Reading First and non-Reading First Title I schools.

Reading First schools received more outside assistance in selecting assessments than Title I schools. At the same time, staff in both RF and Title I reported that the district is largely responsible for the selection and interpretation of reading assessments.

There were some differences in the types of assessments teachers in Reading First schools and teachers in non-Reading First Title I schools found useful. RF teachers were more likely to identify assessments from their core or supplementary reading programs as useful than are teachers in Title I schools. In contrast, Title I teachers were more likely to report that informal assessments are useful than are Reading First teachers.

Teachers in Reading First schools were more likely to report applying assessments results for varied instructional purposes (e.g., for planning grouping, progress monitoring and identifying struggling readers) than their Title I counterparts.



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