



NEW MEXICO READING FIRST

What Do Our Highest Performing Schools Have In Common?

To begin the 2006/2007 academic year, our external evaluator CCT chose to compare schools showing exceptional results on the DIBELS in 2005-06. Intending to find key implications that could lead to wide-ranging success, they visited schools meeting all of the following criteria:

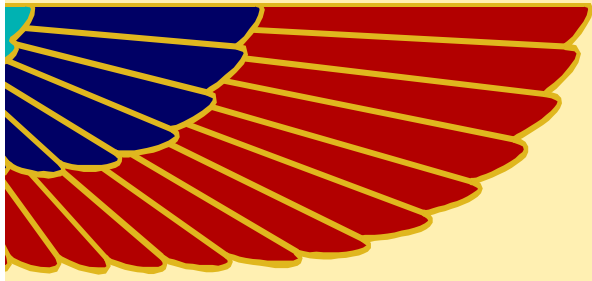
- 70% or more of students attaining Benchmark support status in April, 2006
- 70% or more of third grade students reaching Benchmark status in April, 2006
- Students at Benchmark status increasing by 20% or more between September 2005 and April 2006
- Students at Intensive status decreasing by 15% or more between September 2005 and April 2006
- 90% or more of students at Benchmark status in September 2005 maintaining that status in April 2006

Only three schools in the state met all five of these criteria: Rio Costilla (Questar district) and Gallina (Jemez Mountain district). In addition, CCT contacted a fourth school, Lavaland Elementary in Albuquerque. Lavaland met three of the above listed criteria (70% or more of Benchmark increasing by 20% or more, students at Intensive status decreasing by 15% or more, and 90% or more of Benchmark students maintaining their status), yet did not fit the mold of the other schools in New Mexico. While the other schools are small and rural, Lavaland is one of the largest First schools in the state and is located in a large, urban area. Lavaland's unique characteristics were examined.

Analysis of the data indicated that these four sites had several factors in common that contributed to their students' positive DIBELS results. Some of these factors were expected:

- All had the uninterrupted 90-minute block for core reading instruction
- All had the required Strategic (30 minute) and Intensive (60 minute) interventions
- All had at least a part-time reading coach on site
- All provided ongoing training on key topics, such as the core program, interventions, and use of data to guide instruction

Commonalities between the sites revealed a sophisticated implementation of the program. Several other unexpected factors:



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Common?

to conduct site visits in schools
by implementation factors that
meeting criteria:

- September 2005 and April 2006
- September 2005 and April 2006
- Maintaining their Benchmark

(Alcalde district), Alcalde
Mr. contacted a fourth successful
above listed criteria (students at
increasing by 15% or more, and 90%
remained in mold of a typical successful
school and is one of the largest Reading
schools. Unique results warranted closer

common, which may have led to
the following:

Intervention blocks

Intervention program

of the program, as well as sev-

Commonalities between the sites revealed a sophisticated implementation of the program and several other unexpected factors:

- All adopted their core programs at least one year prior to joining Reading First
- All had Spanish bilingual programs for the entire student body;
- All engaged in district-wide communication between reading coaches and classroom teachers
- All shared data not only with teachers and administrators, but also with students
- All exhibited constant analysis and adjustment regardless of previous success
- All used the “walk to intervention” model, during which at-risk students met with a reading coach or interventionist in ability level groups
- All had close relationships with their PED regional specialists.

While all findings are preliminary and warrant additional analysis and validation, the following themes are provided on the following pages.

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Early Core Program Adoption

At each of the four schools, teachers were reportedly already using an approved core curriculum that was applied for the Reading First grant. Consequently, teachers had received at least one year of training and therefore were familiar with the core curriculum. We suspect that this familiarity with the core curriculum at Reading First. Furthermore, educators may have benefited from a year or more of using the core curriculum before implementing Reading First. During follow-up training (including team observations), it is likely teachers build upon their familiarity with the core, reflect upon their prior experiences using it, and integrate new information into their instructional routines. (Please note that not all schools seemed to profit from early core adoption, each utilizes a different core curriculum.)

Universal Bilingual Education

Perhaps one of the most intriguing findings is that all four schools provided at least some form of Spanish language instruction to all of their students on a daily basis. In all cases, Spanish instruction was provided in reading blocks in either a pullout or push-in framework. In addition, even though instruction was given in English, at two of the sites we observed, teachers and interventionists provided Spanish instructions and/or give additional guidance. At these two schools, there also is a dedicated time for Spanish-speaking students for additional instruction.

District-wide Communication

Communication between the district administration and schools as well as that between schools within the district was addressed in several different ways. In Albuquerque, the district coordinator and reading coaches meet twice every month. Principals also attended the meeting on a monthly basis. In Española, the district coordinator/reading coach travels between her two schools every week, meeting with the other reading coach and interventionist. Española's coordinator and principals meet monthly to present ideas and address Reading First issues. Finally, at Gallina, the district coordinator, regional specialist and entire K-3 staff meet monthly to discuss progress. The data suggest that support and advice from other educators present at these meetings is helpful for all of these schools.

Sharing Data with Students and Parents

While New Mexico Reading First schools keep administrators and teachers informed of student progress, the most successful schools take extra steps to share data with educators and parents. At these schools, DIBELS assessment results are posted either in a public area (Alcalde) or in a private room.

Students at all four schools feel a degree of ownership over their own data. When they see their data point on the school's DIBELS display (Rio Costilla), track their scores in data charts (Alcalde, Lavaland) or complete graphs of their data (Alcalde, Lavaland and Gallina), they

data point on the school's DIBELS display (Rio Costilla), track their scores in data (Lavaland) or complete graphs of their data (Alcalde, Lavaland and Gallina), they own results. One interventionist said that the data has "impacted the students k I'm seeing kids who are really involved in their learning because they're part of t stand that the goal is to read, to read fluently and to understand the reading." S data use has "caused a level of involvement and investment among teachers an before."

Moreover, parents are not only informed about their children's DIBELS assessme supported to understand how the DIBELS can be used to facilitate literacy instru Lavaland, teachers discuss DIBELS scores during parent/teacher conferences. F receive a demonstration of the DIBELS test on a handheld. At both Alcalde and C DIBELS data reports for all students. At Alcalde, they also give a presentation of

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school's Open House held during the beginning of the year.

Analysis and Adjustment

Data collection and presentation, though important, are but the first steps in improvement of instruction. At all of the schools visited, the staff is committed to analyzing data, and adjusting instructional practice accordingly. Gallina's reading coach credited the elimination of SPED referrals this year, but noted that she is still adjusting to foster student success.

Walk to Intervention

Another common factor between all four schools is their use of the "Walk to Intervention" program. Though at each site, they employ a different format. For example at Lavaland, first grade teachers provide interventions to the school's Intensive students, while classroom teachers provide interventions for their Strategic students. At Gallina the reading coach teaches all intervention students at the first grade level's replacement core. At Rio Costilla the district coordinator, the reading coach, and classroom teachers share the responsibility for providing interventions. Three of the four schools use the program at all grade levels as needed. For example, all students struggling with letter recognition meet with the reading coach at differing grade levels.

Support from the Regional Program Specialist

Several interviewees cited help from the PED's regional specialist as integral to the success of the First program. Regional specialists reportedly provide guidance, training and support at school sites. One coordinator credited her regional specialist for the success of the program: "It was through her guidance that we are in this [successful] place." A reading coach at Rio Costilla and two regional specialists working with her district were "impressive" in their "knowledge and experience."

The evidence suggests that a key component to school success is the staff's ability to adapt instructional practice based on data and analysis. Such adaptation, however, is dependent upon the level of staff development. Interviewees at all sites applauded the PED's training offerings. However, not all training at all sites was not equally provided.

It may not be coincidental that the three most successful schools in the state are the smallest sized districts. At these schools, typically there is one class for each grade level and the K-3 staff thus often means training four individuals. In contrast, at large schools training the entire K-3 staff is a prodigious task.



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