

Reading First: Student Achievement, Teacher Empowerment, National Success

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“Reading First has done so much to crack the code on how to get kids to read. It would be tragic to cut the nation’s only reading program when so many policymakers and teachers know it’s working to increase achievement.”

--Secretary Margaret Spellings

Reading First builds on a solid foundation of scientifically based research and provides struggling students in the nation’s highest need schools with the necessary resources to make significant progress in reading achievement.

Reading First is the academic cornerstone of the bipartisan No Child Left Behind Act.

- Reading First provides grants to states to help schools and school districts improve children’s reading achievement through scientifically proven methods of instruction.
- The program funds professional development; scientifically based instructional programs, materials, and strategies; valid and reliable screening, diagnostic and ongoing classroom assessments, and statewide accountability and leadership structures.
- Reading First is designed to help needy students in grades K-3, while Early Reading First helps preschool age children.

President Bush has requested the restoration of funding for the program in FY 2009.

- Under No Child Left Behind, State educational agencies (SEAs) have received over \$6 billion in Reading First grants.
- In FY 2008, Congress decreased the appropriation for Reading First by 61%.
- President Bush’s FY 2009 budget would restore Reading First funding to its FY 2007 level of \$1 billion.

Reading First is working.

- Achievement data reported by the SEAs* on their Annual Performance Reports show that Reading First students from nearly every grade and subgroup have made impressive gains in reading proficiency.

Data for all students:

- In Grade 1, 44 of 50 SEAs reported increases in the percentage of students proficient in reading comprehension. Of these, 31 SEAs increased by 5 percentage points or more.
- In Grade 2, 39 of 52 SEAs reported improvement. Of these, 19 SEAs increased by 5 percentage points or more.
- In Grade 3, 27 of 35 SEAs** reported improvement. Of these, 15 SEAs increased by 5 percentage points or more

English Language Learners:

- In Grade 1, 28 of 37 SEAs reported increases in the percentage of students proficient in reading comprehension. Of these, 25 SEAs increased by 5 percentage points or more.
- In Grade 2, 25 of 37 SEAs reported improvement in reading comprehension. Of these, 19 SEAs increased by 5 percentage points or more.
- In Grade 3, 17 of 25 SEAs reported improvement. Of these, 12 SEAs increased by 5 percentage points or more.

Students with Disabilities:

- In Grade 1, 34 of 44 SEAs reported increases in the percentage of students proficient in reading comprehension. Of these, 28 SEAs increased by 5 percentage points or more.
- In Grade 2, 30 of 48 SEAs reported improvement. Of these, 20 SEAs increased by 5 percentage points or more.
- In Grade 3, 25 of 32 SEAs reported improvement. Of these, 15 SEAs increased by 5 percentage points or more.

National evaluations show that Reading First is changing instructional practice:

- Children in Reading First schools receive significantly more reading instruction – almost 100 minutes more per week on average – than those in non-Reading First Title I schools, according to the Reading First Implementation Evaluation: Interim Report.
- According to the Center on Education Policy, 97% of participating school districts that reported increased student achievement credit Reading First as an important factor.

States and local communities maintain control.

- States and local schools have the flexibility to determine how reading programs are selected, as long as the selected program is grounded in scientifically based reading research.
- There is no federally prescribed reading program.
- States are primarily responsible for ensuring the quality of the local programs they fund, and for ensuring that these programs rely on scientifically based reading research.

Reading First is designed to help the children who need it the most.

- The Department distributes funds by formula to States that have submitted approved applications, taking into account the number of children living below the poverty line in that state.
- State educational agencies (SEAs) then competitively subgrant funds to eligible school districts to establish scientifically based reading programs in schools with the greatest need to improve student achievement.
- At the local level, eligibility is based, in part, on student reading achievement and poverty.

Thanks to Reading First, schools and teachers finally have the technical knowledge and the practical training to ensure every child gets the help he or she needs to excel in reading. As a direct result of Reading First grants, more than 100,000 teachers across the country from kindergarten through grade 3 have been trained to implement high quality, scientifically based reading programs. Their efforts are reaching more than 1.8 million students.

National Reading Panel: Origins of Reading First

- The Reading First initiative builds on the findings of years of scientific research, which, at the request of Congress, were compiled by the National Reading Panel.
- In 1997, Congress asked the Director of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) at the National Institutes of Health, in consultation with the Secretary of Education, to convene a national panel to assess the effectiveness of different approaches used to teach children to read.
- The 15 members of the panel were selected from among nearly 300 persons who were nominated by a wide variety of public sources. The final panel members were selected by the NICHD in consultation with the US Department of Education.
- The National Reading Panel included prominent reading researchers, teachers, child development experts, leaders in elementary and higher education, and parents.
- Reviewing and analyzing over 100,000 studies on reading, The National Reading Panel (NRP) found five components essential to a child's learning to read: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension.

State evaluations in all regions of the Nation show that Reading First is making a difference:

Arkansas:

- Reading First schools made greater gains in increasing the proportion of students proficient or advanced than comparison schools and the overall reading achievement gap, as measured by the third-grade AR literacy benchmark exam, decreased over the past three years.

California:

- Progress gained during the K-3 program continues in grade 4 in Reading First schools, with students gaining an average of 4.1 points in comparison to the 2.4 average across control schools.

- Student achievement in Reading First schools has risen an average of 3.4 points per year, equivalent to 17 points over 5 years.

Colorado:

- A longitudinal examination of students who have been in Reading First for four years showed a 71 percent effectiveness rate (i.e. almost three out of four students progressed out of the strategic or intensive category, or remained at benchmark after four years).

Iowa:

- For the schools that began implementation in 2006, student reading proficiency increased by an average of 25 percentage points across 14 different skill areas. Student proficiency in the 2003 start-year schools increased on average by 17 percentage points across 12 measured skill areas.

Louisiana:

- The special education referral rate has been steadily decreasing over the life of the Reading First grant. The rate has dropped from approximately 50 percent to 19 percent (this is the case statewide, but the Reading First schools have seen greater decreases than non-Reading First schools).

Maryland:

- The number of Reading First students reaching the proficient level on the Stanford Achievement Test (SAT)-10 and the Maryland School Assessment has increased by six percent over the three years of the program.
- The number of students receiving a passing score has increased in all eight participating LEAs.

Massachusetts:

- DIBELS Oral Reading Fluency results show improvement for all grade levels and cohorts, including increases in the percentage of students in the low-risk category, decreases in the percentage of students in the at-risk category, and increased mean scores.

Oregon:

- In comparing outcome data for a cohort of schools with 3 years of program implementation to a cohort of schools with only 1 year of program implementation, the data support that students exposed to more Reading First instruction perform better on reading assessments. On every measure, students with 3 years of Reading First instruction performed better than students with less Reading First instruction—mean performance scores were higher, the percentages of students reaching benchmark goals and reading at grade level were higher, and the percentage of students at high risk for reading difficulties was lower.

South Dakota:

- On the Stanford Reading First, the percent of students in grades K-2 reading “at grade level” increased by approximately 10 percentage points from 2005 to 2007. In grade 3, the percent of students scoring “at grade level” increased by 6 percentage points from 2005-2007.

For more information about the Reading First Program, please visit the U.S. Department of Education's web site at <http://www.ed.gov/programs/readingfirst/index.html>.

* The SEAs implementing Reading First programs and providing data are the 50 States, the District of Columbia, the U.S. Virgin Islands, American Samoa, and the Bureau of Indian Education. Data is reported for schools that began implementing Reading First in the 2003-04 and/or 2004-05 school years. SEA data are included in these calculations *only* if the state provided complete and reliable data for the first year of implementation through 2006-07 on the *same measure* with the *same proficiency benchmark*. The number of SEAs reporting data varies slightly because SEAs did not all provide complete and reliable data for every grade, every year. Detailed state-by-state data are provided at www.ed.gov/programs/readingfirst/performance.html.

** Grade 3 data include only SEAs reporting on the same assessment used in grades 1, 2, and 3. Twenty SEAs administer a different statewide assessment for Grade 3 and, as a result, their data is not included here.