

American Samoa Reading First Year 4 External Evaluation Report



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Introduction and Overview of Evaluation Activities Conducted

The American Samoa Department of Education is in its fourth year of implementing their Reading First grant. Under subcontract, the Technical Assistance and Consulting Services (TACS) at the University of Oregon supports the Reading First program by providing support in data analysis, database development, and conducting the external evaluation.

In late April/early May 2007, a two-week external evaluation site visit was conducted for the American Samoa Reading First program (ASRF). To gain an understanding of the context within which the ASRF program operates, the external evaluator reviewed previous ASRF reports and related materials prior to arriving in American Samoa. Documents reviewed included RF Coordinator report to the Office of Curriculum, Instruction, and Accountability; the Annual Performance Report; the previous external evaluator's progress reports; the federal Reading First Monitors' report; list of RF Coaches roles and responsibilities; and tools and templates used by the RF Team to assess implementation of the program objectives.

The on-site visit included a variety of evaluation activities to gauge the progress made for the 2006/2007 school year. The following table displays the evaluation activities conducted and the method used for each.

Purpose of the Evaluation Activity	Method Used
Review areas of concern and progress since last year	Document review, interview with RF team
Review fidelity of implementation of the reading program	Classroom observations, interviews with teachers and principals
Review successful strategies and areas of concern for leadership	Interview with coaches and RF team
Review effectiveness of professional development activities	Review of PD Database, interviews with teachers and principals, interviews with RF team, review PD event evaluations.
Review student progress in reading	Review of DIBELS data for 2006/2007 school year.

The two-week site visit was during a period when other education activities posed some scheduling challenges. The RF program includes technical assistance from Sopris West, Inc., which involves on-site support to the RF Coaches three times throughout the year. The third of these visits coincided with the External Evaluation site visit, so scheduling the various school visits and time to interview the RF coaches was more challenging. In addition, the annual standards-based assessment was being piloted with the level 3 classes during the first week of the RF site visit. This also impacted the arrangements for classroom observations.

Of note: Based on data collected during the first three years of the RF grant, well over 90% of the students are considered English Language Learners. English is the primary language of instruction and Samoan (and other Asian/Pacific Islander languages) is spoken at home. This poses particular challenges to implementation.

Leadership and the Reading First Program

Communication: The Reading First Team¹

A critical component in this year of the RF grant is the increase in coaches hired, trained and in the schools (from five last year to nine this year). All personnel related to RF agree this has made the difference from years past. The nine women are former teachers and administrators who have an average of 14 years of classroom experience each and bring a total of 124 years to their role as RF Coach. With the addition of the five coaches, serving the reading program in the K-3 classrooms in the 22 schools is done much more effectively. There are, however, three coaches who serve three schools and this poses a challenge to ensuring all of these schools receive adequate support. The RF Program is currently recruiting for three additional coaches and once approval is granted and these positions are filled this should improve the level of support provided to all the schools.

Although five of the RF Coaches have only been coaching full time since January, there is a strong sense of teamwork within the group. They reported that they have learned a great deal from the experiences of their fellow coaches in addition to more formal professional development opportunities. Although when many RF Coaches began, their time was divided between teaching responsibilities and coaching responsibilities, all are now coaching full time. There are still occasions when they substitute for teachers who are absent at their schools, but all agree it's not the expectation of the principals - they do it because they are committed to the students' learning.

To gain a sense of how the communication between the RF Coordinator and the RF Coaches enhances the effectiveness of the RF Coaches, the external evaluator conducted a review of the *school files* for the six schools selected for observation during this site visit. These files include monthly reports from the RF Coaches to the RF Coordinator. These reports include the dates when the RF Coaches conducted activities in the schools, classroom observation information, whether the reading unit assessments were reviewed, and next steps.

It is clear that the monthly reports submitted by the RF Coaches are reviewed by the RF Coordinator. Comments on progress and suggestions for improvement strategies are evident. These reports also reflect that the RF Coaches have

¹ For the purpose of this report, the Reading First Team is defined as the Coordinator, Data Coordinator, TA Coordinator, and Coaches.

conducted activities in their schools. All six school files reviewed contained evidence of at least one classroom observation in the past three months and most had two or more each month. It should be noted however, that these reports are not meant to be a tally of the numbers of observations. The RF Coaches are at their schools daily (or once-a-week for the smaller schools). These reports reflect a sample of the activities conducted and appropriate next steps for review by the RF Coordinator.

In discussions with the RF Coordinator, she indicated that these reports assist her in keeping the Director of Curriculum, Instruction, and Accountability (OCIA) informed of issue areas in the RF Program. The RF Coaches indicated that these monthly reports - though sometimes time consuming - provide direction for their support to the schools. Each month the "next steps" are reviewed and become a plan for the activities they will focus on in each of their schools in the coming month.

Another means of keeping in touch on a regular basis is the weekly RF Team meetings. During the past year these meetings have allowed opportunities for keeping up-to-date on implementation of the reading programs, sharing strategies for instruction, and topics of interest, specifically: K5 small group instruction, making sense of the student data, and professional development related to vocabulary. After observing one of these weekly meetings it was clear that these are more than protocol. The exchange of information took place among and between the RF Team members. It is clear that the RF Coaches are able to bring the perspectives of the teacher and school administrators to the planning and implementation of the RF Program and the RF Coordinators are able to keep the RF Coaches informed of American Samoa DOE initiatives, administrative activities and expectations for the coming month.

In general the monthly reporting mechanism and weekly RF Team meetings provide a means for frequent checks on what is working well, where improvements might be needed, and ensuring these are addressed in a timely manner. The communication among and between the RF Team is effective and each RF Coach has her own laptop to support access to e-mail as an alternative form of communication between meetings. One suggestion was made to have Internet access provided in the RF Coaches' homes to assist this form of communication as well as facilitate the data entry for the DIBELS assessments. The connection in the schools is unreliable and often it is difficult to get access to an Internet connection.

Reading First Coaching Team

When asked about which roles and responsibilities pose a particular challenge, the RF Coaches reported that they sometimes hesitate to approach administrators and/or veteran teachers when they have concerns about what is happening at their schools. They do feel the administrators as a whole understand their

The job of RF Coach is challenging, takes a lot of time, work and commitment, but they feel it is worth the effort to help the students in American Samoa become readers.

role in supporting the reading instruction, but the RF Coaches would like to be better able to communicate effectively with the principals. They see the importance of relationships in their work and feel this is stronger with the classroom teachers. A need for support in building these relationships with the school principals was expressed by some RF Coaches.

The RF Coaches reported they feel confident and able to carry out their other roles and responsibilities with the current level of training and support they receive. They are proud to say they understand the DIBELS data and though it takes a lot of time and effort to collect this three times a year, they are committed to collecting and entering the data and have even begun conducting the data review meeting at their schools when the data are verified. (In prior years, this was done solely by the RF Data Coordinator, but this is gradually shifting to the RF Coaches.)

An example of the strong sense of teamwork is the approach the RF Coaches took to coping with the rapid expansion of the K5 small group pilot. Originally meant to be implemented in only a few schools with targeted training for personnel selected by OCIA and ASRF. This initiative spread faster than K5 teachers - and even RF Coaches - could be trained in its implementation. Two of the RF Coaches whose schools were part of the pilot had been trained and took it upon themselves to help their fellow RF Coaches with supporting the K5 classrooms in their schools. This informal, yet valuable, professional development illustrates the capacity of the RF Coaches and their commitment to ASRF.

Collaboration with American Samoa Department of Education Programs and Initiatives

The RF Team reported that the *Read to Me Samoa* tutoring program was helpful in the classrooms this year. These tutors have received some training in the Read Well curriculum, so are able to support the teachers in their instruction. The required one-year commitment has helped keep a stable group of trained tutors in the classroom.

Although the K5 small group pilot really took hold this year, there are some steps to take to make it more effective. The RF Team reported that the organizational structure at the Department of Education requires some variance in how ASRF interacts with the K5 Division. The K5 Program Director and her three specialists are invited and encouraged to attend the RF professional development activities, but it requires an extra step to do so as they are not housed within the Elementary Division (i.e., contact must be made with an additional person when alerting staff at the OCIA about RF professional development opportunities). There is support for the RF activities, but often the K5 staff have separate professional development opportunities and mechanisms for sharing strategies among their own classroom teachers.

Connections and collaboration with the Special Education Program continue. RF Coaches reported that at the school building level there are examples of positive relationships between the classroom teacher and the special education teacher. This varies by school, however, and there are still some schools where the children receiving special education are instructed *only* by the special education teacher and the classroom teacher is not as involved in their learning. The RF Coaches suggested that having a representative from the Special Education Program come to one of the weekly meetings to provide information on the basic requirements for referral and implementation of special education services might be worthwhile. In this way, the RF Coaches would have an understanding of what is required and this will help them identify ways they can work with the resource teachers and specialists in their schools.

At the administrative level, the RF Data Coordinator and Assistant Director of Special Education have agreed to a progress monitoring initiative that will strengthen the collaboration. Beginning in October 2007, the initiative will begin by tracking progress of a small selection of students with IEPs in a few schools. These data will be reviewed by a team made up of the RF Coach, classroom teacher, resource teacher, resource specialist and an administrator who will then make decisions about improvements to instruction that will assist the student's learning. This collaboration brings the critical people together at the school level and focuses on the student.

Overall, the RF Team has positive working relationships with the Director and other program directors in OCIA. There is regular communication - formal and informal - and potential to solve issues before they become systemic.

Other Leadership Issues

The RF Team reported their efforts to provide support to the Manu'a area where there are three schools. This area has posed a continued challenge as it is remote and travel to and from the islands is not reliable. This year, as in past years, the RF Data Coordinator and some of the RF Coaches visited these schools and provided support for the DIBELS assessments and conducted training. There were also videoconferences through which training was provided to teachers and administrators. In the coming year, plans to continue these videoconferences are underway, but an assessment of whether these are the most effective way to provide support to the RF implementation in Manu'a schools is recommended. In addition, RF Coaches will visit these schools in the coming year to provide on-site support with a focus on professional development beyond only the data collection. Locating a RF Coach in the Manu'a area is also a potential option depending on the progress in recruiting and hiring three new RF Coaches.

What's Working Well?

- Having nine full time RF Coaches on the team has made the difference in the RF Program this year.

- The formal and information mechanisms for effective communication between and among the RF Team strengthens the ability to identify areas of concern and to share strategies for improvement before these become larger issues.
- The two-way information sharing between the RF Team members ensures a variety of perspectives are brought to planning and implementing the RF Program.
- The efforts to find ways to support reading programs in the Manu'a area continues, in particular the videoconferencing alternative is an innovation that should be pursued.
- ASRF has positive working relationships with their colleagues in the Office of Curriculum, Instruction, and Accountability.
- The support of the *Read to Me Samoa* tutors has been helpful in the classrooms.
- The collaboration regarding student progress monitoring has the potential to strengthen the partnership between ASRF and Special Education.

Areas to Strengthen

- Having more reliable access to the Internet may enhance the ability of the RF Coaches to communicate via e-mail.
- Providing support to build professional relationships with the school administrators would help the RF Coaches in supporting the reading programs in their schools.
- Continuing to reach out to the K5 program staff to strengthen communication and collaboration may improve the implementation of the reading programs at that level.
- Continuing to identify ways to provide support to the Manu'a schools would strengthen the implementation of ASRF.
- Explore the potential of Special Education Program staff sharing an overview of special education services and roles and responsibilities of special education staff at the schools.

Professional Development

The ASRF Professional Development Database

Of particular note in this area of ASRF is the completion of a database to track the professional development activities and who attended them. (This was designed and developed through the TACS subcontract.) Because the focus on professional development at the RF Coaches and school staff level is critical to the success of implementing the reading programs, this database is important. This year the database development was finalized and data from previous and more recent ASRF professional development participation was entered. The RF Coordinator was able to retrieve information from the database to assist her in compiling her report to the Director of OCIA and in identifying areas of focus for professional development at the Summer Academy. In conducting the external evaluation, the database was used to identify percentages of specific staff who attended professional

development activities and what types of activities were offered. Overall, this database is an effective mechanism for reviewing whether: 1) the appropriate training is being offered, and 2) the appropriate personnel are attending the training.

A search of the database revealed that 80% of the RF staff (RF Coaches, teachers at the K-3 levels) attended at least one ASRF professional development activity. There were also 21 others associated with the Department of Education, but not directly connected to the reading programs, who attended these activities. In addition to the annual RF Academy held each August, topics for professional development this year included: assessment, data and data management, program implementation, and leadership.

The Sopris West, Inc. Coaches

A key component of ASRF is the ongoing technical assistance from the Sopris West, Inc. (Sopris) Coaches. Three times in the school year three consultants from Sopris provide on-site support to the RF Coaches. This includes partnering with them in their schools and working with them as they assist the teachers. In the past year this “side-by-side” coaching model was conducted in 19 of the 22 schools in American Samoa (the three Manu’a schools were not included). The larger schools were visited all three times to ensure that all the teachers had an opportunity to benefit from the side-by-side coaching.

In addition to the side-by-side coaching, the Sopris consultants provide training on specific topics identified by the RF Team. One of the Sopris consultants provides

Sopris coaches can provide perspectives beyond classroom instruction (e.g., relationships with the administrators, classroom management). This professional development is the backbone to the curriculum and this support is unlike others.

workshops at the RF Summer Academy. She was also instrumental in getting the K5 small group initiative launched by providing the training to the K5 school staff targeted for the pilot as well as RF Coaches in those schools. As the pilot quickly expanded and the small group instruction was implemented in more schools than originally planned, there will be follow-up to this training next year to address issues specific to K5 classrooms.

Identifying Professional Development Topics

The RF TA Coordinator works with the other RF Team members to identify professional development needs. A particular focus has been strengthening vocabulary. This year, a train-the-trainers model was used with three RF Coaches working with small groups. As described earlier, the RF Team meetings provide opportunities for professional development and a variety of topics were addressed through these.

A continuing concern of the RF Team is the lack of professional development for the *Trophies* core curriculum. Students who complete the Read Well curriculum

then begin *Trophies*. To date there has been little opportunity for the RF Coaches to receive training in implementing this curriculum, therefore limiting their ability to support the teachers. The difficulty in securing a consultant to provide training continues as most are booked and do not have time in their schedules to travel to American Samoa. The RF TA Coordinator is working with colleagues in OCIA responsible for curricula for levels 4-8 to bring a consultant to American Samoa to train staff on *Trophies*.

Another concern expressed by the RF TA Coordinator is the limited time available to conduct professional development activities. She is hopeful that the Department of Education will support an early release day at the schools for professional development (i.e., Wednesdays at 1pm).

What's Working Well?

- The development and use of the professional development database provides an effective mechanism for tracking the professional development offered and those who take advantage of it.
- The continued support of the Sopris coaches and the side-by-side coaching model is a strong component to implementing the ASRF initiative.

Areas to Strengthen

- Continuing to find opportunities for professional development regarding *Trophies* core curriculum would strengthen the ability of the RF Coaches to support the teachers.

Program Fidelity

The six school visits conducted on the external evaluation site visit included observing the 90 minute reading instruction, interviewing the classroom teacher, and the school administrators. Although classroom observations were conducted as planned (two K5; one Level 1; one Level 2; and two Level 3), interviews with three of the six teachers and four of the six administrators were not held due to scheduling conflicts and daily school activities.

Snapshot of the Classrooms

Overall, the average reading instruction time in the classrooms was 1.5 hours, with most teachers conducting at least 1 hour. The class sizes ranged from 7 to 32 students and small group instruction was observed in all but one of the classrooms. The students were working in Read Well and *Trophies* core curricula. Three of the six teachers used the Teacher's Guide when providing instruction. For the most part, the instruction was conducted in English, with Samoan used primarily for clarifying vocabulary words.

The small group work included differentiation in instruction, but the extent of this varied from classroom to classroom. In most, the teacher had another individual working with one of the groups, facilitating the management of behavior issues

and eliminating the need for students to transition from one activity to another. In the classrooms where the teacher was alone the skill in managing the classroom varied. There were some innovative approaches to managing the transitions of the small groups: singing, counting out to five, and a key phrase from the teacher. In many of the classrooms, behavior issues grew as the instruction time wore on.

Perspective of the Teachers and Administrators

The teachers seem unable to articulate how they identify which students will be in which small group. Some reported it was based on the student's work, but it was unclear whether assessment data was used when making the determinations. Data seems a key issue and though most administrators admitted that even if they didn't have a deep understanding of the DIBELS data, they understood the importance of it in their school's reading instruction.

When asked about support for struggling learners, teachers and administrators were not explicit in how this is done. Some cooperative relationships between the Special Education resource teacher and the classroom teacher were described. It seems in most schools, the struggling students get more one-on-one instruction from the resource teacher and this is done in addition to the 90 minute reading instruction period. Other than this, there were no clear strategies described for supporting these students.

Both teachers and administrators agree that the RF Coaches have provided great support to the reading instruction at their schools. They see this role as valuable to the progress their students are making.

What's Working Well?

- Classroom teachers are implementing the small group instruction.
- The RF Coaches support is seen as valuable to the teachers and school staff.
- The 90 minute instructional reading period is adhered to for the most part.
- The role of data is viewed as important and the need to use it in decision-making is given weight by the school staff.

Areas to Strengthen

- Support for managing behavior issues may increase the effectiveness of instructional time.
- Provide support and/or training to the administrators on how they can effectively support their teachers in reading instruction.
- Support in using available data and information to group the students may maximize the effectiveness of the instruction.

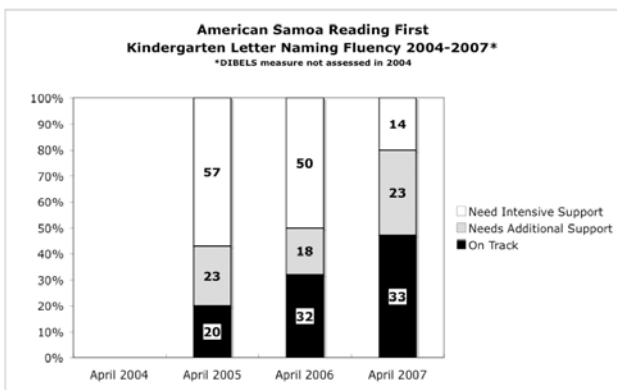
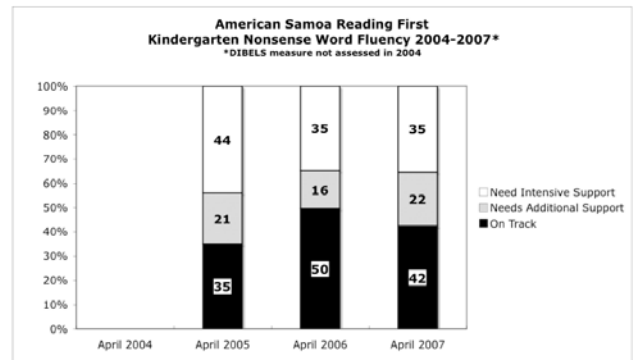
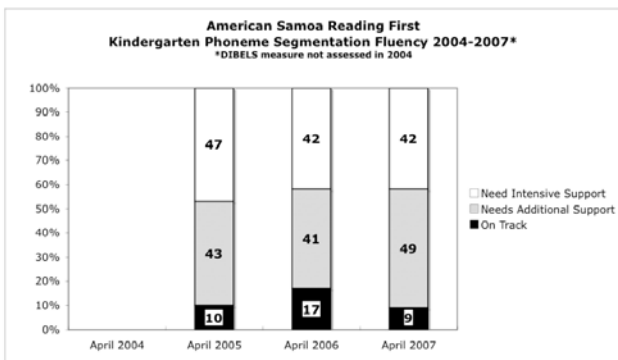
Assessments and Student Performance

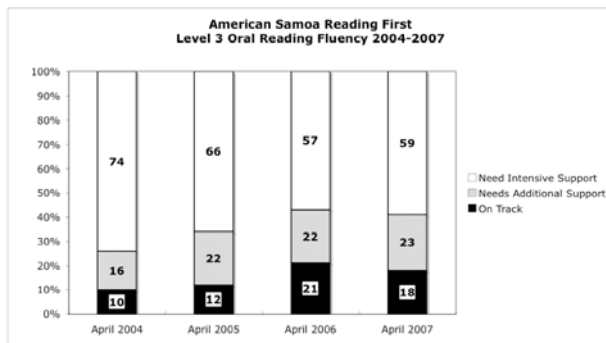
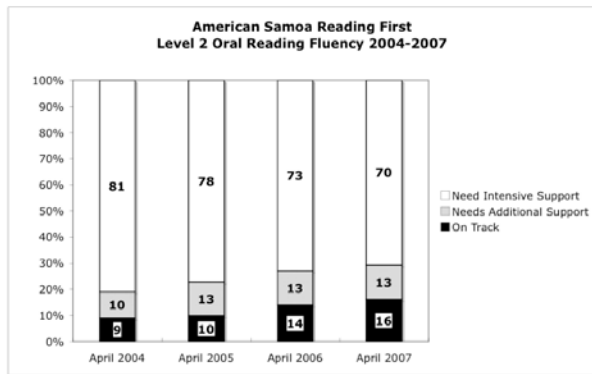
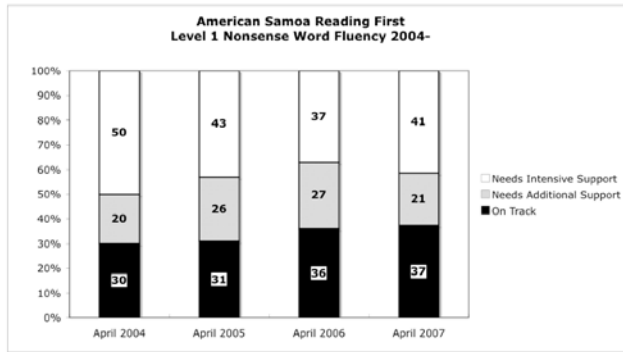
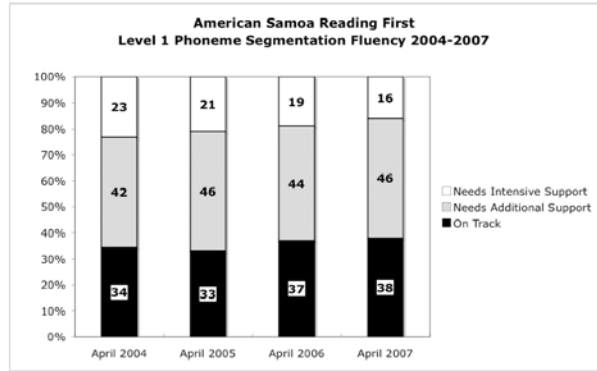
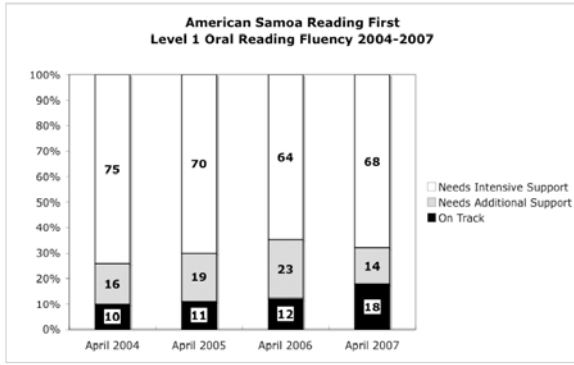
As described previously, the ASRF program is using DIBELS to assess student literacy skills. Each year all students in levels K through 3 are assessed three times in the school year. In addition to this benchmark data collection, ASRF is

working in collaboration with Special Education to progress monitor selected students with IEP goals in reading beginning August 2007. They have targeted three trial schools and identified school team members to collect data ongoingly and use these to guide instruction.

The data below represent the end-of-year assessment results for levels K-3 each year since 2004. These reflect a snapshot of the students currently in the specific level. In the graphs below, the white bars represent students who “need intensive support” with the goal to see a decrease in percentage across time. The black bars represent students “on track” (at benchmark) and the goal is to see an increase in these numbers across time.

The implementation of ASRF involves multilayered strategies to assist teachers and school administrators in improving students’ reading. Solid implementation of these will take time and will not necessarily be immediately reflected in the DIBELS assessment scores. Of note: Across all levels and all measures there has been a decrease in the percentage of students needing intensive support and an increase in the number of students on track.





What's Working Well?

- The DIBELS assessments are being administered and entered on time.
- The RF Data Coordinator is highly skilled in the DIBELS database management (entering, troubleshooting, data farming).

Areas to Strengthen

- Continue to support the RF Coaches in training the school based assessment teams to collect reliable and accurate data.

Conclusions

Based on information collected during the external evaluation visit, it is clear the ASRF program is progressing well. Some critical components for this success are:

- 9 RF Coaches in place (with 3 more positions being filled);
- the RF Coaches are supporting the teachers in levels K through 3 at all the schools;
- the Sopris, Inc. consultants are providing targeted professional development;
- the DIBELS assessment data are collected on time and managed appropriately;
- communication between and among the RF Team is effective.

The RF Team should continue their efforts to identify strategies for continuing to build their own capacity as well as that of school staff as they work to improve reading in American Samoa.