



2006 *Reading First* Site Visits Statewide Report

To satisfy the requirements of Florida's *Reading First* grant, the Florida Center for Reading Research (FCRR) conducted random site visits at approximately 10% of Florida's *Reading First* Schools during the spring of 2006. The purpose of this statewide report is to summarize data collected through all classroom observations, interviews and teacher focus groups. The data provide a snapshot of reading instruction and reading programs in Florida's *Reading First* schools that includes a compilation of the responses to a variety of questions regarding the implementation of district level *Reading First (RF)* grants during the 2005-06 school year. When considered along with other data such as district and school observational records, student reading scores, and informal feedback from faculty and staff, the report can contribute information valuable to the continued implementation of the *Reading First* initiative in Florida.

Site Visit Process

The process of planning and implementing site visits involved several steps which actually began in 2003 in preparation for the first year of site visits in 2004. One of the first tasks was to select an appropriate classroom observation instrument. After several tools for collecting data on teachers' delivery of reading instruction were reviewed, the revised Instructional Content Emphasis (ICE-R) instrument was selected. The ICE-R is a valid and reliable observation instrument used to systematically categorize and code the content of reading and language arts instruction; it can be used to collect data helpful in answering the following questions:

- What is being taught?
- How is it being taught?
- How well is it being taught?
- What is being used to teach?

Data was collected in ten major instructional categories:

1. Concepts of print
2. Phonological awareness
3. Alphabetic knowledge
4. Word study/phonics
5. Spelling
6. Oral language development/discussion
7. Fluency
8. Text reading
9. Comprehension
10. Writing or language arts

For a more detailed description of these ten categories, see Appendix A. The ICE-R also facilitates the collection of data on instructional focus, student engagement and instructional quality.

To help ensure the collection of reliable data, site visit reviewers were selected based on their ability to recognize various aspects of reading instruction. For example, reviewers had to be able to differentiate between phonological awareness and phonics instruction. Classroom reviewers were selected based on their expertise in teaching reading and on successful completion of a two-day training session during which participants practiced using the ICE-R instrument and learned site visit procedures.

Another critical part of the site visit process was scheduling the site visits with schools and districts. The FCRR Director of Professional Development communicated with the randomly selected schools in January 2006 to inform them of the upcoming site visit calendar and procedures. District *Reading First* coordinators ensured that school schedules would accommodate the 45-minute observations during each school's reading block. Three-member teams conducted one-day site visits in ten *Reading First* districts at twenty-four schools during the months of February, March, April and May. Ninety-six randomly selected classrooms were visited in grades K-3 with the number of students per classroom averaging 16. The average length of observations was 45 minutes and the average length of the reading block in observed classrooms was 96 minutes. Shorter informal walk-throughs were conducted in other K-3 classrooms at each school.

Information was collected at each school through classroom observations and interviews with teachers, principals and reading coaches. Two separate interviews were conducted with school principals and reading coaches, respectively. Every effort was made to conduct the interviews with consistency and objectivity. Focus groups were conducted with teachers to gather information on the implementation of the *Reading First* initiative from the teachers' perspective. Each school was asked to select one teacher per K-3 grade level, including ESE and ESOL, to participate in a school focus group conducted by the site visit team. These teachers responded to questions as the spokesperson for their grade level or instructional area; they were not informed of the focus group questions ahead of time. Focus groups consisted of 4-6 teachers and the site visit team with no other school personnel present. All interview and focus group information was collected via laptop computer and analyzed using a software program for coding qualitative data. Additionally, all electronic searches were analyzed in conjunction with the actual interview documents.

Reading First Schools

The site visit schedule for school year 2005-06 was set up differently from previous years. Because the list of *Reading First* schools included both schools new to *Reading First* as well as schools who were in their second or third year of implementation, we determined that site visits would be conducted in two periods, fall and spring. Schools were scheduled for visits in one of the two periods based on their implementation stage. The twenty-four schools randomly selected for spring visits were identified from the pool

of schools in their first year of *Reading First* implementation. A listing of these schools can be found in Appendix B.

School Focus

When discussing strategies implemented at their schools to ensure a strong focus on the *Reading First* initiative, principals noted several elements in their comments which were divided into three categories: those identified with a frequency above 75%, those identified with a moderate frequency of between 35% and 74%, and those identified with a low frequency of less than 30%. “Data-driven instruction” was the only area identified with a frequency of more than 75%; it was noted 83% of the time.

Most of the principals (83%) praised data-driven instruction as key to reading improvement at their respective schools. One principal “constantly looks at data.” Another principal stated, “Teachers are more aware of how data should drive instruction.” Another principal agreed, “Everything is more focused on student needs with all the data. . . . We are more selective in using research-based materials. We are using data to determine who needs help and what kind of help is needed.” Another principal noted that they are “not just doing assessments; now [they] use it to drive instruction.” One principal, observing that the entire school is concerned with data, stated, “The school is data driven; they involve the teacher, the coach, the guidance counselor, the curriculum specialist to analyze data and add strategies to best meet needs. It is ongoing; the subgroups of the at-risk population become the target for improved strategies.” Another principal, who described the process of utilizing the data at the school, stated, “The data is driving the curriculum more. We meet with the school-based Literacy Team and then with teachers and analyze DIBELS and make recommendations for each child using these data.” Still another principal described how they have been “using the DIBELS data for classroom placement and group placement for each classroom and what kind of intervention they need.” Still another principal stated, “Data from *Reading First* helped the school to look at individual students and develop strategies to assist particular students,” adding “use of data drives what happens in small groups.” Another principal stated that they [teachers] are “doing more prescriptive instruction based on the data.” She added, “Now teachers are using this to determine instruction, intervention groups, and instruction.” As one principal succinctly expressed it, “*Reading First* has given us the opportunity to administer the assessments and adjust grouping based on the analysis.” Another principal mentioned an important benefit of using data, “This has empowered teachers to use data and own their own data and instruction.”

The following areas were identified by principals with moderate frequency:

- Professional development (58%)
- Interventions iii (58%)
- 90-minute reading block (42%)
- Progress monitoring (42%)
- Walk-throughs (38%)

A majority of the principals interviewed mentioned professional development (or staff development) as an important element in implementing *Reading First*. One principal

“made sure that all teachers attended *Reading First* academies.” Another principal described their professional development as “more targeted” because of *Reading First*. Another principal “attended the reading academy along with the faculty.” Another stated that her “teachers [had] observed other *Reading First* classrooms in the district to see success in action.” Still another principal stated, “We are trying to retool the teachers so that we don't have to do so much catch-up in later grades. It is really helping us to focus on how to teach children how to read.” One principal “highlighted classrooms for others to observe, especially managerial approaches,” as well as having “the coach to go in [the classroom] with modeling different reading activities.”

Staff development was a focus for several of the principals, including one who described “the staff development that goes with the *Reading First* program” as “critical.” He added, “Our teachers are new and needed training. Teachers are becoming more informed about the *Reading First* strategies. Staff development has been helpful.” Another principal stated, “Staff development—this was new for us, so we did trainings, getting substitutes so teachers could do trainings. Some were done during the day, some after school.” Another principal observed, “This [implementation of *Reading First*] has involved a lot of staff development: new materials, mini staff development from the District, and the reading coach. District has been very accommodating in implementing this new program.” Another stated, “Staff development is another important element [of *Reading First*]. The coaches are training the teachers, helping them set up centers and modeling in the classroom.” Still another principal observed that the school has been having “staff development training for teachers in reading and the technology piece,” as well as “using the reading coach for training.” As one principal stated, “Long-term professional development makes a difference.”

A majority of the principals interviewed also mentioned interventions as an important element in implementing *Reading First*. One principal stated that “they have focused more on iii—making sure it is in addition to regular instruction.” A second principal has been focusing on “on interventions for tier one and two students in third grade.” A third principal stated that they have worked to “develop strategies of how to assist particular students, particularly iii students.” She added, “Intervention has been a success.” Another principal stated that “they are concerned about iii students and constantly work toward helping the iii students.” Still another principal stated, “We are very focused on the intervention groups and what we use during the intervention 30 minute time.” As one principal stated, “The biggest thing this year is the iii.” She added, “We are addressing reading for students who have been retained so that they are not receiving just the same thing but something new to address their needs.”

The following areas were identified by principals with low frequency:

- Teacher collaboration (33%)
- Technology program (21%)
- CRP (17%)
- New organization (13%)
- Library (13%)
- Tutoring (13%)

Support for Reading

Participants in the interviews and focus groups were asked to describe supporters of the schools' reading efforts. Table 1 reflects the responses of the principals, reading coaches and teachers.

| Supporters of Schools' Reading Efforts from the Perspective of: | | |
|---|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Principal | Reading First Coach | Teachers |
| Reading coach (100%) | Principal (96%) | Principal (88%) |
| District staff (92%) | RF PD coordinator (92%) | Reading coach (88%) |
| RF PD coordinator (79%) | ESE teacher (42%) | ESE teacher (58%) |
| Title I (25%) | Speech language teacher (33%) | Speech language teacher (38%) |
| District trainers (17%) | District trainers (29%) | ESOL teacher (25%) |
| | District RF director (25%) | District RF director (21%) |
| | Curriculum specialist (21%) | |

Table 1: Supporters of School's Reading Efforts

Principals

All principals described the reading coach as supportive of their schools' efforts to improve reading achievement. The following statements are representative of their positive comments.

- "Supportive"
- "Invaluable"
- "Excellent rapport with our teachers"
- "Very positive relationship [with teachers]"
- "High level of respect from teachers"
- "Excellent"
- "Very caring and cooperative relationship [with teachers]"

Several principals praised the relationship between the reading coach and the teachers. One principal stated, "Teachers go to her with their problems." A second principal stated, "Teachers and coach work well together! Teachers 'love her to death.' The reading coach has made them feel comfortable. She is a true help agent." A third principal who agreed stated, "Most teachers love the coach and believe she is helpful. . . . Overall, she has a great rapport with teachers and serves as the go-between between teachers and the principal." Another principal stated, "She creates a safe environment for the teachers. She taught here previously and has an excellent rapport. Teachers acknowledge and respect her wealth of information. I can't say enough about her roles and responsibilities and how she executes them." Still another principal echoed the praise, "She is trusted. Teachers are comfortable making mistakes in front of her—a go-to lady for teachers with problems." Another stated, "The teachers respect her . . . and go to her for assistance." One principal at a school with two reading coaches, stated, "They've done an excellent job with the teachers in building a relationship with them. . . . They are doing a very good job implementing the *Reading First* strategies."

Other principals praised the reading coaches for their professionalism and commitment. One principal stated that the reading coach “is a wealth of information.” Another principal noted that the school depends on the reading coach “to model strategies.” Still another principal stated that the reading coach “knows reading.” Finally, one principal stated, “She [reading coach] is genuine, sincere, and passionate about students’ learning. She is already planning for next year.”

Principals also praised the support they had received from district *Reading First* Professional Development staff, which they frequently described as “very helpful” and “informative.” In addition, most of the principals stated that they had regular contact with district coordinators. One principal stated, “We have received excellent support from the District.” A second principal stated that the district coordinator “observed and guided the school in implementation and preparation for the site visit.” A third principal stated that the district coordinator has “observed” in classrooms, offered “feedback and suggestions, “shared her knowledge to help develop [teaching] strategies” and “helped in fluency, Word Walls, etc.” Another principal stated that the district coordinator “comes to our data meetings, talk about strategies, and implementation and what we might do better.” Another principal communicates with the district coordinator “often, at least once a month, but often more.” Another stated, “District has supported school very well and helped them to implement the *Reading First* grant.” Still another principal stated, “District helped the school to get additional teachers . . . , resources and training.” Finally, one principal stated, “[T]he *Reading First* implementation from K-3rd grade . . . has involved a lot of staff development, new materials, mini staff development from the district. The district has been very accommodating in implementing this new program.”

Reading Coaches

Reading coaches often praised the principals’ efforts in implementing *Reading First* as “excellent” or “very effective.” Many of the reading coaches expressed positive comments about the principals; the following are representative:

- “Very supportive”
- “Very helpful”
- “Very efficient”
- “A motivator”

One reading coach stated that the principal “will provide anything [required].” A second reading coach stated that the principal was “committed to the students.” A third reading coach stated, “I cannot say enough about her. She supports us with anything we need.” Another reading coach stated, “If we have ever needed his support, we knew that he would be there to provide us with extra support.” Still another reading coach noted that the principal and she had “done all the planning together.” She added, “We talk and set the tone for the school together. She meets monthly with grade level teams with me.” Finally, one reading coach stated, “He [principal] feels it is important [for DIBELS data] to drive our instruction, and he wants the teachers to use them [DIBELS]; it is the great thing about DIBELS.” She added that the principal is “positive in promoting reading.”

Reading coaches had many positive comments about the *Reading First* Professional Development Coordinators. Several reading coaches described the coordinators as “very helpful” and “very available.” Several coaches also stated that they communicate regularly with the coordinators through school visitations, monthly meetings, telephone conversations and email. Several also stated that the coordinators provide additional professional development on reading instruction or data analysis when the schools request it, as well as training on classroom walk-throughs. Concerning the *Reading First* Professional Development Coordinator, one reading coach stated, “She is always there for me.” A second reading coach stated that the coordinator provides “excellent support for the school.” A third reading coach stated that the two coordinators “always follow through on the delivery of information. . . . They provided intense training days, having us think through how we can talk to teachers about the effectiveness of the CORE, promoting reflective conversations [between] coaches and [teachers].” Another reading coach stated that the coordinator “pushes me forward to think more about the numbers and percents, to look at data, and it has helped me to think that through more carefully.” Still another reading coach praised “the mentorship” of the coordinator, describing it as “invaluable” and “a great support.” Finally, one reading coach stated, “She really helped us with our data analysis meetings. She helped us get organized and set up the one-on-one data analysis meetings. She is a constant support.”

Teacher Focus Group

Most of the teachers described their reading coaches’ efforts to implement *Reading First* as either “excellent” or “very effective.” Many of the teachers expressed positive comments about the reading coaches; the following are representative:

- “Passionate”
- “Unflappable”
- “Wonderful”

Teachers at one school stated that their reading coach stays “a step ahead of us.” They added, “She prepared us for what we would be dealing with.” The teachers at a second school stated that the reading coach provides a “quick response to [their] needs.” Teachers at a third school with two reading coaches, stated, “They have been incredibly helpful in so many ways. They try to meet all of our needs. They make sure we have all of our supplies; they are wonderful.” Teachers at another school with more than one reading coach stated, “They [reading coaches] have done a fantastic job.” Teachers at another school stated that the reading coach “provides good communication;” she “answers questions,” provides “training in center implementation and Word Walls,” and has “helped in classrooms with both modeling and coaching.” Teachers at another school stated that their reading coach “loves to research things” and has helped with “classroom libraries, leveling [books], and training.” Teachers at another school stated that their reading coach is “very accessible,” and is helping “lower readers make the transition into chapter books.” Teachers at still another school stated that the reading coach is a “constant support,” who has “listened when we were frustrated.” Finally, teachers at one school stated, “She [reading coach] taught us all the assessments, and on data analysis she taught us how to use the data. Since it was one-on-one, we even learned more because

she talked about the strategies we could use for each one of the students who were in trouble. She even made centers.”

Most of the teachers described their principal’s efforts in implementing *Reading First* as “excellent” or “very effective.” Many of the teachers expressed positive comments about the principals; the following are representative:

- “Encouraging”
- “Very positive”
- “Very supportive”

Teachers at one school stated that their principal “provided aides for every K-3 classroom for the 90 minutes” as well as “any resources needed.” Teachers at a second school stated, “The principal is ready to supply anything that is needed.” Teachers at a third school stated, “She [principal] has given us time to get professional development during the school day. . . . She supports our learning community time. She reinforces us going back to teach what is not learned. . . . She is approachable, and you are able to explain what you are doing; she is supportive. She will come in and model. She tries to make us think positively. She says she knows we are doing our best.” A teacher at one school stated, “When we say something is not working for us, she [principal] comes in and tries to help us work it out. Her background as an ESE teacher really helps because she can relate to what is happening and gives me ideas for how to work this out with flexibility. She actually came to each grade level and read the story and modeled for us.” Teachers at one school stated, “She is supportive and realizes the importance of reading. She goes out of her way to utilize personnel; she works toward support from the community.” Teachers at another school stated, “He [principal] is very excited about it [*Reading First*] and this is his first year. He has made it a priority. He sits with us during DIBELS analysis. He believes in *Reading First*. That excites us as well. He is there to support us, and if he does not know the answer, he will find out.” Teachers at another school stated, “She [principal] seeks out answers when she doesn’t have them. She makes herself available and asks what she can do to help or what we need.” In addition, the principal also “looks at data with teachers and talks about interventions.” Finally, teachers at another school stated, “She [principal] is aware of everything that is going on [and gives us] anything we need in resources. She models for us, and she supports anything else we want to try. She watches in the classroom so she knows how the whole reading program flows.”

Professional Development

The area of professional development included coaching, modeling, workshops, assistance from the district *Reading First* director, and particular trainings on a special product such as the K-1 FCRR Center Activities resource. One principal enumerated some of the professional development that had occurred at his school, including training on “*Words their Way*, *Quick Reads*, *Foundations*, training for DIBELS assessments, *Road to the Code*, and a great deal of technology training with *River Deep*.” He added, “All K-3 teachers went to summer Reading Academies.”

When asked to describe activities or resources that had had a positive impact on the quality of their teaching, teachers at *Reading First* Schools most often indicated professional development (88%). The reading coaches have been the primary source of professional development for teachers. Teachers at one school stated that the reading coach “helped label classroom libraries and books for level.” They added, “She also had a day when we got together to create center ideas.” Teachers at another school stated, “Teachers have commented on how they are learning more about reading, even veteran teachers.”

Teachers also praised the professional development the reading coaches provided on data analysis. Teachers at one school stated, “She [reading coach] has given us a one-to-one review so we can understand it [data] better.” Concerning DIBELS analysis, teachers at another school stated, “They [reading coaches] have been very helpful . . . , particularly with error analysis.” Another teacher focus group stated, “They [reading coaches] have provided us with some really great training [sessions].” They added, “We have had great data analysis meetings and they are really helping us understand how to use it.” Finally, teachers at another school stated, “She [reading coach] taught us all the assessments, and on data analysis she taught us how to use the data.”

Other activities or resources that teachers mentioned with less frequency included:

- Classroom resources (42%)
- Book study (33%)
- *Reading First* Professional Development Coordinator (29%)
- Peer assistance (25%)
- FCRR learning center activities (21%)
- Reading endorsement/coursework (21%)
- Summer reading academy (17%)
- Guided reading (13%)
- Teacher collaboration (13%)
- Reading centers (13%)

When asked to describe activities or resources that had had a positive impact on the quality of their coaching, reading coaches at *Reading First* schools most often indicated the following:

- *Reading First* Professional Development coordinator (96%)
- Professional development (79%)

Reading coaches praised the support and training they were given by the *Reading First* Professional Development coordinator. The following comments are representative:

- “Very helpful”
- “Consistent visitations”
- “Great”
- “Very available”
- “Excellent support for the school”

The reading coach at one school stated, “She [*RF* PD coordinator] came in March and she's already been here twice to assist us. Our quarterly meetings have been wonderful.” The reading coach at another school also praised the *Reading First* Professional Development coordinator, saying, “She is always there for me.” The reading coach at another school praised the “working relationship” of the *Reading First* Professional Development coordinators and the district coordinators, as well as the professional development they have provided; she stated, “They are always available and they always follow through on the delivery of information. When they plan their training they ask us to bring the most recent data for grade levels, to bring our CORE, and our literacy notebooks. They provided intense training days, having us think through how we can talk to teachers about the effectiveness of the CORE and promoting reflective conversations of coaches.” Another reading coach stated that the *Reading First* Professional coordinator “has come multiple times to meet with me at my request or her request.” The coach added, “She pushes me forward to think more about the numbers and percents and to look at data, and it has helped me to think that through more carefully. We wrote up our reflection of what we achieved this year We spent the day discussing my concerns.”

Other activities or resources that reading coaches mentioned with less frequency included:

- District workshops/meetings (29%)
- FCRR learning center activities (25%)
- Quarterly *Reading First* meetings (21%)
- Collegial sharing/teamwork (17%)
- District training (17%)
- Summer reading academy (13%)
- Book study (13%)
- Classroom resources (13%)

Reading Coach

During the site visit interviews and focus groups, teachers, reading coaches and principals were asked to provide information regarding the activities performed by the reading coach. Table 1 presents the most significant responses by the three groups.

| Perceptions of Significant Activities Performed by Coaches in Spring of 2006 | | | |
|---|-------------------|-----------------|----------------|
| Activity | Principals | Teachers | Coaches |
| Coaching and modeling | 58% | 58% | 58% |
| Visiting classrooms to provide ideas for instruction | 54% | 63% | 67% |
| Providing professional development | 83% | 58% | 79% |
| Providing resources | 45% | 79% | 46% |
| Organizing/conducting assessments | 54% | 38% | 79% |
| Analyzing data | 63% | 50% | 63% |
| Committees/school teams | 50% | 29% | 42% |
| Conferring with teachers | 42% | 46% | 63% |
| Support/encouragement of teachers | 25% | 29% | 13% |
| Classroom walk-throughs | 17% | 4% | 46% |

Table 1: Perceptions of Significant Activities Performed by Coaches

NOTE: Percentages indicate the portion of comments indicating coaches performed an activity, not the quantity of time spent performing an activity.

In discussing their work with teachers, reading coaches specified several aspects of *Reading First* that had had a positive impact on the quality of teacher practice in their school. Reading coaches listed “providing professional development” (79%) and “organizing/conducting assessments” (79%) most frequently.

Reading coaches affirmed the importance and efficacy of professional development, both for the reading coaches themselves and for the teachers. One reading coach observed, “Reading coaches sharing summer training and materials with each other was very helpful.” She added, “The faculty shares and learns together like a family.” A second reading coach also found the summer reading academy helpful. She stated, “In college they don't teach you how to teach reading.” A third reading coach stated, “They [teachers] have the opportunity to observe their peer teachers. They see the strengths and weaknesses of their peers, and then we conference with them. It is more non-threatening to them that way.” Another reading coach stated that she had been doing a lot of “trainings on materials;” she added, “They [teachers] really know how to use the materials. There's modeling and mentoring available so teachers feel they know more about how to implement the programs.” Another reading coach uses a “hands-on demonstration lesson.” Still another reading coach stated that at one point her training and mentoring “was almost every two weeks.” Another reading coach stated, “I am able to give professional development in school weekly with our teachers. The principal made it a point that I could meet with them weekly. We went over the Teacher's Edition from CCRP and Guided Reading and Centers and Differentiated Instruction and K-1 Student

Center Activities.” Still another reading coach stated, “I have been letting the teachers see good teaching. I model a lesson for them, but giving the opportunity to visit other classrooms has been helpful.” She has been “offering professional development without overwhelming them.” She added, “We’ve had so many new things this year. We did a hands-on training for K-1 Center Activities.” Finally, one reading coach, who has been providing professional development on the research, stated: “Giving them research to back up what I tell them—doing it, hearing it, and seeing it in action has made an impact. They [teachers] are now asking me, ‘what does the research say,’ and if it is there they are more willing to try new things.”

Book study was another form of professional development offered by reading coaches. One reading coach stated, “The district required second grade teachers to do a book study on the *Fluent Reader* by T. Rasinski; it really impacted what they are doing.” She also has been “developing *Literacy First* with Rigby. She added, “It was positive with all of the new K-2 teachers. Two third grade teachers came.”

Setting up and maintaining classroom libraries has been another helpful focus of professional development. One reading coach had been delivering training on classroom libraries, including the book leveling system and book shopping. In addition, she stated, “We gave parents resources to take home focusing on phonics and vocabulary. We gave white boards with dry erase markers and wipes and letter tiles. When we demonstrated for parents, the teachers learned what they could do in the classroom.” According to one reading coach, “*RF* Center activities materials are being used now in K-2.” The reading coach at another school “has helped them [teachers] level classroom libraries for reading groups.” Afterwards, “many teachers worked to level books.”

“Organizing/conducting assessments” was another important activity of the reading coaches. In addition to conducting the assessments, the reading coaches also assist teachers in interpreting the data. One reading coach has been “looking at assessments” and “discussing the data” with teachers. Another reading coach pinpointed the advantages of assessments when she stated, “Data analysis meetings have had a positive impact on many teachers, particularly those who have taught a long time and are set in their ways. The data showed them what was working well, and what needed to change.”

The Reading Block

All of the schools visited reported implementing at least a 90-minute reading block, and a few schools reported allotting additional time for reading during the school day.

Core Reading Program

When asked to describe the function of the core reading program in the reading block, 88% of the teachers' comments indicated that the core reading program had played a major role. The following are the core reading programs utilized by the visited schools:

- *Harcourt*
- *Reading Mastery Plus*
- *Voyager*
- *Houghton Mifflin*
- *SFA*
- *Scott Foresman with Links*

Teachers were also asked to identify the strengths and weaknesses of their core reading programs. The results of their responses can be found in Appendix C.

Implementation

During the teacher focus groups, teachers were asked to describe both the aspects of the reading block that they had implemented well and those aspects that they wanted help in implementing better.

Teachers most frequently indicated that they implement the following elements well:

- Phonemic awareness (92%)
- Vocabulary (92%)
- Comprehension (88%)
- Phonics (88%)
- Fluency (79%)

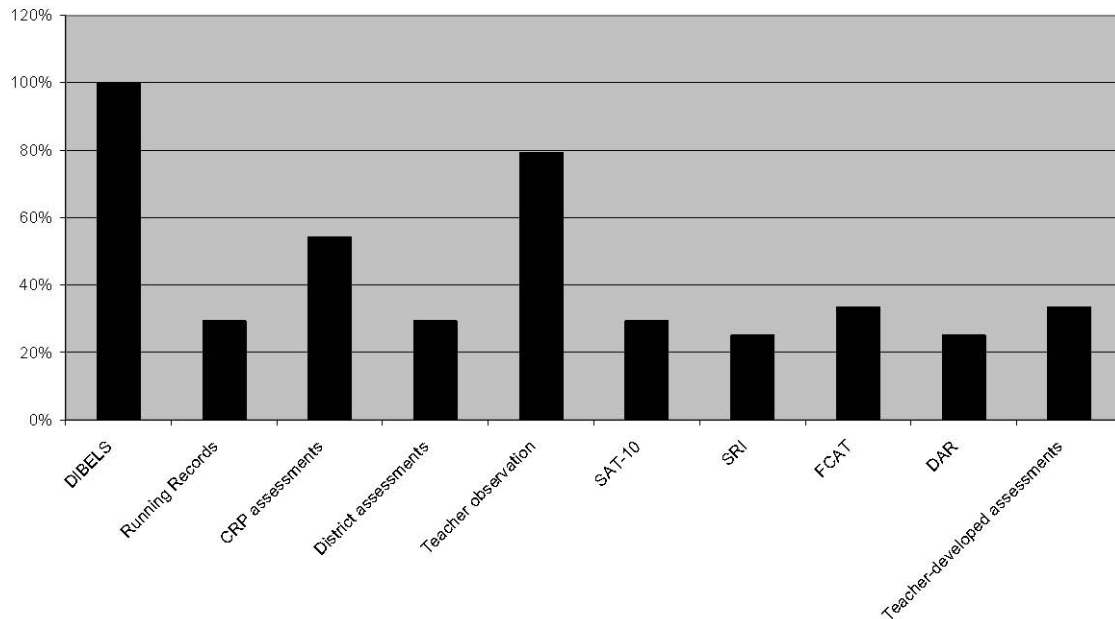
Teachers most frequently indicated that the following elements needed improvement in implementation:

- Fluency (79%)
- Comprehension (71%)
- Phonics (58%)
- Phonemic awareness (42%)
- Vocabulary (38%)

Assessments for Grouping Students

Another topic presented to all focus groups was how students were grouped for reading instruction. Teachers reported using the following assessments to group students:

**Percentage of Teachers Using
Various Assessments to Group Students**



Reading First Challenges

Table 2 depicts challenges as identified by the comments of the three groups: principals, teachers and coaches in *Reading First* schools.

| 2006 Challenges of <i>Reading First</i> Schools | | | |
|--|-------------------|-----------------|----------------|
| Activity | Principals | Teachers | Coaches |
| Assessments | 29% | 25% | 58% |
| Reading block | 17% | 33% | 33% |
| Scheduling | 25% | 25% | 4% |
| Lack of resources | 13% | 17% | 8% |
| Resistant teachers | 21% | 0% | 29% |
| Program implementation | 21% | 17% | 13% |
| Lack of time for professional development | 33% | 17% | 33% |
| Lack of time to accomplish all tasks | 54% | 67% | 58% |
| Personnel shortage | 13% | 0% | 0% |
| Centers | 8% | 38% | 17% |
| CRP | 4% | 13% | 25% |

Table 2: 2006 Challenges of *Reading First*

Principals' Challenges

Principals identified several challenges of *Reading First*. The challenge most frequently identified by principals was “lack of time to accomplish all tasks” (54%). As one principal stated, “Time is the challenge.” Another principal stated that, “especially in the beginning of the year,” there “never seems to be enough time.” Another principal agreed, “The time crunch at the beginning of the year—there was so much in the very beginning. If we could have had some of it spread over the summer, but it all came at once in the fall.” Another principal stated, “Teachers . . . need more time to teach.”

The second most frequently identified challenge mentioned by principals was “lack of time for professional development” (33%). One principal stated, “Teachers need release time to do professional development.” Another principal stated that they need “training for late-hire teachers in *Reading First*.” Still another principal stated that it was a challenge “providing the appropriate staff development for the appropriate group as the different pieces [of *RF*] came in.” Finally, one principal stated that it had been a particular challenge “training teachers in the fluency piece [of *RF*];” she added, “Because contract hours are short, it's a time crunch.”

The third most frequently mentioned challenge by principals was “assessments” (29%). One principal stated that “assessments were challenging,” in part because they require “pulling the assessment team away from instructional duties.” Another principal stated, “Assessments take up a lot of time” and require a “short turn-around time.” Still another principal noted that the “assessment timeline for *Reading First* and district testing overlap.”

Teachers' Challenges

Teachers identified several challenges of *Reading First*. The most frequently identified challenge by teachers was “lack of time to accomplish all tasks” (67%). Teachers at one school stated that they need more “time to combine whole group with differentiating instruction and prepare for FCAT.” Teachers at another school stated that it was a challenge “fitting in writing.” Finally, a concerned teacher at one school stated, “I cannot meet every group every day.”

The second most frequently challenge identified by teachers was “centers” (38%). Teachers at more than one school agreed that “preparation and setting up centers” was challenging. Some teachers also were concerned that “the centers are rushed,” and they “want to make sure it is not just busy work.” Teachers at another school also were challenged by “classroom management, coordination, and time management” of literacy centers. They also are having difficulty “getting the students to work independently.” One teacher focus group was having difficulty “tying all of the learning activities together.” Teachers at another school also stated that it was a challenge finding “something for students to do independently” at the centers. They also noted that center “management” was also a challenge. Teachers at another school were also challenged by “managing centers.” Finally, teachers at one school stated that “making center materials” and finding “time to use the centers” was difficult.

The third challenge most frequently identified by teachers was “reading block” (33%). Teachers at one school noted that “special area ‘bumps’ against the reading block.” Teachers at a second school stated that there is “not enough time within the reading block to complete” [activities]. Teachers at a third school also need more “time to combine whole group with differentiating instruction.” Similarly, teachers at another school found “scheduling” of the reading block challenging. Teachers at another school would like “permission for homogeneous grouping during the 90-minute block.” Teachers at still another school noted that during the reading block “resource teachers cannot pull students out” because of the “protected block of time.” Finally, the teacher focus group at one school stated that the “90-minute block is too long for Kindergarten.”

Reading Coaches’ Challenges

Reading coaches cited several challenges of *Reading First*. The challenges they most frequently mentioned were “assessments” (58%) and “lack of time to accomplish all tasks” (58%).

Concerning “assessments,” the reading coaches at one large school stated it was a challenge “coordinating the assessment team and implementing it [testing].” The reading coach at another large school stated that assessments were challenging because of “such a large student population.” Another reading coach stated, “Getting assessments into place was challenging--organizing, administering, etc. Testing so many students in 15 or 20 days is challenging.” Another stated the “short timeframe” [for turnaround] was especially challenging. Another reading coach agreed that “assessments are challenging due to time involved,” adding that sometimes she “takes on a lot of these duties to keep other personnel from being pulled from their duties.” The reading coach at still another school noted that “outcome assessments” were especially challenging because “so much time is involved.” Another reading coach agreed, “Outcome assessments may be challenging. Last year they did DIBELS 2 times a year; adding two others has not been so challenging.” The reading coach at another school stated that assessments are “challenging because of lack of personnel.” Finally, one reading coach stated that there was “too much testing,” adding “especially at the end of the year—*Reading First* testing in combination with our district testing.”

Concerning “lack of time to accomplish all tasks,” one reading coach, who attributed it to having to serve more than one school, stated, “The *Reading First* coach is split between two schools. I have help with resource specialist at each school, but I'd like to be at a school full-time.”

The second most frequently identified challenges mentioned by reading coaches were “lack of time for professional development” (33%) and “reading block” (33%).

Concerning “lack of time for professional development,” the reading coach at one school stated, “We can't train everyone at once so that we can't hear what other grade levels are experiencing.”

Concerning “reading block,” one reading coach stated, “Reading block scheduling is difficult; the principal is working to improve for next year.” Another reading coach stated that it had been challenging “trying to mix the *Voyager* program into the 90 minutes without diluting the CRP.”

The third challenge most frequently identified by the reading coaches was “resistant teachers” (29%). As one reading coach explained, “Teachers see so much change in programs and leadership, that they really doubt the long-term impact of any one program.” Another reading coach noted, “‘A’ school status made the faculty a bit apathetic at first.” Still another reading coach stated that it had been difficult “getting everybody on board,” adding that it was “hard to add-on different strategies during the year.” Finally, two reading coaches at a large school observed, “Some teachers aren't receptive to suggestions to improve their instruction; they take it as a personal offense.”

Reading First Benefits

The following table depicts benefits as identified by the comments of the three groups: principals, teachers and coaches in *Reading First* Schools.

| 2006 Benefits of <i>Reading First</i> Schools | | | |
|--|-------------------|-----------------|----------------|
| Activity | Principals | Teachers | Coaches |
| Resources | 42% | 54% | 71% |
| Assessments | 42% | 54% | 42% |
| Professional development | 33% | 17% | 71% |
| <i>RF</i> coach | 63% | 54% | 21% |
| Reading focus | 38% | 25% | 25% |
| Improved teacher knowledge of reading | 50% | 25% | 38% |
| Student reading improvement | 33% | 42% | 13% |
| Systematic/research-based | 25% | 17% | 25% |
| Reading block | 13% | 33% | 13% |
| Centers | 8% | 29% | 8% |

Table 3: 2006 Benefits of *Reading First*

Principals' Benefits

The benefits most frequently identified by principals were:

- “*Reading First* coach” (63%)
- “Improved teacher knowledge of reading” (50%)
- “Resources” (42%)
- “Assessments” (42%)

In terms of the *Reading First* coach, several principals agreed that the reading coach is “vital.” One principal stated, “The coach is the reason we are where we are in implementing *Reading First*.” Several principals also stated that the reading coach helps the principal “stay informed.” Another principal stated that the reading coach “supports a

team approach and a school-wide focus.” Finally, one principal called the reading coach the “key” to *Reading First*.

Half of the principals queried listed “improved teacher knowledge of reading,” as an important benefit of *Reading First*. One principal stated, “Teachers have greater awareness of the importance of their instruction for student success in reading.” A second principal stated, “Teachers are more aware of reading instruction and needs of students. Teachers know more strategies for teaching reading and small group instruction.” A third principal stated, “The staff understands more; they are forced to take the role of an empowered professional. *Reading First* has pushed us in this direction.” Another principal stated, “Teachers are more enlightened about what really matters.” Finally, concerning one particularly dramatic example, one principal stated, “One seasoned teacher commented on the fact that she finally knows how to teach reading.”

A sizeable minority of the principals expressed positive comments about the resources which *Reading First* brings to reading instruction. One principal stated, “We never had money before to do what we have done.” Another principal stated, “Resources and materials we receive to help with implementation [of *Reading First*].”

Principals also praised the assessments of *Reading First*. One principal stated, “The focus [is] on the individual needs of children because of data.” A second principal stated, “I’ve never seen my teachers as involved with databases before.” A third principal stated, “Concrete data [allows us] to analyze and be able to gear instruction to help the struggling students right away.”

Teachers’ Benefits

The benefits most frequently identified by teachers were:

- “Resources” (54%)
- “Assessments” (54%)
- “*Reading First* coach” (54%)

More than half of the teacher focus groups praised the resources of *Reading First*, especially the “classroom libraries” and the “baskets of books.”

More than half of the teacher focus groups also praised the assessments of *Reading First*. The teacher focus group at one school stated, “DIBELS is quick and then we have support doing it. The information is so helpful.” One of the members of the teacher focus group at another school stated, “The data have helped me see what I need to do and then I see that they [students] are making progress.” Finally, the teacher focus group at one school praised assessments, because they allow “targeted intervention.”

Concerning “*Reading First* coach,” teacher focus groups were positive in describing the efforts of their respective reading coaches. The teacher focus group at one school stated that the benefits of the reading coach go “on and on and on.” One teacher added, “I love the PowerPoint as soon as she comes back from training.” Teachers at another school

stated that the reading coach plays a “major role” in the implementation of *Reading First*.”

Reading Coaches’ Benefits

The benefits most frequently identified by reading coaches were:

- “Resources” (71%)
- “Professional development” (71%)
- “Assessments” (42%)

Concerning “resources,” reading coaches were positive in their praise of the scope and quantity of *Reading First* resources. One reading coach observed that more “funding [is] available [because of *Reading First*].” The reading coach at another school stated, “Teachers have really appreciated the resources for K-3.” A third reading coach stated that the “libraries as well as the additional district support” have been benefits of *Reading First*.

Concerning “professional development,” the reading coaches agreed that it has played an important role in implementing *Reading First*. At one school the reading coach stated that she has been doing a lot of “training and mentoring.” She added, “At one point it was almost every 2 weeks.” The reading coach at another school stated, “We can never give enough modeling and feedback.” A third reading coach stated that the “emphasis [has been] on using strategies in teaching.” Another reading coach stated, “They [teachers] have the opportunity to observe their peer teachers. They see the strengths and weaknesses of their peers, and then we conference with them. It is more non-threatening to them that way.” Still another reading coach has “trained teachers on Word Walls.” She also taught the book by Debbie Diller on literacy centers.” Finally, one reading coach stated that she has stressed the importance of phonemic awareness to Kindergarten teachers. She also has “used Marilyn Adams’ book with teachers.”

Concerning “assessments,” the reading coach agreed that the availability of reliable data has improved reading at their respective schools. The reading coach at one school stated, “Teachers are using reports to drive instruction better this year.” The reading coach at another school stated, “Data has helped teachers to focus on reading.” Finally, the reading coach at a third school stated, “Teachers are changing their instruction based on the data.”

Suggestions for Program Improvement

Principals, teachers and reading coaches were asked to offer specific suggestions that would improve the implementation of high quality reading instruction. These suggestions are reported in the following chart.

| 2006 Suggestions for <i>Reading First</i> | | | |
|--|-------------------|-----------------|----------------|
| Suggestion | Principals | Teachers | Coaches |
| Deeper and ongoing professional development | 42% | 21% | 58% |
| Additional or improved personnel | 29% | 25% | 8% |
| Improved scheduling/more time | 13% | 50% | 8% |
| More resources or assistance with existing resources | 17% | 21% | 17% |
| More administrative involvement in <i>RF</i> | 17% | 0% | 0% |
| Intervention assistance | 4% | 8% | 13% |
| Improved assessments/assessment data | 0% | 0% | 13% |
| Clarification on <i>RF</i> implementation | 0% | 0% | 13% |

Table 4. 2006 Suggestions for *Reading First*

Examples of coaches' comments and suggestions for program improvement include:

- “Scheduling needs to be improved.”
- “Make the coaching position full-time.”
- Hire “a reading resource teacher.”
- “Support people in the classroom”
- “DIBELS reports—need the raw scores reported over time by students in a particular class”
- “Help in organizing DIBELS and other data for analyzing in a user-friendly way with teachers”
- “Need clarification on what guided reading should look like”
- “More time to meet with teachers and provide professional development”
- “More materials that are teacher specific: guided reading books, big books that are more theme-related for first grade”
- “More time for coaching and getting in the classroom to help the teachers”
- “Redesigning how target interventions are happening for those students who have a need for intervention”
- “More support from *Reading First* to know what is the most important thing is for me to be doing each year”
- Assistance with “grouping of students for intervention”
- “Professional development needs to be delivered at the beginning of the year.”
- “Improve the intensity of small group teacher-led instruction; guided reading is not reaching our struggling readers.”
- “Be in school more.” (rather than at district meetings)
- More resources
- “Provide more professional development for teachers.”
- “Get in the classrooms more.”

Examples of teachers' suggestions include:

- "A set of written guidelines for *Reading First* to build a school-based consensus on how *RF* translates into the classroom"
- Better utilization of aide's time
- "Common block of uninterrupted time"
- "Having the flexibility to spend more time on one activity and less time on another"
- Increase number of students attending summer school
- "Paraprofessionals are needed to help with centers."
- "I would like to be able to meet with all my groups, not just my low group."
- "Longer reading groups"
- "More tutors, and one-on-one teaching opportunities for struggling readers"
- "Additional supplemental intervention programs for individual instruction, as the CRP has limited resources for iii"
- "Catching the struggling students early, by pulling K and 1st as well as 3rd"
- "Longer reading block"
- "More time for training, especially with Promethean boards"
- Teachers would like to have more input on purchase of materials.
- "More parent involvement in reading"
- "More flexibility during the 90 minutes"
- "More personnel for assessments"
- "Flexibility for moving students for morning instruction"
- "Going to media center during the 90-minute block"
- "More academic/reading time within the day"
- "More resource people from within the school to do DIBELS"
- "More Title I personnel"
- "Supplemental phonics program"
- "Professional development on time management: how to get it all done and use everything"
- "Paraprofessionals during reading block"
- "Bigger space in the classroom"
- "More time to teach writing"
- "Kindergarten reading block in the morning"

Examples of principals' suggestions include:

- "Make sure that scheduling maximizes the effectiveness of the block."
- "More principal involvement in grade level meetings"
- "More contact/involvement from district level"
- "Have coach at the school during the first two weeks instead of going to training for *Reading First*"
- "K-3 reading block in the morning"
- "Different iii programs"
- "Teachers need training to effectively teach vocabulary and comprehension."

- “Have reading coach in classrooms more”
- “Have paraprofessionals in all classes during reading block”
- “More opportunities to collaborate with other *RF* schools”
- “Early release days to provide professional development and literacy workshops”
- “More teacher planning time”
- “Component for accelerated students”
- “More flexibility in use of money to get equipment such as computers, overhead projectors”
- “Lengthened school day”
- “More tutoring assistance”
- “Allow administration to have more time in the classrooms monitoring.”
- “Full-time reading coach”
- “Time to improve implementation”
- “Continue support and monitoring by coaches and administration”
- “More support staff: paraprofessionals, hourly teachers”
- Reduce number of assessments.
- Additional reading coach
- “Provide more job-imbedded professional development.”
- “More professional development”
- “More materials for small group, skills-focused lessons”
- “Assistant for reading coach”
- “Opportunity to have teachers observe in other classrooms”

Observational Data

The following section provides information on the types of instruction that were observed in classrooms visited by the reviewers. These data were collected during the 45-minute observations conducted in 96 classes in grades K-3 at 24 *Reading First* schools. The average number of students in these classrooms was 16.

Table 4 summarizes data on quality of instruction, the amount of student engagement and instructional focus across all site visits in first year schools.

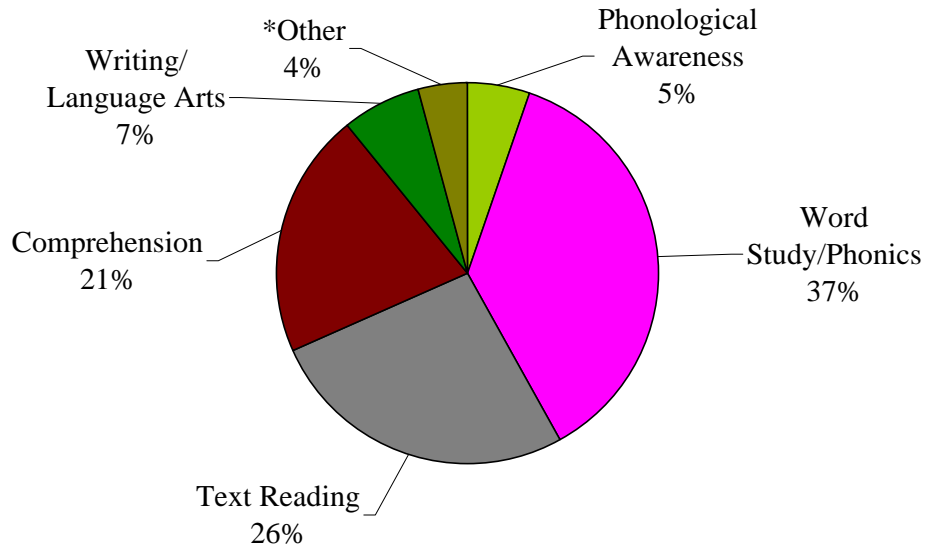
| Ratings of Teachers' Quality of Instruction, Student Engagement and Instructional Focus in <i>Reading First</i> Schools | | | | | |
|--|------------------|------------------|-------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| | K | 1st | 2nd | 3rd | All Grades |
| Overall quality of instruction (4 pt. scale) | 2.92 (.82) | 2.63 (.73) | 3.10 (.85) | 3.08 (1.02) | 2.93 (.86) |
| Overall student engagement (3 pt. scale) | 2.33 (.49) | 2.21 (.48) | 2.33 (.60) | 2.50 (.57) | 2.34 (.54) |
| Percentage of instructional time focused on instructional activities | 89% (11%) | 86% (14%) | 85% (15%) | 90% (10%) | 87% (13%) |
| Length of observation | 45.29 (1.08) | 44.83 (3.12) | 45.63 (1.17) | 43.92 (2.41) | 44.92 (2.12) |
| Length of reading block | 95.00 (11.42) | 94.58 (10.62) | 100.00 (16.94) | 98.13 (14.66) | 96.93 (13.62) |

Table 4: Ratings of Teachers' Quality of Instruction, Student Engagement and Instructional Focus in *Reading First* Schools

The average instructional quality rating of the teachers who were observed was 2.93 on a 4-point scale, with 4 being the highest quality. Examples of teacher characteristics that would qualify as high quality include: using explicit, direct language; modeling examples for students; providing immediate, corrective feedback to students; and scaffolding tasks and materials to meet student needs. Similarly, student engagement during this observation period was 2.34 on a 3-point scale. High student engagement is described as when almost all students are actively engaged in a learning activity. During all observations, the average amount of the class time dedicated to instructional activities was 87%. During kindergarten observations, 89% of the time was focused on instructional activities. During the first grade observations, 86% of the time was focused on instructional activities. During the second grade observations, 85% of the time was focused on instructional activities. During the third grade observations, 90% of the time was focused on instructional activities. The remaining non-instructional time was spent on activities such as behavior management, announcements, instructions, distributing materials, facilitating seat work, etc.

Figures 1-4 show the percentages of instructional time dedicated to various reading categories in each grade across all classrooms in the 24 *Reading First* schools where observations were conducted during spring 2006. For a description of the instructional categories, refer to Appendix A.

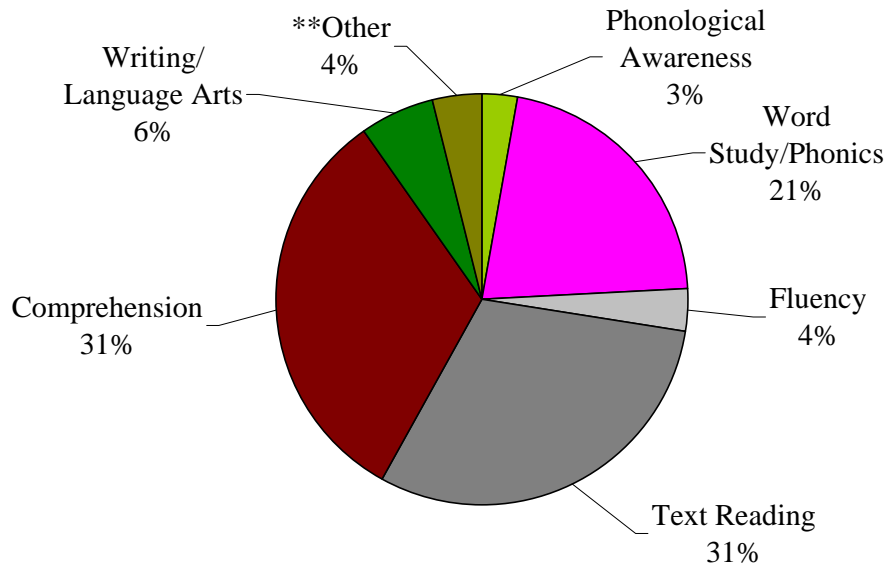
Kindergarten



*Concepts of Print, 1%; Alphabetic Knowledge, 2%; Oral Language 1%; Fluency, less than 1%

Figure 1

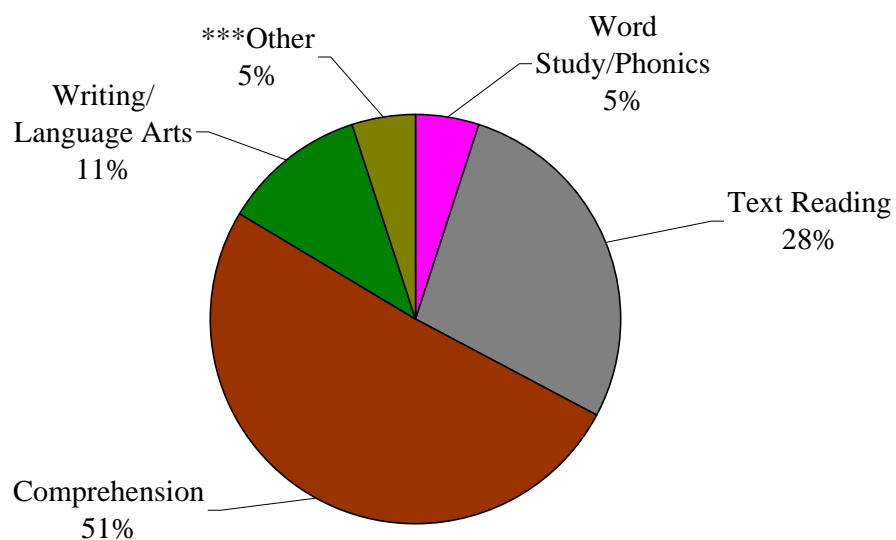
First Grade



**Concepts of Print, 1%; Spelling, 2%; Oral Language, less than 1%

Figure 2

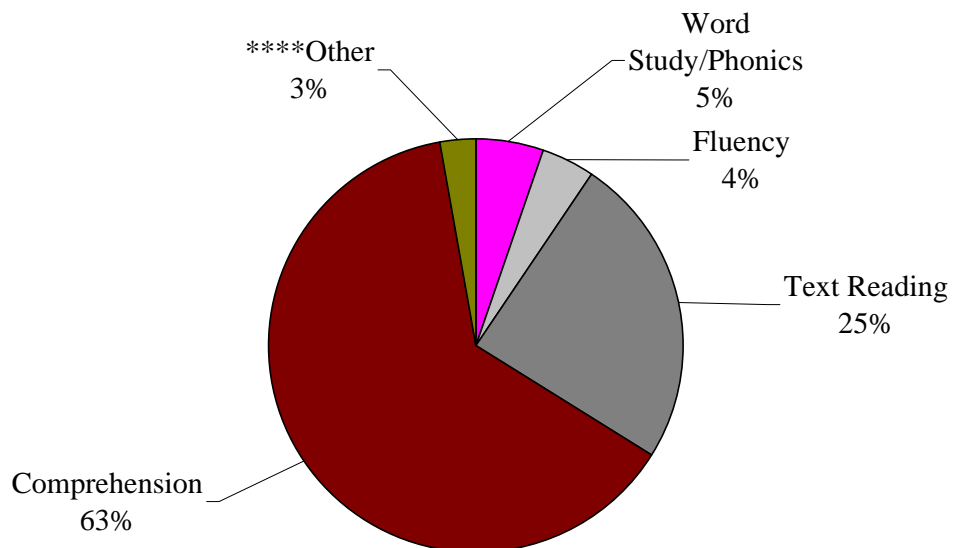
Second Grade



***Concepts of Print, less than 1%; Phonological Awareness, less than 1%; Spelling, 2%; Oral Language, 1%; Fluency, 2%

Figure 3

Third Grade



****Oral Language, 1%; Writing/Language Arts, 2%

Figure 4