

2005 *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 2005. 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 2004-05 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, a valid and reliable observation instrument used to systematically categorize and code the content of reading and language arts instruction, 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 2005 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 23 *Reading First* districts at 39 schools during the months of March, April and May. 156 randomly selected classrooms were visited in grades K-3 with the number of students per classroom averaging 17. The average length of observations was 46 minutes and the average length of the reading block in observed classrooms was 94 minutes. Shorter informal walkthroughs 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; 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 teacher 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 their questions as the spokesperson for their grade level or instructional area and 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.

The remainder of this report summarizes the 2005 site visit data collected statewide. Of the 39 schools visited, 8 of the schools were operating in their initial year of *Reading First*; 31 of the schools were operating in their second year. This report summarizes the data separately for these two groups, first year schools and second year schools.

Section One

First Year *Reading First* Schools

Eight schools were randomly selected from first year *Reading First* schools for site visits in the spring of 2005. A listing of these schools can be found in Appendix B.

School Focus

When discussing strategies implemented at the school to ensure a strong focus on the *Reading First* initiative, several elements were noted frequently across all principal comments in the eight first year schools.

The following areas were identified with 75% frequency:

- 90 minute protected reading block (75%)
- Data driven instruction (75%)

The following areas were identified with frequency between 38% and 74%:

- Team or co-teaching (50%)
- Walkthroughs (50%)
- Family involvement (50%)
- Professional development (38%)
- Core Reading Program (38%)
- New organizational system (38%)

The following areas were identified with less than 38% frequency:

- Increased personnel (25%)
- Special support programs (25%)
- Tutoring (25%)
- Technology programs (13%)

Professional Development

When asked to describe activities that had positively impacted the quality of their teaching, teachers at first year schools indicated most often the following: the reading coach, professional development such as workshops or book studies, the summer reading academy, and classroom resources. Other areas mentioned were smaller class sizes, assessments, and collegial sharing and teamwork.

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 First Year Schools 2005			
Activity	Principals	Teachers	Coaches
Coaching and modeling	63%	50%	88%
Visiting classrooms to provide ideas for instruction	25%	25%	100%
Providing professional development	38%	25%	75%
Providing resources	25%	75%	63%
Organizing/conducting assessments	25%	25%	63%
Entering assessment data	0 %	0%	13%
Analyzing data	63%	13%	63%
Committees/school teams	25%	0%	25%
Administrative (budget/materials)	13%	0%	0%

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.

Reading coaches at first year schools were asked to offer suggestions that would improve the implementation of quality reading instruction. Thirty eight percent (38%) of their suggestions centered on curriculum issues such as a longer reading block, a scheduled time for intensive interventions, and more emphasis on fidelity to the Core Reading Program (CRP). Other suggestions included more opportunities for quality professional development and reduction in the amount of assessments. One coach out of the eight reading coaches at first year schools commented that their district *Reading First* director was doing a wonderful job of coordinating the program, that the excellent communications between the school and district reflected a common focus on improving students' reading success, and felt that no suggestions were needed to improve the implementation of their reading program because it was going so well!

The Reading Block

When asked to describe the function of the CRP in the reading block, 100% of the comments in first year schools indicated that the CRP played a major role. Some teachers discussed other resources that were used when the core program did not sufficiently address a skill but all felt that the CRP was the driving force of their reading instruction during the reading block.

During the teacher focus groups, teachers were asked to describe the aspects of the reading block that they implemented well. Then they were asked to describe those aspects that they wanted help in implementing better. In first year schools, the elements that teachers felt they were implementing well included both whole and small group instruction with others feeling that their strengths were in certain elements of reading such as vocabulary, phonics, and phonemic awareness.

The elements teachers described with the highest frequency as needing improvement were centers and classroom management. Mentioned with less frequency were the areas of needing more materials and more time; other teachers commented that a need was to facilitate assessments without pulling personnel from classrooms such as paraprofessionals and Title I personnel because when they were pulled, work with students was impeded.

Another topic presented to all focus groups was how students were grouped for reading instruction. All teachers indicated that DIBELS assessment results were used to group students for flexible reading groups. They also reported using additional measures to assist them in placing students for reading instruction. The most frequently mentioned tools used along with DIBELS were: CRP assessments, teacher observations, and norm referenced test results such as the SAT.

Reading First Challenges

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

2005 Challenges of Reading First First Year Schools			
Activity	Principals	Teachers	Coaches
Assessments	50%	13%	75%
Reading block	38%	25%	13%
Lack of resources	50%	38%	38%
Resistant teachers	25%	0%	25%
Program implementation	75%	50%	50%
Lack of time for professional development	13%	13%	13%
Lack of time to accomplish all tasks	25%	38%	63%

Table 2: 2005 Challenges of *Reading First* in First Year Schools

The most frequently identified challenge by teachers in these first year schools was program implementation. This challenge was described in terms of implementing various

elements: reading centers, differentiated instruction, designing appropriate learning activities, implementing the CRP, working with assistants to coordinate their work, and learning how to adequately plan and organize. The second most challenging areas mentioned by teachers were lack of resources (38%) and lack of time to accomplish all their tasks related to implementing their reading instruction (38%). Teachers indicated that this challenge related to not having enough materials, getting materials late and not having appropriate level materials for all students. They also felt overwhelmed with all the tasks related to providing instruction and commented that there were just not enough hours in the day to accomplish all the necessary tasks. The third most frequently mentioned challenge, the reading block, was closely related to the first and second challenges. Teachers mentioned that keeping students engaged, implementing small group instruction, and designing academic reading centers made the reading block challenging.

Reading coaches cited several challenges. Seventy five percent (75%) of coaches' comments reported that assessments were challenging. They mentioned the multitude of details to take care of in this area as well as the number and frequency of assessments. Similarly, lack of time to accomplish all their tasks was identified 63% of the time. Like teachers, coaches viewed program implementation as challenging with 50% of the coaches' comments ranking program implementation as their third most challenging area.

Similarly, principals identified the area of program implementation as their top challenge (75%). The next most challenging areas were assessments and lack of resources - each identified with the same frequency (50%). Also identified as challenging was scheduling the reading block (38%) in terms of coordinating times and resources to ensure that all K-3 teachers had an uninterrupted block of time for reading.

Reading First Benefits

The following table depicts benefits as identified by the comments of the three groups: principals, teachers and coaches in first year schools.

2005 Benefits of Reading First First Year Schools			
Activity	Principals	Teachers	Coaches
Resources	38%	63%	50%
Assessments	75%	38%	63%
Professional development	25%	13%	25%
RF coach	100%	100%	0%
Reading focus	38%	50%	13%
Improved teacher knowledge of reading	25%	25%	0%
Student reading improvement	38%	38%	25%
Teacher openness	13%	0%	63%
Protected time to teach reading	0%	38%	0%

Table 3: 2005 Benefits of *Reading First* in First Year Schools

Though clearly challenging, assessments were also identified as a benefit by coaches, teachers, and principals an average of 59% of the time. On average, 50% of the time, all three groups identified having additional resources as a benefit of the program. Perhaps most important is the benefit of student reading improvement, identified by teachers and principals 38% of the time. Other benefits were also named and were reflective of the identifying group. For example, 50% of teacher comments reported that the program brought a helpful reading focus in their classrooms. 100% of principals' and teachers' comments indicated that having a reading coach was a favorable part of the program. Several comments indicated that the coach was a major reason for the success of the program in the school. According to teacher focus groups, 25% of teachers' comments indicated that a benefit of *Reading First* was their improved knowledge of reading while 38% of their comments indicated that a program benefit was having protected time to teach reading. In 63% of the coaches' interview comments, it was reported that teacher openness to new strategies and ideas was beneficial.

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 32 classes in grades K-3 at eight first year schools. The average number of students in these classrooms was 19 (range 7-44; K = 19, 1st 19, 2nd = 18, 3rd = 18).

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 & Instructional Focus First Year <i>Reading First</i> Schools					
	K	1 st	2 nd	3rd	All Grades
Overall quality of instruction (4 point scale)	2.75 (.50)	2.75 (.50)	3.00 (.63)	3.00 (.00)	2.90 (.45)
Overall student engagement (3 point scale)	2.45 (.41)	2.50 (.56)	2.67 (.27)	2.9 (.11)	2.63 (.38)
Percentage of instructional time focused on instructional activities	85% (14%)	92% (4.7%)	95% (00%)	94% (8.8%)	92% (7.6%)
Length of observation	45 (1)	45 (1)	47 (6)	47 (2)	46 (3)
Length of reading block	90 (00)	93 (5.7)	92 (2.8)	91 (2.5)	91.6 (3.08)

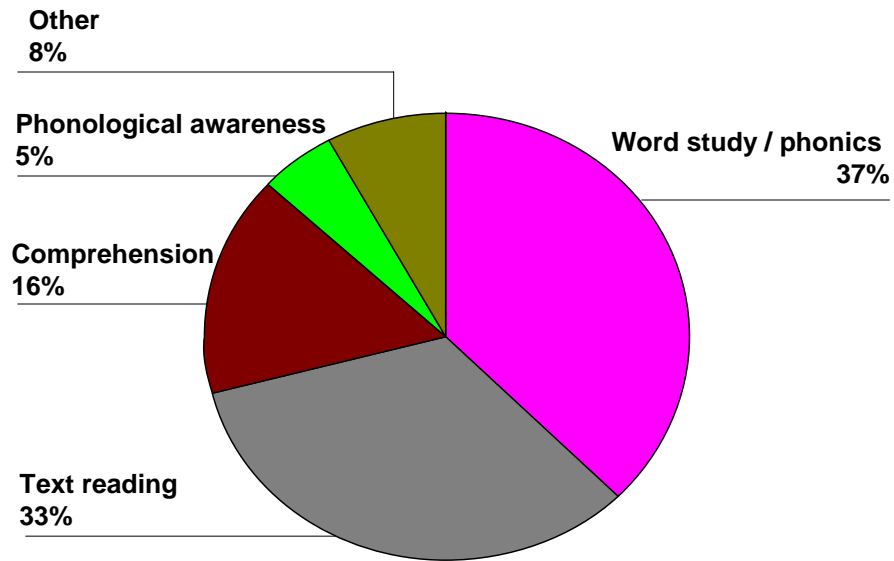
Table 4: Ratings of Teachers' Quality of Instruction, Student Engagement & Instructional Focus in First Year *Reading First* Schools

The average instructional quality rating of the teachers who were observed was 2.9 on a 4-point scale, with 4 being the highest quality. Examples of teacher characteristics that

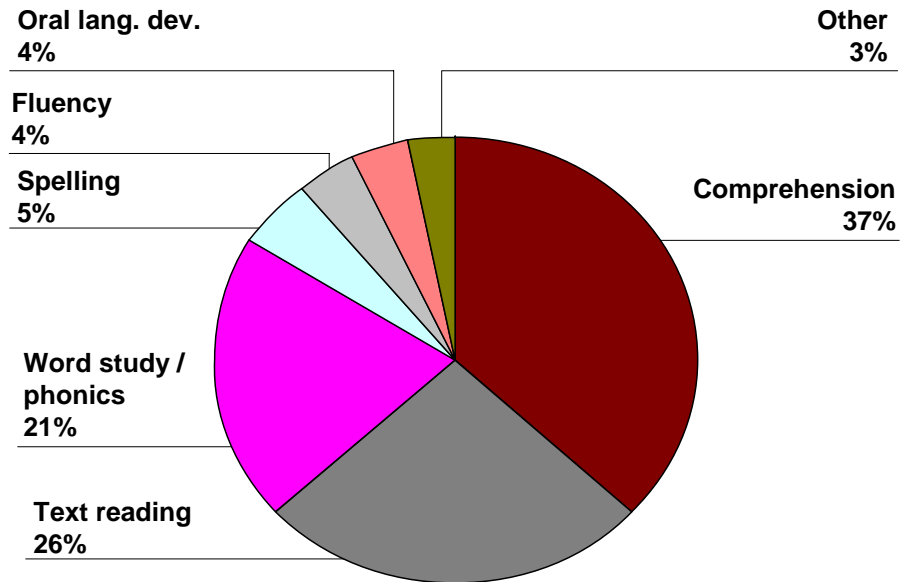
would qualify as high quality include: using explicit, direct language; modeling examples for students; providing immediate, corrective feedback to students; and scaffolding tasks and materials to meet student needs. Similarly, student engagement during this observation period was 2.6 on a 3-point scale. 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 92%. During both kindergarten observations, 85% of the time was focused on instructional activities. During the first grade observations, 92% of the time was focused on instructional activities. During the second grade observations, 95% of the time was focused on instructional activities. During the third grade observations, 94% 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, etc.

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

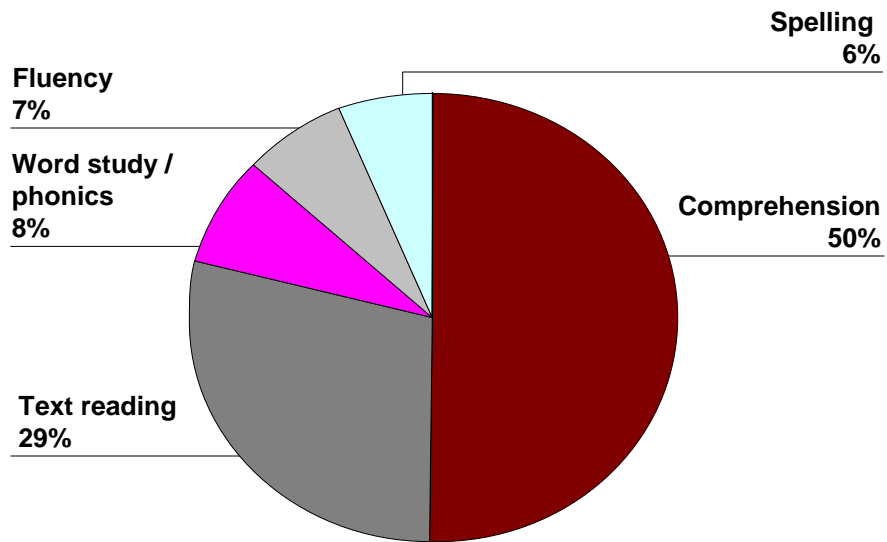
First Year Schools Kindergarten



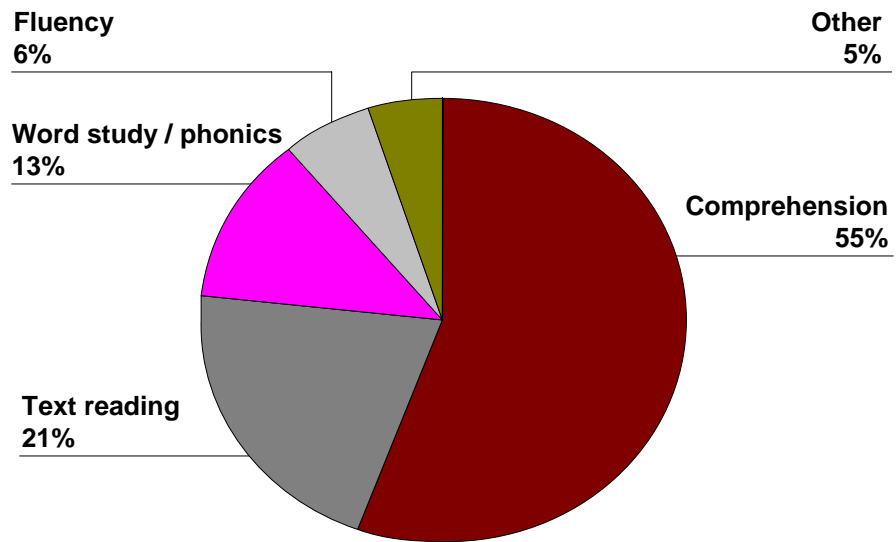
First Year Schools 1st grade



First Year Schools 2nd grade



First Year Schools 3rd grade



Section Two

Second Year *Reading First* Schools

Thirty one schools were randomly selected from the group of second year *Reading First* schools for spring 2005 site visits. A listing of these schools can be found in Appendix B.

School Focus

When discussing strategies implemented at the school to ensure a strong focus on the *Reading First* initiative, several elements were noted frequently across all principal comments in second year schools.

The following areas were identified with 75% or higher frequency:

- Data driven instruction (84%)
- Professional development (78%)

The following areas were identified with frequency between 38% and 74%:

- Walkthroughs (53%)
- Reading block (53%)
- Family involvement (38%)
- Enhanced libraries (38%)
- Team or co-teaching (38%)
- Core Reading Program (38%)

The following areas were identified with less than 38% frequency:

- Increased personnel (32%)
- Special support programs (25%)
- Tutoring (25%)
- New organizational system (19%)
- Technology programs (13%)

Professional Development

When asked to describe activities that had positively impacted the quality of their teaching, 100% of teachers indicated that the reading coach had played a strong role in improving their reading instruction. Almost all of the teachers (90%) reported that professional development such as workshops or book studies had moved them towards better instructional practices. Other positive influences mentioned by at least 1/3 of the teachers were: observing model lessons, peer collaboration, the Just Read, Florida! Summer Reading Academy and teaching resources.

Reading Coach

During the site visits, teachers, reading coaches and principals were asked to provide information regarding the activities performed by the reading coach. Table 5 presents the most significant responses (in terms of frequency) by the three groups.

Perceptions of Significant Activities Performed by Coaches Second Year Reading First Schools			
Activity	Principals	Teachers	Coaches
Coaching and modeling	63%	53%	87%
Visiting classrooms	6%	17%	68%
Providing professional development	41%	47%	71%
Providing resources	44%	67%	48%
Organizing/conducting assessments	34%	20%	56%
Entering assessment data	0 %	0%	0%
Analyzing data	31%	27%	77%
Committees/school teams	6%	0%	13%
Administrative (budget/materials)	3%	0%	28%

Table 5: Perceptions of Significant Activities Performed by Coaches in Second Year Schools 2005
NOTE: Percentages indicate the portion of comments indicating coaches performed an activity, not the quantity of time spent performing an activity.

Reading coaches at second year schools were asked to suggest ideas and changes that might improve the implementation of quality reading instruction. Twenty nine percent (29%) of their suggestions centered on personnel issues such as needing more reading specialists to work directly with students, particularly with struggling students; and more assistants in kindergarten and first grade classrooms. Twenty three percent (23%) of their comments suggested that more opportunities for professional development would be helpful; that a common planning time for grade level sharing and planning would be an improvement; and that a reduction in the amount of assessments, particularly in the spring, would improve the program.

The Reading Block

When asked to describe the role of the Core Reading Program in reading instruction, 84% of the comments indicated that the Core Reading Program (CRP) played a major role with 16% indicating that it played a minor role with other resources used in place of the CRP.

During the teacher focus groups, teachers were asked to identify the aspects of the reading block that they implemented well. Then they were asked to describe those aspects that they wanted help in implementing better. In second year schools, 35% of teachers' comments indicated that their strong point was small group instruction with 16% indicating that whole group instruction was their strongest area of teaching.

Implementing reading centers was cited 52% of the time when teachers were asked to identify the aspects of the block that they wanted to implement better. Other areas mentioned as weak were time to fit in all the required components of the block (23%) and differentiating instruction (13%).

Another topic presented in all interviews was how students were grouped for reading instruction. All teachers indicated that DIBELS assessment results were used to group students for flexible reading groups. They also reported using additional measures to assist them in determining how to place students for reading instruction. In second year schools, the most frequently mentioned tools used along with DIBELS were: CRP assessments, teacher observations, and running records.

Reading First Challenges

Table 6 depicts challenges as identified by the comments of the three groups: principals, teachers, and coaches.

2005 Challenges of Reading First Second Year Schools			
Activity	Principals	Teachers	Coaches
Assessments	45%	29%	42%
Reading block	42%	61%	19%
Lack of resources	35%	23%	29%
Resistant teachers	19%	0%	39%
Program implementation	35%	65%	32%
Lack of time to provide professional development	32%	0%	23%
Lack of time to accomplish all tasks	23%	29%	29%

Table 6: 2005 Challenges of Reading First in Second Year Schools

The most frequently identified challenge by teachers in these second year schools was program implementation. This challenge was described in terms of implementing various elements: reading centers, differentiated instruction, designing appropriate learning activities, implementing the CRP, working with assistants to coordinate their work, and learning how to adequately plan and organize. The second most challenging area mentioned by teachers was implementing the reading block in terms of keeping students engaged, implementing effective small group instruction, and designing academic reading centers. Almost a third of the teacher comments (29%) reported that assessments and lack of time to complete all the many reading tasks were both challenging areas. Twenty three percent (23%) of all teacher comments identified lack of resources as a challenge.

Reading coaches cited several challenges. 42% of coaches' comments reported that assessments were challenging. They mentioned the multitude of details to take care of in this area as well as the number and frequency of assessments. Coaches' comments (39%) revealed that resistant teachers who did not "buy in" to the *Reading First* program were challenging, also. Like teachers, coaches viewed program implementation as challenging with 32% of the coaches' comments ranking this as their third most challenging area. Other coaches' comments (29%) indicated that lack of resources, both material and human, made the job of coaching challenging.

Similarly, principals identified the area of assessments as their top challenge (45%). The next most challenging area was the reading block in terms of scheduling and allocating resources to ensure that every teacher in the school had equitable access to all school services and special areas. Two additional challenge areas were identified by 35% of the principals' comments: having adequate resources to deal with all teacher and student needs in reading and program implementation.

Reading First Benefits

Table 7 depicts benefits as identified by the comments of the three groups: principals, teachers and coaches in second year schools.

2005 Benefits of Reading First Second Year Schools			
Activity	Principals	Teachers	Coaches
Resources	53%	87%	52%
Assessments	69%	39%	71%
Professional development	34 %	35%	58%
RF coach	100%	94%	0%
Reading focus	56%	23%	39%
Improved teacher knowledge of reading	53%	19%	61%
Student reading improvement	66%	32%	39%
Protected time to teach reading	25%	19%	10%

Table 7: 2005 Benefits of *Reading First* in Second Year Schools

Though clearly challenging, *Reading First* assessments were also identified as a benefit by coaches, teachers and principals an average of 60% of the time. On average, 64% of the time, all three groups identified having additional resources as a benefit of the program. Perhaps most important is the benefit of student reading improvement,

identified on average by all groups 46% of the time. Other benefits were also named and were reflective of the identifying group. For example, 56% of principals' comments reported that *Reading First* brought a helpful reading focus in their school. 94% of teachers' comments indicated that having a reading coach was a favorable part of the program with all principals agreeing. Several comments indicated that the coach was a major reason for the success of the program in the school. On average 44% of comments from all groups indicated that a benefit of *Reading First* was improved knowledge of reading.

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 124 K-3 classrooms at 31 second year schools. The average number of students in these classrooms was 17 (range 16-19; K = 17, 1st = 17, 2nd = 19, 3rd = 16).

Table 8 summarizes data on quality of instruction, the amount of student engagement and instructional focus across the 31 site visits at second year schools.

Ratings of Teachers' Quality of Instruction, Student Engagement & Instructional Focus Second Year <i>Reading First</i> Schools					
	K	1 st	2 nd	3rd	All Grades
Overall quality of instruction (4 point scale)	3.05 (.76)	2.8 (.79)	3.00 (.79)	3.00 (.79)	3.00 (.78)
Overall student engagement (3 point scale)	2.60 (.35)	2.41 (.32)	2.74 (.47)	2.72 (.43)	2.62 (.41)
Percentage of instructional time focused on instructional activities	89% (9.6%)	88% (7.7%)	90% (8.6%)	95% (4.2%)	91% (8.1%)
Length of observation	47 (4.2)	45 (4.1)	45 (2.3)	45 (4.6)	46 (4)
Length of reading block	87 (12)	88 (16)	97 (21)	102 (26)	94 (21)

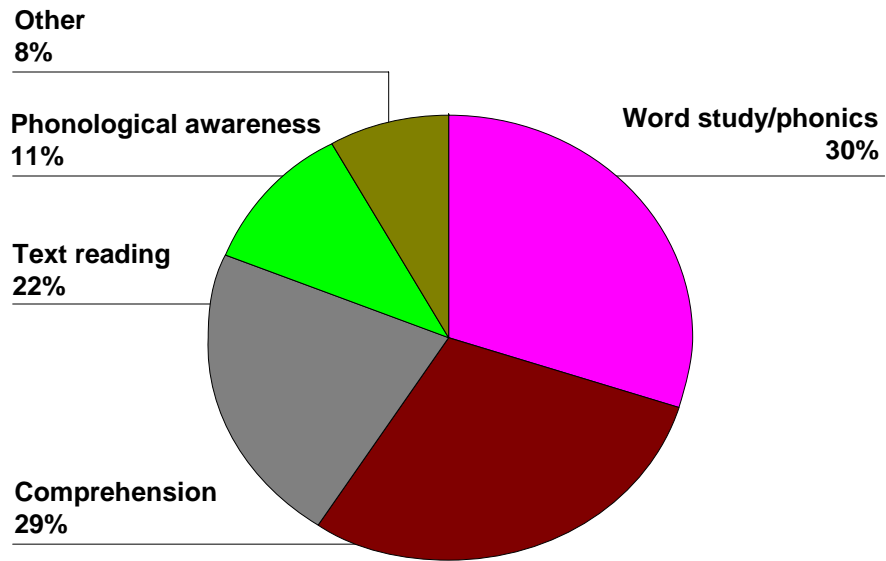
Table 8: Ratings of Teachers' Quality of Instruction, Student Engagement & Instructional Focus in Second Year *Reading First* Schools

The average instructional quality rating of the teachers who were observed was 3 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 2.6 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

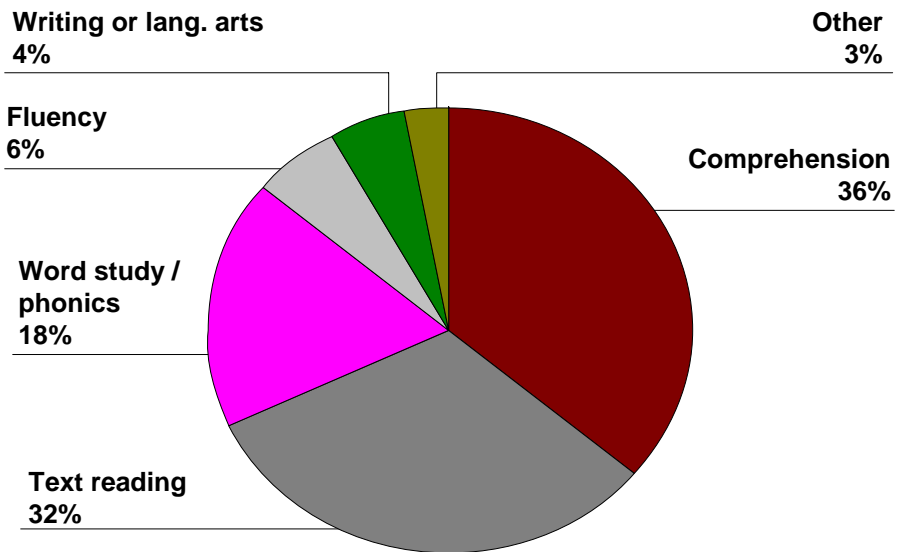
was 91%. During kindergarten observations, 89% of the time was focused on instructional activities. During the first grade observations, 88% of the time was focused on instructional activities. During the second grade observations, 90% of the time was focused on instructional activities. During the third grade observations, 95% 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, etc.

Figures 1-4 show the percentages of instructional time dedicated to various reading categories in each grade across all 124 classrooms in the 31 second year *Reading First* schools. For a description of the instructional categories, refer to Appendix A.

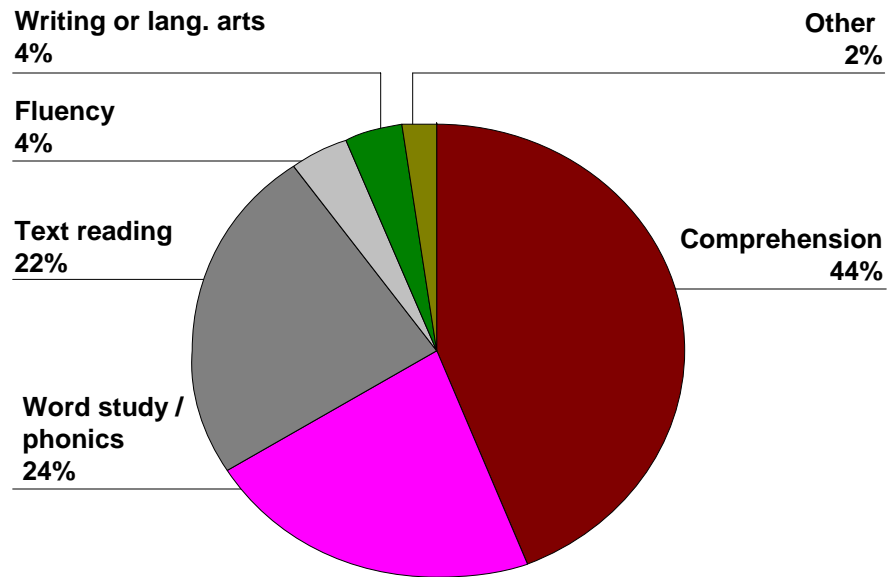
Second Year Schools Kindergarten



Second Year Schools 1st grade



Second Year Schools 2nd grade



Second Year Schools 3rd grade

