



## **2008 *Reading First* Site Visits Statewide Report**

To satisfy the requirements of Florida's *Reading First* grant, the Florida Center for Reading Research (FCRR) conducted site visits at a sample of Florida's *Reading First* Schools during the spring of 2008. 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 *Reading First* (RF) grants during the 2007-08 school year. When considered along with other information such as district and school observational records, student reading scores, and informal feedback from faculty and staff, the report can be valuable to the continued implementation of the *Reading First* initiative in Florida.

### **I. Site Visit Process**

The process of planning and implementing site visits involved several steps to ensure efficient communications, scheduling, site visits, and reporting. When site visits to Florida's *Reading First* schools began in the fall of 2004, 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. 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 observation instrument and learned site visit procedures. The ICE-R was used to conduct classroom observations during site visits conducted from 2004-2007; a shorter observation tool was used in 2008 and is displayed in Appendix A.

A critical part of the site visit process is scheduling the site visits with schools and districts. The FCRR Director of Professional Development communicated with the randomly selected schools in early February 2008 to inform them of the upcoming site visit calendar and procedures. District *Reading First* coordinators ensured that school schedules would accommodate the classroom observations during each school's reading block. Two-member teams conducted one-day site visits in nine *Reading First* districts at fourteen schools during the months of March, April and May.

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 collecting qualitative data.

## **II. Reading First Schools**

The original plan for determining schools for site visits involved randomly selecting these schools. However, the *Reading First* Leadership Team determined that more information was needed on the characteristics of successful *Reading First* schools. Therefore, schools were selected for spring 2008 site visits based on their improved performance on reading comprehension measures since their first year of *Reading First* implementation. Schools were sorted by their Combined Growth Index (CGI), which represents the amount their percent of students at grade level had increased, and their percent of students at high risk had decreased, since the first year they participated in *Reading First*. For all schools, a "beating the odds" index was calculated as a measure of school performance once the demographic information of students in the school was controlled statistically. This provided a way to directly compare the performance of schools that had different "degrees of difficulty" in terms of the characteristics of students attending the school. Schools had to have a "beating the odds" index that was above average for their cohort to be considered a high performing school. The most important criteria involved the extent to which student performance on reading comprehension measures had improved since the first year of *Reading First*. After that, schools had to be in the top half for their cohort in their "beating the odds" index, and they had to have more than 30 students at each grade, stability in the principalship, and a grade of A,B, or C during school year 2006-07.

Fourteen schools were selected for visits during spring of 2008. A listing of these schools can be found in Appendix B. Over 200 K-3 classrooms were visited in these schools.

Fifty-seven percent (57%) of these schools were completing the fifth year of implementation of their *Reading First* grants, seven percent (7%) were completing their fourth year of implementation, and thirty-six percent (36%) were completing their third year of implementation.

## **III. School Focus**

To gather information related to the heart of schools reading efforts, principals were asked to answer several important questions. These questions pertained to the following areas: components of their school success, use of data, scheduling, classroom walkthroughs, faculty attrition, technology, and communication.

### **Elements of Success**

When asked to identify the most important elements of their school's success, 65% of principals named the reading coach as a key factor. One principal emphasized the vital role of the reading coach by describing her as the "backbone" and "cornerstone" of the school's reading program. Another principal stated, "I don't know what I'd do without her," and described her efforts by

adding, “She goes to meetings and brings back new and useful information. I can pick her brain about strategies. We talk about what we see in classrooms and what we need to do for teachers.” A description of the reading coach and her role by another principal was, “She is wonderful. She helps with fidelity checks; she does demonstration lessons. She is liked by the staff and is very experienced. She really coaches when she is in the classroom.” At another school, the principal summarized the reading coach’s impact by stating that she had been a “key ingredient to the school’s success”.

Throughout the teacher focus group interviews, the role of the reading coach was seen as a strong, supportive one. The teachers at one school summarized by saying, “She is great....she has an open-door policy and puts in lots of overtime....She has modeled and given feedback to improve teaching skills. She is supportive and complimentary of teachers’ efforts.” At another school, the focus group teachers, when asked to rate the reading coach’s efforts, stated, “If there’s ‘beyond excellent’, mark that.” They also stated that the reading coach is willing to model at any time, and that she is “very prepared.” These teachers added that the reading coach “provides in-depth knowledge . . . to classes, giving praise and constant feedback” and that she provides teachers with “lots of resources.” Many teachers at the visited schools stressed the trusting relationship and open communication system forged by the reading coach at their schools.

The second element contributing to increased student performance in reading, identified by 45% of the principals, was the effective scheduling of the 90 minute reading block. While many principals acknowledged that this scheduling was often difficult, they also recognized that the consistent uninterrupted reading block was crucial to their schools’ success. The scheduling of the reading block was accomplished in a variety of ways at the successful schools, including:

- staggering schedules by grade level to allow for assistants/special teachers to “float” into classrooms throughout the day.
- scheduling the reading block at the same time for all classes.
- customizing the reading block scheduling according to class make-up. Classes with more high-risk students often had a longer reading time or had more time devoted to small-group instruction.
- incorporating content area instruction into the reading block.
- departmentalizing, with one or two teachers at each grade level teaching reading. At a number of schools, the “most highly-qualified teachers” were chosen to teach reading.

In discussing the scheduling of the reading block, a number of principals explained that their master schedules revolved around the reading block; the reading block was scheduled first, and other subject areas were then incorporated into the daily routine.

For 35% of principals, another critical element of school focus leading to increased student performance in reading was the placement of students by educational need. One principal

stressed that grouping students was “an efficient way to reduce the number of groups in each class” in order to “address the wide disparity among readers at each grade level.” A variety of models for student placement was employed by the schools visited, including:

- a Walk and Read model. At the beginning of the reading block, students traveled to their reading classrooms and remained there for the entire reading block. Classes with high-risk students were often smaller, and the reading block time was frequently extended in those classes.
- “skill group” classrooms, where students were grouped by skill needs in reading. In this model, students sometimes changed teachers as their skill needs changed.
- stable classrooms with homogeneous grouping. Many of these classrooms had two or three small groups for reading. A number of principals noted that, in this model, the “most highly qualified teachers” were placed with the most struggling readers.
- a combination of Walk and Read and departmentalization, particularly in third grade.
- during reading instruction, use of a group rotation model to enable “double dosing” of the most high-risk reading group; for example, three different reading groups and four time slots with the most high risk group filling two of the four time slots.

Professional development and support was identified by 40% of principals as a component of school success. One principal stated that, “having a relationship and continuing dialogue with *Reading First* at the district and state level” was very important. At one school, the principal explained, “The district has trained principals to know what reading [instruction] looks like.” Another principal commented that the training and support received through the *Reading First* initiative was “the best thing since sliced bread.” A number of principals stressed that the professional development provided by both the district and the reading coach was critical and that the reading coach’s support in the classrooms following all training was essential for effective implementation.

## **Use of Data**

Principals were questioned about the role of student reading data in the implementation of their reading program. In response, 100% of the principals stated that data was used to make instructional decisions. One principal stated, “We study data weekly, often daily.” At another school, the principal noted, “We use data to drive all instruction at the school.” He added that, because of the school’s careful use of student performance data, “We have seen tremendous progress of some of our kids.” At another school, the principal stressed the importance of a “close examination of student performance data” and “consistent follow-up” in implementing the instructional components indicated by the data. Another principal stressed the use of individual student data and stated, “We go beyond red/yellow/green [DIBELS scores] to look at specific student needs.” This use of individual data was indicated as an important component by another principal, who explained that student assessments were helpful in identifying intervention strategies for struggling readers.

A number of principals related how data was used to make school-wide instructional decisions. One principal explained, “Data showed us that vocabulary was a needed area of focus, so we have included more vocabulary in our daily instruction.” Another principal explained that, by tracking comprehension scores, the school identified “main idea” as a strategy that many students were lacking. When the data meetings at one school indicated that first-grade fluency scores were low, the teachers began to focus on ways to increase this skill with first-graders. “The [data] discussions really helped to enlighten [teachers] about student needs,” stated the principal. At another school, when data showed that an early intervention program, *Foundations*, was leading to increased performance for kindergarten students but that some of these students were not yet on grade level, the decision was made to continue the use of the program into first grade for those struggling students.

During the site visits, a variety of specific models for data use was observed including:

- large charts posted with student data from a number of assessments. These charts were updated frequently.
- item analysis of SAT 10 scores to determine areas where additional instruction was needed.
- error analysis of oral reading fluency probes to determine individual student’s skill needs.
- graphing of individual student scores.
- individual student data folders including a number of formal and informal assessment results.
- use of information and charts from the Progress Monitoring and Reporting Network (PMRN).
- students keeping their own data folders and tracking their own progress.

The use of student data to determine classroom placement was identified by 50% of the principals who were interviewed. One principal stated, “The analysis of student skills affects how students are grouped and regrouped for reading instruction.” At another school, the principal explained that error analysis of Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) assessments was used to group students in classrooms by educational needs. During the site visit interview, one principal explained the process of using data to determine placement: “At the end of the year, we take the SAT 10 data and teachers sit together and rank students at each grade level. We tweak these rankings based on teacher observations.” Students are then homogeneously grouped in classrooms. The principal continued, “Then in the fall, we look at student performance by percentage, so we know how close each student is to meeting goals. Teachers have said this really has helped them.” In discussing the use of data for classroom placement, another principal stated, “We group students by ability so there are two levels in each classroom with a 20-point deviant in each classroom based on [data]...”

In discussing the use of data at their schools, 35% of the principals indicated that ongoing progress monitoring (OPM) was an important component. One principal stated that OPM is conducted for high risk students every two weeks; then “data is examined for weaknesses, and the reading coach suggests additional instructional strategies.” This frequent assessment and follow-up for high-risk students was the basic model followed by schools using OPM.

Several principals discussed specific ways in which OPM data is used at their schools. One principal explained: “Within a two-to three- week period, if a student does not make progress, we adjust instruction or group assignment.” Another principal stated, “There are OPM meetings every other week with teachers, which all four members of the leadership team usually attend.” During these meetings, he explained, teachers identify which skills each student needs to progress to the next grade, thereby helping to align instruction across grade levels. At another school, teachers maintain OPM notebooks so that, according to the principal, “they can adjust the programs and materials a student is using.”

### **Scheduling of the Reading Block**

When asked to describe the scheduling of their schools’ reading blocks, 80% of the principals reported that a 90-minute block of uninterrupted time for reading was consistently in place. At one school, the principal emphatically stated, “All [teachers] must abide by the 90-minute requirement.” Another principal stressed that, at her school, the 90-minute block is “sacred” and is protected and supported by all members of the faculty and staff. Yet another principal explained, “There is no flexibility allowed in the scheduling of the reading block. Everything else is flexible to allow for this uninterrupted time. There are no pull-outs during the reading block.” At this school, the ELL and ESE teachers “pushed in” to allow all students to remain in the classrooms for the reading block and to receive additional needed support during this time.

While adhering to the 90-minute block requirement, the principals at 40% of the schools reported that their schedule for reading was customized by class make-up. (Note: the majority of these schools grouped students in classrooms by educational need.) At one school, the principal stated, “Some grade levels and some specific students have more time for reading than others.” He further explained that high-risk students generally had a longer reading block and that classes with a large number of these students were smaller. Another principal at a school that utilized skill groups for reading noted that the reading schedule was on a “sliding scale” based on students’ needs. This scale indicated how often and for how many minutes per day students would receive small-group instruction; the principal indicated that some students would “change classrooms throughout the day” to receive the reading instruction they needed. The principal at another school summed up this customized scheduling by explaining, “The scheduling of the reading block varies in each classroom and is determined by the level of students. In a classroom with more high-risk students, more time is devoted to small-group instruction.” He added that the reading coach has encouraged teachers to work with their high-risk readers first in the rotation, “so there is no chance of running out of time for this group.”

### **Classroom Walk-throughs**

During the site visit interviews, principals were asked to discuss the classroom walk-throughs conducted at their schools. At 100% of the schools, the principals reported being involved in

these observations on a regular basis. In schools with assistant principals, this member of the administrative team was often involved in walk-throughs, either in conjunction with the principal or separately. As one principal indicated, “We [principal and assistant principal] try to get into every room at least once each week.” In fact, at 80% of the schools, principals reported that these observations did occur at least weekly in every classroom.

At 65% of the schools, the reading coach and/or other members of the leadership team also conducted walk-throughs in K-3 classrooms. A number of the principals interviewed made a clear distinction between their roles and the roles of the reading coach in these classroom observations. One principal stated, “The principal and assistant principal go in as evaluators, the reading coach as support.” Another principal, while distinguishing these two slightly varied roles, stated the goal of all walk-throughs: “to help teachers, and they understand there is no threat.”

At 100% of the schools some, if not all, of the walk-throughs were spontaneous and unannounced; the announced visits, if any, were usually the summative teacher evaluations performed at the end of the year.

Several of the interviewed principals noted specific elements that were generally included in their walkthroughs, including:

- Stopping to talk with students in the classrooms, to have them explain what they are doing.
- Using lesson plans to monitor fidelity of instruction.
- Using district, state, or school-based checklists.
- Breaking down walkthroughs into instructional components. For example, one set of walkthroughs focused on the set-up and organization of classroom libraries.

After conducting the classroom walk-throughs, 75% of the principals indicated that they gave feedback to teachers through notes, emails, or conversations. The principal at one school indicated that the type of feedback given depended on the needs of the individual teacher and ranged from short emails to one-on-one conferencing. Another principal reported that he provided initial feedback to teachers largely through emails with “positive comments and ideas of what to do next.” He added that a teacher who received a “see-me” message in an email would then schedule a one-on-one conference with the principal. At one school, the principal admitted that there was little time for formal conversations following walk-throughs and that feedback was mostly informal. She added, however, that if a teacher was having difficulty, an in-depth conversation would follow the walk-through; the reading coach would then provide modeling or training as a result. Another principal explained that she used walk-through information to look for trends and provided feedback in these common areas of teacher need at grade-level meetings. For one principal, a walk-through checklist provided a means of giving consistent, structured feedback to teachers. This checklist, he reported, was used over time to

help teachers improve in specific areas. “Teachers like to see the checklist as often as possible,” he stated, “and [they] will ask for it if the leadership team doesn’t use it.”

Principals at 80% of the schools visited also indicated that they provided follow-up on the walk-throughs by revisiting the classrooms. At some of the schools, the principal or assistant principal was responsible for this revisit; at others, the reading coach received information from the principal and revisited the classroom for follow-up. At a large number of the schools, the reading coach was responsible for helping teachers implement the improvements suggested by the walk-throughs by modeling, co-teaching, and/or providing additional professional development.

### **Faculty Stability**

At 75% of the schools visited, the principals reported a relatively stable faculty, with a small number of new teachers joining the staff each year. In 45% of the schools, an average of fewer than five new teachers was hired each year. Several principals reported that their school lost teachers largely through retirement and moving out of the district. As one principal stated, “People don’t leave to transfer; they leave to retire or move away.” Principals at these schools recognized the benefits of this stability. As one principal stated, teacher stability has led to a “highly-qualified faculty who are committed to the school’s philosophy.” Another principal referred to his school’s “high-quality, stable faculty who work well together and believe in the benefits of PD [professional development].” The positive aspect of being able to provide in-depth training and support was noted by another principal who spoke of the school’s teachers as having “lots of deep knowledge.” At one school, the principal stated that the stable faculty was one of the major components of their success, allowing the school “to look at assessments each year and then to discuss as a team what works and what training is needed.”

### **Technology**

Technology was used in all of the schools interviewed, but the emphasis on computer programs in reading instruction and reinforcement/support varied widely. At several schools, technology played a minor role. At 75% of the schools, however, computers were used during the reading block, primarily during independent reading center time. In addition, 65% of the schools had a computer lab, and students received additional time with technology outside of the reading block. In several schools, third graders were given additional access to the computer lab before and/or after school in preparation for the FCAT. At 40% of the schools, a technology specialist provided students and teachers with assistance in the lab.

The specific technology programs used at the schools also varied widely, but there were several common factors. At 65% of the schools, the computer programs were selected with help from district personnel. Training for teachers on the use of the selected programs was largely provided by the reading coach (20%), district personnel (35%) or by the specific technology company (20%).

A majority of the technology programs selected (60%) had systems that provide for internal reporting and/or monitoring. This feature allowed the programs to generate individual student progress reports and/or to adjust for student errors, providing scaffolded instruction or more practice with needed skills. Teachers at several schools reported that they used the programs’

reports to identify students who needed to change skill groups or needed more *iii* time. At a number of schools, information from the programs' reports was also used as part of a student's data folder and included in the "data chats" with the leadership team. In addition to these internal monitoring systems, 70% of the schools reported that teachers also monitored student use of the technology programs on a regular basis.

## **Communication**

Principals at all of the schools visited acknowledged the importance of communicating with the faculty on a regular basis. The primary method for accomplishing this communication was through weekly/biweekly grade-level meetings attended by the principal or a member of the leadership team; 85% of the schools visited used this method. One principal noted that it was more efficient to address specific needs in grade-level groups rather than in faculty meetings. "I try to have as few faculty meetings as possible," she stated. Another principal noted that the use of these small, regularly-scheduled meetings helps teachers at each grade level "to stay on the same page."

Principals at 40% of the schools also communicated with faculty through the school's leadership team. At one school, the principal explained that the reading leadership team sent out minutes of all of the meetings held and then discussed these issues at grade-level meetings. The principal at another school explained that teachers and the leadership team have "ongoing communication based on the data." In addition, 50% of the schools had cross-grade-level meetings or articulation meetings on a regular basis to address alignment of reading instruction across grade levels. At one school, vertical planning for reading took place after early student dismissal one day each week.

## **IV. Reading Instruction**

All of the schools visited reported implementing at least a 90-minute reading block. The principal, reading coach and teacher focus group at each school were questioned about the function of their core reading program (CRP) and as well as other materials used for reading instruction; they were also questioned about intervention instruction in terms of how *iii* students were identified, how instruction was scheduled, and how it was delivered.

### **Core Reading Program**

When asked to describe the function of the core reading program during the reading block, 75% of the teachers' comments indicated that the core reading program had played a major role. Principals at all schools supported the use of the core reading program. One principal stated that "The CRP provides for whole-group and small-group differentiated instruction, and teachers are expected to deliver these." At another school, the principal explained, "The CRP clearly outlines a plan for teachers to use that meets all students' needs, has a clear daily plan of instruction, and provides a variety of genres of reading for all students."

## Supplementary Materials

At 65% of the schools, responses from the principal interviews, reading coach interviews and teacher focus groups indicated the significant use of materials to supplement the core reading program during the reading block. Many of these successful schools have conducted a careful examination of their CRP and have identified the strengths and weaknesses relative to their student population. Areas of identified weaknesses have then been addressed with supplemental materials so that all five components of reading are taught effectively using appropriate resources. One principal explained that his school uses the “instructional plan” of the CRP and then supplements in various components where needed. Another principal shared, “While the CRP provides a baseline, it doesn’t teach to mastery, so other supplemental materials have to be used.”

At a number of schools, a supplemental program is scheduled into the reading block on a daily basis; for example, at one school the first thirty minutes of the reading block is devoted to instruction using *Saxon Phonics*. Another school added an extra thirty minutes to the reading block in order to provide daily instruction using the *Spaulding Phonics* program. Yet another school, which identified vocabulary as a weak area in many of its students, used *Elements of Reading/Vocabulary* during the first part of each day’s reading block.

## Identification of Students for Immediate Intensive Intervention (*iii*)

Providing effective, targeted small-group or individual immediate intensive intervention (*iii*) for at-risk readers in grades K-3 is a critical component of the *Reading First* initiative. At a large majority of schools (75%), DIBELS was the primary assessment used for determining which students received *iii* instruction. The principal at one school explained, “We start with the third DIBELS as a screener [for *iii*] and we use fluency timings to progress monitor.” Another principal stressed the use of DIBELS but also included other assessments as identifiers of *iii* students. “We use DIBELS to determine the students who need *iii*,” she stated. “Also, if students score Level 1 on FCAT or low on the SAT 10, they also receive *iii*. Moderate-risk students are also included if they are struggling.” Other principals, coaches and focus group teachers included these assessments for identifying those students who would benefit from this intensive instruction:

- CRP tests (30%)
- SAT 10 (25%)
- DAR (15%)
- DRA (10%)
- Running records (10%)
- Flint Cooter Inventory (5%)
- PPVT (5%)
- ECI/EII (5%)
- Skills checklists (5%)

In discussing the data used to identify students in need of *iii*, many principals stressed the collaborative efforts of the teachers, reading coach, and the reading leadership team. One principal explained, “We regularly look at student progress....We use checklists and classroom observation. In upper grades, we look at students’ comprehension growth and pay special attention to benchmark tests. We also use teachers’ daily feedback.”

## **Intervention Materials**

At the majority of schools visited (75%) principals reported the materials/programs utilized for *iii* instruction were different for each grade level. At a number of schools, the materials/programs differed for each individual classroom. One principal stated, “Because our classrooms are ability-grouped, every classroom has a different need.” The reading coach at one school noted, “no one shoe fits all” and added that she encouraged teachers to deliver appropriate skill-focused lessons using commercial and teacher-made materials as needed. In fact, at 40% of the schools visited, teacher-made materials played a significant role in *iii* instruction. One principal reported, “Over 50% of the activities and games [used for *iii*] are developed by the reading coach.”

## **Scheduling of *iii***

At 80% of the schools visited, additional time for intervention instruction was scheduled outside of the reading block. At some schools, the time for *iii* delivery was determined individually by the classroom teachers; at some schools, the principal/leadership team met with teachers to schedule this instructional component. The principal at one school reported, “We [leadership team and teachers] sit down with each grade level to determine how and when they will work *iii* into their schedules.” The additional *iii* time outside of the reading block was scheduled in a variety of ways; during special area classes (20%) and before/after school (15%) were the most common times. At one school, the principal explained, “We have to close the gap with a double dose of *iii*, so they [struggling readers] are pulled out in the afternoon for 45 minutes to one hour daily.” After-school tutoring programs were also in effect at a number of the successful schools.

At 40% of the schools, *iii* instruction also occurred during the reading block. The two most common methods for this scheduling were an extended reading block (120-150 minutes) or more time in the reading block devoted to small-group instruction, including *iii* groups. The reading coach at one school gave an explanation of this small-group routine: each classroom assigned students to one of three reading groups and had four small-group times scheduled each day. The fourth group time was a “double-dose” or *iii* group, which was “skill-based, flexible, and kept to five or fewer students.” The reading coach at this school encouraged teachers to see the *iii* group as the first small-group rotation each day.

Additional aspects of *iii* were examined and discussed at each school visited, including group size and frequency of instruction. At 60% of the schools, principals reported that this instruction was scheduled daily, five days a week. At 45% of the schools, *iii* was scheduled for at least 30 minutes each day, and 40% of the principal reported that each *iii* instructional group contained five or fewer students.

Providing and training personnel to deliver *iii* is a critical aspect to this intensive instruction for struggling readers. At 80% of the schools visited, classroom teachers were responsible for providing *iii* to their students. At 70% of the schools, paraprofessionals were also involved in delivering this instruction, usually in conjunction with the classroom teachers. “The bottom line is that the teacher is responsible [for *iii*],” stated the principal at one school. At one school, teachers prepared boxes of *iii* materials organized by skills, and paraprofessionals, with the teachers’ guidance, pulled activities for instruction. At a number of other schools, the support

personnel involved in *iii* delivery attended grade-level meetings and/or teacher planning sessions. In addition to classroom teachers and paraprofessionals, *iii* providers included: intervention specialists (25%), volunteers (15%), special area teachers (10%), reading resource teachers (10%), Title 1 teachers (10%) and ESE teachers (10%).

At 100% of the schools visited, the majority of the training for delivery of *iii* instruction was conducted by the reading coach. One principal explained, “The reading coach is very involved” in ensuring effective *iii* instruction; she models this instruction and also pairs teachers with other teachers who are experienced in *iii* delivery. At another school, the reading coach receives training on each *iii* program utilized at the school and then brings this knowledge to classroom teachers and other *iii* providers. The reading coach at one school explained that she does “side-by-side training” with the paraprofessionals who deliver *iii*, letting them observe her first and then teaching with feedback from the coach. This method, she explained, helps to “build expert skills” in the support personnel delivering intensive instruction. At a number of schools, the principal and/or reading coach described the coach’s modeling of appropriate techniques and strategies for *iii* that occurred on a regular basis. One principal explained that the reading coach conducts “training and modeling with students in the *iii* groups” and also “provides instruction based on DIBELS data.” He added, “The teachers really respond to this [approach].” Training for *iii* instructional delivery was also provided at some schools by district personnel (20%) and by program trainers (20%).

## **V. Challenges**

According to teachers in the schools’ focus groups (40%) and principals (15%), the lack of sufficient time for reading instruction was the biggest challenge of implementing a high quality reading program. One principal stated, “We need to find ways to provide more time for reading instruction for the most struggling readers, find a way to let them have three to four hours of reading instruction daily.” Teachers at one school’s focus group stressed, “There is not enough time to do 1½ hours of reading and then do content areas.” At another school, teachers stated that the major challenge was “time management, how to fit in 120 minutes of reading instruction [required by the district] without giving up other content areas.” Likewise, reading coaches also felt that a lack of sufficient time was a significant challenge; 40% listed “lack of time to complete tasks” and 30% listed “lack of time for professional development” as important. One reading coach stated, that there are “so many tasks, [I] find it hard to have enough time to spend in the classrooms.” Another coach alluded to this challenge by noting that she would “love an extra hour in the school day.”

## **VI. Positive School Characteristics**

As a result of the visits and interviews at these schools which have achieved significant improvement in student reading achievement since their implementation of *Reading First*, the following positive characteristics were observed, some or all of which may be contributing to the schools’ successes.

### **Effective Reading Coach**

At 100% of the schools visited, the reading coach was observed to play a vital role in implementing and supporting the K-3 reading program. The coach at these schools is seen as a

knowledgeable, respected leader who displays professionalism and a strong commitment to both teachers and students. Teachers at one school described their coach as “top-notch, knowledgeable, a great resource,” which mirrored the comments at a large majority of the schools. One principal summed up the coach’s role at his school by saying, “Without her, it would be difficult to have success”, and this sentiment was expressed by a large number of the principals who were interviewed.

### **Strong Leadership**

At 70% of the schools, strong consistent leadership by the principal and the reading leadership team was observed. This allowed for the following positive elements to occur:

- Well-defined roles for administration - At one school, the principal explained that each member of the leadership team had a specific set of roles: the reading coach provided PD and support; the curriculum specialist provided data focus and educational planning; the principal focused on asking the “hard questions”, encouraging teachers to reflect and develop an understanding of the importance of implementing best practices. A large number of other schools with strong leadership teams had defined individual roles in a similar manner.
- Continuous instructional improvement – The leadership teams at these schools understood the specific needs of teachers and students and made efforts to move toward meeting these needs.
- Strong, consistent school vision and consistent implementation of school goals
- Close examination of the structure and organization of the school’s schedule and implementation of changes and improvements based on needs
- Forging of strong partnerships among faculty so that teachers observe and learn from each other

### **Faculty Stability**

At 50% of the schools, a stable faculty was observed as a positive school characteristic. This stability enabled the reading coach to provide more in-depth professional development and to consistently help teachers refine their instructional delivery. At a number of these schools, teacher stability also led to strong team-building and the development of professional collegiality, where teachers felt comfortable visiting each other’s classrooms and sharing each other’s effective instructional techniques and strategies. In many of these schools, the small number of new teachers each year received additional, differentiated professional development and classroom modeling by the reading coach.

### **Efficient Grouping of Students**

At many schools, some form of student grouping occurred during the reading block. This helped to reduce the number of reading groups in each classroom and addressed the varying degrees of reading proficiency at each grade level. A number of principals at these schools reported that

this grouping was also helpful in managing the master schedule and in assigning support personnel to classes. One principal stated, “Doing skill grouping has helped with this schedule tremendously. We started out with the reading block and scheduled specials around that. Kids are ability grouped by reading in each classroom. The teacher does grade-level whole-group instruction first, and then meets with each skill group.”

## **Others**

In addition to the above, the following positive school characteristics were also observed:

- Support for teachers during the reading block (25%)
- Team approach/use of professional learning communities (20%)
- Promoting of parent involvement (20%)
- Close examination of instructional materials (20%)
- Error analysis of student assessments (15%)

## **VII. Overall Recommendations**

At the conclusion of each school visit, the site visit team met to discuss the interview information obtained from the principal, reading coach, and teachers as well as the results of classroom observations in all/the majority of the school’s K-3 classrooms. The result of these discussions yielded the following suggestions and recommendations that could help to extend the impact of *Reading First* as plans evolve for the future.

### **Focused Classroom Observations**

At 35% of the schools visited, it was recommended that the administration identify those teachers who were highly effective in particular elements of instructional delivery (e.g., scaffolded instruction, classroom management, independent reading centers) and provide scheduled observations by other teachers who could benefit from observing and adopting these model practices. These observations should be characterized by the following components: a clear explanation of the component(s) to be seen; written or oral feedback from the teacher(s) observing; a follow-up by the leadership team/reading coach to ensure that the effective elements are being implemented in the observer’s classroom. This would enable each school to increase the number of classrooms in which the most effective instructional components were in place.

### **Increased Professional Development in Differentiated Instruction**

At 50% of the schools visited, the recommendation was made to provide more training and support in the development and implementation of skill-focused independent reading centers that are targeted toward specific student need. This training should include: methods for developing/utilizing activities that reinforce previously taught skills and strategies; examples of student-friendly directions at centers; ways of ensuring student accountability through clear student outcomes in order to maintain on-task behavior. In addition, training and support should be given in the management of these centers, including use of center rotation charts and methods for managing differentiated centers such as color-coded folders for each group. Most importantly, additional training should include methods of differentiating instruction through varying the content, process, and/or product of center activities based on student data.

At 25% of the schools visited, the recommendation was made to provide additional professional development and support in the differentiation of small group instruction. This training should focus on the use of individual student data to identify strategies, methods and materials for this instruction. Using each school's core reading program as a base, specific examples of appropriate activities in each of the five reading components for meeting varying needs of students should be included.

### **Scheduling and Delivery of Immediate Intensive Intervention**

At 25% of the schools visited, the recommendation was made to improve the scheduling and delivery of immediate intensive intervention (*iii*) instruction. The following elements should be addressed by the school's leadership team to ensure that struggling readers receive effective intervention in their areas of need: ensuring that a daily scheduled time of at least 30 minutes is provided for *iii* for each student requiring this instruction; ensuring that *iii* groups remain as small as possible, ideally with 5 or fewer students; reviewing and, if necessary, revising the school's schedule to ensure that as many personnel as possible are allocated to classroom teachers who are delivering *iii* instruction. To ensure effective delivery of *iii*, teachers should continue to receive professional development in choosing appropriate materials and programs to address the individual needs of their struggling readers. In addition, reading coaches should model *iii* instruction with at-risk readers using appropriate materials, techniques, and strategies.