

## **2004 *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 2004. 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 2003-04 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. 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* Site Visit Coordinator communicated with the randomly selected schools in January 2004 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 17 *Reading First* districts at 34 schools during the months of March, April and May. 132 randomly selected classrooms were visited in grades K-3 with the number of students per classroom averaging 19. The average length of observations was 46 minutes and the average length of the reading block in observed classrooms was 100 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, 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 lap top computer and analyzed using a software program for coding qualitative data.

The remainder of this report summarizes the 2004 site visit data collected statewide.

### **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 schools visited.

The following areas were identified with 74% or higher frequency:

- Data – driven instruction
- Professional Development
- Implementation of new organizational system

The following areas were identified with frequency between 39 and 73%:

- Special funding (68%)

- Tutoring (59%)
- Team or co-teaching (59%)
- Targeted methodology in reading (50%)
- Increased personnel (47%)
- Emphasis on remedial groups (41%)

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

- Student motivational programs (29%)
- School-wide technology initiatives (29%)
- Computer-based reading programs (35%)
- Other supportive programs (12%)
- Literacy centers (29%)
- Classroom libraries and leveled reading materials (38%)
- Extended school day (29%)
- Family involvement (35%)

### **Professional Development**

When asked to describe activities that had positively impacted the quality of their teaching, 70% and 79% of the teachers' comments noted coaching and professional development (school and district based) respectively as significant influences. Human resources (such as district reading contacts, having paraprofessionals in the classroom) and teaching resources (additional instructional materials) were mentioned 45% and 52% of the time, respectively. The areas of modeling, collaboration with peers, summer reading academy and assessments were mentioned an average of 37% of the time. Taking college classes was mentioned with 18% frequency.

### **Reading Coach**

Principals, focus group teachers and the reading coaches themselves were asked questions regarding the coach's role and activities. Analysis of all responses revealed that the following activities were identified as most significant as determined by frequency of responses in the areas listed in Table 1.

<b>Perceptions of Significant Activities Performed by Coaches</b>			
<b>Activity</b>	<b>Principals</b>	<b>Teachers</b>	<b>Coaches</b>
Coaching and modeling	41%	53%	91%
Visiting classrooms to brainstorm ideas	41%	56%	71%
Providing professional development	41%	41%	53%
Providing resources	15%	47%	41%
Organizing/conducting assessments	41%	6%	68%
Entering assessment data	12%	0%	24%
Analyzing data	12%	24%	38%
Committees/school teams	15%	12%	38%
Administrative (budget/materials)	12%	35%	38%

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.

Coaches were asked to offer suggestions for improving their level of success as reading coaches. The three suggestions mentioned most frequently were:

1. Provide more training for coaches
2. Provide more materials, particularly in the areas of tutoring; parent training; test preparation for students; and teacher professional development
3. Improve the testing schedule

### **The Reading Block**

During the teacher focus groups, the following question was posed: How do you plan and implement a typical 90-minute reading block in your classroom?. Teachers described using a variety of student groupings - whole group, small group, guided reading groups and literacy center groups. Of the 34 schools visited, none of the teachers indicated the exclusive use of either small or large group instruction during the 90 – minute reading block. Rather, a combination of both small and large group instruction was reported across all schools visited. Some teachers described their reading groups as “guided” reading groups while others used the term “reading groups”. Some classrooms utilized the “push-in” model for reading block instruction through use of personnel such as ESE and ESOL teachers working in the regular ed classroom instead of “pulling out” these students for instruction in a separate classroom. In some schools, instructional aides and assistants were assigned to work with individual students or small groups to ensure that all instructional needs were met.

When asked to describe the function of the Core Reading Program (CRP) in the reading block, teachers in 91% of the schools indicated that the CRP played a major role. Only 6% of the teachers responded that their CRP played a minor role in their reading instruction. An even smaller percentage reported specific problems using their core program such as the program not providing enough leveled readers and not emphasizing strategies for struggling readers.

Teachers also were asked to identify the information they used to group children and to plan instruction for flexible reading groups. 100% of the schools visited reported using the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) measures in combination with other assessments. The major assessments used in combination with DIBELS were teacher-developed tests and observations identified 52% of the time, core curriculum assessments (33%) and running records (33%).

### ***Reading First Challenges***

The following table depicts challenges as identified by the comments of the three groups: principals, teachers and coaches.

<b>Challenges of <i>Reading First</i></b>			
<b>Activity</b>	<b>Principals</b>	<b>Teachers</b>	<b>Coaches</b>
Assessments	53%	63%	56%
Scheduling Reading Block	29%	0%	0%
Managing Reading Block	0%	67%	0%
Lack of Resources	26%	36%	18%
Resistant Teachers	24%	0%	38%
Program Implementation	0%	58%	0%
Lack of Time to Provide Professional Development	0%	0%	50%
Lack of time to accomplish all tasks	15%	24%	32%

Table 2: Challenges of *Reading First*

The most frequently identified challenge by teachers was managing the reading block (67%). Teachers indicated that this challenge related to accomplishing instructional plans for all students, preparing and organizing literacy center activities, and directing a smooth flow of activities during the reading block. The second most frequently mentioned teacher challenge was assessments (63%). In this area, some teachers (42%) commented that testing took away from instructional time or created other problems, while others (21%) indicated that the DIBELS assessments did not accurately reflect students' performance. The third most frequently mentioned challenge, implementation, was closely related to the first challenge. Teachers reported implementation challenges such as being inundated with materials in some schools but in other schools reported lacking

materials, difficulty coordinating with other teachers, and finding enough time to adequately plan and organize.

Reading coaches cited several challenges. 56% of coaches' comments reported that the testing process and data management were overwhelming; similarly, not having adequate time to provide professional development for teachers was identified 50% of the time. Getting the cooperation of teachers in implementation of the *Reading First* program was challenging according to 38% of the coaches' comments.

Principals identified the area of assessments as challenging as did the coaches and teachers. Additionally, 26% of the principal comments revealed lack of resources as a challenge. Other challenges were also acknowledged: scheduling the reading block (29%), resistant teachers (24%) and lack of time (15%).

### ***Reading First* Benefits**

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

<b>Benefits of <i>Reading First</i></b>			
<b>Activity</b>	<b>Principals</b>	<b>Teachers</b>	<b>Coaches</b>
Resources	56%	73%	29%
Assessments	53%	48%	50%
Professional Development	53%	52%	53%
RF Coach	100%	94%	0%
Reading Focus	38%	30%	0%
Improved Teacher Knowledge of Reading	24%	33%	0%
Student Reading Improvement	18%	42%	15%
Protected Time to Teach Reading	0%	30%	0%
Teacher Openness	18%	0%	56%
Principal's Leadership	0%	35%	21%

Table 3: Benefits of *Reading First*

Though clearly challenging, *Reading First* assessments were also identified as a benefit by coaches, teachers and principals an average of 50% of the time. On average, 53% of the time, all three groups identified having additional resources and professional development as benefits. Perhaps most important is the benefit of student reading success, identified by teachers 42% of the time. Other benefits were also named and were reflective of the identifying group. For example, 38% of principal comments reported the area of providing a school wide reading focus as a beneficial area. All (100%) principals at the 34 site visit schools and 94% of teachers' comments indicated

that having a reading coach was beneficial. According to teacher focus groups, 33% of teachers' comments indicated that a benefit of *Reading First* was their improved knowledge of reading. In 56% 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 132 classes in grades K-3. The average number of students in these classrooms was 19 (range 7-44; K = 19, 1<sup>st</sup> 19, 2<sup>nd</sup> = 18, 3<sup>rd</sup> = 18).

Table 4 summarizes data on quality of instruction, the amount of student engagement and instructional focus across all 34 site visits.

<b>Ratings of Teachers' Quality of Instruction, Student Engagement &amp; Instructional Focus</b>					
	K	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3rd	All Grades
Overall quality of instruction (4 point scale)	2.92 (.73)	3.04 (.73)	3.00 (.70)	3.22 (.47)	3.04 (.67)
Overall student engagement (3 point scale)	2.64 (.39)	2.73 (.34)	2.69 (.44)	2.82 (.31)	2.72 (.37)
Percentage of instructional time focused on instructional activities	87% (12%)	90% (9%)	87% (11%)	89% (12%)	88% (11%)
Length of observation	45 (6)	47 (4)	45 (6)	46 (11)	46 (7)
Length of class	99 (28)	102 (28)	98 (32)	102 (27)	100 (28)

Table 4: Ratings of Teachers' Quality of Instruction, Student Engagement & Instructional Focus

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 2.7 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 88%. During both kindergarten and second grade observations, 87% of the time was focused on instructional activities. During the first grade observations, 90% of the time was focused on instructional activities. During the third grade observations, 89% 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 34 classrooms where observations were conducted. For a description of the instructional categories, refer to Appendix A.

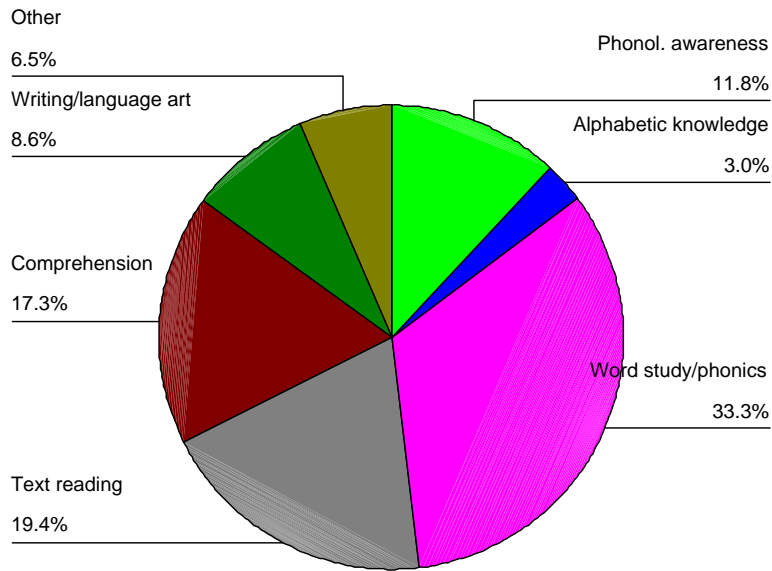


Figure 1: Kindergarten

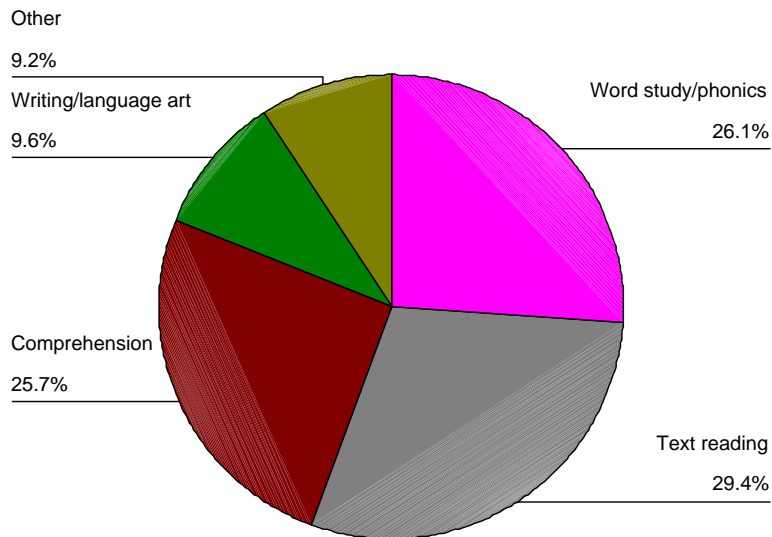


Figure 2: 1<sup>st</sup> Grade

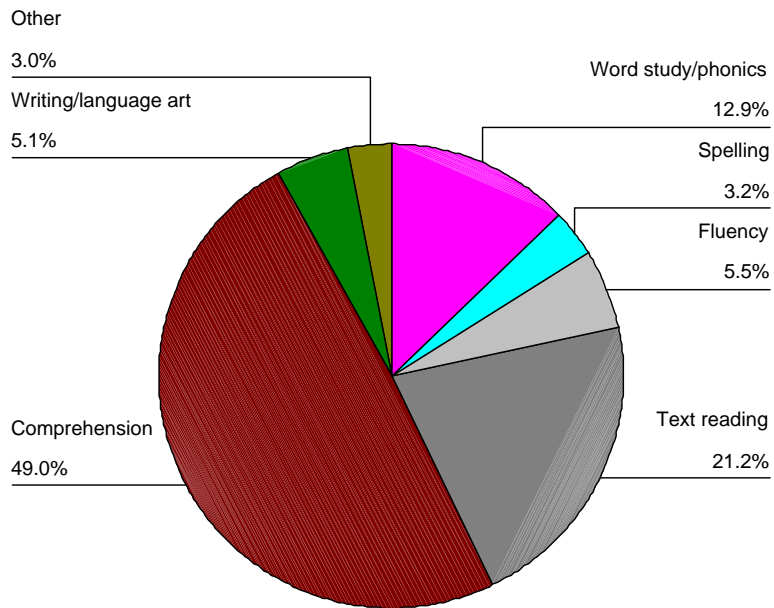


Figure 3: 2<sup>nd</sup> Grade

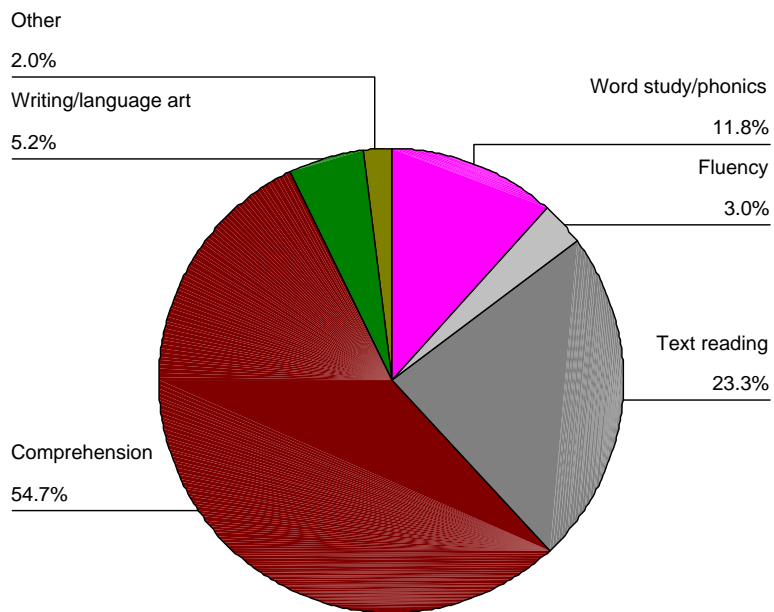


Figure 4: 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade

**Appendix A**  
**Instructional Content Emphasis, Revised**

**Content Categories**

Content Categories	1: Concepts of Print	2: Phonological awareness	3: Alphabetic knowledge	4: Word study/Phonics	5: Spelling
Descriptors	1. Concepts of print	1. Rhyming 2. Blending or segmenting sentences/sylls. 3. Onset/rime 4. Blending or segmenting phonemes 5. Isolation tasks 6. Other	1. Letter identification and/or recognition. 2. Other	1. Letter/sound relationships 2. Provides opportunities for application of letter/sound knowledge to reading /writing/spelling. 3. Irregular words 4. Word reading 5. Integration of word study 6. Other	1. Spelling
Content Categories	6: Oral language development	7: Fluency	8: Text reading	9: Comprehension	10: Writing or language arts
Descriptors	1. Teacher initiated structured opportunities to talk with teachers/peers. 2. Expansion of student initiated language (incidental language strategies) 3. Other	1. Letter or sound naming fluency 2. Word fluency 3. Repeated reading of text 4. Other	1. Supported oral reading 2. Choral reading 3. Independent silent reading 4. Independent oral reading 5. Teacher reads aloud 6. Teacher reads aloud while students read along 7. Other	1. Vocabulary 2. Prior knowledge/predicting 3. Reading comprehension monitoring 4. Listening comprehension monitoring 5. Comprehension strategy instruction/use 6. Other	1. Shared writing 2. Writing composition 3. Independent writing/publishing 4. Grammar and punctuation 5. Handwriting instruction 6. Copying 7. Other

Adapted from Edmonds., M. S., & Briggs, K. L. (In press). Instructional Content Emphasis instrument. In S. R. Vaughn & K. L. Briggs (Eds.) *Reading in the classroom: Systems for observing teaching and learning*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.