

FCRR Briefing Paper

Increasing Resources for Reading First Assessment Teams

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Reading First schools in Florida are required to administer screening, progress monitoring, diagnostic, and outcome assessments in order to provide useful information to help guide instruction in every classroom. These assessments also are essential to insure that no child who is struggling in learning to read will go unnoticed by his or her teacher and principal. One of the key elements in successfully executing the Reading First assessment plan is a highly skilled, school-based assessment team. Identifying, training, and assigning these team members to conduct screening and progress monitoring testing three times a year with all kindergarten through third grade students can be an arduous task. However, school principals are in a unique position to determine how this can be accomplished without sacrificing other critical activities that must be carried on at the school during these assessment periods.

One aspect of the Reading First grant that principals should work to protect is the role of the Reading Coach. This individual's primary responsibility is to assist teachers in implementing high quality instruction through mentoring, staff development, and support services. In many cases, during the first year of implementation of the Reading First program, the Reading Coach has devoted considerable time to organizing the assessment team and then participating as an active member. This has resulted in a diversion of their teacher-support role to that of an assessment specialist for a considerable amount of time during the year. This FCRR Briefing Paper is written to provide principals with suggestions for developing assessment teams in a way that will allow coaches to spend less time on assessment and more time providing professional development to teachers.

In order to assist principals in selecting appropriate persons to serve on the Reading First assessment team, the following considerations are offered.

1. Reading First funds can be spent to hire personnel from outside the school to be trained to a high level of expertise in progress monitoring (DIBELS), one of the outcome measures (PPVT-III), and to offer assessment services. Besides participating in training, these individuals would need to be well informed about the confidentiality of student records and meet whatever other personnel requirements are necessary to work in the school. Individuals who might be considered for training to assume part time employment as assessment team members include:
 - ✓ Retired teachers or other educators (in general, retirees must have been retired at least one year before being reemployed)
 - ✓ AmeriCorps members
 - ✓ University or College of Education students and interns
 - ✓ Active PTA members from the community
 - ✓ Stay-at-home fathers and mothers
 - ✓ Business partners
 - ✓ Substitute teachers

2. Educators who are current employees of the school district also should be considered as possible members of the school assessment team. In some cases arrangements may need to be made with other administrators to release these individuals from current assignments for one or more days to serve on the assessment team. The following educators from outside the school or who provide itinerant services to the school may be considered for training and to provide assistance as members of the assessment team:
 - ✓ Speech and Language Pathologists
 - ✓ FDLRS staff
 - ✓ Central or regional district office staff
 - ✓ School Psychologists

3. Finally, non-instructional staff at the Reading First school should be considered for the assessment team but given relief from all but critical duties during the assessment windows. These staff include:
 - ✓ Principals (some prefer to assess third graders to have better knowledge of the reading skills of students at this grade level)
 - ✓ Assistant Principals
 - ✓ Guidance Counselors
 - ✓ Media Specialists
 - ✓ ESE teachers
 - ✓ ESOL teachers
 - ✓ Paraprofessionals

The assessment windows for each school will be posted on the Progress Monitoring and Reporting Network (PMRN) website, and this information will be useful to principals in recruiting team members well before the Reading First assessments begin and in arranging for training from district DIBELS Training Facilitators. If you want to know the names of your district's DIBELS Training Facilitators, contact the coordinator of the Reading First program in your district or email the FCRR Assessment Program office at assessments@fcrr.org. Having individuals identify specific dates for these assignments may be beneficial in ensuring that commitments are honored and the school is able to handle the assessment requirements without undue burden to any one person.

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