

This mixed-methods study was conducted in the context of a research-practice partnership with a school district. The findings are not causal. The findings are intended to help our partners use research and evidence to make decisions about their schools.

LITERACY LEADERSHIP TEAMS: SUPPORTING IMPLEMENTATION OF EVIDENCE-BASED READING AND LITERACY PRACTICES IN SCHOOLS

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PURPOSE

Evidence-based practices (EBPs) are practices for which there is some research evidence that their use is associated with positive student outcomes. Decades of research has revealed many EBPs that can be used in classrooms to support reading and literacy achievement.¹ However, teachers often find it difficult to implement EBPs. As instructional leaders, principals, reading coaches, and other school-based leaders are critical to ensuring that effective instruction is happening in classrooms.² However, there is limited evidence about the challenges and opportunities they face while trying to support teachers' uptake and use of EBPs.

During the 2022-2023 school year, state-level mandates required many schools in our partner school district to create Literacy Leadership Teams. Charged with implementing the district's reading plans in their schools, these teams included a school administrator, reading coach, media specialist, lead teachers, and others school personnel. These conditions allowed us to explore implementation issues, in particular in schools where many students were not reading on grade level.

RESEARCH QUESTION

What are the challenges and opportunities school leaders face when supporting the implementation of reading and literacy EBPs in classrooms?

KEY TAKEAWAYS

We worked with principals and literacy coaches in six elementary and middle schools to better understand their experiences. All were participating in year-long, job-embedded, collaborative professional learning communities (PLCs). The PLCs focused on what each needed to know and to do to implement reading and literacy EBPs in schools. Principals and coaches participated in surveys, focus groups, and interviews throughout the year. They also completed several activities, such as Principal-Coach Agreements, Needs Assessments, and Logic Models. We also observed their Literacy Leadership Team Meetings.

Challenges. Analyses revealed different kinds of challenges. For example, leaders in middle schools reported challenges with block scheduling that made it difficult to implement 45-60 minute reading intervention classes five days per week. In addition, leaders in all schools reported challenges with providing sufficient support for new teachers who were also settling into their new jobs.

Opportunities. Analyses also revealed different kinds of opportunities. For example, all leaders reported that participating in the PLCs with their peers in other schools improved their understanding of EBPs and changed their attitudes about using specific EBPs in their schools. In addition, although

About Our Schools

Our Students

- 66%** Black/African American
- 94.2%** Economically Disadvantaged
- 24.3%** Students with Disabilities
- 32.5%** Meeting or exceeding expectations on the state English Language Arts/Reading test

Our Principals

- 71.4%** Black/African American
- 85.7%** Women
- 100%** with Masters Degree
- 14.3%** with a Reading Endorsement
- 100%** More than 5 years as a Principal

Our Coaches

- 54.1%** Black/African American
- 100%** Women
- 66.7%** with Masters Degree
- 100%** with a Reading Endorsement
- 33.3%** More than 6 years as a Coach

they may have started the year in different places, principals and coaches in the same school came to closer agreement over the year about various aspects of reading and literacy EBPs. Both also reported that working together with their colleagues on the Literacy Leadership Teams over time allowed for multiple leaders and champions to emerge. Together, they developed a shared mission, vision, understanding, and approach to implementing reading and literacy EBPs that they felt could be sustained despite the challenges they faced.

Common Challenges	Common Opportunities
Time was a consistent barrier, for both learning new EBPs and observing use of EBPs	Principals and coaches valued working together and with their peers as a cohort during the school year
Funding for training and resources towards implementing EBPs in the schools was often limited	A formal principal-coach agreement was a useful tool to support shared understanding of their roles
Onboarding new standards, testing, and curricula while also implementing new EBPs was overwhelming	Literacy Leadership Teams allow for a shared approach to supporting implementation of reading and literacy EBPs
Both teacher and staff turnover strained their ability to maintain knowledge and practices around EBPs	Leaders in both elementary and middle school reported that working together helped them better align instructional approaches for transitioning students between their feeder schools

IMPLICATIONS

Although principals and literacy coaches encountered many challenges, the results provided initial evidence for two solutions to support implementation of reading and literacy EBPs in classrooms: (1) job-embedded, collaborative, cross-site PLCs for school-based leaders and (2) school-based implementation teams, like the Literacy Leadership Teams. This evidence may be helpful for school leaders, who can create Literacy Leadership Teams in their schools. This evidence may also be helpful for district leaders, who can create opportunities for cross-school PLCs for school leaders. Efforts focused on school-based leaders, aligned with efforts to support classroom instruction, may lead to improved reading achievement in schools.

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Cite as:

Terry, N.P., Newton, Y., Lampkin, L.O., Baisden, J., Duclos-Francois, J., Little, C.W., Blake, M.R., Raines, R., Harris, M. (2023, December 1). Literacy Leadership Teams: Supporting implementation of evidence-based reading and literacy practices in schools. Florida Center for Reading Research. <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.24585069>.

Acknowledgement

The work presented here was funded, in part, by funding from the William T. Grant Foundation and Spencer Foundation (Grant # ICG-203107), Doris Duke Foundation (Grant # 2022043), the Institute of Education Sciences (R305B200020) and the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services Preparation of Special Education, Early Intervention, and Related Services Leadership Personnel Program (H325D190037). The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not represent views of the funding agencies or university. We are grateful to our partners who continue to collaborate with us in service of children, families, schools, and communities.

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The Florida Center for Reading Research (FCRR) is an interdisciplinary research center at Florida State University. Drawing from multiple disciplines, FCRR investigates all aspects of reading and reading-related skills across the lifespan. Through rigorous and robust research, innovation, and engagement, FCRR advances the science of reading to improve learning and achievement from birth through adulthood.