COLLABORATIVE CENTER FOR LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

Executive Summary
30th September, 2004- 1st November, 2005

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Introduction
The Collaborative Center for Literacy Development at the University of Kentucky is responsible for conducting the state evaluation for Reading First (R.F.). It examines the effectiveness of Kentucky R.F. from three perspectives:

1. Kentucky R.F. program implementation
2. Reading achievement gains of students P1-P4
3. The impact of Kentucky R.F on reducing the numbers of students reading below grade level.

Approximately 2962 teachers and 1095 Special Education teachers are involved in this initiative. The State has appointed ten state coaches, eleven state literacy coaches and all R.F. schools have appointed a School R.F. Coach.

The evaluation documents the progress of approximately 18,527 students P1-P4 in seventy-four schools using the mandatory assessments, GRADE and DIBELS. In addition, in-depth case studies of twenty schools were conducted. The final evaluation cycle for the 2004-2005 school year included observations in eighty classrooms in the twenty case-study schools, as well as interviews with parents, school coaches and principals of these schools. Interviews were also conducted with state and district coaches and administrators from the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE).

Observations were conducted at R.F. professional development workshops, including the Summer Institutes, the Special Education Institutes, and the Principals' Institute, as part of the evaluation process. A number of specifically designed observation and interview tools were developed for the evaluation and are attached to the full report.

Findings
Professional Development
Currently, all schools have produced a professional development (PD) plan that reflects the needs of their school and their students. Using GRADE and DIBELS assessments, many schools have tried to plan school-level PD focusing on specific student needs. In addition, school staffs have identified topics for further study with the guidance of principals, State, District and School coaches. Summer Institutes, Principal Institutes and Fierce Conversations workshops have been well attended and received.

The 2005 Summer Institute focused on the classroom environment, systematic and explicit instruction, the five components of reading and literacy center design and use. A Special Education Summer Institute was conducted for the first time this year. Most teachers laud the support provided by timely, effective R.F. professional development. Teachers report that they feel confident in incorporating the 5 components of R.F. into their core programs, and are seeking more opportunities to collaborate, reflect and practice building literacy centers. Teachers responded favorably to the shortened format and the improved quality of presentations. Many teachers indicated that the Fierce Conversations workshop, held in March of 2005, has had a positive impact on communication in their schools.

Recommendations

- With a move to embedded PD, KDE to monitor and investigate what constitutes quality embedded PD.
- Provide PD that "meets teachers at their point of need".
- Explore alternative ways of presenting professional development, for example, based on specific grade levels, core programs, peer presenters, and the use of technology.
- Examine the ways schools have followed up Summer Institutes with embedded professional development and a more practical, hands-on approach.
- An external evaluation of the Special Education Summer Institutes be conducted.

Instruction

The overwhelming majority of schools report outstanding success in the classroom as a result of the R.F. initiative. Case-study data indicated the level of student engagement increased throughout the school year. Teachers showed continued growth in their use of systematic and explicit instructional strategies and the core programs. While reliance on the core manual was still observed, and many questions about use of the core programs remain, teachers appeared more confident and comfortable using the core programs.

The use of literacy centers has increased throughout the year and teachers have attempted to make them an integral part of the instructional process. However, not all centers appeared to be aligned with the core materials or the five components.

Differentiation in instruction was not evident in small groups and literacy centers. There seemed to be an expectation that all students can perform the same tasks irrespective of their individual needs.

Recommendations

- Teachers to be supported (for example, through professional development) in how to design small group instruction and literacy centers to meet individual needs.
- Teachers network to share ideas and resources with teachers in other schools working with the same grade level and the same core program.
- Teachers to be given more ideas and strategies for accommodating the needs of accelerated learners.
- An investigation to be completed regarding the organization of the 90-minute block and the choices teachers make regarding the allocation of time for small group, whole class and independent learning.

Classroom environment

Changes in classroom environments were observed in the case-study schools. As the school year progressed, it was noted that teachers attempted to display more student work related to literacy development and more word walls were evident. Still, however, there

was a predominance of commercially produced materials and extreme variation in the use of environmental print.

More interruptions within the classrooms, as well as less organized student transitions were noted in observations that were scheduled near the end of the school year. It was also observed that one of the case-study schools continued to have only a seventy-five minute literacy block.

Recommendations

- All interruptions during the 90-minutes cease.
- Classroom environments become a celebration of students' efforts and to be used as a resource for literacy learning.

Core Programs

Over the course of the year, teachers have become increasingly successful and comfortable with the core materials. Where teachers had previously seen the core materials as stifling, they now see the organization and standardization they provide as liberating. The majority of schools is delighted with their core programs and materials. They are excited about finding new ways to integrate the 5 components and learning centers into their daily planning. A few schools expressed concern over their core programs, citing a lack of diverse reading materials and confusion over how they could change their programs if needed.

Recommendations

- KDE to provide networking and professional development opportunities based on the use of core programs.
- Core programs to be examined in relation to the assessment data to determine which programs appear to be contributing to the greatest improvement in results.
- Core programs in combination with intervention programs to be examined in order to find the combinations contributing to the greatest improvement in results.
- Further investigation to be conducted on how supplemental materials are selected to match the needs of students.

Intervention

The use of interventions is highlighted as a problematic area. Across the state, there are 34 interventions in place and often a combination of interventions is being used in each grade. When asked to identify their interventions, some coaches identified teaching strategies and tutoring programs, rather than legitimate intervention programs.

Choosing, implementing and managing intervention programs are primary concerns that need to be addressed. Many schools report they do not have the intervention tools necessary to meet the instructional needs of their students. Schools report difficulty selecting students for intervention, and struggled to find time to provide intervention outside the 90-minute block. These problems exist because of the lack of certified personnel, scheduling constraints, and time needed to teach other required Kentucky core content. Some schools are dissatisfied with the intervention programs they have chosen.

The R.F. assessment process has helped schools know the needs of their students and narrow the focus of their intervention instruction. Schools are using assessment data to drive their intervention program instruction. Teachers are looking forward to improving and refining this aspect of R.F. in the upcoming school year.

Recommendations

- Research team to investigate more thoroughly the use of interventions over the next year and the various combinations of core programs and interventions.
- Professional development to focus on interventions and differentiation of instruction.

Assessment and Accountability

Teachers in the R.F. schools have adapted well to the use of GRADE and DIBELS and agree the assessments provided valuable data regarding student performance and needs. They especially liked the immediate feedback provided by DIBELS. In all schools, it is clear data from GRADE and DIBELS is being used to inform instruction. Receiving GRADE data late has caused some schools problems in assigning students to interventions. Schools have adopted other assessments for progress monitoring including those associated with core programs, SRI, SRA, PAST, and BEAR. In some instances, there is a concern that students are being over-assessed.

Recommendations

- KDE to negotiate a more prompt response to the GRADE assessments.
- Through professional development, explore strategies and ideas to support struggling readers on the basis of GRADE and DIBELS data.
- Plateaus in test results with specific subpopulations and grades have been noted and require additional attention, for example, in terms of interventions.

Leadership

Generally, the communication between KDE and the schools has improved. Some school coaches feel that KDE and State Coaches are still sending out mixed messages. There has been a noticeable improvement in response time to questions from schools seeking clarification. The R.F. Coordinator has been highly praised for her competent approach, and strong commitment to ensuring R.F. is implemented as planned. State Coaches continue to be concerned about the unavailability of the R.F. Coordinator because of her involvement in other KDE initiatives.

Recommendations

- The roles and responsibilities of the R.F. Coordinators to be investigated to ensure 100% commitment, and availability, to R.F.
- More emphasis to be placed on ensuring State Coaches and KDE administrators are sending out consistent messages to schools.

State Coaches

State Coaches continue to work tirelessly and are seen as fundamental to the success of the R.F. initiative. Time management and finding a balance between the many tasks they carry out continues to be a major concern. They are pleased with the progress of schools in relation to test results, the use of literacy centers, teachers' increased understanding of core programs and higher levels of teacher self-esteem. They are aware of the impact they have had on improving teaching and learning. Throughout the year, a minority of school coaches report that their relationship with the state coach has been strained due to a lack of support. This issue seems to have been resolved.

Recommendations

- KDE to examine the level of support available to state coaches from the KDE office.
- Burnout continues to be an issue requiring consideration.
- The nature of the feedback given to schools and teachers to be explored.

School coaches

School coaches are most often praised as the keys to successful implementation and are diligent workers. There are strong indications that most school coaches did everything in their power to ensure their schools' successful transition into R.F. They remain enthusiastic and dedicated to the success of this reading initiative. They report positive growth in teacher competence and student outcomes in literacy. They seem excited by what they have been able to accomplish. During the twelve months of implementation, the use of the word "overwhelmed" decreased when describing their involvement in R.F.

Time Issues

School coach responses indicate, as they did last fall, that time management has been a barrier to effective, hands-on leadership. As the school year progressed, the school coaches were able to spend more time in classrooms providing assistance and feedback to teachers. However, this did not constitute the majority of their time and significant portions of their time were spent on administrative tasks. Principals are extremely reliant on School coaches. There is need for clarification of the role of the school coach and they need assistance in prioritizing their responsibilities.

Administrative Duties

Most School coaches report feeling overwhelmed by the administrative duties they must complete on a daily basis. Coaches feel that almost all of their time is spent completing, filing and transferring paperwork and test data. This aspect of their job has led to high levels of stress, and in some cases, burnout.

Role confusion

In some schools, confusion regarding the role of the school coach as evaluator, mentor, "tool" or coach leaves the school coach feeling wary of how feedback is received by colleagues.

Recommendations

- KDE to give assistance in clarifying the role of the school coach and setting priorities.
- Data management system to be in place for the beginning of the new school year thus simplifying one administrative task.
- Provisions to be made, for example, reducing administrative responsibilities, freeing School coaches to spend the majority time in classrooms.

District coaches

The role of the district coach is described in diverse terms ranging from "extremely involved and making regular site visits" to "not appearing at all" to "being contentious". In the schools where there is ongoing involvement, principals and school coaches value the additional layer of support and shared responsibility of the district coach. District coaches express concern about being overwhelmed with their district responsibilities and finding time to do tasks associated with R.F.

Recommendations

- KDE to clarify roles of district coaches and explore balance between R.F. and other district responsibilities.
- District coaches to explore methods of giving formal feedback to schools.

Principals

Generally, principals are supportive of the initiative and delegate most of the responsibility of R.F. to the school coach. Words of acknowledgement and praise for the school coach are genuinely offered. However, some principals seem to pass all responsibility to the coach with comments such as "She did not know what she was getting herself into, but I did." And "I knew all I had to do was hire a good coach and she

would see that it gets done." The majority of school coaches feel that they are well supported by their principals, however, some expressed concerns about "being isolated" and requiring more input from the principal. Some state coaches echo these sentiments when they describe some principals as "slowing down" progress.

Recommendations

- Principals and school coaches to meet and prioritize R.F. tasks freeing School coaches to spend more time in classrooms.
- Principals, in collaboration with school coaches, to clarify the role of the school coach. Teachers to be made aware of the involvement of the school coach in classrooms.
- Some principals are required to take a more active role in providing instructional leadership in Reading First.
- Continue to provide opportunities for networking amongst R.F. principals.
- Develop a simplified walk-through and provide training for principals on conducting the walk-through and providing feedback to teachers.
- Walk-throughs to be focused, for example, on an aspect of R.F. such as centers, student engagement, classroom environment.

Teacher satisfaction

Although schools report a much higher level of teacher buy-in than they did in the fall, there are still pockets of resistance. Some teachers are simply exhausted after a year of immense change. Many schools are concerned about staff turnover and the challenge of adequately training new teachers. Despite these concerns, it is clear that teachers have found a new sense of confidence with R.F., and their students' performance on assessments has validated their efforts.

Recommendations

- KDE to investigate ways in which to support principals and districts reassign teachers philosophically opposed to Reading First.

Parents

Reading First implementation has had a surprisingly positive effect on school communities. We have seen numerous examples of parents and children becoming excited about reading, and the school has become a center for social interaction and celebrations of learning outcomes. At the end of year one, school coaches are identifying "parental involvement" as the next big step in implementation. Some school coaches have already reporting great success with family literacy nights and other community activities.

In parent interviews conducted at case-study schools, parents seemed pleased with R.F. outcomes, although they do not profess to know many details about the program itself. Some parents of students in P3 and P4, along with advanced P2 students, expressed concern over R.F.'s ability to meet the needs of accelerated students.

Recommendations

- More publicity to be given for Reading First in Kentucky.
- Schools to initiate meetings with parents to outline the changes that have occurred as a result of R.F.