



Here's How

Local Sustainability Strategies

FOR LOCAL LEADERS

Staffing Practices

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Managing Staffing Practices to Sustain Reading Achievement

Those who aspire to leading a school to a high level of success dream of having each position on staff filled with “just the right person” working at peak performance to take student achievement to new heights. Those who have led a school improvement initiative such as Reading First know that there are many realities which can limit this idealized staffing and staff performance scenario. Even schools in which staffing is solid and progress is steady often experience a set-back when a strong principal, coach, or teacher leaves the school. Adjusting to the inevitable turnover on a school staff is one of the on-going challenges in sustaining any education initiative, including evidence-based reading programs. Who is assigned to a vacant position **does** make a difference and determining what elements of the staffing function can be managed at the district or school level is a critical part of any sustainability plan.

Staffing and Reading Achievement

Consider a school needing a new principal, coach or teacher. New hires can be sought either by a generic job description and traditional hiring procedures or by those reflecting the priorities of the school. The former will tend to draw traditional candidates; the latter will attract those who share the school's vision for

improvement. Similarly, for current staff a generic job description and traditional support system will tend to perpetuate the status quo; guidelines and procedures reflecting strong reading priorities will lead staff members to develop and hone new knowledge and skills.

What positions are most affected?

Staffing practices to promote achievement apply to all staff whose work relates directly to student learning or whose responsibility it is to fulfill the mission of the district. This includes principals, coaches, teachers, and instructional assistants at the school level. It also includes any administrator, director or coordinator who oversees elementary schools or reading programs at the district level.

The staff members in each of the positions in the text box to the right have responsibilities within their roles that can increase student reading achievement. Since each staff position can be seen as a resource for learning, it is important that each staff member do everything within their power and authority to facilitate student reading achievement.

Staffing Can Impact Reading Programs

Consider the impact these positions can have on evidence-based reading programs:

- Principals
- Coaches
- Teachers
- Instructional Assistants
- Superintendents
- Assistant Superintendents
- Director of Elementary Education
- Director of Special Education
- Director of Federal Programs

Sustainability is the ability of a program to operate on its core beliefs and values (its reading culture) and use them to guide essential and inevitable program adaptations over time while maintaining improved outcomes.

Adapted from Century and Levy, 2002

Staffing Practices to Focus On

District staffing practices can have their greatest impact when they are most directly connected to the mission (purpose) of the organization. If we accept that teaching all students to read is the most important function of elementary schools, then we want to make the best use of the tools available to us, including staffing practices, to fulfill that function.

There are several types of staff-related practices which school and district leaders can establish and maintain to help address the organization's purpose and goals. See the table below for specific examples of practices. A brief hypothetical description of these practices illustrates how they might be implemented in a particular context.

Staff-Related Practices

To Support Your Organization's Reading Goals

There are several types of staff-related practices which school and district leaders can establish and maintain to help address the organization's purpose and goals:

- *Personnel-related **school board policies** or **administrative procedures** related to the reading initiative. This can include job descriptions, hiring practices, goal-setting, supervision and evaluation procedures, and training requirements.*
- ***Job descriptions** for principal, coach, teacher, reading specialist, special education teacher, and instructional assistants.*
- ***Hiring procedures** can include job postings, screening, interviewing, and reference-checking.*
- ***Assigning staff** to schools, positions, and grade levels.*
- ***New staff support** can include orientation, acculturation, "catch-up" training, and mentoring.*
- ***On-going staff support** can include goal-setting, growth-oriented supervision, active support.*
- ***Developing leaders from within** the organization can include recruiting, shadowing, training, early leadership opportunities, mentoring, advanced leadership opportunities.*

Getting Started

There are several steps which district and building leaders can take to strategically incorporate personnel practices into their school improvement efforts.

Staffing Policies to Support Achievement

The district superintendent, with input from the personnel director, can talk with school board members about which staffing practices the district might want to consider incorporating into school board policy or district administrative procedures to support efforts to increase student achievement.

Review Job Descriptions

Create or adapt hiring criteria for principals, coaches, teachers, and instructional assistants which reflect practices that promote improved reading outcomes for students.

Let Goals Guide Hiring

The hiring criteria should identify from a pool of applicants, the candidate most likely to succeed in an SBRR-based reading initiative. Such practices incorporate reading-related criteria and questions at the job posting, screening, interview and reference check stages. You might also want to consider using performance tasks as part of job interviews. For principals or coaches, consider doing an instruc-

tional walk-through or reviewing some representative data, then ask what the candidate saw and how they would follow up. For teachers, consider having them review a set of classroom data or present them with a realistic scenario of student underperformance and asking them how they would respond—either individually or collaboratively.

Assign Staff Strategically

Consider “best fit” of each candidate with the reading initiative or the likelihood of any given candidate impacting student success when assigning principals and coaches to schools and when assigning teachers and assistants to grade levels; know your prerogatives regarding re-assignment of staff across grade levels (or across schools, if applicable) for a better fit with the program.

Develop Leaders from Within

Develop a process to develop future reading leaders from within the entity, such as the district or school.

Bring New Staff Up-to-Speed

Develop procedures for routinely providing orientation, “catch-up” training, mentoring, and differentiated support for staff new to a building which has already been implementing a SBRR-based reading initiative—or for staff who are new to a position or to a grade level.

Support Growth of All Staff

Use the instructional walk-through and coaching processes to provide on-going, differentiated support for all staff who instruct reading groups (including classified staff).

Let School Goals Guide Staff Goals

Incorporate reading-based knowledge and skills in the goal-setting and supervision process for all staff.

The district level self assessment tool can serve as a first step in helping principals reflect on their knowledge and behavior related to some of the effective staffing practices mentioned above.

District and building leaders will be best positioned to sustain an evidence-based reading model when the organization’s reading vision, coupled with student reading outcomes, is used to guide staffing decisions.



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