



*Reading First Sustainability*  
**Overview**

## Sustaining Reading First

Schools across the country are seeing significant improvements in reading achievement for students served by Reading First (*Reading First Implementation Evaluation: Interim Report, USDE, 2006*). But the Reading First community, including teachers, principals, district and state leaders, are concerned with their ability to sustain the improved student reading results in light of the eventual loss of the federal funding that launched the initiative and the federal leadership and support that was provided during grant implementation. Reading First Leaders are looking for guidance in identifying which of the key aspects of the initiative to sustain and how to develop and implement a Reading First sustainability plan.

The Sustaining Reading First Webpage offer a variety of resources and tools to assist leaders at all levels in sustaining scientifically based reading instruction.

### What is sustainability?

*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*

**It's more than maintenance.** We might be tempted to think that sustaining Reading First simply involves keeping up the reading instruction practices beyond the initial funding period—in other words, maintaining the scientifically based reading instruction practices Reading First schools have implemented. In fact, it's not possible to freeze a program in time and simply maintain. Real sustainability of scientifically based reading instruction means continuing to use core beliefs and values arising from scientifically based reading research as a foundation, while improving and adapting the schoolwide reading program over the course of time.

**It's more than replacing grant funds.** No one can deny that on-going funds are needed to implement scientifically based reading instruction. For recurring resource need, funds formerly available through Reading First must be replaced. However, funding is only part of the picture. Reading First has taken the findings of scientific research into practice and led the way in implementing a new way of teaching reading. Many schools have successfully implemented new practices and are seeing the pay-off in student outcomes. Funds are needed to support and facilitate this—but they are a means and not an end.

## **What are we trying to sustain?**

### **Results**

The most important thing to focus on sustaining is the improved student achievement results accomplished through Reading First. We should never lose sight of the fact that sustaining Reading First is first and foremost about continuing to make progress toward the goal of all students reading on grade level by the end of third grade.

### **A Strong Evidence-Based Reading Culture**

Of all the elements of a school-wide reading model like Reading First, leadership and a strong reading culture have the greatest potential for sustaining the model over time as initial funding streams disappear. Strong leadership and reading culture will take scientifically based reading instruction—including its vision, underlying values, and beliefs and practices—from a federally supported initiative to simply being the way reading is taught in a school or district.

### **Fidelity to Implementation**

You cannot sustain what you have not fully implemented. Research-based curricula and instruction, formative assessments, and high quality professional development—these are the foundational elements of Reading First put into place. Only after teachers have gained expertise in the implementing scientifically based reading instruction and experienced initial success can they adapt and refine the effort so that it thrives over time.

## **What resources are available to help you sustain the success you have achieved through Reading First?**

### **Planning for Sustaining Reading First**

The first step in planning for sustainability is to conduct a needs assessment to determine where you stand on key issues related to sustaining Reading First. The Sustainability Self Assessment Tool is designed to be used by program leaders at different levels—classroom, school, district, and state—to determine their capacity to sustain their program and to identify areas that need to be developed in their sustainability plan.

### **Training and Technical Assistance in Sustaining Reading First**

Sustainability Planning Workshops for Local Districts Local planning workshops will be offered on a scheduled basis. These workshops will serve selected districts in two regional workshops each year. They provide an opportunity for a cross-program district team to conduct needs assessments and develop a sustainability plan under expert guidance.

Technical Assistance Technical assistance in sustainability will be offered to state departments of education on a scheduled basis. The purpose of this assistance is to facilitate the assessment of a state’s current capacity for sustaining Reading First and determine appropriate actions.

### **More Resources on Sustaining Reading First**

- *The Sustainability Briefs Series*

This series of briefs provides in-depth treatment of key sustainability topics. Available in several brief options, these briefs are useful for individuals wishing to deepen their understanding of sustainability or for use in group settings such as study groups or workshops.

Building a Strong Reading Culture: What You Can Do

Developing Effective Reading Leadership

- *Reading First Sustainability Literature Review*

This review examines the literature on sustaining school reforms and identifies seven key concepts of sustainability as they relate to Reading First. It is a useful starting point for program leaders who are beginning to plan for sustainability.

- *Reading First Sustainability Annotated Bibliography*

This briefly annotated compilation of the literature on sustainability was used to develop the literature review and is a source of suggested reading for program leaders who want to delve more deeply into the sustainability literature.



**RMC Research Corporation**  
1501 Wilson Boulevard, Suite 1250  
Arlington, VA 22209

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