



FOR LOCAL LEADERS

Here's How Local Sustainability Strategies

From Standards to Practice

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Working from Standards to Practice in Sustaining Scientifically Based Reading

Evidence-based reading programs are most likely to be sustained over time when the state, district, and school levels each play their appropriate role in supporting and implementing effective reading instruction. States can embed the five components of effective reading instruction into content standards and related resources that clarify what teachers are expected to teach and what students are expected to learn. Districts can support implementation by providing the professional development, instructional programs and materials, assessments, databases, and staffing that enable school level staff to carry out effective instruction. A Reading First grant may have provided seed money to get effective instruction in place—and student outcomes may be on the rise as a result. As the grant expires, the district role in supporting reading instruction that is scientifically based and that addresses state standards becomes ever more important. A key question for district leaders is: *How can we ensure that K-3 teachers continue to focus their reading instruction on helping students to learn to read at proficient or higher levels as measured by state standards?*

Strategies to Maintain High Quality Instruction

One strategy is to fully articulate what high quality reading instruction is and to share this understanding in a very public way. This can provide a shared conceptual understanding of what teachers are expected to know and be able to do. Alexander and Fives (2000) provide a useful description of the types of teacher knowledge that each develop through a series of stages. We can easily derive impli-

cations for sustaining instruction that continues to push to higher student reading achievement.

Another general strategy is to ensure that teachers have access to curricula-related resources that are organized in relation to the components of effective reading instruction and related state standards. One resource from the University of Oregon's Big Ideas in Beginning Reading is *Mapping*

Instruction to Achieve Instructional Priorities in Beginning Reading[®]. It spells out for each grade and for each component "instructional priorities" and the months during which they should be addressed in teacher instruction. This resource can serve as a conversation starter by comparing the scope and sequence presented with district ELA curriculum guides or core reading programs.

Case Study: Vancouver School District, WA State

In practice, encouraging K-3 teachers to focus their instruction on helping students reach higher outcomes requires an integrated, purposeful effort on the part of a district. The Vancouver School District in the state of Washington has 21 elementary schools, six of which have benefitted from Reading First grants. Their efforts began before the inception of the Reading First program, however. Examining their state assessment data, and knowing that eventually students would need to meet

standards to graduate, they heard the call to retool and improve. An instructional audit by outside experts helped them craft a plan that built on their previous efforts and provided a path into the future.

Sustainability in Vancouver is facilitated by the fact that Reading First was embedded within their larger improvement goals and strategies. As the grant comes to a close, it is only natural that they will continue and expand the strategies that have worked for them. Below are some

of the steps that have worked for them:

Step 1: Build on Resources from the State The Washington Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction has developed many useful resources that support teaching to state reading standards. Staff from Vancouver has served on state committees that developed, for example, the Essential Academic Learning Requirements, Washington state content

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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

References

Alexander, P.A., & Fives, H. (2000). *Achieving Expertise in Teaching Reading.*

In L. Baker, M.J. Dreher, & J.T. Guthries (Eds.) *Engaging Young Readers: Promoting Achievement and Motivation* (pp. 285-308). New York: Guilford

Case Study: Vancouver School District, Cont.

standards and the Grade Level Expectations that describe the precise skills student must learn at each grade level. This experience has given district staff a deep grounding in state infrastructures and prepared them to take support for instruction to a fine grained level within the district.

Step 2: Develop a Literacy Framework

Early on, Vancouver determined that they needed a more systematic program to teach early reading skills to their students. They were beginning to find lots of pieces of a whole and felt the need to make connections. How do you show how each effort—whether it is professional development, bringing in a speaker, or the purchase of a supplemental program—connects to a larger district vision of literacy development in K-12? Their answer was to involve educators at all levels from across the district in developing a K-12 literacy framework.

The framework included: (1) Dimensions of Engaged and Effective Reading (i.e., motivation, cognition, and knowledge); (2) Building Blocks for Reading with Ease (the five components of reading instruction); (3) Dimensions of Readiness to Learn (historically, the district had thought of readiness as birth-five, but concluded it is much more; the framework builds in issues of readiness as students transition from elementary to middle school, middle to high school, post secondary readiness and issues of readiness having to do with professional development for their teachers). The framework is interesting for its K-12 approach and as an illustration of how the components of reading instruction from the National Reading Panel Report can be embedded within structures that also include other areas of emphasis that have locally defined importance.

Step 3: Take the Framework into Practice

Having a framework with broad-based support enabled Vancouver district leaders to take certain actions and set certain expectations, which answer the question: What do all teachers need to do if they are to be successful in helping students learn to read?

Consistent Core Reading Program The district moved to using the same core reading program in all 21 elementary schools. Starting with state resources on core programs, teachers reviewed materials and

reached a consensus decision. Interestingly, the group selected a core program that was different from the one used in RF cohort one and two schools. Beyond selecting a common core program, the district established that there will be 180 instructional days and 90 minutes of reading instruction per day. They were explicit about what should and should not happen during the reading block to ensure fidelity of implementation.

A Three Tiered Approach The district specified which interventions should be used and aligned the framework with Response to Intervention (RTI). In order to clarify the progress monitoring process for teachers, they developed the Reading Placement Pathway. For each grade level K-12, the Reading Placement Pathway identifies screening instruments to be used. For each performance level (intensive, strategic, benchmark, and advanced) the criteria for the level based on assessment results, interventions, delivery strategies, and ways of verifying progress are presented. Then, methods for certifying progress overall in the grade level are presented. In addition to using the Pathway as a common “map,” the district expects that schools will convene a Collaborative Academic Support Team three times a year to use data to look at every child and make recommendations about instruction and placement.

Incentives for Professional Development

Recognizing the need for professional development, every teacher in the district receives \$875 in professional development money. They can either pay for courses with these funds or pay themselves to attend additional district courses. There is an extensive catalogue of courses including training in the core and supplemental programs and assessments. In addition,

up to \$2000 is available for each teacher to take courses outside the district working toward a reading endorsement.

Implementation Costs District funds were used to cover costs related to the core curriculum, interventions, assessments, and professional development.

The Vancouver School District story illustrates that even when state infrastructures are well developed, local districts have considerable work to do in clarifying what teachers are expected to do and what students are expected to learn on a day to day basis.

It is this fine grained understanding of improving instruction that will make it possible to continue to increase student reading outcomes over time.

Stages of Knowledge: the Reading Teacher

Below is a chart indicating the stages of teacher knowledge, as described by Alexander and Fives (2000), as they apply to evidence-based reading programs, such as Reading First.

Types of Teacher Knowledge	Application in an Evidence-based Reading Program
Declarative Knowledge “knowing what” Content knowledge of literacy and pedagogy	Teachers continue to deepen knowledge of the five components of effective reading instruction and of how students learn the knowledge and skills described by those components within their state’s standards-based system. In sustaining, this may require a flexible repertoire of professional development to address the needs of teachers beginning their careers and those that need targeted professional development in specific aspects of instruction.
Procedural Knowledge “knowing how”	Teachers plan and smoothly implement daily learning activities and experiences. They continue to expand their repertoire of instructional methodologies over time and have fluid delivery of these methodologies.
Conditional Knowledge “knowing where and when”	Students from different SES groups may bring different levels of language and literacy development to school—one source of student variation. Conditional knowledge informs teachers of where they need to scaffold skills for particular students—when and where in the core reading program instruction can be modified to bring reading skills of all students to a uniformly high level.
Teacher Motivation	Teachers believe that each child can learn to read at proficiency or higher; they are committed to evidence-based practices; and they take pride in being able to meet each student’s needs.
Strategic Processing	Some student reading difficulties will require more than differentiation within the core reading program. Using strategic processing, teachers provide supplementary or intensive interventions. This is the engine that drives relentless pursuit of each child’s reading achievement. It comes into high visibility in sustainability phases, when the focus is increasingly on solving the challenge of moving every child to proficiency.



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