



Here's How

State Sustainability Strategies

State Leadership

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- Alabama: How Reading First Helps a State Make the Grade
- West Virginia: A Three-Tiered Model of Instruction

Providing Effective State Leadership for Sustaining Evidence-based Reading Programs

State level leadership is critical to efforts to sustain and scale up evidence-based reading programs. State leaders must share a common understanding of the approach to teaching reading. They must see the benefits to such an approach and be active and visible in creating coherence of state initiatives and actions. When coherence is obtained, various state program offices can focus together on the mission at hand—raising student reading achievement in the best way possible, using evidence-based reading programs. By working collaboratively, state program offices support districts by providing them with access to scientifically based resources that align with improved student reading outcomes. Sustaining an evidence-based reading program is more likely to occur when support for a common state reading vision is evident from the highest levels of state leadership.

Which leaders should be involved?

Leaders at any level of state government can play significant roles in promoting reading success in the state—from the Governor to the Chief State School Officer to a state literacy program staff member. It is not necessary to be a reading expert. Any state

leader who is concerned with student achievement in reading has a valuable perspective to bring. State leaders can work together to (1) develop and communicate a statewide vision for widespread success in reading, (2) develop a state-wide model

to guide districts' implementation of evidence-based reading practices, (3) assemble a team of staff members and collaborators to carry out the work articulated in the model, and (4) create a statewide system of support to assure success in this mission.

Defining a Statewide Vision for Reading Instruction

In pursuing any improvement effort, author Steven Covey, advises, "Begin with the end in mind." State leaders of literacy committed to having a literate citizenry are guided by what most would agree is the most important outcome of elementary schools—to teach students to read. They communicate often with stakeholders at all levels about this goal in clear, compelling, visionary terms.

These state leaders of literacy:

- Keep the mission of the schools in the forefront.
- Develop and articulate a clear, simple vision for widespread student success in reading.
- Share these guiding ideas with others at every opportunity.

The Florida Reading First director said, "We have had a governor whose number one priority on the list was reading. So there was a goal set and a reading office established. His goal was to have all kids reading on or above grade level by year 2012. *Just Read, Florida!* was established within the Florida Department of Education, and anything to do with reading comes through the *Just Read, Florida!* office."

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

The West Virginia Reading First director says:

"We built some statewide structures by coordinating with all the different reading initiatives. By mandate of our Chief State School Officer, this summer [2007] we will be rolling out the model to all of our elementary schools. It's not optional; they are all required to implement the Reading First-like model in all elementary schools no later than fall 2009. This is a monumental task, [and] it has not been easy. We choose to call this something besides 'Reading First.' We're just simply calling it K-3 Reading Model. Our K-3 reading model has seventeen different components that will look very familiar to the Reading First community."

Defining a Statewide Vision (cont.)

In Alabama, the position of Assistant State Superintendent of Education for Reading was created to focus solely on statewide reading, overseeing the implementation of and interaction between the Alabama Reading Initiative and Reading First. The initiative is described in *Alabama: How Reading First Helps a State Make the Grade*⁹. The benefits of using scientifically based programs have filtered

throughout the Alabama state education system. The state leaders interact regularly with district leaders to encourage them to invest in an evidence-based reading model. Alabama has put its energy, focus, and dollars into a K-3 prevention model that is based in scientific reading research, and state leaders are working hard to ensure that it will be sustained.

A Statewide Model Based on the Tenets of Reading First

State leaders seek to assure that all students become good readers, promoting what has been learned from Reading First to build a cohesive model of reading instruction throughout the state. Presenting these practices as a purposeful, unified approach helps convey the model's essential features, shows how they work together, and describes how those in various roles can communicate the

model and help schools implement it.

These state leaders combine the mission/vision for student reading success along with goals and elements of the Reading First model into a state literacy framework, plan, or initiative and determine how to provide the training and support needed to roll the model out statewide to non-Reading First schools.

Establish a Statewide Reading Team

The state leadership team for reading should be thought of as including not just those in the Reading First office, but also those in other state education agency (SEA) offices with reading-related responsibilities, higher levels of management in the SEA and those who serve as members of the state reading advisory committee, as called for in NCLB (2001). Responsibilities of the statewide reading team include:

- Attending to the placement of the reading function within the state department of education organization chart.
- Using the guiding principles (identified on page 1) for hiring, assigning and supervising personnel and operating the state reading office.

- Advocating for a cross-departmental reading management team within the department and for inter-departmental data sharing and communication.
- Assembling a strong, committed and visionary state literacy advisory committee, as called for under NCLB (2001).

In Maryland, the Chief State School Officer is a proponent of evidence-based reading programs, and there is a great deal of support from top leadership on downward. In the MSDE organizational chart, Reading First is located in the Office of the State Superintendent in order to coordinate work across the department. The superintendent leads two to three yearly leadership team meetings with stakeholders—e.g., legislators, PTA representatives, or the Reading Success

Everyone Plays a Part

After reflecting on the brief stories from the states described here, consider how you might equip and support leaders in your state, from the Governor to your Chief State School Officer to fellow state literacy program staff members, to play significant roles in promoting reading success. Share some of the stories or strategies that proved successful in other states and imagine how a similar approach might work in your state. And most importantly, be on the look out for opportunities to work collaboratively with other state program offices and provide them with access to scientifically based resources that are aligned to improving student reading outcomes.

Establish a Statewide Reading Team (cont. from page 2)

committee. At the leadership team meetings they discuss the impact of Reading First on K-3 reading outcomes. The state superintendent also established a Reading First management team. This team meets monthly and has representation from other program offices.

The Maryland Reading First director also serves on the Response to Intervention (RTI) planning committee within the state department of education. Her involvement on that committee, along with her collaboration with other committee members, has resulted in Maryland's Special Education program reflecting the tenets of Reading First.

Collaboration around RTI has proven fruitful for a number of states. In the words of another Reading First director, "The best way I could talk about collaboration with Reading First and other program agencies is through a PowerPoint that describes the 'Three Tiered Model of Instruction@.' This PowerPoint was developed jointly by special education, Title I, and Reading First. We deliver the same PowerPoint statewide no matter who is delivering the information on three-tiered reading instruction. In our state, every school K-12 is required to have a three-tiered intervention model in place by fall of 2011. Our RTI model was based on Reading First."

Collaboration with Other State Program Offices

Collaboration is a key to successful implementation of an evidence-based reading model in the state. Section 1117 of Title I, NCLB requires that each state establish a statewide system of intensive and sustained support and improvement for local education agencies and schools receiving Title I funds—to increase the opportunity for all students to meet the state's academic content and achievement standards. This is an opportunity for state leaders to collaborate and to focus on supporting evidenced-based reading instruction as an improvement strategy. As one Reading First director said: "Reading First is based in NCLB and

everybody has to do NCLB. So that's what we used as our way of collaboration."

In building the literacy components of the statewide system of support, state leaders can:

- Set an expectation for cross-program or cross-unit collaboration and alignment in supporting districts.
- Explicitly describe the role of evidence-based reading programs in the state's approach to school improvement planning.
- Review all state monitoring processes and make these an occasion for supporting the use of evidence-based reading programs.
- Provide guidance to districts in how they can use the process for applying for federal funds to coordinate resources to support implementation of evidence-based programs.
- Include reading benchmark and classroom assessment in discussions of the state's approach to comprehensive assessment and build components of the state longitudinal data system accordingly.
- Communicate regularly with school district leaders regarding their identified needs to improve student reading achievement and state resources to address the needs.



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