

## Florida Reading First: Principals' Survey

In May of 2004, principals of *Reading First* schools in Florida were asked to participate in a survey regarding the implementation of the *Reading First* Grant in their schools. The purpose of this survey was to obtain information about the extent to which schools have been able to implement *Reading First* requirements, and to determine principals' perceptions of issues associated with *Reading First*. The information in this report is based on responses from 309 of 328 *Reading First* principals who completed the survey.

It is Florida's intent to include *Reading First* school leadership in not only the site-level supervision of *Reading First* activities, but also in the ongoing refinement and improvement of the grant implementation process. As the ultimate goal of *Reading First* is improving individual student achievement, the principal's knowledge and involvement is critical to the success of grant activities at the school level. Therefore, we believe that this information is important to the overall success of Florida's *Reading First* program.

To gain insight into *Reading First* implementation issues, principals were asked to respond to 32 survey questions separated into six categories.

- Core Reading Program
- Professional Development for Teachers Beyond That Associated with the Core Reading Program
- Leadership/Organizational Practices to Support Effective Instruction for All Students
- Implementation of *Reading First* Assessments
- Interventions for Struggling Readers
- Comments About Your School and *Reading First*

Results from these six categories were analyzed, and the most relevant for state technical assistance are reported below:

- 100% of schools are using a common core curriculum to guide instruction in all K-3 classrooms.
- When asked how much training in the core reading program was received by teachers before they began using it to guide instruction, all responded at least one full day.
- When asked what percentage of teachers in the school attended the summer *Reading First* training academies, all responded that at least 75% of teachers had participated.
- All principals reported that they were able to visit each K-3 classroom 3-6 times per year to observe reading instruction.
- All principals reported that they meet with their reading coach one or more times per month to discuss reading instruction or student progress.
- Each principal signed into the Progress Monitoring and Reporting Network (PMRN) at least 1-3 times per year to analyze student performance data.
- All but one of the principals reported that they attended grade level team meetings.
- When asked about time scheduled for reading instruction each day in schools, 100% of principals indicated they had scheduled at least 90 minutes.

- Most principals reported having between 5 and 8 members on school-based assessment teams.
- All but two principals reported using published reading intervention programs to guide interventions for students at risk of being below grade level proficiency by the end of the school year.
- All but two principals reported using computer-based intervention programs for students at risk of being below grade level proficiency by the end of the school year.
- Most of the principals commented that the presence of a reading coach was the most significant advantage of being a *Reading First* school.

Principals of Florida *Reading First* schools that ranked in the top 10 among our top 50 calculation were also interviewed by telephone to determine what factors were instrumental in the successful implementation of *Reading First* in their schools in the 2003-2004 school year. While there were a variety of responses given as rationale for the success of the respective programs, three critical factors were common to each of the principals interviewed.

1. **Research-based Core Reading Curriculum** – The use of a core curriculum that is grounded in reading research was mentioned by each of the principals of top 10 Florida *Reading First* schools as a primary reason for the success of their programs. Many of the principals related that the changes associated with adopting research-based reading curriculum was not popular among their faculties at first; however, all said that teachers in these schools now depend on the core curriculum as a basis for effective reading instruction.
2. **Student Performance Data** – Each of the principals interviewed cited the use of reading performance data as a central component of their *Reading First* success. The analysis of data taken from Florida’s Progress Monitoring and Reporting Network (PMRN) is a focus of each of our top 10 schools as evidenced by the principals’ ability to discuss the current status of their reading programs with a high level of specificity. The principals related that the PMRN is the most important factor in their ability to analyze the success of reading programs.
3. **Resources Provided Through *Reading First*** – The influx of reading resources made available via the Reading First grant was also mentioned by all top 10 principals as a critical part of an effective *Reading First* program. In addition to materials and other support provided through *Reading First*, each of the principals interviewed credited their site-based *Reading First* coach as being an instrumental factor in the success of their reading programs in 2003-2004. Principals described various ways in which the reading coach coordinates and focuses the implementation of *Reading First* in these successful Florida schools.

The overarching theme in each of these interviews was that changes and support brought about by accepting *Reading First* into these schools were key components leading to increases in student performance in reading.