

Early Literacy Specialists (ELS) in SDP

Program Implementation and Student Literacy Gains, 2015-2016 SY

This brief summarizes the findings of a mixed-methods study conducted by the Office of Research & Evaluation (ORE), which focused on Year 1 implementation of the literacy coaching initiative. Specifically, the study examined the impact of Early Literacy Specialist (ELS) coaches on K-3 teachers' experiences and students' literacy outcomes. The full report is available upon request.

Study Overview

The literacy coaching initiative is part of a three-year district-wide plan to provide high-quality literacy instruction to all students. Starting with the lowest performing elementary schools in Year 1 (2015-16SY), SDP is adding ELS coaches to schools each year until all schools serving K-3 students have a coach. In fall 2015, funded in part by a grant from the William Penn Foundation, 58 SDP schools had an ELS coach. The Year 1 implementation study sought to understand the role of ELS coaches on students' reading levels and the experiences of teachers, coaches, and principals at ELS schools.

Why is this study important to SDP?

- **Literacy coaching is an effective professional development model**, especially for teachers working in urban districts (Blackowicz et al., 2005; Cantrell & Hughes, 2008; Marsh et al., 2008; Sailors & Price, 2010). In particular, literacy coaching has been found to be an effective way to mitigate some of the harmful effects of high teacher and student turnover endemic to large, urban school districts (Allensworth, et al., 2009; Reichardt, 2008)
- **Literacy coaching is linked to increases in early literacy outcomes.** Results from a four-year longitudinal study of a literacy coaching program found students in Kindergarten to 2nd grade experienced literacy gains that were 16% higher in Year 1 and 32% higher in Year 3 than literacy growth in the baseline year (Biancarosa et al., 2010).
- **Anchor Goal 2 (in Action Plan 3.0) is that 100% of 8-year olds will read on grade level.** We wanted to explore the impact of ELS as a strategy for encouraging early literacy growth since this is the first time that ELS was implemented in SDP schools.

What do ELS coaches do?

ELS coaches support students by...

- Promoting and supporting the implementation of research-based teaching practices for literacy
- Improving teacher content knowledge, instructional practices, classroom environments and classroom structure
- Providing content-focused coaching and resources

Sample Snapshot

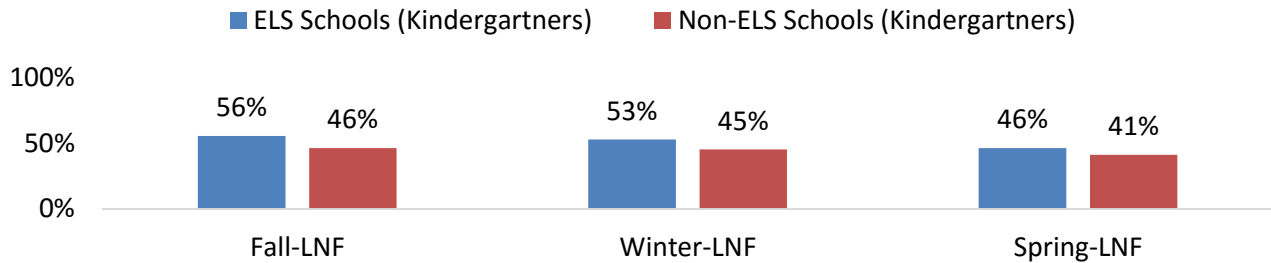
Schools: 58
K-3 Students: 14,337

Students in the sample were:

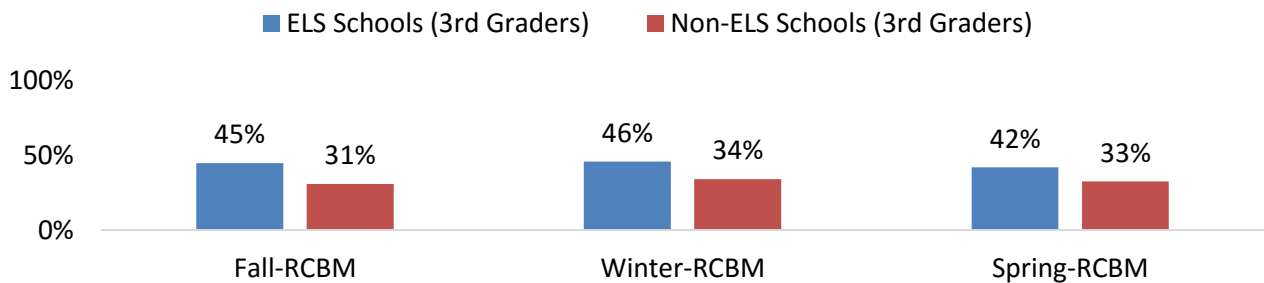
	%
Asian	4%
Black	53%
Latino	29%
Other	8%
White	6%
Female	48%
Male	52%
Special Education	9%
ELL	12%

Year 1 Findings

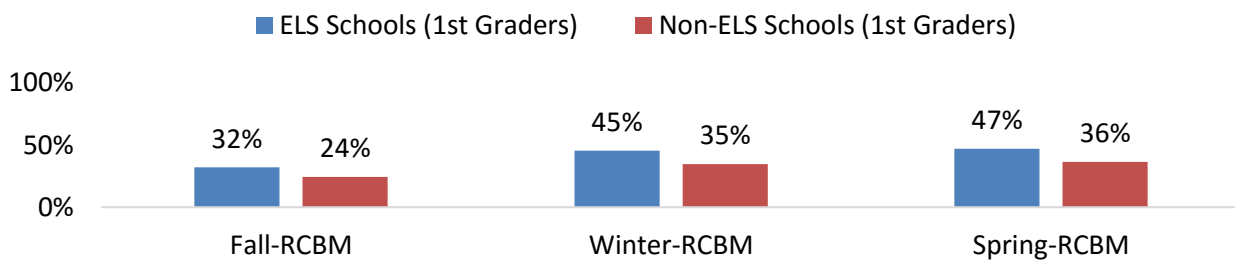
The percent of **kindergarteners** in ELS Schools identified as needing **Tier 2 support** decreased from 56% to 46% from Fall 2015 to Spring 2016 (blue bars). Because student performance is expected from Fall to Spring, we also find that fewer kindergarteners in non-ELS schools were identified for Tier 2 support (red bars). However, the change in non-ELS schools was not as large as the change in ELS schools.



Similarly, the percent of **third-grade students** in ELS schools identified as needing **Tier 3 support** (as measured by the Reading Curriculum-Based Measurement (R-CBM)) decreased from 45% in Fall 2015 to 42% in Spring 2016. During the same time period there was a slight increase in the percent of students in non-ELS schools identified for Tier 3 support. A slightly higher percentage of students in both ELS and non-ELS schools were identified for Tier 3 support on the Winter R-CBM assessment as compared to the Fall R-CBM assessment.



Conversely, the percent of **first and second grade students** identified as needing **Tier 3 support** increased across the school year for both ELS and non-ELS schools. More research is needed to understand the factors related to the performance of first and second grade students.



The ELS teacher focus groups revealed that the ELS teachers felt that their coach was knowledgeable and able to provide a wide-range of supports. One teacher summarized her feelings this way:

"I feel like whatever we knew that we needed help with we were able to express that to them, and then they were able to come through with that type of support."