

K-3 Reading Specialists

Program Implementation and Student Literacy Gains, 2015-2016 SY

This brief summarizes the findings of a quantitative study conducted by the Office of Research & Evaluation (ORE) that focused on the relationship between receiving Reading Specialist support and students' early literacy outcomes. The full report is available upon request.

Guiding Research Questions

Two main research questions were the focus of the study:

1. Is there a relationship between working with a Reading Specialist and student literacy outcomes as measured by DRA scores?
2. Are students who are receiving Reading Specialist support demonstrating improvement in their tiered intervention level as measured by AIMSweb tiers?

Why is this study important to SDP?

- **With a particular expertise in teaching literacy, Reading Specialists are well-positioned to select the research-based instructional approach that works best for specific literacy issues** such as decoding or comprehension. This should increase the likelihood of positive outcomes and ideally begin closing the gap between low-level and on-target readers.
- **The differentiation of instruction provided by the Reading Specialists removes the burden of intensive intervention from the teacher** and thus, all students in the class should be more likely to reach their full reading potential (Connor & Morrison, 2016).
- **Reading Specialists provide individualized student instruction (ISI), which has proven to be highly effective in improving literacy levels of students in grades Pre-K to third** (Conner & Morrison, 2016). The results of Connor et. al.'s 2013, cluster-randomized controlled, longitudinal efficacy study provides evidence that individualized reading instruction is more effective in improving students' reading skills than instruction of similar quality that is not individualized and that the benefits accumulate over time in early elementary students.
- **Anchor Goal 2 from the District's Action Plan 3.0 is that 100% of 8-year olds will read on grade level.** This study examines the Reading Specialists program as a strategy for expediting the early literacy growth of struggling readers.

Program Features

During the 2015-2016 School Year (SY), the School District of Philadelphia (SDP) introduced Reading Specialists to 18 elementary schools.

The Reading Specialist program aims to provide an additional level of early literacy support to Kindergarten to third grade students who are significantly behind their expected reading level.

Reading Specialists worked with their targeted students at least weekly in small groups using specially designed lesson plans that use best practices to scaffold student learning in order to address deficiencies in reading, writing, phonics, and word study.

Sample Snapshot

Schools: 18

Total Students Seen: 870

- 69 Kindergarteners
- 311 First Graders
- 285 Second Graders
- 205 Third Graders

Findings

61% of K-3 students who worked with a Reading Specialist demonstrated at least one academic year of growth according to Fall 2015 and Spring 2016 DRA2 scores, regardless of their baseline reading level. As grade level increased, the percent of students making at least one academic year of growth increased.

Grade	N	Percent of Total
Kindergarten (n=27)	1	4%
First (n=181)	74	41%
Second (n=172)	118	69%
Third (n=131)	105	78%
Grand Total (n=515)*	298	61%

*In total, 515 students had both baseline and summative DRA2 data.

According to DRA2 scores, the percent of third-grade students identified as needing *Intensive Intervention* decreased 16% from Fall 2015 to Spring 2016 and 5% of students moved to *At Target* during the same time period. A small percentage of second graders also saw some positive movement between tiers from Fall 2015 to Spring 2016.

	Kindergarten		First Grade		Second Grade		Third Grade	
	Fall	Spring	Fall	Spring	Fall	Spring	Fall	Spring
At Target	81%*	8%	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	5%
Strategic Intervention	19%	67%	42%	6%	1%	3%	2%	13%
Intensive Intervention	NA*	25%	58%	94%	99%	96%	98%	82%

*Kindergarten students can only be identified as *At Target* or *Strategic intervention* for the first marking period

According to student performance on the AIMSweb Letter Naming Fluency assessment (LNF), the percentage of Kindergarten students requiring a Tier 2 or 3 intervention decreased from Fall 2015 to Spring 2016. According to student performance on the AIMSweb Reading Curriculum-Based Measure (R-CBM), the percentage of second and third grade students requiring Tier 3 intervention also decreased from Fall 2015 to Spring 2016.

