

See below for a new report on Reading First from the Center on Education Policy. The embargoed report, *Keeping Watch on Reading First*, is available at <http://www.cep-dc.org/pubs/readingfirst/>.



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NEWS RELEASE

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Majority of Participating States & Districts Credit Reading First for Achievement Gains in Early Grades

Billion-Dollar Federal Program Is Driving Significant Changes in Instruction, Curriculum, Assessment

WASHINGTON – September 20, 2006 – Reading First – the federal program aimed at boosting reading skills in high-poverty, low-performing schools and districts -- is having a significant and positive impact on student achievement, according to state and local education officials surveyed for a report on the program's impact from the Washington, D.C.-based Center on Education Policy.

The report finds that Reading First has led to many changes in curriculum, instruction, and assessment, and that significant majorities of participating states and districts credit Reading First for student achievement gains, according to surveys conducted for the report.

Of the school districts surveyed that reported increased reading achievement, virtually all districts with Reading First subgrants reported that Reading First's instructional program was an "important" or "very important" cause for gains (97 percent), and that Reading First's assessment system was an "important" or "very important" cause (92 percent).

Of the 35 states reporting achievement gains in the survey, 19 reported that Reading First instructional programs were an important or very important cause for improvement, while 16 said that Reading First assessments were an important or very important cause. Many other state officials reported they did not yet know the impact of Reading First on achievement; 11 were unsure about the effects of the instructional programs and 13 were unsure of the effects of the assessment system.

"Reading First is causing changes in instruction and assessment because the program has strict requirements backed up by substantial funding," said Jack Jennings, president of CEP.

The majority of states (45) reported that they had sufficient funds for implementing Reading First instructional programs, while 43 reported that they had sufficient funds for conducting Reading

First evaluations. In addition, unlike other federal education programs—such as Title I Part A grants to districts—Reading First is a new funding stream. Therefore, funds to carry out the requirements of Reading First are not being reallocated from other uses.

Many of the gains may be due to significant changes driven by this well-funded program, according to the report. For example, 60 percent of Reading First districts had to change their reading program in order to qualify for a Reading First funding, and 86 percent of Reading First districts required that elementary schools devote a specified amount of time to reading, compared to just 57 percent of non-Reading First districts.

In addition, while about 6 percent of U.S. public schools and 12 percent of public school districts participate directly in the annual \$1 billion Reading First program, the report also finds that the law has affected many non-participating schools and districts, through expanded local instruction and assessment programs and state professional development and technical that can often apply to non-participating schools and districts.

However, Reading First may not be having as much impact as it could, according to the report, as its implementation is often not coordinated with Early Reading First, a complementary federal initiative aimed at boosting pre-reading and language skills prior to kindergarten. Of 37 states responding to a survey item, 24 reported that the two programs were not coordinated, while 10 states reported that they were. Three states did not know.

In contrast, most states (38 of 50 responding to the survey item) and 80 percent of Reading First districts reported that they have coordinated Reading First with the federal Title I, program. According to the surveys and case studies conducted for the report, that coordination often meant changing Title I reading instruction to match Reading First and, at times, expanding Reading First to non-Reading First schools.

An embargoed copy of *Keeping Watch on Reading First* is available at <http://www.cep-dc.org/pubs/readingfirst/>

Based in Washington, D.C. and founded in January 1995, the Center on Education Policy is a national, independent advocate for public education and for more effective public schools. The Center works to help Americans better understand the role of public education in a democracy and the need to improve the academic quality of public schools. The Center does not represent any special interests. Instead the Center helps citizens make sense of the conflicting opinions and perceptions about public education and create conditions that will lead to better public schools.

<p>The report, along with additional information on CEP, its publications and its work, is available on the web at www.cep-dc.org.</p>

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