Reading First
Locally Appreciated, Nationally Troubled
Purpose and Key Findings

In the past year, the federal Reading First program, which seeks to improve reading instruction in the early elementary years, has been fraught with scandal at the national level. The Inspector General in the U.S. Department of Education (ED) found misconduct, including inappropriate intervention in states’ selections of reading programs, by Reading First officials in ED and by leaders of organizations with federal contracts. The Inspector General and the Government Accountability Office (GAO) also found mismanagement in some states.

This report from the Center on Education Policy (CEP), an independent nonprofit organization, focuses on a different set of questions related to state and local implementation of Reading First. In particular, the report explores five areas of concern:

1. The perceived effectiveness of Reading First
2. Challenges of implementing the program
3. Expansion of the program
4. Coordination between Reading First and the federal Title I program, which provides additional instruction in reading and math to low-achieving students in low-income schools
5. The accuracy and usefulness of evaluations of Reading First

This is the third annual CEP report on Reading First. It is part of a broader series of CEP reports published in 2007 on how states and school districts have implemented the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), the law that authorized the Reading First program. The information in this Reading First report was based on an annual survey of 50 states, a nationally representative survey of 349 responding school districts, and case study interviews with district- and school-level administrators in nine school districts. We arrived at the following key findings:

- **Reading First has value.** Despite misconduct and mismanagement at the national level and in some states, the Reading First program has still had a meaningful impact at the local level. A variety of reports, including our study, suggest that local schools and districts are implementing Reading First as intended and that the program may have a positive impact on achievement.
• **States and districts say Reading First improves reading achievement.** The majority of states (82%) reported that Reading First professional development is very or moderately effective in raising student achievement, while 78% said that Reading First curriculum and assessment materials are very or moderately effective. Many districts with Reading First grants concurred: 69% of districts reported that Reading First’s assessment systems were important or very important causes of increased student achievement, and 68% said Reading First’s instructional programs were important or very important causes.

• **Reading First has changed reading instruction.** In order to qualify for Reading First grants and meet the law’s requirement that reading programs be scientifically based, two-thirds (67%) of the districts participating in the program reported making changes in how teachers teach reading. These changes included purchasing new materials.

• **Reading First has a broad effect.** Reading First directly touches the 13% of districts and 6% of schools nationwide that participate in the program as well as the states that administer the program. But the program’s impact is much broader. More than half of Reading First districts reported using elements of Reading First in non-Reading-First schools and in the upper grades. An exception was the element of a reading coach, which fewer districts used in non-Reading-First schools or grades, perhaps because the cost was prohibitive. Similarly, states reported that more than 3,000 non-Reading-First districts participated in state-led Reading First professional development.

• **Reading First and Title I are coordinated, according to states and districts.** Most states (80%) and most districts (75%) with Reading First grants indicated that Reading First is well coordinated with Title I. This may have helped districts and states to expand some aspects of Reading First into districts and schools without official grants.

**Recommendations**

CEP makes the following recommendations for continuing the positive aspects of Reading First and guarding against further program mismanagement. These recommendations are based on this year’s study of Reading First, as well as on our previous two years of Reading First research and our review of other investigations of the program.

• **Congress should continue to fund the Reading First program.** Congress should increase current levels of funding to states so that the program can reach more schools and districts.

• **The Government Accountability Office should review state criteria for grants.** A GAO review of state criteria for distributing and continuing grants could ensure that no instruction or assessment programs are inappropriately promoted.

• **All recommendations of the ED Inspector General reports should be followed.** The Inspector General issued seven audits of Reading First, six of which found misconduct and/or mismanagement of Reading First at the state and federal levels. Following the recommendations of the Inspector General is essential to ensuring that future Reading First funds are not misused.
Study Background and Data Sources

This report on Reading First is part of a series of CEP reports titled *From the Capital to the Classroom: Year 5 of the No Child Left Behind Act*. Other reports in the series can be accessed on the CEP Web site, www.cep-dc.org.

This report also builds on two earlier CEP reports on Reading First published in 2005 and 2006. While it is important for officials to uncover and guard against mismanagement of programs like Reading First, it is also important for policymakers and educators to have current information about the implementation and effects of these programs at the state and district level. The CEP series of Reading First reports has sought to provide this latter type of information. The 2005 and 2006 reports were based on annual state and school district surveys, school district case studies, reviews of state Reading First grant applications, and other national data and media reports. They examined a variety of Reading First issues, including the potentially inappropriate ED influence on states’ choices of instructional and assessment programs. They also defined and explored several areas of Reading First implementation that should receive special attention as the program matures.

Drawing on our findings from 2005 and 2006, we identified five areas of concern, listed in the Purpose section above, to explore in this 2007 report. To learn more about these areas, we added more Reading First questions to our annual NCLB surveys and case study protocols.

This report is based on the following data sources. More information about these sources and the research methods used can be found at www.cep-dc.org, in the Methodology link for each of the 2007 NCLB reports.

- **State survey.** Since 2003, CEP has surveyed state departments of education about the implementation and effects of NCLB. From fall 2006 through January 2007, all 50 states responded to this year’s survey. However, some states did not complete every question or section, so the response rate varied by question. To maximize the likelihood that respondents would provide accurate information, we promised anonymity to individual states.

- **District survey.** Since 2003, CEP has also conducted an annual survey of a nationally representative sample of school districts. From November 2006 through February 2007, the survey was administered to 491 school districts, stratified by district type (urban, suburban, or rural), district size, and whether the district had at least one school identified for improvement, corrective action, or restructuring under NCLB. Urban districts and districts with schools in improvement were oversampled to allow for separate analyses based on these categories. A total of 349 districts responded to the survey for a 71% response rate. To ensure that each kind of district sampled was adequately represented in our overall national calculations, the data were weighted during analysis.
- **District case study interviews.** Since 2003, CEP has conducted case studies of NCLB implementation in up to 43 school districts, chosen to represent a variety of urban, rural, and suburban districts from all geographical regions of the country. From this year’s universe of 43 case study districts, a subset of nine districts was selected for in-depth interviews on Reading First, based first on whether the district had a Reading First grant and then on whether the official being interviewed was knowledgeable about Reading First. From fall 2006 through January 2007, a CEP consultant and CEP staff conducted interviews with district- and school-level staff from these nine districts and from six schools within these districts. Table 1 lists these districts and schools and provides basic information about the districts, including the total number of Reading First schools. Interviews with district and school staff were analyzed using qualitative data analysis software. Information and quotations from these interviews are interspersed throughout this report.

- **Review of other studies.** A CEP consultant also examined other publicly available evaluations of Reading First grants.

### Table 1. School District Case Study Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School District Name and State</th>
<th>Number of Reading First Schools</th>
<th>District Type</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boston Public Schools, Massachusetts</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Urban, K-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicago Public Schools, Illinois</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>Urban, K-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carson Elementary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Pope Elementary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Clark County School District, Nevada</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Urban, K-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado Springs School District 11, Colorado</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Urban, K-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escondido Union School District, California</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Suburban, K-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fort Lupton Weld Re-8 School District, Colorado</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Rural, K-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas City, Kansas Public Schools, Kansas</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Urban, K-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oakland Unified School District, California</td>
<td>24*</td>
<td>Urban, preK-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cox Elementary Education of Change (charter school)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>New Highland Elementary</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sobrante Park Elementary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palmdale Elementary School District</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Suburban, K-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yucca Elementary</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Does not include charter schools.

*Source: Center on Education Policy, NCLB Case Studies, 2006-07.*

The sections that follow describe the Reading First program, summarize the national investigations of the program, and discuss what we learned about the five main areas of concern.
General Description of Reading First

Over the past five years, about $1 billion annually has been appropriated for Reading First. Enacted in 2002 in Title I, Part B, subpart 1 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act as amended by the No Child Left Behind Act, Reading First aims to improve reading in the early elementary years. States received assistance in developing their Reading First plans and applications from the U.S. Department of Education and from RMC Research Corporation, which received a federal contract to help states implement the program. In addition, Reading First established three regional Technical Assistance Centers (TACs) at the University of Oregon, the University of Texas-Austin, and Florida State University.

All 50 states, the District of Columbia, and six U.S. territories currently receive Reading First grants. States use competitive subgrants to distribute the majority of funds to local districts and schools with high poverty and high concentrations of children in grades K-3 who read below grade level. To receive these grants, districts and schools must meet all of the Act's requirements, such as using scientifically based reading programs, materials, instructional strategies, professional development, and assessments.

At the time this report was issued, according to the Reading First database maintained by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL), 1,801 districts (13% of public school districts) and 5,884 schools in these districts (about 6% of public schools) participated in the grants. The majority of these schools (95%) are Title I schools, but schools do not have to participate in Title I to receive Reading First funds. Title I funds are allocated to schools based on their proportions of students from low-income families, while the factors used to distribute Reading First funds also include lower reading achievement and other demographic information. In the SEDL database, Florida has the highest number of non-Title I schools receiving Reading First funds—34 out of 584 schools or 6%. Nevada has the highest percentage of non-Title I schools receiving Reading First funds—26 out of 30 schools or 67%. In addition, a few Reading First schools are nonpublic schools. Washington state's Web site lists two Reading First schools that are private.

States may retain up to 20% of their Reading First funds for state-level activities, such as professional development for teachers, technical assistance to districts, and general administration of the grant. Grants to states continue for six years, pending a mid-grant evaluation.

Reading First legislation specifies the essential components of reading that must be explicitly addressed in all funded activities of states, districts, and schools; they include phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Furthermore, all instructional activities, materials, and assessments funded through Reading First must be supported by scientifically based reading research.
Controversy has surrounded Reading First, particularly in the last year. Seven audits have been issued by ED’s Office of the Inspector General. Table 2 presents the major findings of these audits.

The U.S. Congress has also investigated wrongdoing in Reading First at the federal level. In 2007, for example, the House Education and Labor Committee held a hearing on April 20 about mismanagement and conflicts of interest in the Reading First program and another hearing on May 10 about accountability in ED’s oversight of Reading First (Miller, 2007). Chairman Edward Kennedy of the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee issued a report on conflicts of interest in Reading First implementation at the three Regional Technical Assistance Centers (Kennedy, 2007).

Both the Inspector General and the Congress found conflicts of interest within ED and the TACs in their administration of Reading First and the assistance they provided to program participants. More specifically, the investigations concluded that federal administrators inappropriately pushed states and districts to purchase products and services from specific publishers, including publishers with financial ties to some federal administrators. The GAO report of February 2007 put these findings in a national context (Government Accountability Office, 2007). According to the report, ten state administrators said that ED officials suggested they stop using specific programs or assessments; four said that ED officials suggested they adopt specific programs or assessments; and five said that ED officials suggested they change professional development providers.

Problems have occurred at the state level as well. The Georgia, New York, and Wisconsin state departments of education all had varying degrees of mismanagement in awarding grants, according to the ED Inspector General reports. These instances of state mismanagement were not due to conflicts of interests, according to the reports, but to a general lack of oversight of the program. The Inspector General found no mismanagement of Reading First in Alabama.

Perceived Effectiveness

More than three-fourths of states and two-thirds of districts with Reading First grants reported in our 2006-07 surveys that the Reading First assessment systems and instructional programs were important causes of increases in student achievement. These responses represent the views of state and district administrators, rather than a cause and effect relationship between Reading First and achievement. Still, the responses provide important insights. First, because state and district surveys are confidential, administrators have little reason to exaggerate their claims. Second, although the survey represents the opinions of state and local administrators, these opinions are important because they show what initiatives the respondents believe are successful and which they will put their energies into implementing and expanding. In addition, most case study districts reported that Reading First had a positive effect on their schools.
Table 2. Inspector General Audits and Reviews of Reading First, October 2005 to March 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Audit or Review</th>
<th>Major Finding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alabama’s Reading First program, October 2005</td>
<td>• The audit found no significant problems with the Alabama State Department of Education’s administration of Reading First.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National audit of the Reading First program’s grant application process,</td>
<td>• ED did not select the expert review panel in compliance with NCLB.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 2006</td>
<td>• Although screening for conflicts of interest was not required, the screening process ED created was ineffective.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• ED did not follow its own guidance for the peer review process.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• ED awarded grants to states without documentation that the subpanels approved all criteria.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• ED included requirements not specifically in NCLB in the criteria used by the expert review panel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• ED obscured the statutory requirements of NCLB, for example, by adding requirements to state applications that were not in NCLB; ED acted in contravention of the GAO Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government by displaying a lack of integrity and ethical values; and ED took actions, such as intervening to influence a state’s selection of reading programs, that called into question whether they violated the prohibitions included in the Department of Education Organization Act.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin’s Reading First program, October 2006</td>
<td>• The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction did not ensure that all funded district and school applications met high standards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York State’s Reading First program, November 2006</td>
<td>• The New York State Education Department could not provide documentation for $216 million in Reading First grants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The New York State Education Department inappropriately awarded $118 million in Reading First grants to nine districts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The New York State Education Department did not follow federal record retention requirements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia’s Reading First program, January 2007</td>
<td>• The Georgia Department of Education did not have written policies and procedures for Reading First and did not adequately manage the district grant application process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National audit of ED’s administration of selected aspects of the Reading</td>
<td>• Sessions at the Secretary’s Reading Leadership Academies* focused on a select number of reading programs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First program, February 2007</td>
<td>• The Reading Leadership Academy Handbook and Guidebook appeared to promote the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills Assessment (DIBELS) test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• ED did not adequately assess issues of bias and lack of objectivity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RMC Research Corporation’s administration of the Reading First program</td>
<td>• RMC did not adequately address conflict of interest issues; for example, RMC did not have a clause about conflict of interest in its subcontract and did not adequately vet technical assistance providers for potential conflicts of interest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>contracts, March 2007</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Reading Leadership Academies were sponsored by ED and the National Institute for Literacy.

**Figure 1. Percentage of States Viewing Reading First Professional Development as Effective in Raising Student Achievement**

Figure reads: In 2005, 36% of states rated Reading First professional development as very effective in raising student achievement, a share that rose to 38% in 2006.

Note: Due to rounding, percentages for each year may not total 100%.

Source: Center on Education Policy, State Survey, December 2005, item 10, and December 2006, item 18.

**Figure 2. Percentage of States Viewing Reading First Curriculum and Assessment Materials as Effective in Raising Student Achievement**

Figure reads: In 2005, 33% of states rated Reading First curriculum and assessment materials as very effective in raising student achievement, a share that rose to 40% in 2006.

Note: Due to rounding, percentages for each year may not total 100%.

Source: Center on Education Policy, State Survey, December 2005, item 10 and December 2006, item 18.
STATE SURVEY RESULTS

The number of states reporting a positive effect of Reading First on student achievement increased from last year. As shown in figures 1 and 2, in 2006 more states reported that Reading First professional development, curriculum, and assessment materials were very or moderately effective in raising achievement than did in 2005. In addition, fewer states reported they did not know the effects of Reading First in 2006 than in 2005. The fact that states have another year’s worth of data from Reading First schools may account for these differences, but the rise may also indicate that Reading First has become more effective. The percentage of states rating Reading First as minimally effective decreased as well, and no state has ever reported in our NCLB annual surveys that Reading First was not at all effective.

DISTRICT SURVEY RESULTS

More than two-thirds of districts with Reading First grants that had experienced achievement gains in reading reported that Reading First was an important cause of these gains. As shown in table 3, 69% of these districts rated Reading First assessment systems as important or very important causes of increased reading achievement, while 68% rated Reading First instructional programs as important or very important causes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program or Requirement</th>
<th>Important/Very Important</th>
<th>Not at All/Somewhat Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School district policies and programs unrelated to NCLB</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCLB’s Reading First assessment systems¹</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCLB’s Reading First instructional program¹</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCLB’s requirement to develop school improvement plans¹</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCLB’s requirements for programs to be grounded in scientifically based research</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State policies and programs unrelated to NCLB</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCLB’s adequate yearly progress requirements</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCLB’s highly qualified teachers requirements</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student demographic changes</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCLB’s supplemental educational services requirements</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCLB’s public school choice requirements</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ Only responses from districts that have a Reading First grant are included.

Note: Due to rounding, some rows may not total 100%.

While Reading First remained the most highly rated NCLB program in 2006 in terms of its effect on achievement, the percentage of districts that rated Reading First instructional programs as an important or very important cause of increased achievement represents a drop from the 97% that gave these responses in 2005. Although this drop may reflect a real change in districts’ views about the effectiveness of Reading First instructional programs, it may also be attributable to an overall trend of dampening enthusiasm for most of the programs or requirements listed in table 3. In this year’s survey (2006), there were slight drops in the percentages of districts rating almost all policies as important or very important, including district policies, state policies, and all but one NCLB policy. The decline in Reading First ratings might also be due to variations in the sample from 2005 to 2006.

In addition, we phrased the questions about causes of increased student achievement differently in 2005 and in 2006. In 2005, we asked whether the policies were important in raising overall student achievement and closing achievement gaps. In 2006, we asked whether policies were important in raising student achievement in reading specifically. Because of this variation in the questions, comparisons should be made tentatively. The percentage of districts rating Reading First’s assessment programs as important or very important was also slightly lower in 2006 than in 2005, but the apparent drop was not statistically significant.

INTERVIEW RESULTS

Our case study interviews provided more in-depth information about district and school experiences of the effectiveness of Reading First. Seven of nine participating districts said Reading First was effective in raising student achievement. District officials measured this success based on both the progress monitoring required by Reading First and state test scores. Many saw fluctuations in student performance but said that overall the program was effective. For example, Jennifer Varrato, coordinator for literacy in Nevada’s Clark County School District, which includes Las Vegas, made this observation:

*When we started off, we had maybe two [Reading First] schools making AYP for reading/language arts and now we have upwards of seven to eight schools making AYP for reading/language arts . . . When we look at our data across our subgroups, we know that we’re making gains in closing the gap for certain subgroups . . . of course, some more at some schools than others, but overall it’s been very beneficial in raising student achievement.*

An exception to the generally positive characterizations of Reading First came from the Fort Lupton Weld Re-8 School District in Colorado, which attributed its across-the-board decreases in student achievement to Reading First. Fort Lupton’s schools enroll anywhere from 36% to 45% English language learners, which may have some impact on the effectiveness of Reading First. Carrie Duits, assistant superintendent of student achievement, said that the Reading First program put too much focus on fluency at the expense of comprehension:

*In our experience with Reading First, word calling was as important as understanding the words. That’s not right, and our results are showing it. When the state tests our students, they want to know if students understand what they’ve read. They don’t listen to our students reading [on the state test] . . . The state cares about whether or not students understand what they read.*
Implementation Challenges

Even in districts that indicated Reading First was effective most of the time, interviewees reported challenges to implementing the program well. These included difficulties in getting schools to implement the program faithfully, teacher turnover, and student mobility. In addition, many districts reported they had to make major changes in their reading programs to comply with Reading First.

PROGRAM FIDELITY

Several interviewees said that getting teachers to use Reading First materials correctly was both difficult and essential. For example, Sid Smith, director of curriculum and instruction for the Boston Public Schools, made this comment:

“We've seen real growth in almost all the schools. I'd say in the schools where there hasn't been a growth it is definitely an issue of quality implementation. It's not the curriculum. It's not the guidelines. It's whether or not people are faithful in terms of implementing it the way we said it needs to be implemented.”

At Yucca Elementary in Palmdale, California, getting teachers to implement Reading First materials correctly has been a gradual process. Initially some teachers resisted, but over time the program has become more accepted according to Principal Hector Algeria:

“Now that things have started to work, we are all witness to the benefits of [Reading First], which gives us that much more energy and that much more buying-in . . . We know that if we can just continue to do this just a little bit better, just a little tighter, just a little bit cleaner, we can get that much bigger results from our work.”

TEACHER TURNOVER

Reading First relies on professional development to train teachers to implement the curriculum well. Often this curriculum is new to teachers. Several district administrators said that because of this reliance on professional development, teacher turnover—a general problem in many districts—is especially disruptive to Reading First. For example, at a Kansas City Reading First school that is not progressing as well as others in the district, 90% of teachers left after the first year of Reading First training, according to Jill Shackleford, superintendent of schools. Because of the school’s long history of low performance and poor reputation in the community, the school struggles with high turnover, she said, and must retrain large percentages of teachers each year.

In Oakland Unified, voluntary teacher turnover was exacerbated by forced teacher turnover in some Reading First schools in the restructuring phase of NCLB sanctions. For example, Lockwood Elementary used “replacing staff” as its response to restructuring under NCLB. Mary Pippitt Cervantes, the district’s coordinator for both preK-5 English language arts and Reading First, described what happened after Lockwood replaced staff due to restructuring:

“Lockwood [reading scores] went down in spite of all the support from Reading First. But then again, almost every teacher there was new, [along with a] brand new principal, brand new assistant principal, two brand new coaches. But they made a lot of gains in the sense that they established stability, they established a really good culture, and almost all the same teachers that were there last year have returned.”

Overall, Reading First worked well in Oakland, according to Cervantes, although large staff turnover hampered some schools in the short run.
STUDENT MOBILITY

Reading First is designed to be implemented at the school level. While some districts, including Boston, Oakland, and Palmdale, have chosen to expand Reading First to non-Reading-First schools, the program is not required to be implemented districtwide. This means that if students change schools during the early elementary years, they may not get a complete Reading First education—a situation that some case study schools viewed as problematic.

For example, in Escondido Elementary district, Jorge Antillon, the district’s Reading First coach, said that up to half of the students in some schools change schools over a two-year period. “That’s a problem,” he said, “because what you get is kids coming in from other districts that may not have Reading First, or from within our district from a non-Reading-First school, although we are working towards consistency across the entire district.”

Escondido, which is near the Mexican border, has the additional challenge of immigration. Some students enter 2nd or 3rd grade directly from Tijuana or other Mexican communities, and have no English background. “No matter what you do in those primary grades to get such students to grade-level reading ability, the catch-up plan is hampered by the missing years of instruction and the available curriculum,” Antillon said. Although district officials appreciated Reading First, Antillon noted that the program alone could not solve all students’ reading difficulties, especially if students changed schools frequently or came to school with little knowledge of English.

REQUIRED CHANGES IN READING PROGRAMS

For the past three years, CEP’s survey has asked districts with Reading First programs if they had to change their reading programs in any way to qualify for a Reading First grant. In the 2006-07 school year, 67% of Reading First districts reported they had to make changes, up slightly from the 60% of Reading First districts that gave this response last year.

Districts were asked to describe these changes in an open-ended question, to which 38 districts responded. It is important to note that responses to this question were unlikely to yield an exhaustive list of changes but instead represent the changes that district officials decided were worth mentioning. The following changes were the most common:

- More than two-thirds of districts responding to this question reported purchasing new textbooks or other reading materials. Reading First schools are required to use textbooks based on scientific research. Those districts that did not change may have already been using texts and materials based on research.

- About half of these districts reported making changes in instruction, with the majority indicating they increased time in reading. Reading First requires an uninterrupted reading block of at least 90 minutes.

- About a fourth of districts mentioned adding or changing student assessment programs.

Other changes reported by several districts included increasing or changing professional development for teachers and adding or changing interventions for struggling students.

The most frequent change, purchasing new texts or materials, was also mentioned in interviews with several case study districts. For some this was a welcome change, but others found the change disruptive. For example, in the Chicago Public Schools, Reading First schools were offered five different reading programs to choose from. Schools gave this “mixed reviews,” said Carmel Perkins, the district’s Reading First manager. If the school had an older textbook, it typically welcomed the change, Perkins noted, but other schools had different view:
Some schools had recently adopted programs, so that means their switch happened within a short timeframe . . . Not only did it waste money, but schools had to adjust to new theories and provide professional development for the teachers and the lead literacy teachers in such a short amount of time.

Expansion of Reading First

Reading First provides grant funding only for grades kindergarten through 3 in low-income, low-achieving schools that have successfully competed for Reading First grants. We learned from case studies, however, that some districts with Reading First grants used other funds to replicate Reading First instruction and assessment systems in the upper elementary grades and in some schools that did not qualify for or had not applied for Reading First funds. At the same time, states have discontinued grants to some districts and schools. Survey and interview questions explored the expansion of Reading First as well as the prevalence of discontinued grants.

EXPANSION INTO UPPER GRADES

To determine the extent of expansion into the upper grades, we asked districts to report elements of Reading First that they were using in elementary grades higher than grade 3. Their responses are shown in table 4. More than three-fourths of districts reported at least some expansion into upper grades for all the listed elements of Reading First except having a reading coach. The expense of adding a coach may be prohibitive.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element of Reading First</th>
<th>Yes, in ALL Upper Grades</th>
<th>Yes, in SOME Upper Grades</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Other / Don’t Know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Using student assessments to guide reading instruction</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using research-based reading materials and instruction</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing ongoing professional development in research-based reading instruction</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing interventions to struggling readers similar to those required by Reading First</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using a 90-minute (or more) reading block</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a reading coach</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table reads: Sixty percent of districts with Reading First grants reported using Reading First student assessments to guide reading instruction in all upper elementary school grades across the district; 23% reported using these assessments in some upper elementary grades in some or all schools; 10% reported they did not use Reading First assessments in any upper grades in any school, and 7% said they did not know or had some other way of implementing Reading First.

Note: Due to rounding, some rows may not total 100%.

Source: Center on Education Policy, February 2007, District Survey, item 54 (table RF58).
Interviews in case study districts and schools affirmed these survey findings. All but one of the case study districts had expanded Reading First into the upper grades at some schools. For example, in Boston 32 of 34 elementary schools have moved instructional and assessment systems of Reading First into grades 4 and 5. In Colorado Springs, Reading First-like instruction and materials can be found in all Reading First schools through grade 5.

Districts were quick to explain that Reading First funds cannot be used for this expansion. Instead, districts typically used Title I funds or general funds. In keeping with our survey responses, case study districts sometimes said they had difficulty funding coaches for the upper grades. In Palmdale, Principal Alegria said he did not have funding for 5th and 6th grade coaches, so he said he sent the grade-level chairs from these grades to the state Reading First coach training. These teachers provide some coaching to their peers.

**EXPANSION INTO NON-READING-FIRST SCHOOLS**

To determine the extent of expansion to non-Reading-First schools, we asked districts to report which elements of Reading First they were using in non-Reading-First schools. Their responses are shown in table 5. Many districts have expanded some elements of Reading First into non-Reading-First elementary schools, with the exception of adding coaches, which may be cost-prohibitive.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element of Reading First</th>
<th>Yes, in ALL Non-Reading-First Elementary Schools</th>
<th>Yes, in SOME Non-Reading-First Elementary Schools</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Other / Don’t Know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Providing ongoing professional development in research-based reading instruction</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using student assessments to guide reading instruction</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing interventions to struggling readers similar to those required by Reading First</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using research-based reading materials and instruction</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using a 90-minute (or more) reading block in grades K-3</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a reading coach in grades K-3</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table reads: Sixty-three percent of districts with Reading First grants reported providing ongoing professional development in research-based reading instruction in all non-Reading-First elementary schools; 10% said this professional development was used in some non-Reading-First elementary schools; 20% said this professional development was not used in any non-Reading-First elementary schools; and 7% said they did not know or that the district had some other way of implementing Reading First.

*Source: Center on Education Policy, February 2007, District Survey, item 53 (table RF4B).*
Interviewees in seven of our case study districts reported that some elements of Reading First had been introduced in non-Reading-First schools. At times this was a specific district effort to replicate all elements of Reading First in non-Reading-First schools. For example, Oakland put Reading First programs in seven schools with internal district funding. Palmdale used Title I and general funds to put Reading First in all schools, although the coaching role is assumed by administrators or lead teachers in schools that do not have additional federal Reading First funds.

Other districts are implementing particular elements of Reading First in non-Reading-First schools rather than replicating the program fully. Some of these districts said they observed successes in Reading First schools and have attempted to use these successful elements of Reading First districtwide. For example, in Chicago district officials said all district elementary schools have the option over the next three years of selecting a core program from a limited number of programs, and all are using DIBELS, a Reading First student assessment system.

In some districts, the impetus to expand some elements of Reading First to non-Reading-First schools has come from principals and teachers. Mary Pippitt Cervantes of Oakland explained this development:

> We have more non-Reading-First schools wanting to participate, say, in our data nights, which are some of the things that we do with our Reading First plan. They want to come to hear some of the Reading First [presentations]. The principals and some of the lead teachers want to participate.

Jennifer Varrato noted that in Clark County, Nevada, Reading First has spread to non-Reading-First schools simply because most elements of Reading First are based on research that should be informing reading instruction regardless of whether schools get special grants:

> It's not that we want to make all of our other schools Reading First schools per se. It's that we want them all to use all of the scientifically based information that Reading First is supporting. As Reading First was coming online, our district was already really looking at the National Reading Panel and all the other reading research that was coming out. So definitely in Clark County School District, we are rolling out components that look similar to Reading First because they're based on the same philosophy and the same scientifically based information.

Our state survey data also affirm this move of Reading First elements, particularly professional development, into non-Reading-First schools. We asked states to report the number of non-Reading-First districts that participated in Reading First professional development provided by the state. A total of 44 states responded to this open-ended question, and 42 provided usable information. States reported that 3,273 non-Reading-First districts had participated in Reading First professional development. The total number was probably even greater, since the two states providing unusable data reported either the number of non-Reading-First teachers that participated or the number of non-Reading-First schools that participated.

**DISCONTINUED GRANTS**

Reading First grants may be discontinued for a variety of reasons. States may discontinue grants due to faulty implementation of the program or poor student performance. Districts and schools may opt out of the program if they no longer want to participate. Grants may also be discontinued if schools are no longer high-poverty due to changing student demographics, if schools close, or if the district leadership changes. In short, sometimes Reading
First grants are discontinued because of district and school dissatisfaction with the program or poor results. SEDL, which tracks Reading First participation for ED, does not track or report discontinued grants, so little public information is available on this issue.

To learn more about discontinuation, our survey asked state officials to report the number of discontinued grants in their state and the reasons for discontinuation. Twenty-two of 46 responding states reported that at least one grant was discontinued. Table 6 shows the number of grants discontinued for various reasons. Only 46 states responded to these questions, so the numbers in the table will vary slightly from the actual national numbers due to missing data.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for Discontinuation</th>
<th>Number Discontinued Nationally (Total for 46 States)</th>
<th>Range Among States (Lowest Number in Any State to Highest Number)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School or district closure</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>0-14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor performance*</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in leadership</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>0-11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>0-14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6. Number of Discontinued Reading First Grants Reported by States

Table reads: In the 46 states that responded to this survey question, 35 grants were discontinued because the school or district closed. The number of grants discontinued for this reason ranged from 0 in the state with the lowest number to 14 in the state with the highest number.

*The response of “poor performance” was intended to indicate poor student performance. Some states, however, may have interpreted the item to mean poor performance of school or district staff in implementing the grant, so these 12 discontinued grants may be due to either or both reasons.

Source: Center on Education Policy, State Survey, December 2006, items 56a-56e.

States that chose “other” as a response were asked to specify the reasons for discontinuation. Responses included districts that withdrew from the program voluntarily because they did not agree with the requirements of Reading First, those that refused to comply with Reading First requirements, those that withdrew due to high student performance (so they felt the grant was no longer needed), those whose Reading First school merged with another school due to declining enrollments, and those whose Reading First school split into two or more schools due to rising enrollments.

As shown in table 6, the number of discontinued grants is relatively low in all categories and in total. This is another indicator that district and school satisfaction with Reading First is relatively high. It also suggests that states, for the most part, have been satisfied with district and school implementation and student results.

Not all states are satisfied, however. In the state that discontinued 10 grants due to poor performance, for example, Reading First seems not be working as well as in states that did not discontinue any grants due to poor performance. Similarly, in a state where several schools or districts have opted out of Reading First, the program may not have buy-in from districts and schools.
While the majority of our case study districts reported continuing or completing their Reading First grants, Fort Lupton reported opting out. Carrie Duits explained why:

*We felt, based on our statewide testing results, that we needed to make some decisions that would not be allowable within the Reading First guidelines in our state. And we felt that if we were to accept the money, we would need to follow the guidelines exactly the way they wanted us to.*

Fort Lupton has changed its instructional program to focus more on reading comprehension than on phonics and phonemic awareness. While opting out of Reading First appears to be the exception nationally, examining districts and schools that opt out and states with larger numbers of these districts and schools may provide important insights into Reading First.

**Coordination with Title I**

The NCLB statute does not require Reading First to be coordinated with other literacy initiatives. Still, there is considerable overlap between Reading First and Title I, the largest program authorized by NCLB, and coordination of these two programs might be beneficial. For this reason, our study examined coordination of Reading First with Title I.

Thirty-nine of the 49 states responding to a survey question about coordination said that Reading First was coordinated with Title I in their state. Of these states, 33 responded to an open-ended question asking them to describe their coordination efforts. Rather than generating an exhaustive list of collaboration activities, the responses to this open-ended question appear to highlight collaboration efforts that states thought were important to mention:

- Almost half of the 33 states reported that Title I and Reading First officials at the state, district, and/or school level attended planning meetings together, worked on a common team, or reported to a common supervisor.

- Almost a fourth of the 33 states reported that Title I and Reading First state, district, and/or school level officials either worked together to create professional development activities and/or attended these professional development activities jointly.

- Several states reported that housing Title I and Reading First officials near one another at the state department of education also facilitated collaboration.

Other forms of coordination reported by a few state officials included requiring schools and/or districts to submit school improvement plans that described how the two programs would be coordinated and requiring Title I and Reading First schools in the same district to use the same curricular and assessment materials.

While most states reported that the two programs were coordinated, open-ended responses showed that the extent of coordination varied. Some states used more than one coordination strategy. For example, one state official described a tightly coordinated effort:

*Reading First and Title I are in the same office [at the state department of education], have the same organizational structure, and have the same executive director. The two have joint meetings, conduct cooperative district/school monitoring, and collaborate on a statewide message for coaching, professional development, assessment, and scientifically based reading research.*
Other states reported their Reading First and Title I programs were coordinated less formally. One official wrote simply, “Reading First staff and Title I staff consult on a regular basis.”

As in previous years, the majority of districts (75%) reported in 2006 that they coordinated Reading First with Title I by adopting or modifying the Title I reading program to meet the requirements of Reading First. The question we asked districts was slightly more specific than the question we asked states. States were asked, Is the Reading First program coordinated with the Title I program in the state? Districts were asked, Has the district modified the Title I reading program so that it is coordinated with the materials, instruction, and/or assessment of Reading First? While it is possible that a district would modify Reading First to fit Title I, that seems unlikely, since Reading First has more specific requirements for reading instruction, curriculum, and assessment. We did not ask states about modifying the Title I reading instruction, curriculum, and assessment because the program is administered at the district level.

To collect more information about modifications, an open-ended question on our survey asked districts to describe how Title I had been changed due to Reading First. Several districts reported that Title I reading activities adopted all requirements of Reading First and that the programs are now indistinguishable. One district reported that Title I no longer provides reading instruction in K-3 Reading First schools. Because these districts modified all or no aspects of Title I to conform with Reading First, they were taken out of the subsequent analysis, which examined how districts changed isolated aspects of their Title I program in reading to conform with Reading First. These remaining 46 districts responding to this question reported modifying Title I in the following ways:

- A little more than a third changed the Title I reading curriculum to match the Reading First curriculum.
- A little more than a third adopted Title I interventions systems for struggling readers that are similar to intervention systems in Reading First.
- About a fourth used Reading First assessments in Title I.
- About a fourth had Title I teachers attend Reading First professional development.

Other changes reported by less than a fourth of these districts were aligning Title I instruction with Reading First instruction, using Title I to add a coach in non-Reading-First grades or schools, increasing the time required for reading, and coordinating the uses of funds in the two programs.

Findings from case study interviews supported our district survey findings. All nine case study districts reported that Title I was coordinated with Reading First. As in survey districts, case study districts said that elements of Reading First—including curricula, intervention systems, assessments, and professional development—were being used in Title I. In several instances, district officials noted that Reading First provided information about research-based content for district literacy programs, while Title I provided the funds to purchase that content. This was the case in Escondido, according to Jorge Antillon:

The goals of Title I in our district are very much in line with exactly what we’re doing in Reading First because we’re, of course, focusing on struggling readers. Reading First offers us the “what to do” and Title I funds support the “how to do it” throughout the district.
In our 2006 report on Reading First, we reported that Expanding the Reach, an ED-funded initiative, aimed to bring Reading First instructional and assessment methods to non-Reading-First Title I schools and had the potential to increase collaboration between Title I and Reading First. Although Expanding the Reach funds have been discontinued, some of that collaboration between Reading First and Title I may have continued without additional funding.

**Accuracy and Usefulness of Evaluation**

Reading First requires states and districts to collect several different types of evaluative information. First, states must require Reading First districts and schools to track individual student progress and make decisions based on this data. In addition, states engage evaluators to track progress at the state level. States must also submit data to ED for a midpoint review of the grant. Finally, ED has commissioned three national studies of Reading First.

**INDIVIDUAL STUDENT ASSESSMENT**

As discussed earlier in this report, 69% of Title I districts with Reading First grants reported that Reading First assessments were an important or very important cause of increased achievement. Similarly, all case study districts indicated that they used data from Reading First assessments and other state reading assessments to make decisions about curriculum and instruction. Most found looking at assessment data helpful. A typical comment came from Jill Shackelford of Kansas City:

> We have good reading coaches that can help teachers analyze that data, see where our weak spots are, and see where kids need to be double-dipped in fluency or vocabulary or whatever. The small flexible groups need to get intensive intervention. That’s when we’re plugging up some of those holes in instruction, so, that’s how we used the data.

Many districts reported using data from Reading First assessments for the following decisions:

- Making decisions about whole-group reading instruction, such as deciding whether an entire class needs more practice developing fluency
- Grouping students for instruction during the 90-minute reading block, especially in districts that use Title I teachers, paraprofessionals, or other educators to lead small flexible groups
- Determining interventions for struggling students who are assigned 30 minutes of additional reading instruction

Some district interviewees said that it was challenging to find time and expertise at the school level to analyze data as fully as Reading First demands. The Oakland Unified district has addressed this challenge by instituting data nights. Reading First Coordinator Mary Pippitt Cervantes described the events:

> After every benchmark on two different nights, we bring in half of the Reading First schools with their leadership team—the principal, the AP, and the lead teacher for each one of the grades—to a data night. We do a professional development piece where we model the analysis of the data from the benchmark assessment. I do this with a districtwide analysis. Then, schools have their own data they analyze.
While most districts reported analyzing data as part of Reading First and finding this analysis helpful, finding value in analyzing data did not always correspond with an endorsement of Reading First. In Fort Lupton, the district’s analysis of reading assessments showed that reading achievement was declining; according to Carrie Duits, this led the district to stop participating in Reading First.

**STATE EVALUATION**

In addition to assessing students, all states use a portion of their Reading First funds to hire outside evaluators to evaluate Reading First. These evaluations are primarily aimed at helping states improve their Reading First programs, rather than making judgments about the program’s effectiveness. Some states and evaluators have made the results of these evaluations public. These results generally show that Reading First has promising positive effects on student achievement (e.g., Dickenson, Monrad, & Johnson, 2007; Grehan, Smith, & Ross, 2006; Salzman et al., 2007).

In our case study interviews, we did not ask specifically about the usefulness of these state evaluations of Reading First. A few district officials did, however, discuss this topic when asked about evaluations of Reading First in general. Sid Smith with the Boston Public Schools made this observation about the Donahue Institute’s internal evaluation of Massachusetts Reading First:

> The initial data that we're getting, which is basically analysis of our scores as well as our implementation, has pretty much already had a positive impact on instruction . . . We've already learned a lot. As a result of the data we've gotten back, we've increasingly focused on fluency and particular comprehension strategies that we decided to ramp up.

One Chicago official, Jodi Dodds Kinner, director of elementary literacy, talked in detail about the kind of data collected by the University of Illinois and its impact on instruction:

> They gave us wonderful information that we were able to use to make adjustments to our program, adjustments at the school level as well . . . They looked at our formative assessment and screening data. They also looked at teachers’ survey information, observation information, and then they also looked at a portfolio piece where teachers submitted student work and then wrote a reflective piece.

Not all districts were as enthusiastic about the usefulness of the state evaluations. Carrie Duits of the Fort Lupton district said that the state evaluation was not really helpful:

> The people we worked with were great but the data [from DIBELS] did not really help us predict how we were going to do on the statewide testing. It wasn't about comprehension and so therefore, how could it really support any use of assessment data to guide instruction?
STATE MIDPOINT REVIEW

NCLB requires states to conduct annual evaluations and to issue a midpoint progress report to ED three years into the state grant. In addition, the law requires these midterm reports to be reviewed by an expert panel, which under the Reading First guidance is appointed by the U.S. Secretary of Education and the National Institute for Literacy. On the basis of the review, ED will determine if the state is making sufficient progress to warrant continuation of the grant.

Although ED began distributing Reading First funds in 2002 and has awarded states funding for four consecutive years, more than half of state grants were first distributed during 2003. According to ED officials, states turned in reports for the midpoint review in the fall of 2006, and reviews of these reports are being conducted.

State survey data for this study were collected from fall 2006 to January 2007; therefore, just eight states reported having undergone the midpoint review process. Two of these states said the review was very fair, in that it accurately evaluated the state reading program, and very effective, in that it provided useful information about ways to improve the reading program. Three states said the review was somewhat fair and somewhat effective in providing useful information. The other three states did not respond to the question or said they did not know. In an open-ended response, one state official wrote this about the midpoint review:

"We were given the opportunity to describe our program using statistics, scores, and narratives. Our review not only addressed student achievement. It also addressed improvement in teacher practices and teacher buy-in of the program. It indicated areas of strength and areas of need. This will help us to determine ways to further help districts/schools through professional development, monitoring, and technical assistance."

NATIONAL ASSESSMENT

As reported in our 2005 study, ED has commissioned three national studies of Reading First:

1. *Analysis of State K-3 Reading Standards and Assessments* by RMC Research Corporation and the McKenzie Group

2. *The Reading First Implementation Study* by Abt Associates


The *Analysis of State K-3 Reading Standards and Assessments* examined the relationship between state content standards and assessments and the Reading First essential components of reading instruction—phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Content standards and state assessments in a random selection of 20 states were evaluated using an expert review of state reading content standards for grades K-3 (U.S. Department of Education, 2005). The study found that Reading First’s emphasis on the five essential components of reading has not spread to all state policy. State assessments and, to a lesser extent, state standards, neglect essential components, especially phonemic awareness, phonics, and fluency, which are all difficult to assess on paper-and-pencil tests. Although most states in our study reported coordinating Title I and Reading First, and although most districts reported extending some elements of Reading First to non-Reading-First schools and grades, Reading First appears not to have spread to all state policy.
The Reading First Implementation Study examined Reading First implementation using national surveys, interviews, and databases containing Reading First grant information. Results suggested that Reading First is being implemented in schools and classrooms in accordance with the legislation (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). In particular, Reading First schools were more likely than non-Reading-First schools to have a scheduled reading block, purchase new materials that were better aligned with Reading First, provide interventions for struggling readers, employ a reading coach, and engage in extensive professional development. Reading First schools also reported receiving more technical assistance for K-3 reading than non-Reading-First schools. The researchers have not yet examined how student achievement differs in Reading First and non-Reading-First schools or how school-level implementation of Reading First affects student achievement. These subjects will be addressed in the final report due out in the summer of 2008.

The American Institutes for Research released data showing that student achievement in reading is rising in Reading First schools in many states, but provided no comparisons with non-Reading-First schools (Manzo, 2007). The other national study commissioned to explore Reading First’s effect on student achievement, The Reading First Impact Study, will assess the impact of Reading First on classroom reading instruction and student achievement (Bloom et al., 2005); results are not yet available.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Much remains unknown about Reading First’s long-term effect on student achievement. Findings from The Reading First Impact Study and the midpoint reviews should provide more information. In the meantime, it is clear that conflicts of interest and mismanagement at the federal level and in the regional Technical Assistance Centers have marred the program. Funding cuts may result from these misdeeds (Glenn & Brainard, 2007). But are these cuts justified, and should the program face major changes as the Congress revises NCLB? This, of course, is a key question policymakers must answer.

Despite conflicts and mismanagement in the upper levels of Reading First administration, our study found that the majority of states and districts with Reading First grants report that the program has helped increase student achievement in reading. Reading First has also had a broad reach. Many districts reported changing the way they teach reading to meet the requirements of Reading First. These districts also reported expanding many features of Reading First into non-Reading-First elementary schools and into the upper grades.

Based on our findings, we recommend that Congress increase funding for Reading First so that the program can be expanded into more schools and districts. However, to guard against future mismanagement and conflicts of interests, all the recommendations of the Inspector General audits should be implemented and GAO should review state criteria for grants.
References


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