



Growing Readers Program: A K-3 Literacy Professional Learning Grant

2017-2018 End-of-Year Evaluation
Report Executive Summary



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●●● Overview

The Regional Educational Service Agency (RESA) Growing Readers Program (GRP) is a K-3 literacy professional learning grant administered through the Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA). The program aims to provide consistent and high-quality professional learning to teachers on effective reading instruction to help more children read at grade level by the end of third grade. The GRP is part of GOSA's goal to invest in universal RESA initiatives that ensure all regions in Georgia are receiving high-quality, replicable professional learning.

The first iteration of the GRP was implemented during the 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 school years, and the recommendations it received through the evaluation process were used to improve the current program. The second iteration of the GRP began in the 2017-2018 school year with new schools and teachers and will continue the focus on literacy instruction for K-3 students in the same schools through the 2018-2019 school year. During the first year of the current program, each RESA identified one or more reading specialists to provide coaching support to teachers and school leaders on reading instruction and tiered interventions for struggling students.¹ Reading specialists are educators with a background in literacy instruction who were either already working for or hired by a RESA for this program.

For the 2017-2018 school year, RESAs recruited schools using the 2016 College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI) Third Grade Lexile Indicator for schools in each RESA.² Schools with Third Grade Lexile Indicators below the state average were given priority. Each RESA selected three schools to participate. Schools then selected two teachers per grade level from kindergarten to third grade to participate in the GRP. The GRP has 25 reading specialists working with 53 schools in all 16 RESAs. The second year of the current GRP will commence in 2018-2019.

●●● Program Goals

By the end of year one (Spring 2018):

- Observation data will show 75% of grant teachers effectively implement conferring.

The GRP met this goal. 98% of teachers were observed effectively conferring at the end of year one.

- 50% of students reading below the end-of-year (EOY) benchmark on the mid-year assessment will be on or above grade level at the end of the year.

The GRP was close to meeting this goal. 42% of students reading below the EOY benchmark on the mid-year assessment were on or above grade level at the EOY—only eight percentage points below target.

By the end of year two (Spring 2019):

- Observation data will show 90% of grant teachers effectively implement conferring.

The GRP is on track to meet this goal. The conferring strategies teachers were taught are sustained throughout year two.

- Observation data will show 75% of grant teachers effectively implement strategy groups.

Teachers will be taught to effectively utilize strategy groups during year two.

- 50% of students reading below the EOY benchmark on the mid-year assessment will be on or above grade level at the end of the year.

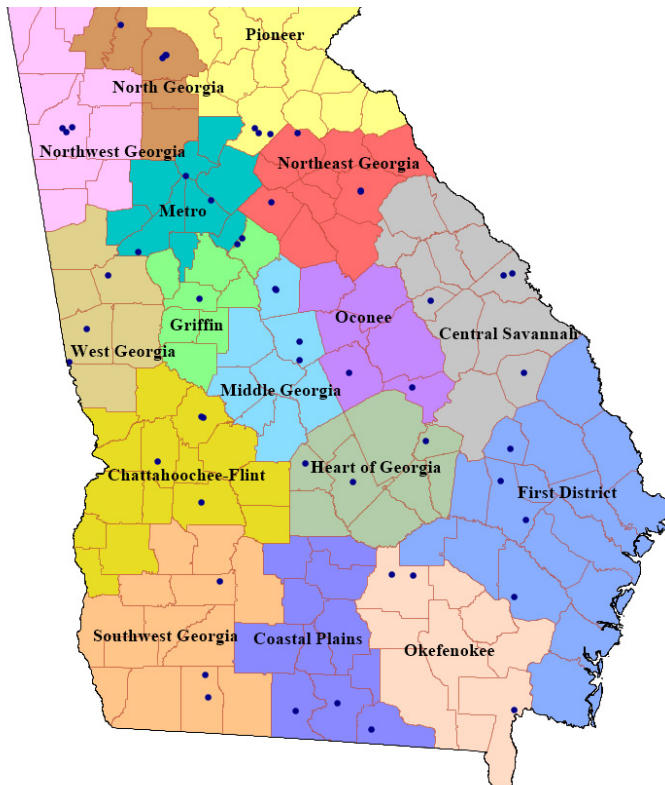
Teachers will continue to learn, teach, and reinforce additional reading strategies to grow student literacy.

- 85% of struggling readers in grant classrooms will increase reading achievement by a minimum of one year's growth.

RESA Specialists will instruct teachers on what one year's growth means for each student.

●●● Evaluation Methodology

The evaluation focuses on four areas: implementation consistency, teacher practice, RESA cohesiveness and collaboration, and student outcomes. This report presents major findings for the 2017-2018 school year from multiple evaluation instruments, including quarterly status reports, professional learning session feedback forms, EOY surveys, the Teacher Observation Tool, the Collaboration Self-Assessment Tool, and student performance measures.



●●● Major Findings

Evaluation Focus Area I:

Implementation Consistency

GOSA's Research and Evaluation team reviewed quarterly status reports and professional learning session feedback forms to evaluate implementation consistency. Key findings include:

- All RESAs implemented all components of the GRP during 2017-2018, including but not limited to the completion of three formal observations, submission of assessment data, and two professional learning sessions.
- Although the amount of contact time between participants and reading specialists varied among RESAs, the accessibility and support from each specialist was consistent across all regions.

- The two professional learning sessions trained teachers on effective reading instruction, conferencing with students, and utilizing research-based reading assessment practices.

- Responses for each professional learning session were consistently positive among all participants.

- An overwhelming number of participants stated that video examples of teachers conferencing with students would strengthen the professional learning sessions.

Evaluation Focus Area II: Teacher Practice

To assess this focus area, GOSA's Research and Evaluation team analyzed the Teacher Observation Tool for teachers and EOY surveys for teachers, coaches, and administrators. Key findings include:

- The GRP met its goal for at least 75% of teachers to conference effectively with students because 98% of teachers were observed effectively conferring at EOY.

- Teachers need additional support in establishing an effective balance of whole group instruction, small group instruction, and independent practice.

- Over 90% of teachers, administrators, and coaches felt the GRP was valuable to improving literacy instruction and were likely to continue using GRP strategies in the future.

- By the EOY, over 94% of teachers believed they were at least proficient in conferencing with students and selecting targeted interventions, compared to less than 33% at the BOY.

- On average, administrators and coaches observed a 20 percentage point increase in the percentage of teachers selecting targeted reading intervention strategies to support struggling students and using formal and informal reading assessment data to make instructional decisions.

- All participants recommended increasing the number of participants in the GRP to scale the program's impact schoolwide and proposed encouraging teachers within the program to collaborate with each other outside of professional learning sessions.

●●● Major Findings

Evaluation Focus Area III: RESA Cohesiveness and Collaboration

GOSA's Research and Evaluation team examined the cohesiveness and collaboration of RESAs through the GRP using a Collaboration Self-Assessment Tool.³ Key findings include:

- All specialists felt the GRP partnership has enabled consistent professional learning for teachers across the state.
- All specialists rated the GRP partnership as being better than other professional learning they have experienced.
- All specialists recognized that the partnership has strengthened over the three years and the shared purpose and focus among all RESAs is unique and impactful for schools.
- Specialists believe that Growing Readers is successful due to the focused work and evidence-based practices of the specialists, the off-site and on-site support they provide teachers, and the guidance and dedication

“Growing Readers is successful because it is simple, practical and easy to implement. Teachers are supported throughout the two-year period and are empowered as they constantly grow as observers of readers and reading instructors. Once the participants see the value and progress of the readers in the GRP, their mindset shifts and there is no going back.”

Evaluation Focus Area IV: Student Outcomes

GOSA's Research and Evaluation team analyzed student independent reading levels using four different leveling systems at the middle-of-year (MOY) and EOY. Although beginning-of-year (BOY) reading levels were also recorded, MOY levels were utilized as the baseline to ensure accurate reporting.⁴ The analysis focused on the percentage of all students and target

students who are meeting grade level benchmarks that the GRP team uniquely defined for each leveling system. Target students made up 62% of the population and were identified if they were below EOY grade-level benchmarks at the MOY assessment. For the purposes of the evaluation, target students represent students who were struggling readers and needed additional support. Key findings include:

- The percentage of all students meeting GRP benchmarks grew by 29 percentage points from 29% at the MOY to 58% at the EOY.
- Kindergarten saw the largest growth (47 percentage points) in the percentage of students meeting GRP benchmarks at the EOY.
- 42% of target students, who were below grade level at the MOY, met grade level benchmarks by the EOY (eight percentage points under the year one GRP goal).
- Histograms displaying changes in reading levels throughout the year indicate that, although the majority of target students were still below grade level at the EOY, many target students advanced their reading level in 2017-2018.

●●● Recommendations

Based on the major findings, some of GOSA's key recommendations include:

- Identify potential opportunities for GRP participants to collaborate with other GRP teachers within RESAs and across the state.
- Conduct formal calibration exercises with teachers to determine a student's independent reading level to improve inter-rater reliability and the validity of assessment data.
- Immerse teachers into the goal-setting process for their students and ensure they understand what one-year-growth looks like for each student.
- Develop additional communication pathways between GRP participants and RESAs, such as sharing personal contact information, to maximize the GRP's effectiveness with participating teachers and schools.

●●● Recommendations

- Revise the Teacher Observation Tool to focus on the impact of specific GRP practices and ensure that the tool measures GRP's direct and intentional impact, rather than instructional components unrelated to GRP's curriculum.
- Identify additional opportunities for teachers to reflect on their own practice and growth as a result of the GRP to encourage the development of personal and professional goals.
- Encourage teachers to internalize their personal responsibility in sustaining GRP practices after the two-year program.

●●● Next Steps

The major findings indicate that the RESAs are successfully collaborating and delivering consistent, effective professional learning in K-3 literacy instruction to teachers. As a result of the GRP, teachers are changing their reading instructional practices to incorporate new strategies such as conferencing. The percentage of students meeting GRP benchmarks has increased by 29 percentage points between the MOY and EOY of 2017-2018 to 58%. Additionally, 42% of students below grade level at the MOY met grade level benchmarks at the EOY.

GOSA will continue to collect data on implementation consistency, teacher practice, RESA cohesiveness and collaboration, and student outcomes as the GRP begins its second year in 2018-2019.



End Notes

¹ Tiered interventions are part of the Response-to-Intervention (RTI) model in which teachers provide individualized supports in addition to regular classroom instruction to students who are performing below grade level according to the student's specific needs.

² The 2016 CCRPI Third Grade Lexile Indicator was used for school recruitment because the 2017 data was not yet available.

³ Due to the RESA specialists' consistently positive responses in prior evaluations, the Collaboration Self-Assessment Tool was shortened to four targeted questions to assess the main themes of the GRP team's collaboration.

⁴ Teachers did not receive professional learning or coaching on leveling students prior to BOY benchmarking, so the GRP Design Team decided to use MOY scores for more accurate reporting.