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

2015-2016 End-of-Year Evaluation Report Executive Summary

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THE GOVERNOR'S OFFICE OF
STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

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Executive Summary

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 GRP is currently a two-year program that is being implemented during the 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 school years. Future extensions of the program are contingent upon funding availability. During the first year of the 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 2015-2016 school year, schools were recruited using the 2014 College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI) Third Grade Lexile Indicator for schools in each RESA, beginning with the lowest performing. RESAs continued recruiting until at least three but no more than six schools in each RESA agreed to participate. Schools then selected at least one teacher per grade level to participate in the GRP. The GRP has 26 reading specialists working with 61 schools in all 16 RESAs. The goal of the GRP is to provide consistent, statewide, high-quality professional learning to teachers to improve student achievement.

Program Goals

The one-year goals for the GRP, as identified in the strategic plan, include:

- Anecdotal and observation data will show 90% of teachers served effectively implement research- and/or evidence-based instructional and assessment practices.
- 85% of participating Tier 2 and Tier 3 students will increase reading achievement by a minimum of one year's growth.
- 90% of RESAs successfully implement all components of the GRP and express interest in replication.
- 80% of participating schools in the GRP will increase the percentage of students reading on grade level by the end of third grade by 10% of the

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[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.

baseline gap to 100%, as indicated by the College and Career Reading Performance Index (CCRPI) Third Grade Lexile Indicator.[2]
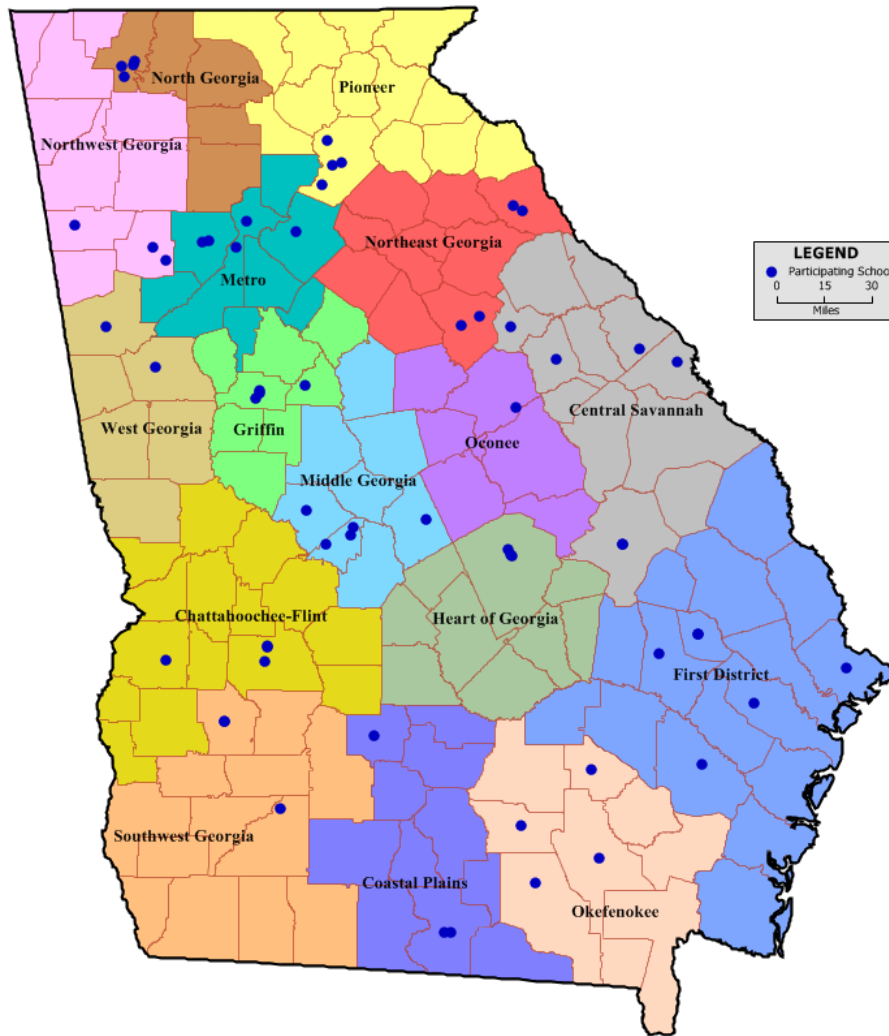
Map of Participating GRP Schools

Evaluation Methodology

GOSA developed several evaluation instruments to collect developmental and summative information on the GRP. The evaluation focuses on four areas: implementation consistency, teacher practice, RESA cohesiveness and collaboration, and student outcomes. This report presents major findings for the 2015-2016 school year from multiple evaluation instruments. Evaluation instruments include phone interviews, monthly status reports, professional learning session feedback forms, end-of-year surveys, teacher observation tools,

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[2] GOSA and the GRP team will compare the 2014 and 2016 CCRPI Third Grade Lexile Indicator. However, GOSA recognizes that 2016 CCRPI data will not be available until spring 2017, so this analysis will be included in an addendum to the 2015-2016 GRP End-of-Year report.

collaboration self-assessment tools, meeting minutes, and student performance measures.

Major Findings

Evaluation Focus Area I: Implementation Consistency

GOSA evaluated whether the GRP was consistently implemented across all RESAs. Reading specialists submitted monthly status reports to GOSA to track program implementation. GOSA also conducted phone interviews and administered a feedback survey for all three professional learning sessions with the same content delivered in each RESA. Key findings include:

- All RESAs implemented all components of the GRP as of April 2016, including the completion of three observations, submission of assessment data, and three professional learning sessions.
- Although the amount of contact time with reading specialists varied among RESAs, the accessibility and support from each specialist was consistent across all regions.
- The professional learning sessions successfully trained teachers on effective reading instruction, conferencing with students, administering assessments, and implementing targeted interventions.
- Responses for each professional learning session were consistently positive and improved after each successive session.
- By Professional Learning Session 3, over 90% of training participants agreed that the session taught useful strategies, was engaging and organized, and prepared teachers to support struggling students.
- Open-ended responses yield further evidence that the sessions were interactive, offered valuable networking and collaboration opportunities, and provided teachers with useful strategies that they could use immediately in the classroom.

Evaluation Focus Area II: Teacher Practice

GOSA and the GRP team developed a Teacher Observation Tool to evaluate whether teachers are learning and improving upon reading instructional strategies. GOSA also administered an end-of-year survey to teachers, administrators, and coaches to obtain qualitative data on the GRP's impact. Finally, GOSA conducted phone interviews with a sample of participants from each RESA. Key findings include:

- By the end of the school year, at least 90% of teachers are implementing at least one research-based strategy related to assessment and data.

- By the end of the school year, the percentage of teachers utilizing at least one research-based strategy for alignment to standards, balanced instruction, conferencing, and interventions is below the goal of 90%.
- Compared to the beginning of the school year, the percentage of teachers who are conferencing with students, using data to group students, and implementing targeted interventions grew by an average of 30 percentage points.
- Teachers need support in ensuring students are engaging with new reading instructional strategies in meaningful ways.
- Over 90% of teachers, administrators, and coaches feel the GRP is valuable to improving reading instruction practices.
- By the end of the school year, almost 100% of teachers feel at least proficient in conferencing, administering and using assessment data, and selecting targeted interventions, compared to an average of 40% of teachers at the beginning of year.

"I have more strategies to teach reading. I have new procedures to provide a productive reading environment in my classroom, and I now love teaching reading."

- On average, administrators and coaches have observed a 65 percentage point increase in the percentage of teachers who are conferencing, progress monitoring, implementing targeted interventions, balancing instruction, and sharing strategies with other teachers.
- The program exceeded participants' expectations by teaching relevant reading instruction strategies and improving teacher confidence.
- Teachers and leaders recommended increasing the number of participating teachers in the program.
- Participants also recommended shortening the length of the professional learning sessions.

Evaluation Focus Area III: RESA Cohesiveness and Collaboration

As part of GOSA's initiative to ensure RESAs provide consistent professional learning statewide, GOSA also evaluated the cohesiveness, successes, and value of the RESA partnership. GOSA developed a Collaboration Self-Assessment Tool and analyzed meeting minutes from GRP meetings to identify the following key findings:

"Consistent, quality teaching practices have been shared, practiced and implemented across the state. This is the beginning of systemic change that should spread to more and more classrooms in the schools involved in the grant work."

- All reading specialists agree that they communicate with one another, are actively engaged, understand the goals, and complete tasks.
- All specialists agree that the partnership has allowed for collaboration and networking among RESAs and consistent professional learning for teachers across the state.
- Reading specialists identified several positive impacts of the GRP, including observable changes in teacher practice, unity among RESAs, networking among teachers, schools, and districts, and increased supports for struggling readers.
- RESAs are working cohesively and frequently to produce high-quality professional learning sessions and resources that enable standardized professional learning for educators in Georgia through a unified RESA effort, which has benefitted both RESAs and the schools they serve.

Evaluation Focus Area IV: Student Outcomes

GOSA evaluated reading assessment scores for all students of participating teachers. Schools used a variety of reading assessments to monitor student growth. The analysis focused on the percent of all students who are meeting national benchmarks, which are uniquely defined for each assessment. GOSA also examined whether the gains made by Tier 2 and Tier 3 students, who are at-risk students performing below grade level, were statistically significant.[3] However, the variation in assessments and sample sizes makes it difficult to draw conclusions on how students are performing across the board. Once available, GOSA will also analyze the College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI) Third Grade Lexile Indicator to assess any changes in school performance for GRP participants after the year-long program.[4] Key findings include:

- The percentage of all students meeting national benchmarks grew by 6 percentage points from 39% at the beginning of the year to 45% at the end of the year.
- Second grade saw the largest growth in the percentage of students meeting national benchmarks.

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[3] Tier 2 consists of students who are performing below benchmark levels and are at some risk for academic failure, but who are still above levels considered to indicate a high risk for failure. Tier 3 includes students who are considered to be at high risk for failure. Each school determines its own tiering system based on student data. For more information on RTI, please visit www.rtinetwork.org.
[4] Since 2016 CCRPI data will not be available until late 2016, GOSA will release this analysis as an addendum to the 2015-2016 GRP end-of-year report.

- Large variability exists in GRP schools' student performance, largely due to the variety of assessments used.
- The percentage of Tier 2 and Tier 3 students meeting national benchmarks was 17% both at the beginning of the year and the end.
- Schools that administered assessments with numerical scales, which represents 80% of Tier 2 and 3 students, had statistically significant gains, while those without numerical scales did not have statistically significant gains. It is important to note that these differences could also partially reflect differences in characteristics of the assessments rather than just differences in outcomes. For the statistically significant gains, the effect size ranges from small to large depending on assessment.
- Given the variability among assessments and small sample sizes, GOSA cannot draw any overall conclusions on Tier 2 and 3 performance during the 2015-2016 school year.

Recommendations

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

- Streamline the student assessment data collection process from schools so data are received on time.
- Consider restructuring professional learning sessions to one-day instead of two-day trainings.
- In addition to teaching new strategies, provide teachers with support on how to ensure student are engaging with the new strategies in meaningful ways.
- Include more participants from each school without compromising the effectiveness of the GRP's current model.
- Use only assessments with numerical and equal interval scales. However, if this is not possible, all GRP schools should use the same assessment. If this assessment does not have a numerical and equal interval scale, the student outcome goals should be realigned to fit the assessment chosen.
- Develop a consistent methodology across participating schools (insofar as it aligns with RTI) for establishing cut points for placing students in Tier 2 and Tier 3 and require GRP schools to report on the methodology used.

Next Steps

The major findings indicate that the RESAs are successfully collaborating and delivering consistent, valuable professional learning in K-3 literacy instruction to teachers. As a result of the first year of the GRP, teachers have begun to change their reading instructional practices to incorporate new strategies learned from the reading specialists. The percentage of students meeting national benchmarks has increased by six percentage points over the 2015-2016 school year to 45%. Nevertheless, large variability exists in GRP schools' student performance, largely due to the variety of assessments used, making it difficult to draw overarching conclusions. Tier 2 and Tier 3 students made statistically significant gains in reading performance on assessments with numerical scores during the school year;

however, the effect size ranges from small to large depending on the assessment. GOSA will continue to collect data on implementation consistency, teacher practice, RESA cohesiveness and collaboration, and student outcomes as the GRP continues during the 2016-2017 school year.