



The Reading Mentors Program: A Language and Literacy Partnership

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

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Executive Summary

Overview

The Reading Mentors Program: A Language and Literacy Partnership (RMP) aims to improve the efficacy of kindergarten through third grade (K-3) teachers in literacy instruction through comprehensive coaching support for teachers and leaders at participating schools. Language and Literacy Specialists (LLSs) provide research-based professional learning, personalized one-on-one coaching based on individual teacher needs, and support for data-driven instruction to teachers and administrators in participating Georgia public schools. The RMP aims to build capacity and facilitate the change needed in each participating school to strengthen instructional practices and help more students read at grade level by the end of third grade.

Governor Deal first began the RMP in 2012. The 2015-2016 school year marks the beginning of the newly revamped three-year RMP that has expanded its focus to include not only conventional reading skills, but also foundational reading skills such as speaking, listening, and writing. The RMP currently serves approximately 21,000 students in 60 schools and 22 districts across the state. Participating schools submitted applications to be a part of the program. The Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA) reviews school applications, hires the RMP staff, and provides overall guidance to the program. The RMP team consists of 2 Program Managers and 17 LLSs. The LLSs work directly with teachers and leaders in approximately three to five schools each, and the Program Managers oversee and support LLSs.

Program Goals

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

- LLSs will show marked improvement in their knowledge of early literacy skills related to oral language and phonological awareness.¹
- 90% of principals and teachers indicate that they are well supported by their LLS.
- 100% of district central office staff indicate that they received timely and professional communication regarding the status of the program from their respective Program Manager.²
- Generate statistically significant increases in the percentage of students meeting grade-level benchmarks in Oral Reading Fluency on the Dynamic

¹ Phonological awareness is the ability to understand that words are comprised of different sound units.

² The RMP has two Program Managers who oversee and support the activities of the LLSs and frequently interact with all district-level program participants.

Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) Next assessment from beginning-of-year administration to end-of-year administration. The three-year goals for the RMP (to be completed by the end of the 2017-2018 school year), as identified in the strategic plan, include:

- 90% of students will be reading at or above grade level by the end of third grade.
- 95% of stakeholders (teachers, coaches, administrators, and district staff) will indicate that participation in the RMP is valuable in meeting individual teacher professional learning goals, as well as school- and/or system-level literacy goals.

Evaluation Methodology

GOSA's Evaluation team will produce annual mid-year and end-of-year reports for each year of the three-year program, as well as a summative report on the RMP as a whole at the end of the third year. GOSA's Evaluation team developed several evaluation instruments to collect information to inform developmental and summative analyses of the RMP. The evaluation focuses on three areas: program implementation, stakeholder satisfaction and impact, and student outcomes. This report presents major findings from multiple evaluation instruments for the 2015-2016 school year, as well as evaluative conclusions and recommendations. Evaluation instruments include weekly logs submitted by the LLSs, phone interviews, focus groups, end-of-year surveys, the School Literacy Needs Assessments, the Teacher Progress Monitoring Forms, and student reading performance data.

Major Findings

EVALUATION FOCUS AREA I: PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

GOSA's Evaluation team analyzed data from weekly logs completed by LLSs and conducted phone interviews and focus groups with teachers to evaluate program implementation. Key findings include:

- LLSs spent 39% of their time on supplemental LLS operations, which include conducting professional learning sessions for school faculty, gathering resources, and other administrative work.
- LLSs spent 25% of their time providing one-on-one coaching to teachers, including observations, educational discussions, and gathering resources to support teachers.
- As the 2015-2016 school year progressed, LLSs spent more time providing one-on-one coaching and less time providing data analysis and

assessment support, indicating a shift in focus from DIBELS Next training to instructional support.

- In terms of content area, LLSs spent 55% of their time on instructional strategies, 17% on assessment strategies, and 25% on data review.
- There is variation among the LLSs in how often they are able to visit schools, affecting how much face-to-face time LLSs were able to provide to each school.

EVALUATION FOCUS AREA II: STAKEHOLDER SATISFACTION AND IMPACT

GOSA's Evaluation team administered end-of-year surveys to teachers, coaches, administrators, and district staff to collect feedback on the RMP.³ GOSA's Evaluation team also conducted phone interviews and focus groups with teachers to determine stakeholder satisfaction and impact. Furthermore, GOSA's Evaluation team also analyzed findings from the School Literacy Needs Assessment and Teacher Progress Monitoring Forms to assess the impact of the RMP on school and teacher practices. Key findings include:

- Although the RMP did not meet its goal for 90% of stakeholders to indicate that they are well supported by the LLS, over 85% of coach, administrator, and district staff survey respondents feel very or extremely supported; however, only 59% of teachers who responded to the survey feel very or extremely supported by their LLS.
- The RMP is somewhat on track to meet its three-year goal for 95% of stakeholders to indicate that participation in the RMP is valuable to meeting literacy goals, as over 80% of coach, administrator, and district staff respondents feel the RMP is very or extremely valuable. However, again, only 59% of teacher respondents feel the RMP is valuable.
- 100% of district staff who responded to the survey indicated they received good or excellent professional communication from the Program Managers, but only 89% of respondents rated timeliness as good or excellent.
- All stakeholder respondents feel more proficient in reading instruction and assessment strategies, but many teachers feel the RMP is time-consuming and demanding.
- All stakeholder respondents indicated some confusion caused by misalignment between the RMP framework and other district or school initiatives.
- All stakeholder respondents recommended increasing the amount of face-to-face time with LLSs.

³ Participating coaches in the RMP have different titles depending on the school or district, and several RMP schools do not have coaches. In general, coaches provide instructional support, including literacy instruction, to teachers and staff in their schools.

- During the 2015-2016 school year, more schools became at least operational in implementing ongoing formative and summative assessments, best practices in literacy instruction, and tiered interventions for students.⁴ However, schools could use more support in establishing continuity of literacy instruction schoolwide and improving instruction through effective professional learning.
- LLSs identified 66% of teachers as proficient or exemplary in employing research-based instructional strategies to engage students in active learning and 63% of teachers as proficient or exemplary in using assessment data to drive instruction. This is an increase of 37 percentage points from the beginning of the school year.
- LLSs indicated that teachers still need support in developing higher-order thinking among students through questioning and problem solving and teaching students how to self-assess and monitor their own learning.

EVALUATION FOCUS AREA III: STUDENT OUTCOMES

GOSA's Evaluation team evaluated student performance on the DIBELS Next assessment from the beginning, middle, and end of the school year. Once available, GOSA's Evaluation team will also analyze the College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI) Third Grade Lexile indicator to evaluate any changes in school performance over time.⁵ Key findings include:

- The percentage of all students meeting DIBELS Next benchmark goals increased by only three percentage points to 62% at the end of the year, which is 28 percentage points below the RMP's three-year goal for 90% of students to be reading at or above grade level by the end of third grade.
- 43% of schools had EOY percentages of students meeting benchmarks that were greater than the overall program percentage (62%), and 52% of schools saw growth in the percentage of students meeting benchmarks.
- The percentage of students meeting benchmark goals increased for kindergarten and first grade but decreased for second and third grade.
- The RMP did not meet its goal to generate statistically significant increases in the percentage of students meeting benchmark goals in oral reading fluency, as the percentage dropped from 58% to 52% during the school year.⁶

⁴ 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.

⁵ Since 2016 CCRPI data will not be available until late 2016, GOSA will release this analysis as an addendum to the 2015-2016 RMP end-of-year report.

⁶ Only second and third graders are assessed on oral reading fluency. Oral reading fluency is measured by taking the median number of words read correctly by a student on three one-minute passages.

- The percentage of third graders meeting oral reading fluency benchmarks dropped by eight percentage points, while the percentage for second graders dropped by four percentage points.
- Students who met mid-year benchmark goals were 33% more likely to meet benchmarks goals at the end of the year than students who did not meet mid-year benchmarks.

Recommendations

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

- Establish clearer program expectations and ensure all stakeholders understand the purpose and components of the RMP.
- Improve ongoing communication with all stakeholders to ensure all parties' visions are aligned and that all needs are being met.
- Restructure LLS schedules to allow for more meaningful face-to-face time between LLSs and stakeholders. If restructuring is not sufficient, encourage frequent digital coaching with teachers, coaches, and administrators to maximize LLS accessibility when LLSs are not in schools.
- Revise program expectations to accommodate competing responsibilities for teachers, coaches, and administrators, or provide increased support to stakeholders on how to implement RMP practices without feeling overwhelmed.
- Provide schoolwide support on how to establish continuity of literacy instruction across the curriculum, and make sure professional learning is meaningful and effective.
- Support teachers in ensuring students are actively and meaningfully engaged in their own learning through student self-assessment and higher-order thinking.
- Identify target areas of deficiency for each grade level in each school and provide extensive support to teachers on how to address each target area, with additional support aimed towards second and third grade teachers and students.
- Establish oral reading fluency as a professional learning priority for LLSs, teachers, coaches, and administrators to support stronger oral reading fluency development among students.

Next Steps

The major findings indicate that the RMP is having some impact on reading instruction and assessment strategies in participating schools, but that there is still room for growth over the remainder of the three-year program. Teachers, coaches, administrators, and district staff are learning and implementing research-based reading instructional strategies and frequently collecting and analyzing student

data to guide instruction. However, teachers feel overwhelmed by program expectations, and all stakeholders would like more time with LLSs. Schools still need support in establishing well-rounded literacy environments, especially in terms of continuous literacy instruction across the curriculum and professional learning. Additionally, there was only a slight increase in the percentage of students meeting benchmark goals by the end of the year, and the percentage of students meeting benchmark goals in oral reading fluency declined.

GOSA's Evaluation team will continue to use consistent evaluation instruments to collect data on program implementation, stakeholder satisfaction and impact, and student outcomes for each year of the three-year program. The annual mid-year and end-of-year reports will monitor any growth and inform ongoing program developments. The summative report at the end of the RMP will evaluate any three-year trends and the program's overall impact.