

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

2016-2017 Mid-Year Evaluation Summary

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Mid-Year Evaluation 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. Schools then selected at least one teacher per grade level to participate in the GRP. For the 2016-2017 school year, participating schools were allowed to select additional teachers to participate in the GRP. If a school chose not to continue in 2016-2017, reading specialists recruited new schools. The GRP now has 25 reading specialists working with 65 schools in all 16 RESAs.

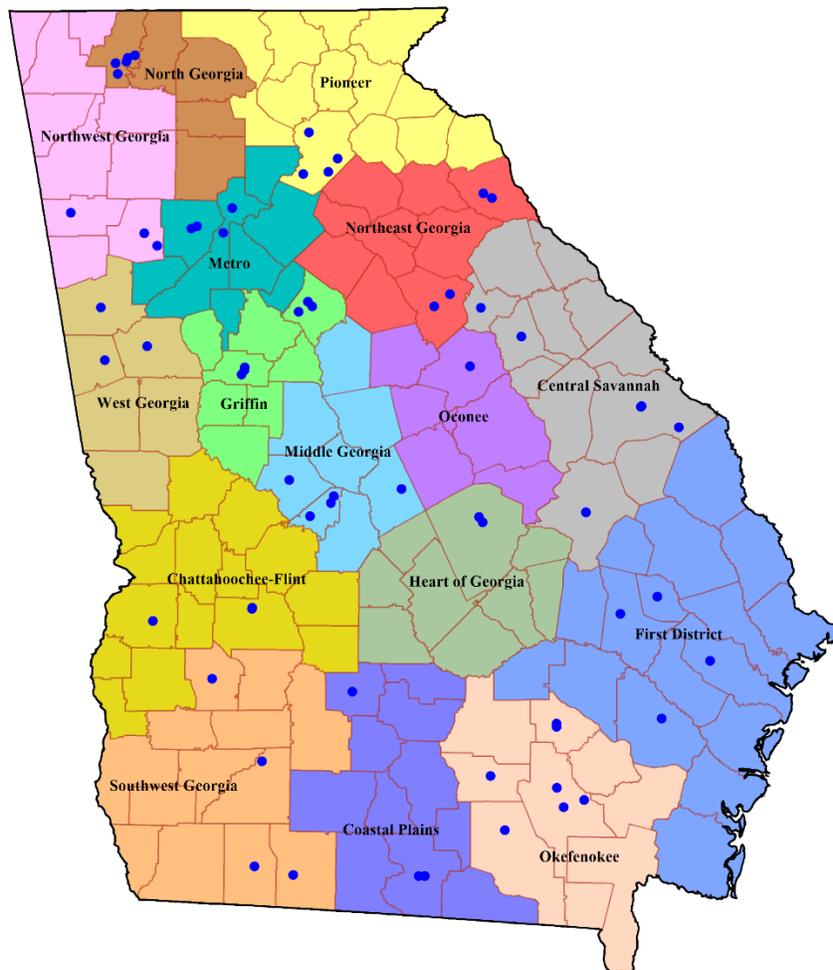
Program Goals

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

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 summary presents preliminary findings for the 2016-2017 school year from multiple evaluation instruments. Evaluation instruments include quarterly status reports, professional learning session feedback forms, teacher observation tools, returning teacher self-assessment tools, collaboration self-assessment tools, and student independent reading levels. The

² For schools who entered the GRP in 2015-2016, GOSA and the GRP team will compare the 2014 and 2016 CCRPI Third Grade Lexile Indicator. This analysis will be included in an addendum to the 2015-2016 GRP End-of-Year report. For schools who entered the GRP in 2016-2017, GOSA will release an addendum to the 2016-2017 GRP End-of-Year report when the data are available.

2016-2017 mid-year summary provides an overall status update of the GRP's implementation so far, and the 2016-2017 end-of-year report will provide more evaluative conclusions and recommendations.

Preliminary Findings

Evaluation Focus Area I: Implementation Consistency

GOSA analyzed data from quarterly status reports submitted by the reading specialists to track program implementation. GOSA also administered a feedback survey for the professional learning sessions delivered to new and returning teachers. New teachers complete Sessions One, Two, and Three during the school year. Returning teachers complete Sessions Four and Five. As of December 2016, specialists only delivered Sessions One and Four. Preliminary findings include:

- All RESAs are implementing all components of the GRP as of December 2016, including the completion of baseline observations, baseline assessments, and the delivery of Professional Learning Session One to new teachers and Session Four to returning teachers.
- Approximately 90% of participants in Session One and Session Four agreed that the sessions taught useful strategies, were engaging and organized, and prepared teachers to support struggling students.
- The percentages of new teachers who felt positively about Session One were slightly higher than the percentages of returning teachers who felt positively about Session Four.
- Open-ended responses yield further evidence that both Session One and Session Four were interactive, offered valuable networking and opportunities to practice, and provided teachers with useful strategies that they could use immediately in the classroom with struggling readers.
- The positive feedback from both Sessions One and Four indicate the program is on track to meet its goal for 90% of RESAs to successfully implement all components of the GRP.

Evaluation Focus Area II: Teacher Practice

GOSA and the GRP team developed a Teacher Observation Tool to evaluate whether new teachers are learning and improving upon reading instructional strategies. GOSA and the GRP team also developed a Returning Teacher Self-Assessment Tool to collect information on whether returning teachers are still

implementing the reading instructional strategies learned in the program's first year.³ Preliminary findings include:

- 61% of new teachers had lessons that were aligned to the Georgia Standards of Excellence (GSE) and the five components of reading.⁴
- 23% of new teachers were observed using an effective balance of whole group instruction, small group instruction, and independent practice, which is below the program goal of 90%.
- The percentage of new teachers observed conferencing with students during the reading block (16%) is also significantly lower than the program goal of 90%.
- New teachers need support in using assessment data to differentiate instruction through flexible groups, assigning students appropriately leveled texts, and implementing strategy groups.
- 49% of returning teachers use whole group instruction, small group instruction, and independent reading on a daily basis, which is more than double the percentage of new teachers but still lower than the goal of 90%.
- Half of returning teachers conference at least three times a week with struggling readers.
- The majority of returning teachers felt confident in creating and implementing strategy groups, but they need support in how to provide students with specific follow-up plans.
- Open-ended responses reveal that returning teachers need support in effectively managing their time to practice and implement all of the GRP strategies successfully.

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 and analyzed a Collaboration Self-Assessment Tool and attended GRP meetings to identify the following preliminary findings:

³ Due to time restraints, reading specialists only conduct and submit formal observation data for new teachers. Reading specialists provide support to returning teachers as needed outside of the professional learning sessions.

⁴ The five components of reading are phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.

“Many of our teachers have had light bulb moments when successfully implementing conferring and working with students one-on-one. Students are eager to read with their teachers and express an increase in their level of enjoyment when reading.”

- All specialists agree that meetings are positive, the GRP can adapt to challenges, the GRP has made progress towards its goals, and the GRP has fostered beneficial, collaborative relationships among RESAs.
- Specialists had the highest agreement amongst each other about the partnership’s progress towards goals and potential to impact literacy instruction in Georgia.
- Specialists had the lowest agreement amongst each other about how program goals are determined.
- Reading specialists identified several positive impacts of the GRP, including observable gains in teacher knowledge, collaboration within schools and between schools and RESAs, and the development of students’ love for reading.
- The positive responses from reading specialists indicate that the GRP is on track to meet its goal for 90% of all RESAs to express interest in program replication.
- GRP meetings and materials produced demonstrate that RESAs are working cohesively and frequently to produce high-quality professional learning sessions and resources that enable standardized professional learning for educators in Georgia.

Evaluation Focus Area IV: Student Outcomes

GOSA evaluated independent reading levels for all students of participating teachers. Schools chose one of five reading leveling systems to monitor student growth. The baseline analysis focuses on the percentage of all students who are meeting GRP grade-level benchmarks, which were uniquely defined for each leveling system by the GRP Design Team.⁵ However, the variation in leveling systems and sample sizes makes it difficult to draw conclusions on how students are performing across the board. 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.⁶ Preliminary findings include:

⁵ The grade-level benchmarks represent the target independent reading level for a student to be considered “on grade level” at the end of the school year.

⁶ For schools who entered the GRP in 2015-2016, GOSA and the GRP team will compare the 2014 and 2016 CCRPI Third Grade Lexile Indicator. This analysis will be included in an addendum to the 2015-2016 GRP End-of-Year report. For schools who entered the GRP in 2016-2017, GOSA will release an addendum to the 2016-2017 GRP End-of-Year report when the data are available.

- 10.5% of all students met GRP grade-level benchmarks at the beginning of the school year.
- Third grade had the highest percentage of students meeting GRP grade-level benchmarks (18.0%), and kindergarten had the lowest percentage (3.6%).
- Across most leveling systems, more than half of all kindergarteners were identified as unable to read the lowest text level within the leveling system.
- Large variability exists in GRP student performance across leveling systems, ranging from 16.2% of students using Reading Recovery meeting benchmarks compared to 5.0% of students using Reading A-Z meeting benchmarks.
- Large variability exists in GRP student performance by school and RESA.
- The percentage of students in returning teachers' classrooms meeting benchmarks at the beginning of the year was only slightly higher than the percentage of students meeting benchmarks in new teachers' classrooms.
- Due to the variation in reading assessments used by schools during the 2015-2016 school year, the sample size of students with reading level information from 2015-2016 was too small to report any significant findings in comparison to 2016-2017 reading levels.

Next Steps

The preliminary findings establish strong baseline data for more in-depth analysis of the GRP's impact at the end of the year. The implementation consistency findings indicate that the RESAs are successfully collaborating and delivering consistent, valuable professional learning in K-3 literacy instruction to new and returning teachers. The teacher practice findings identify target areas of need for new and returning teachers to improve reading instruction. The RESA cohesiveness and collaboration findings demonstrate that specialists agree the GRP is a strong and valuable partnership for K-3 literacy in Georgia. Finally, the student outcomes data reveal that the majority of students need to advance their independent reading level in order to meet grade-level benchmarks by the end of the year.

GOSA will continue to use consistent evaluation instruments to collect data on implementation consistency, teacher practice, RESA cohesiveness and collaboration, and student outcomes through the rest of the 2016-2017 school year. The end-of-year report will provide a more complete analysis of the GRP as a whole by including a comparison of mid-year findings with end-of-year data and additional qualitative data from surveys, interviews, and/or focus groups.