The Reading Mentors Program: A Language and Literacy Partnership

2016-2017 End-of-Year Evaluation Report Executive Summary

The Reading Mentors Program: A Language and Literacy Partnership

●●● Overview

The Reading Mentors Program: A Language and Literacy Partnership (RMP) aims to improve the efficacy of kindergarten through third grade (K-3) 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 2016-2017 school year marks the second year 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. In the second year of the program, 19 additional schools began participating in the RMP. The RMP currently serves approximately 28,000 students and 1,200 teachers in 76 schools and 23 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, selects schools, hires the RMP staff, and provides overall guidance to the program. The RMP team consists of 2 Program Managers and 18 LLSs. The LLSs work directly with teachers and leaders in approximately three to five schools each, and the Program Managers oversee and support LLSs.

●●● One Year Program Goals

• 90% of principals and teachers indicate that they are well supported by their LLS.

• 85% of teachers will indicate that they have learned a variety of instructional strategies from their respective LLS.

• 100% of the LLS team will actively coach 10 or more teachers in a virtual coaching platform.

• 100% of district central office staff will indicate that they received timely and professional communication from their respective Program Manager.[1]

• The percentage of students meeting grade-level benchmarks in oral reading fluency on the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) Next assessment will have a statistically significant increase from the beginning-of-year (BOY) administration to the end-of-year (EOY) administration.

●●● Three Year Program Goals

• 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.
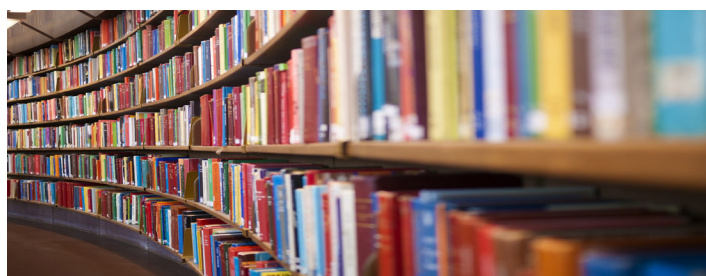
●●● Evaluation Methodology

GOSA's Research and Evaluation team produces annual mid-year summaries 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 Research and 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 2016-2017 school year, as well as evaluative conclusions and recommendations. Evaluation instruments include phone interviews, focus groups, end-of-year surveys, School Literacy Needs Assessments, Teacher Progress Monitoring Forms, and student reading performance data.

●●● Major Findings

EVALUATION FOCUS AREA I: PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

GOSA's Research and Evaluation team analyzed virtual coaching activity and conducted phone interviews and a focus group with teachers to evaluate program implementation. Key findings include:

• 89% of the LLS team (16 out of 18) actively coached ten or more teachers in a virtual coaching platform in 2016-2017, which was below the program goal of 100%.

• LLSs actively coached an average of 14 teachers through virtual coaching.

• LLSs provided support to participants through collaborative meetings, classroom observations, modeling, virtual coaching, and email.

• Teachers identified variation among the LLSs in how often they were able to provide face-to-face support, which may be a result of the RMP's differentiated coaching model or inconsistencies among LLSs.

EVALUATION FOCUS AREA II: STAKEHOLDER SATISFACTION AND IMPACT

To gauge this focus area, GOSA's Research and Evaluation team administered end-of-year surveys to teachers, coaches, administrators, and district staff, conducted phone interviews and a focus group with teachers, and analyzed findings from the School Literacy Needs Assessment and Teacher Progress Monitoring Forms.[2] Key findings include:

• More than 85% of coach, administrator, and district staff survey respondents felt very or extremely supported, while 77% of teachers who responded to the survey felt very or extremely supported by their LLS. These percentages fall short of the goal of 90% of stakeholders feeling well supported by the LLS,

• The RMP is on track to meet its three-year goal for 95% of administrators and district staff to indicate that participation in the RMP is valuable to meeting literacy goals, as over 90% of respondents felt the RMP is very or extremely valuable. However, the RMP is not as close to meeting the goal for teachers and coaches; only 71% of teacher respondents and 83% of coach respondents felt the RMP is valuable.

• The RMP met its goal for 100% of district staff respondents indicating they received good or excellent professional and timely communication from the Program Managers.

• All respondents felt more proficient in reading instruction and assessment strategies as a result of RMP.

• Many participants stated that the lack of time to implement RMP practices in the classroom due to competing district initiatives was a major challenge.

• Some participants identified limited LLS availability and LLS mid-year turnover as additional challenges.

• School administrators reported the greatest growth (18 percentage points) from BOY to EOY in regularly using professional learning to improve instruction as a result of the RMP.
school year.

●●● Major Findings

EVALUATION FOCUS AREA II: STAKEHOLDER SATISFACTION AND IMPACT (CONT.)

• Schools could use more support in establishing a consistent literacy focus schoolwide and identifying strategies to support struggling readers.

• LLSs identified 70% of teachers as proficient or exemplary in employing research-based instructional strategies to engage students in active learning and 62% of teachers as proficient or exemplary in using assessment data to drive instruction. This is an increase of over 30 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 as well as

EVALUATION FOCUS AREA III: STUDENT OUTCOMES

GOSA's Research and Evaluation team evaluated student performance on the DIBELS Next assessment from the beginning, middle, and end of the school year. Once available, GOSA's Research and Evaluation team will also analyze the 2016-2017 College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI) Third Grade Lexile indicator to evaluate any changes in school performance over time.[3] Key findings include:

• The percentage of all students meeting DIBELS Next benchmark goals increased by only 0.2 percentage points to 55% at the end of the year, which is 35 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.

• 49% 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 53% to 46% during the school year.[4]

• The percentage of students meeting EOY benchmarks in 2016-2017 (55%) was 6.5 percentage points lower than the percentage of students meeting EOY benchmarks in 2015-2016.

• The percentage of students meeting EOY oral reading fluency benchmarks in 2016-2017 (46%) was six percentage points lower than the percentage of students meeting EOY oral reading fluency benchmarks in 2015-2016.

• For students who have DIBELS Next scores in both years, the percentage of students meeting benchmarks increased in 2015-2016 but decreased during 2016-2017.

• 59% of students in Stage 2 schools that began the RMP in 2015-2016 met EOY benchmarks compared to 43% of students in Stage 1 schools that began the RMP in 2016-2017. However, the percentage of students meeting benchmarks did not grow from BOY to EOY in Stage 2 schools.

●●● Recommendations

Based on the major findings, the Research and Evaluation team recommends the following actions:

• Ensure district staff are aware when RMP implementation expectations do not align with district initiatives, especially with regards to reading assessments, to address redundant or inconsistent messages to schools.

• Annually communicate clear and consistent program expectations to all participants, including teachers, coaches, administrators, and district staff, at the start of each school year.

• Encourage participants to utilize virtual coaching as an additional means to engage with LLSs.acy instruction across the curriculum.

• Monitor LLS feedback through virtual coaching to ensure it is equally as beneficial to teachers as on-site support.

• Build the capacity of schools' Literacy Leadership Teams to facilitate consistent literacy instruction across the curriculum.

• Support teachers in ensuring students are actively and meaningfully engaged in their own learning through student self-assessment and higher-order thinking.

• Conduct longitudinal analyses of RMP students at the school-, grade-, and teacher-level to identify potential areas of deficiency by school.

• Develop targeted professional learning content that addresses areas of deficiency identified through program data.

• Prioritize oral reading fluency as a major professional learning focus area for LLSs and participants.

• Help schools develop sustainability plans for achieving and maintaining improvements in reading performance.

●●● 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 that conflict with district initiatives, 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. 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. Additionally, for students that have been in the program for two years, student performance has declined.

GOSA's Research and 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 summaries 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.

End Notes

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

[2] 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.

[3] 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.

[4] 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.