

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

2016-2017 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.

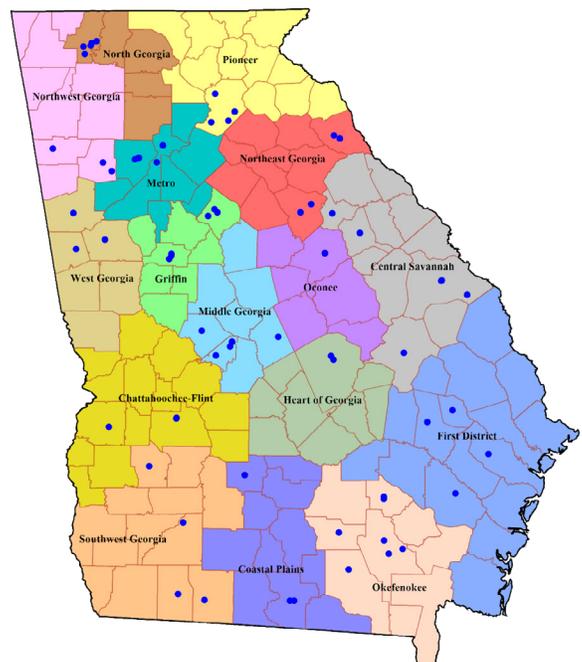
The GRP is a two-year program implemented during the 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 school years. During the first year of the program, each RESA identified one or more reading specialists to provide coaching support to teachers and school leaders on reading instruction and tiered interventions for struggling 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. For the 2016-2017 school year, schools could choose to remain in the program and/or add an additional teacher per grade level. In RESAs with schools that chose not to continue with the program, new schools were recruited using the same criteria in 2015-2016.² The GRP has 26 reading specialists working with 65 schools in all 16 RESAs. Participants who began the

GRP in 2016-2017 are referred to as year one participants, and participants who began the GRP in 2015-2016 are year two participants.

●●● Program Goals

- 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 will 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 baseline gap to 100%, as indicated by the College and Career Reading Performance Index (CCRPI) Third Grade Lexile Indicator.³



●●● 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 2016-2017 school year from multiple evaluation instruments, including phone interviews, quarterly status reports, professional learning session feedback forms, end-of-year surveys, the Teacher Observation Tool, the Year Two Teacher Self-Assessment, the Collaboration Self-Assessment Tool, and student performance measures.

●●● Major Findings

Evaluation Focus Area I:

Implementation Consistency

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

- All RESAs implemented all components of the GRP during 2016-2017, including but not limited to the completion of three observations, submission of assessment data, and five 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 among all participants.
- On average, the percentage of year one participants (94%) who felt the professional learning sessions were useful, engaging, and well-executed compared to year two participants was slightly higher than the percentage of year two participants (92%).
- An overwhelming majority of participants agreed in phone interviews and on each session's feedback form that the GRP is teaching them new strategies to use in the classroom to support struggling readers.

Evaluation Focus Area II: Teacher Practice

GOSA's Research and Evaluation team used the Teacher Observation Tool for year one teachers, Year Two Teacher Self-Assessment, end-of-year (EOY) surveys to teachers, coaches, and administrators, and phone interviews. Key findings include:

- The GRP met its goal for at least 90% of year one teachers to conference effectively with students, assess students formally and informally, and use assessment data to guide instruction. However, only 80% of year one teachers effectively implemented strategy groups to support students.
- Year one teachers need additional support in establishing an effective balance of whole group instruction, small group instruction, and independent practice, as well as more guidance on how to successfully execute strategy groups in the classroom.
- Year two teachers increased their confidence in utilizing GRP strategies and implemented independent reading time and conferences with struggling readers more often in their second year.
- 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.
- Year two teachers were slightly less satisfied with the GRP compared to year one teachers in 2016-2017. Year two teachers also felt slightly less satisfied in 2016-2017 compared to EOY survey responses from 2015-2016.
- By the EOY, over 95% of teachers believed they were at least proficient in conferencing with students and selecting targeted interventions, compared to less than 30% at the BOY.
- On average, administrators and coaches observed a 70 percentage point increase in the percentage of teachers conferencing with students, using assessment data to inform instruction, implementing targeted interventions, balancing instructional formats, and sharing strategies with other teachers.
- All participants recommended increasing the number of participants in the GRP to scale schoolwide.

●●● 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. Key findings include:

- All specialists felt the GRP partnership has enabled consistent professional learning for teachers across the state and is likely to impact K-3 literacy instruction in Georgia.
- All specialists agree that the partnership has allowed for collaboration and networking among RESAs that will lead to outcomes otherwise not achievable by one RESA alone.
- Reading specialists were not as cohesive in their feelings about the partnership's functionality and capacity at the EOY compared to MOY.⁴ The percentage of specialists who agreed that meetings were at a convenient time and location, and that the partnership dealt with conflict in a positive way, dropped by ten percentage points from MOY to EOY.
- All specialists recognized that the partnership has strengthened over the two years, and the shared purpose and focus among all RESAs is unique and impactful for schools.

Evaluation Focus Area IV: Student Outcomes

GOSA's Research and Evaluation team analyzed student independent reading levels using five different leveling systems at the BOY, MOY, and EOY. The analysis focused on the percentage of all students who are meeting grade level benchmarks that the GRP team uniquely defined for each leveling system. GOSA also examined any gains made by Tier 2 and Tier 3 students by identifying target students who were performing below grade level at the BOY.⁵ Although not explicitly Tier 2 or Tier 3 students, for the purposes of the evaluation, target students represent students who were struggling readers and needed additional support. Once available, GOSA's Research and Evaluation team 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 program.⁶ Key findings include:

- The percentage of all students meeting GRP benchmarks grew by 46 percentage points from 11% at the BOY to 57% at the EOY.
- Kindergarten saw the largest growth (60 percentage points) in the percentage of students meeting GRP benchmarks at the EOY.
- The percentage of students meeting EOY benchmarks in year one teachers classrooms (58%) was slightly greater than the percentage in year two teachers' classrooms (55%).
- 38% of target students, who were below grade level at the BOY, met grade level benchmarks by the EOY.
- 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 2016-2017.



●●● Recommendations

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

- Revise the model for year two to allow more coaching support from reading specialists, so teachers in their second year can continue making progress.
- Restructure professional learning sessions so they are earlier in the school year and do not require as much time out of the classroom for teachers.
- Identify potential opportunities for GRP participants to collaborate with other GRP teachers within RESAs and across the state.
- Embed leadership training and capacity building into professional learning content so GRP participants can effectively sustain the work schoolwide without the reading specialist.
- Incorporate literacy block scheduling into professional learning sessions to help teachers internalize next steps and plan enough time to implement GRP strategies.
- Encourage full participation, as opposed to voluntary, from administrators and/or district staff to ensure sustainability of GRP practices in the future.

- Promote the GRP collaboration within each RESA as an exemplar of how RESAs can collaborate more in the future to address other professional learning initiatives.
- Require teachers to complete a formal calibration exercise for determining a student's independent reading level to improve inter-rater reliability and the validity of assessment data.
- Differentiate coaching support by grade level to help all K-3 teachers achieve similar gains in reading performance.

●●● 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 GRP, teachers are changing their reading instructional practices to incorporate new strategies such as conferencing and strategy groups. The percentage of students meeting GRP benchmarks has increased by 46 percentage points over the 2016-2017 school year to 57%. Additionally, 38% of students below grade level at the BOY 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 next two-year iteration in 2017-2018.

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 Some schools chose not to continue for a variety of reasons, including changes in administration or a desire to focus on other school initiatives.

³ GOSA and the GRP team will compare the 2016 and 2017 CCRPI Third Grade Lexile Indicator. However, GOSA recognizes that 2017 CCRPI data will not be available until late 2017, so this analysis will be included in an addendum to the 2016-2017 GRP End-of-Year report.

⁴ GOSA did not administer the assessment at the BOY.

⁵ Tier 2 consists 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.

⁶ Since 2017 CCRPI data will not be available until late 2017, GOSA will release this analysis as an addendum to the 2016-2017 GRP end-of-year report.