



Student Progress with America Reads

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OVERVIEW

Learning to read and write is easy for some children. About 5% of our nation's children learn to read even before schooling and without great effort. Another 20% to 30% learn to read once given formal instruction. However, for nearly 60%, learning to read presents many challenges and for almost half of those children, reading can be one of the most difficult skills to acquire.

On 1994 measures from the National Assessment of Educational Progress, 44% of fourth grade children were below basic reading levels. This evidence cuts across all ethnic and socioeconomic variables. By 12th grade, 23% of students remain below basic level. According to the National Research Council, these struggling high school readers are largely from families living in poverty.

The America Reads Challenge Act of 1997 provided funding for school and community partnerships to implement effective tutoring and training programs designed to reach children in the greatest need. We know that tutoring works. Research shows that children in tutoring programs gain academically as well as in self-confidence. Children also benefit from the individualized support and undivided attention and encouragement from tutoring.

In the mid-Atlantic region, six sub-contract grants were awarded by the Laboratory for Student Success (LSS) to tutoring programs in: Philadelphia; Washington, D.C.; Baltimore; Newark, DE; Norristown, PA; and Princeton, NJ.

These programs were selected on the basis of the following proposed characteristics: effective tutor training model, potential for improving children's reading, commitment of participating partners, management strength, staff qualifications, potential for training tutors, and ease of replicability.

Internal monitoring and evaluation mechanisms were established by each site to: (1) assess the effectiveness of tutor training, (2) determine the degree to which the programs were implementing stated goals and objectives, and (3) judge the overall impact of the tutoring programs on reading ability.

This *Spotlight* presents findings from the six sites, providing comparisons of program components, implementation results, and student outcomes relative to the program goals and objectives.

Program Components

Through on-site observation and record reviews, LSS staff gathered and rated data related to 11 program components. In addition, LSS staff conducted personal interviews and focus groups with key administrative personnel and program participants. To better enable the assessment of program components, and to provide more concise descriptions of the procedural knowledge developed at each site, a scale was devised to quantify the data. The results are summarized in the table below.

Site Reviews

Analyzing the results by site, it is apparent that there is some variability in terms of the degree to which program elements were implemented. Site C's program incorporated the most features, yielding a 67% success rate for implementing all program components at maximum levels. The remaining sites are rank-ordered as follows: site D, site B, site F, site A, and site E (refer to Table 1).

All programs focused on serving a substantial number of children and kept progress logs to document change over time. The program most highly rated in terms of incorporating the most program components (site C) was the one that had the least number of children receiving tutoring. This may have been attributed to more time available to cultivate expert tutoring and conduct data analysis to document change.

The highest ratings (>70%) among the six program sites were for: (1) maintaining updated progress logs at each session (83%); (2) tutoring the anticipated number of students as designated in the proposals (80%); and (3) individualizing tutoring to each student's needs.

Of moderate strength were program components incorporating: (1) a variety of topics when training tutors; (2) on-site supervision of tutoring sessions; (3) use of reflection sessions, where tutors would meet to review their students' progress; and (4) planned data analyses. College students in federal work-study programs had greater opportunities to meet as a group compared to community

Spotlight on Student Success is an occasional series of articles highlighting findings from the Laboratory for Student Success (LSS), the Mid-Atlantic Regional Educational Laboratory, that have significant implications for improving the academic success of students in the mid-Atlantic region. For information about the LSS and other LSS publications, contact the Laboratory for Student Success, 1301 Cecil B. Moore Avenue, Philadelphia, PA 19122-6091; telephone: (800) 892-5550; e-mail: lss@vm.temple.edu. Also visit our World Wide Web site at <http://www.temple.edu/LSS>.

volunteers who had varied schedules and responsibilities.

The programs' weaker aspects (40-50% success rate) were related to collaboration for tutors with parents and teachers. Only site A had regular contact with teachers built into their program planning. This site developed individualized objectives for students with input from their teachers. Of negative impact, this intense individualization and follow-up may have been a factor limiting the total number of students who received tutoring. Overall, tutors and teachers rarely engaged in direct dialogue about the impact of tutoring on classroom achievement. Tutors stated that they had a sense of their students' progress from the students themselves.

Some attention to the implementation of these key program elements seems warranted. It was apparent that the degree to which the observational data provided evidence varied across program features and sites. However, programmatically, it appeared that as the number of students receiving tutoring increased, teacher-tutor communication and individualized data analysis decreased.

Program Outcomes

The America Reads initiative has helped students in a variety of ways. Tutoring appears to have contributed to student progress in the six programs that served approximately 4,000 young children. In terms of improved reading

skills, as measured by the Concepts of Print Test at one site, the youngest students improved from an initial 36% accuracy rate to 53% after tutoring. The older students' ability to read improved from a 79% accuracy rate to approximately 90% after five individualized tutoring sessions. Concerning fluent reading ability, whereas no students at one program began reading fluently, 50% of the students reached that criterion level by the end of the program. Many children who entered the program unable to read words completed the program able to read beginning-level storybooks.

In terms of exposure to the program, students who received tutoring more than five hours made more substantial gains than those students tutored less than five hours. On average, the gains were about 1.5 reading levels for those receiving more tutoring.

Formal training to learn about the tutoring process was beneficial. After training, tutors' skills at record keeping and charting student progress increased from 7% accuracy to about 70% accuracy.

Impact of Tutoring

In addition to observational data and reports, surveys of participants indicated that of the 326 students who were questioned, more than 96% said tutoring helped them become a better reader and that they now want to read more. When asked, "Has your reading

changed since you started getting tutoring?" students made comments such as: "I know mostly all the words now"; "My teacher thinks I'm doing better"; "My reading is getting good; I can read hard books"; "I got better"; and "I read at home every day now". Students indicated that their tutors made them feel special and believed their progress was important. Such consideration is often cited as contributing to resilience among children (Wang & Gordon, 1994).

The parents surveyed indicated that their children seemed to be learning more from what they read. The majority of parents (72%) reported that their children now enjoyed reading at home.

These gains were found at sites where essential program features included individualized student reading plans with progress logs that were coordinated with teacher input, on-site tutor supervision, and opportunities to read high interest, appropriately leveled books. In summary, for those programs implementing features listed in the chart below, the America Reads initiative seems to have contributed to individual student's progress in reading throughout the mid-Atlantic region.

Related References

Wang, M.C., & Gordon, E.W. Eds. (1994). *Educational Resilience in Inner City America: Challenges and Prospects*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Publishers.

Table 1: Rankings of America Reads Tutor-Training Program Features Using A Five-Point Evaluation Scale

Program Location Site	Number of Children Receiving Tutoring - Rating (n=total #)	Data Analysis Pre-Testing w/ Post Testing Planned	Variety of Topics for Training Tutors	Teacher of Student Involvement	Parental/Community Involvement Regularly Planned	Reflection Sessions for Tutors	Supervision On Site	Tutor has Knowledge of Impact on Achievement	Strategies Modeled for Tutors On Site	Progress Logs Updated Each Session	Individualized to Child's Specific Needs	Overall Site Rating	Overall Success Rate for Implementing All Program Components - Per Site
Site A	3 (n=122)	2	2	4	3	1	3	2	2	4	5	31	56%
Site B	5 (n=100)	2	2	3	3	4	3	3	2	3	3	33	60%
Site C	2 (n=30)	5	5	2	3	2	3	3	3	5	4	37	67%
Site D	5 (n=521)	2	4	1	2	3	4	2	3	5	4	35	64%
Site E	5 (n=1775)	2	3	1	2	2	4	2	1	3	3	28	51%
Site F	4 (n=326)	3	4	1	1	5	2	2	2	5	3	32	58%
Overall Feature Rating	24	16	20	12	14	17	19	14	13	25	22	196	59%
Overall Success Rate for Program Feature - All Sites	80%	53%	67%	40%	47%	57%	63%	47%	43%	83%	73%	59%	

Evaluation Scale: 1=None-Not evidenced to any degree 2=Minimal or initial evidence 3=Adequate-moderately demonstrated evidence 4=Good-sufficiently demonstrated evidence 5=Excellent-exemplary evidence