

Reading Endorsement Program Evaluation (2010-2011)

Executive Summary

The Duval County Public School (DCPS) district began utilizing ‘Reading Competencies’ program in the 2007-08 school, and continued utilizing the program through the 2009-2010 school year. The overall average number of participating teachers in the program for each year was about 650. Different grade level teachers across the school district have participated in the DCPS Add-on Program for K-12 Reading Endorsement. The expectation was that teachers who obtained the reading endorsement by completing the required reading competencies would acquire the appropriate skills necessary for them to identify reading problems and raise their knowledge and skill level of all district’s content area teachers so that they can better assist students struggling to meet literacy standards in every elementary, middle and high school.

The stated legislative purpose in requiring the K-12 Reading Endorsement program has been to ensure that highly qualified teachers will be available for students needing intensive reading instruction. The purpose of this evaluation was to assess whether, and to what extent participation in DCPS Add-on Program for K-12 Reading Endorsement course participation produced a positive impact on student reading achievement by conclusion of the 2009-10 school year. The study also examined the beliefs and attitudes of teachers in relation to their reported levels of implementation of strategies taught in Reading Competency courses in classrooms. This evaluation used a mixed-methods approach in order to obtain evidence of the ways by which participating in Reading Endorsement Program courses impacted classroom teachers’ knowledge, skills, and practices in their own classrooms. Both quantitative and qualitative data for the evaluation were gathered from multiple sources including online surveys from teachers who had completed one or more Reading Competency courses between July of 2008 and December of 2010. Paired with teacher level data were students’ most recent FCAT Reading achievement data in the form of FCAT standard and developmental scale scores (2010-11 school year). For the purpose of this evaluation, teachers of students in Grades 4 through 10 who had received the professional development of interest (Reading Endorsement Competency courses in 2008-2010) were used for analysis. The rationale for this form of comparative analysis was that higher levels of achievement gains made by students of teachers completing multiple required reading endorsement courses would provide evidence to support the program’s *theory of action* which suggested that teachers completing one or more of the five required courses would be better prepared to teach

students with high levels of need at the secondary level in the area of reading. For this analysis, FCAT Developmental Scale Scores (DSS) in Reading from the spring of 2010 were used, as compared with DSS scores for the previous year, creating gain scores utilized as the primary measurement of achievement. Overall results from these analyses were that no clear pattern of increase gains could be discerned for teachers completing multiple courses of Reading Endorsement training.

Recommendations

The findings from this evaluation report suggest that while the rationale for providing this mandated endorsement program may be well-intentioned, the current evidence provided on students of teachers completing various competency courses does not provide evidence that there is a parallel improvement seen in reading achievement. Following are highlights of the findings and possible areas in which changes or actions may be needed to improve sources of evidence or the actual impact seen on teaching practice as evidenced by improvements in the reading achievement of students:

- While there is no clear pattern of greater levels of student achievement associated with the completion of multiple reading competency courses, the greatest impact appears to be related to groups of teachers who have completed between 60 and 180 hours of training. This relates to teachers completing either two or three competency courses. The question might be – *which combination of courses seem to result in the greatest gains?* This might be a question of special importance and one that is explored more deeply in the next evaluation.
- Second, a recommendation which has been made in other previous evaluations of professional development programs offered in Duval County is worth repeating and found to be relevant here as well. There is a critical need for including content-based observations of teachers in their own classrooms around the knowledge and skills taught in reading endorsement courses. Teachers need follow-up and support in the new skills and knowledge that are taught as an adjunct to their own learning, and seeing evidence of these practices taking place in classrooms is absolutely critical to assuring that there is transfer of training and that the desired outcomes of professional development are finding expression in the form of classroom teaching practice.
- Finally, the issue of providing appropriate and cost-effective methods for providing professional development opportunities for teachers is an ongoing concern. The opportunity cost of removing teachers from classrooms in order to provide them with professional development is problematic. Where mandated forms of professional development are needed, the most cost-effective and productive forms of offering this training must be constantly

reviewed and reassessed. It is recommended that alternative methods for the delivery of Reading Competency courses be evaluated from the perspective of multiple stakeholders: teacher participants, principals, and providers. At this point, it appears that possibly the most desirable delivery format may be a hybrid version of these courses that could offer options for individuals to experience portions of the course in a face-to-face fashion while completing other portions of the content as online instruction. Many teachers have stated that they prefer face to face over other modes of training, but increasing numbers of teachers are also expressing dissenting points of view. This is an area that must be constantly reassessed in light of the changing views of participants, and as new and more interactive forms of online course delivery emerge.