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Ohio's Third Grade Reading Guarantee, A Case Study of a Funded Consortium's Efforts in 2013-2014

IMPORTANCE

In June, 2012, the Ohio Legislature passed a bill requiring all third graders, with the exception of students with disabilities or English-learners, to pass the state's third grade reading exam to continue on to the fourth grade. In October, 2012, the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) provided a competitive grant for LEAs to design and implement a grades K-3 early literacy and reading intervention plan. The Case Study of a funded consortium's efforts to improve third grade proficiency in reading will provide insights into one funded consortium's implementation of Ohio's Third Grade Reading Guarantee.

BACKGROUND

Ohio is one of 13 states across the country that requires third grade students to be reading at grade level in order to be promoted to 4th grade. In October, 2012, the Ohio Department of Education announced a competitive grant to design and implement a grades K-3 early literacy and reading intervention concept that assists students in improving and enhancing their reading development and prepares them to read at grade level by the end of grade three. LEAs were able to apply for the funding either individually or through a consortium.

One funded consortium of three LEAs elected to embrace the multi-sensory Orton-Gillingham (O/G) training and resources for implementation. The areas to be investigated include the following:

1. The teachers' and administrators' feedback and buy-in regarding the O/G training;
2. The successes and challenges for implementation of the O/G instructional strategy;
3. The successes and challenges experienced in the development and maintenance of a Professional Learning Community among the consortium LEAs;
4. The progress and monitoring tools used for reading skill development;
5. Determination of reading skills improved for those students identified as underperforming and for those identified as performing on or above grade level in 2012-2013; and
6. The percentage of K-3 students identified as underperforming in 2013-2014.

RESEARCH DESIGN

A mixed method design was used to collect qualitative and quantitative data to address the 6 research areas. Interviews, classroom observations and focus groups with teachers and administrators provided data for research areas 1 – 4. The qualitative data was housed in Nvivo. The transcripts from audio files and supporting documents from each site were coded according to themes related to the research areas as well as themes that emerged from the coding process.

DATA

Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was granted in August, 2013. Two of the three members of the funded consortium agreed to participate. The third LEA determined that its K-3 teachers had too much on their plate to participate.



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PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Partial qualitative and quantitative data collection are complete. The remainder of the data collection will be completed by the end of June, 2014. The preliminary findings for the first four research areas are included below:

Training: Teachers described the training as informative, engaging and useful for students who did not respond well to current forms of reading instruction. Many indicated that they would like to repeat the training now that they have started implementation. Administrators from one LEA attended the training with the teachers. They reported that having attended the training with the teachers facilitated rich conversations after classroom observations.

Implementation Successes: Teachers reported that kindergarten students were grasping concepts faster with O/G than with previous curriculum. They felt that struggling students were able to retain information better when the tactile aspect was included. Administrators reported that the classroom groupings developed based on O/G levels provided opportunities for improvement for all levels of students. One LEA implemented an after school required reading enrichment time based on O/G progress monitoring. The enrichment included O/G activities.

Implementation Challenges: Teachers reported four types of challenges: a) supplies were not available until mid-way through fall quarter; b) school day does not allow time for full implementation of O/G; c) inconsistency of implementation throughout a building minimized effectiveness of team teaching and intervention strategies; and d) difficulty merging O/G with currently adopted LEA reading curriculum.

Administrators reported challenges regarding four topics: a) the O/G progress monitoring tool is not state approved, causing LEAs to use a monitoring tool not aligned with O/G strategies; b) LEA has not adopted O/G as the reading curriculum therefore teachers choose between using the LEA adopted curriculum or the O/G curriculum; c) sustainability will be difficult due to costs of training new hires and providing needed supplies; and d) state reporting requirements do not include TGRG reading interventions used thus minimizing administrators' awareness of programs used throughout the state to improve third grade reading proficiency.

Professional Learning Communities (PLC): PLCs were not supported for two reasons: late receipt of O/G materials for all teachers and extreme weather related cancellations and delays minimized time to develop the PLCs.

Progress and Monitoring Tools: Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA), Study Island, and Renaissance Place (STAR).

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