

# Assurances for the Sake of Our Students

*Improving Student  
Achievement in Reading  
and Language Arts!*



## California's Reading First

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# Table of Contents

<b>Executive Summary</b>	5
<b>Foreword</b>	7
<b>Assurances for the Sake of Our Students</b>	9
Introduction	9
Instructional Program	11
Provisions for Professional Development	12
Pacing Plans & Instructional Time	14
Curriculum - Embedded Assessments	17
Collaborative Dialogue	18
Roles & Responsibilities of the Site Administrator	18
Coherence with Other School Site Programs	20
Conclusion	21
<b>A Topside Perspective: A Superintendent’s Reflections on Reading Reform</b>	22
<b>A Local Perspective: The 10 Things I Learned About Literacy Initiatives</b>	26
<b>California Reading First Assurance Statements</b>	30
<b>Reading First Service Providers to LEAs &amp; Partnering Agencies</b>	32
<b>References &amp; Acknowledgements</b>	33



## Executive Summary

Reading First is a national initiative, established under the federal No Child Left Behind Act. Specifically, Reading First was authorized by Title 1, Part B, Subpart 1 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as amended by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. California has been approved to receive approximately \$900 million, over a six-year period, to improve classroom instruction in reading provided that “substantial progress” is made toward this goal. In California, Reading First represents a system of delivery based on scientific research and standards-based reading and language arts content. This encompasses effective instructional strategies, learning expectations for all students, district and school level leadership for planning, collaboration and coordination, and explicit program components, including pacing schedule, instructional time, periodic assessments and analysis, professional development for teachers and principals, and instructional support through coaches. The outcome of this system is student success in reading and language arts, specifically all students reading at or above grade level by the end of third grade.

Student success in reading is the most significant educational issue facing California’s future prosperity. Fortunately, reading/language arts has the most rigorous scientific research on how to teach all students to read proficiently. The California Reading First Plan is based on Assurances. These Assurances are designed to help districts and schools apply this research. Essentially, California’s Reading First Assurances represent the “critical success factors” for districts serious about making improvements in student achievement.

# Foreword



Within the past decade, California has embarked on a comprehensive public school reform effort that is based on a simple but profound proposition: to prepare each student to meet or exceed world-class standards for academic excellence. At the heart of this reform movement is a commitment, by both individuals and institutions, to increase academic expectations and the achievement of each student in every California public school. California's reading reforms are the foundation of this major effort. These high expectations for student achievement will not be realized unless we can effectively teach all students to become proficient readers by third grade.

California's move to a standards-based instructional system began with the adoption of academic content standards in the four core academic areas, including English-Language Arts (1997). In 1999, the State adopted a Reading/Language Arts Framework, which was followed in January 2002 by the historic adoption of English-Language Arts/English Language Development instructional materials. These materials were, for the first time, based on scientific research evidence of how to effectively teach children to read.

The California Reading First Plan is voluntary for districts that want to undertake this work. The Plan is based on the essential, critical components of a successful reading program that will allow students to reach California's high standards. These components include—scientifically-based reading materials aligned to State content standards; ongoing professional development, based on the reading materials, for teachers and principals; continuous assessment of student progress; and, using student data to inform teaching practices.

Many individuals have made significant contributions to the success of this program. They were willing to undertake this very difficult work without knowing whether they would be successful. They committed to the components through a set of Assurances. They asked serious questions about their own

schools and past practices. Is this work really possible? Can we use a program as a tool to improve teaching, and does that really lead to improved learning? Can we organize ourselves so specifically as a system, and structure our support to be coherent and effective? Can we stay focused long enough to see the results of these efforts in improved literacy levels across all groups of students?

They found the answers in their schools and classrooms where this work has been done. Through the use of regular ongoing assessments, teachers now have the data to inform them of each student's progress. For the first time in many of these schools, teachers can tell you exactly how their students are doing and how they and their colleagues are working together to improve instruction. In these schools, almost all first grade students learn to read by April. The students coming into the school remain the same, but the changes in student achievement and classroom teaching are significant. In growing numbers, those involved in this work—the teachers, principals, coaches, district staff and superintendents—believe the Assurances will help to guide this work. It is the best work we have ever done as educators.

Success in Reading First will depend on continued collaborative, coordinated, focused, and sustained actions. It will have to occur one classroom at a time and one school at a time until every one of our districts succeed. Ensuring that every child has the reading skills necessary to succeed is our moral obligation and absolute responsibility. The district, by committing to these Reading First Assurances, is making a public pledge that it will do everything in its power to accomplish this goal. And, the effect of these worthy endeavors of principals and teachers will result in student successes that will last a lifetime.

Marion Joseph  
Former Member, State Board Of Education, 1997 - 2002

## California's Promise for Success

Student success in reading is perhaps the most significant issue facing California's schools as well as our State's future prosperity. Reading is considered one of the "gateway skills" that can either provide a foundation for school and life success or a serious hurdle for individuals and groups. According to the 2003 National Assessment of Educational Progress, only 21% of California's fourth graders are reading at proficient (reading at grade level) or advanced levels. According to the Sacramento Bee (Nov. 15, 2003) "...sixty-seven percent of California's poor 4th graders scored below basic in reading (meaning they could not demonstrate partial mastery of the subject matter)." While this may be a reality today, this is not an acceptable future for our kids.

Over the next six years, through the Reading First Initiative, California has a nearly billion-dollar opportunity to improve student achievement in reading—and to do so in a way that is sustainable, repeatable, and empirically proven to be successful. The districts of Round 1 in 2002-03 and Round 2 in 2003-04, began their commitments to the Reading First Plan, with an initial 3-year grant and an opportunity to re-apply for another round of 3-year grants based on their "substantial progress" in student achievement. Based on the efforts of these 73 districts, the Reading First Initiative will touch the lives of 309,540 K-3 students in 654 schools and 15,000 teachers who will receive instructional support from over 900 instructional program coaches.

Just as learning to read requires time, repeated exposure, and sustained practice for students, this systemic change for teachers will take time. It will also require serious and sustained efforts by district and site administrators. Students who enter 1st grade under the Reading First Initiative, and those who follow them, have the greatest opportunity to succeed over a three-year period; and kindergartners over the four to six-year period. All cohorts of students will have the benefit of this focus effort throughout each of these most critical years with the realistic expectation of successfully reading by the end of 3rd grade. By fourth grade, the real progress will be apparent, and these students will contribute to a substantial change in California's reading performance.

Thus, these Assurances, for the sake of our students, hold the tremendous promise for providing equal opportunities to succeed.

# Assurances for the Sake of Our Students

## *Improving Student Achievement in Reading and Language Arts!*

The Local Educational Agency (LEA) Assurances are at the heart of Reading First for California's lowest performing schools (see the Assurances section). These Assurances embody the research-based factors and conditions that have been proven to impact student achievement. They also serve as an agreement between the state, district, and schools to take specific action. Experience has proven that cursory and general agreements are not enough. Success occurs when these Assurances are fully implemented, sustained over time, and become the everyday instructional practices for all students in every classroom, at every grade level, and throughout every year. The Assurances necessitate knowledgeable leadership, instructional support, and commitment and dedication to the goal that every student learns to read by the end of 3rd grade. Implementing these foundational Assurances is hard work and requires intensive and sustained efforts that challenge even the most committed educators.

By design, the Reading First schools are the furthest behind and face a variety of complex challenges. To be selected as a Reading First school, the school is already failing 50% or more of its 2nd and 3rd grade students. To be successful, these students need a full and comprehensive program delivered by skillful teachers so that the needs of all students are met. Teachers have, for the first time, a key teaching tool—the district-adopted reading/language arts program. Instruction now covers, and provides practice of, the English/Language Arts Content Standards; embeds the scientifically-researched content elements and instructional strategies on how to teach reading; and offers daily lessons focused on universal access for at-risk students and practice strategies for English learners.

***Student failure is unnecessary.  
All but 2 to 5 percent of public schools'  
students can learn to read well.***

Foorman, Francis, Shaywitz, et al. 1997

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***California reading scores have shown little change since 1992.***

***In 2003, only 21% of fourth grade students are reading at a “proficient level” (grade level) or above; and 39% at “below basic” (performing two or more years below grade level).***

***In California’s high-poverty schools, 10% of the students scored at “proficient level” or above, while 67% scored at “below basic level.”***

***Of California’s ethnic groups, the percentage of students in the “below basic level” were high: 67% of Hispanics, 63% of African Americans to 32% of Asians and 31% of Anglo students. Only Alabama and Mississippi had higher percentages of low-scoring students.***

National Center for Education Statistics, 2003

Sally Shaywitz, M.D., a leading researcher, has spoken out about California’s standards-based approach:

...Educators and parents in other states should demand that their state adopt comparable standards...For this reason, I recommend the two reading programs that have been adopted by California...These programs are complete and incorporate each of the elements of an effective reading program, including phonemic awareness, phonics taught systematically and explicitly, spelling, sight words, stories to read aloud and silently, fluency practice, writing, and strategies for building vocabulary and developing comprehension. If your school is using a program that has been adopted by the State of California, you are in good hands. Your child will learn to read.

Compounding the challenges of implementation, our Reading First schools are unusually tough places for teachers to teach and for students to learn. Many of these schools are large and have spent years without a coherent focus. Many of these schools experience a change in teachers each year. Often teachers believe that because the students come from diverse and possibly poor backgrounds, they cannot achieve at a rate equal to students in more affluent areas. The Assurances, when fully and completely implemented, will empower the district and its teachers to believe that all students, regardless of socio-economic status, have the potential to meet or exceed the English/Language Arts Content Standards.

Research into failing schools reveals that fragmented, unsystematic instruction is all too common. These schools often use diverse, though well-intended interventions, supplemental programs, or other initiatives with the intention to become more successful. Year after year, they spend money, staff time, and other resources to support these “shotgun” initiatives. In retrospect, these schools don’t have extra time or extra money to “try things out” and hope they work. More importantly, studies show that making these diverse investments have not paid off.

A study of an improvement project in the Chicago public schools found that unless the school staff worked directly on specific academic improvement with a coherent curriculum, the results were weak and insignificant. When schools use, and hold everyone accountable for using, a common instructional framework and an integrated curriculum, assessment model, teaching strategies, and supplemental materials, higher gains in student achievement occur. This change does not happen magically. In order to reach every student, in every classroom, in every failing school, educators must implement a rigorous and systematic instructional approach that takes serious steps toward improving reading instruction. The Assurances are a road map, or guide, for successful change.

The purpose of this article is to provide a description and commentary on the key Assurances. The Assurances offer a rigorous set of actions that promise improved student achievement. However, these actions must be implemented fully, simultaneously, and relentlessly. The Assurances are similar to and parallel with the “essential program components” recently incorporated in the state-wide efforts for State intervention in improving low-performing schools (e.g. School Assistance Intervention Team [SAIT] for Program Improvement and Low Performing Schools).

## Tips: Instructional Program

We have found that full implementation of any program is a difficult and challenging task. When we began to implement the new Board-approved instructional program, it started to bring up issues around professional autonomy, accountability, job security, and other individual values. Large scale change is always difficult and usually painful—in one way or another. As is often the case, when core issues and beliefs are challenged, our school and district staff were fairly vocal in expressing their concerns. We heard many comments. “No one size fits all.” “The program is too hard for my students.” “My students need a different approach.”

In the past, we had been known to practice selective abandonment when faced with this type of resistance or when the process of getting everyone on board created too much discord. Recently, we really thought about it and talked about it. The reactions were pretty normal. And, as educators, we have very little experience with any type of full implementation—let alone one that strikes at the heart of these highly personal issues.

We now all recognize the need for making improvements to our system—and we all recognize the difficulties and complexities involved with improving the current system. The challenging part is really how to fix it; how to successfully navigate and make progress along the road to improvement. It is only when leadership has a deeper understanding of the instructional program, that we, as an educational community, can have a system that can address access and equity for all students.

Louise Waters, Associate Superintendent  
Oakland Unified School District

***Our district recognizes that a key to success is the match between what is expected and what really happens in classrooms everyday.***

Kathleen Cooper  
Associate Superintendent,  
Sacramento City USD

## Instructional Program Focus

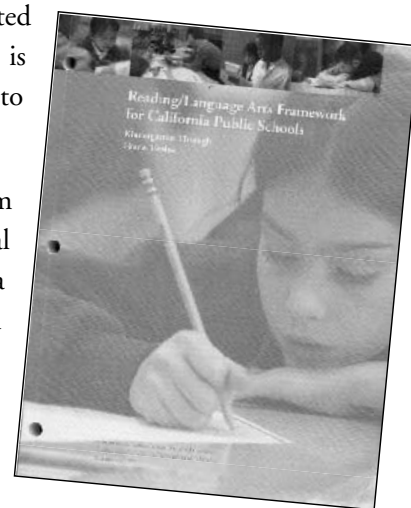
**Adopt and fully implement the district’s State-adopted K-3 instructional reading/language arts program for K-3 teachers and special education teachers; including the alternative Spanish version (if selected).**

All Reading First districts are required to adopt and fully implement a State and local Board approved reading and language arts program. In grades K-3, this means committing to teach fully either *Houghton-Mifflin: A Legacy of Literacy* or *SRA/Open Court Reading 2000* or *2002* instructional programs (or their alternative Spanish versions, per AB 1485, 2003). Through the use of the adopted program, the Reading/Language Arts Framework and English-Language Arts Content Standards are brought into the classroom.

Superintendents and School Board members have questioned the necessity of being so specific about teaching and learning through the use of an adopted reading/language arts program. In general, leaders at both the state and federal levels have supported the scientific findings on the most effective methods of teaching reading. Given that our State’s criteria for selecting reading/language arts programs are based on this scientific evidence, it becomes necessary to require the use of a common and focused program in order to provide all students a consistent education. Then too, when state and federal leaders set explicit “instructional expectations” per agreed-upon content standards and corollary accountability for student achievement, such a common program needs to be fully implemented.

The key is that the district needs to monitor whether the adopted instructional program is fully and effectively taught; all of the program’s resources are accessed and utilized; and teachers are provided with the necessary support so that all students can meet or exceed the grade-level English/Language Arts Content Standards. When taught effectively, the district’s adopted program has everything that is needed to work and has proven to increase student achievement.

Confirmation of the impact from using a common instructional program was emphasized in a recent report by *EdSource* on California’s lowest performing schools:



## Tips: Instructional Program

Full implementation of a comprehensive program across all classrooms will be a challenge for Reading First schools. In the past, we tried to bring about improvements through involving teachers in the process and buying and trying multiple approaches. Our superintendents and board members listened and encouraged our teachers to select content to emphasize. Our intention was to create stronger ownership from teachers. Unfortunately, it led to divisions among teachers and philosophies—and led us to a “student-centered” focus.

Encouraging our teachers to work solely from their individual preferences and professional knowledge worked sometimes. It worked when the teacher was very skillful, worked from deep understanding of the content standards, and consistently assumed full responsibility for the success of every student. (Sometimes, it was these outstanding teachers who objected the loudest to the full teaching of a common, adopted instructional program.) However, even with the positive experiences and teacher successes, the continued success of students was never assured. The next year, students moved on to another classroom and may not have been “so lucky.” Sometimes, the teacher was less prepared, had just an average skill level, delivered fragmented instruction, used more disorganized methods, or simply used materials based on preferences rather than standards. And, all too common, we faced the teacher beliefs that some students were incapable of achieving grade level content standards. This approach prevented us from achieving a “teacher-centered” focus, wherein the teacher took responsibility for all students learning.

We will continue to involve our teachers, but we committed to focus solely on ways to reach student results, using a common instructional program that is enhanced by teacher strategies, strengths, and collaboration toward common goals.

Now our new practices are about implementation and focus. While everything can be in place at the mechanical, superficial level, it must also be done right and in-depth. The two areas of real emphasis are: one, the monitoring of data, that is, finding the evidence, and then knowing what to do next to support achievement. And, two, protect the school from conflicting influences. The latter one is hard to do, but it is an equity issue. It is not about some succeeding—it is about all students succeeding.

Kathleen Cooper,  
Associate Superintendent, Sacramento City USD

*Among the most improved schools, a curriculum-based focus seems to make a difference. Consistent with much research, California’s school reforms have called for school-wide adoptions of a unified, well-integrated curriculum and instructional approach. This school-wide focus means that all teachers are using the same books, have had the same training on how to use the curriculum effectively, share a common set of expectations for student performance, and use the same methods to assess student progress and help students who are having trouble.*

## Provision for Professional Development

**Require, in Year 1, or the first year the teachers work at a Reading First school site, participation of all teachers (K-3 and K-12 special education) in a State approved AB 466 program (with LEA responsible for 80 hours of practicum).**

**Require in Years 2 and 3, all teachers participate in a comparable AB 466 professional development program for advancement of skills in use of adopted program and instructional strategies.**

**Require, in Year 1, or the first year the principals work at a Reading First school site, participation of all principals (K-3 elementary schools) in State approved AB 75 Module 1 curriculum.**

It is not practical or realistic to expect improved and sustained student learning based solely on the implementation of the district’s adopted instructional program. The next step is providing the support necessary to ensure effective teaching of the adopted instructional program. Sustained implementation requires initial and ongoing, high quality professional training. And training must include teachers and district and site administrators. This Assurance is the agreement that all K-3 teachers receive comprehensive training in the effective use of the adopted instructional program, (year 1: AB 466); and all site administrators receive training (year 1: AB 75, Module 1) in the content and instructional design of the adopted program. Teachers learn about the design, content, and instructional strategies embedded in the program. Site administrators learn how to effectively support and supervise teachers in their quest to improve student learning through the use of the adopted program.

Our past models of professional development seldom required, or even expected, teachers to fully implement their new learnings in the classroom. Most often, districts offered training on a supplemental basis. In the past, it was expected that teachers select trainings based on their needs for new strategies of instruction and on content perceived to meet student needs. This “picking and choosing” increased differences in teacher performance and accentuated variability in student outcomes.

## Tips: Professional Development

Most often, teachers and administrators appreciate the “required” training. It represents support for the initial implementation and access to ongoing learning. However, once back at the school, the effects of the training are different. Even with strong leadership and support, the expectation on teachers to adhere to both the instructional design and the content of the program may begin to ruffle feathers.

When we first implemented our board adopted reading/language arts instructional program and began to send teachers off to training, we had only moderate results. We heard comments from teachers, such as: “I went to the training, but I am going to modify the program to fit my class.” “Learning about it is one thing, but to really teach it the way it is written is impossible.” “My students can’t read the books, so why should I teach it?” Even our administrators made comments such as: “My teachers tell me it is not meeting the needs of the English learners in their rooms.” “I know I should visit and observe classrooms, but other demands keep getting in the way.” “I am expecting my teachers to go ahead and teach it. They just had a full five days of training and that is plenty of time to learn it.” We faced a great challenge, and an age-old problem, of transferring training into practice—and ultimately into new skills and behaviors.

Now after the second year institute and follow-up training, teachers are far more positive about their strengths with teaching reading because their students are more engaged in their learning and achievement on state measures is beginning to soar.

Celia Ayala, Director  
Pasadena Unified School District

*Teachers are not born knowing  
how to teach reading.  
Teachers have to learn how.  
Teaching reading IS rocket science.*

American Federation of Teachers, June 1999

Today, Reading First districts and others know that training on the instructional program increases the likelihood that teachers will preserve the integrity of the program and will establish professional expectations to become skillful deliverers of the program.

The preliminary data from Round 1 of the Reading First End-of-Year surveys provides insight on training practices. Every Reading First district reported that over 80% of their teachers attended the initial training (AB 466) and about half reported that over 75% of their site administrators attended Module 1 of the site administrator training (AB 75). However, the majority reported that limited follow-up training and support had occurred. Follow-up training at the school site, using the adopted instructional material, is critical to both teacher and principal alike in making gains in student achievement.

The mere sending of participants off to training usually results in a weak transfer of training into practice. To better ensure this transfer, district instructional support needs to be available to reinforce the training and assist schools as they continue to learn and implement the program back at their school site. Specifically, the district should actively participate with instructional support personnel (e.g. coaches, experts in the adopted program, instructors for review and advanced training). Should the district provide teacher-peer coaches, additional training and support is necessary for these providers so that professional development can occur in the classroom (e.g. do demonstration teaching, side-by-side teaching, and offer assistance with lesson planning).



## What About English Language Learners?

Our district faced the challenge of effectively teaching English learners (EL). When we initially adopted our reading program, we were told that all of the state-adopted materials contain a set of specific support materials with strategies for instruction designed to meet the needs of these students. We were assured that full implementation would provide each classroom with the content and context of teaching that is standards based, comprehensive, and includes proven strategies to meet the needs of diverse learners. Initially, we were not convinced that the Board-approved instructional programs would be truly effective with these students.

Despite our initial skepticism, we made a commitment to use the Board-approved reading/language arts instructional program with students who were at grade level, two or less grade levels below, and EL students. We found that being specific about the content and process of learning helped to uncover which students needed extra support to master the content. We also found, through making the commitment to fully implement the program, that there is strong support material, within the core program, designed for specific student needs such as English learners and standard English learners. The core approach of these programs really centers around how all children learn to read. By being specific about what is to be explicitly taught in all classes and by being specific about how to meet the needs of students with specific material, each Reading First district can be assured that all students, including EL students, have an equal opportunity to succeed.

Jim Morris, Assistant Superintendent,  
Los Angeles Unified School District

***The most difficult job the district  
will have is to keep the  
instructional time and require  
adherence to the pacing schedule.***

Jean Fuller, Superintendent,  
Bakersfield City Elementary School

## Pacing Plans and Instructional Time

**Assure the adopted reading/language arts program will be fully implemented and the daily instructional time will be protected from disruptions for a minimum of 2.5 hours for Grades 1-3, and 1 hour for Kindergarten, through use of a pacing schedule.**

**Develop and implement assessment plan for all Reading First schools based on valid and reliable instructional assessments from the recommended list, which includes a frequently used program monitoring assessment based on the instructional program.**

The inclusion of a district-wide pacing plan and the mandate for instructional time for reading/language arts instruction are also essential. Reading First districts are to institute a program-based, lesson-specific, pacing plan (with an instructional schedule) and ensure adherence to the mandated minimum instructional minutes appropriate for the grade level. So, what does this really mean? And why is it so important? A pacing schedule for instruction creates a uniform expectation for teachers, across classrooms, to skillfully deliver specific lessons at a rate that will maximize the potential for learning. The approved programs are designed to give students multiple opportunities to receive explicit instruction on essential skills and specific concepts. Each program (in 1st, 2nd, and 3rd grade) has 2 and 1/2 hours of core materials and 30-45 minutes for additional student practice for the teacher to use.

Pacing has been shown to be very important in learning. If the pace of instruction is slowed, then students receive fewer opportunities to practice and master a given standard. *Research has demonstrated that low achieving groups of students actually receive less content and actual instruction during the school year.* Less frequent exposure is related to depressed achievement.

The Assurance to establish a pacing schedule for instruction actually opens doors across classrooms. This utilization of a common schedule creates a system where instruction is coordinated across the grade level and all teachers are consistently teaching the standards-based program to all students.

A pacing schedule for instructional content has been perceived as unresponsive to the needs of some students. In the past, some educators have argued against pacing and believe that students learn to read and write in different ways and therefore need different approaches to learning. This assumption is false. Reading research indicates that ninety-five percent of all children learn to read exactly the same way. However, some students need a higher number of exposures to the

## Tips: Pacing Plans

Initially, in our district, pacing plans were perceived as unnecessary and unrealistic. Implementing the pacing guides has been a challenge for administrators and teachers. The pacing guides were not well understood nor perceived positively by some teachers. We heard teachers saying things like: “The program just has too much to teach.” “The teacher’s manual is hard to follow.” “The students can’t sit still that long to get to all the content.” “The small group and large group instructional sessions are not working.”

As we began to address these reactions, we also began observing classrooms. We found that the key ingredients to teachers’ success with the pacing guide are planning and preparation. Pacing creates the need to plan and prepare, which leads to better teaching, which leads to easier pacing. When we targeted planning and preparation, without giving up on the pacing, our teachers began to see improvements.

Stella Toibin,  
Assistant Superintendent, Paramount USD

same content in order to master it. *So, in essence, the real difference is the number of times a student is exposed to the material.* Together with the pacing guide, the spiraled structure of the adopted instructional program is designed specifically to meet the needs of almost all learners.

The success of the pacing schedule is dependent on the district establishing and protecting the instructional minute requirements, sometimes called “sacred time.” This “sacred time” deepens instruction and addresses the needs of particular students. While working with small groups of students, teachers can address these needs while other students practice and apply their learning in independent activities provided by the program. (See sample pacing guide below.)

### Winner Elementary School    Elementary Curriculum — Language Arts Open Court Recommended Pacing Guide

#### *Traditional Calendar*

### Third Grade

Getting Started  
5 Days  
Sept. 3 – Sept. 9

Sept. 1 – Oct. 21			Oct. 22 – Dec. 6			Dec. 9 – Feb. 3			Feb. 4 – March 28			March 31 – June 12		
Unit 1 Friendship			Unit 2 City Wildlife			Unit 3 Imagination			Unit 4 Money			Unit 6 Country Life		
Lesson	Selection	Days	Lesson	Selection	Days	Lesson	Selection	Days	Lesson	Selection	Days	Lesson	Selection	Days
1	Gloria Who Might Be My Best Friend	5	1	The Boy Who Didn't Believe	5	1	Through Granpa's Eyes	5	1	A New Coat for Anna	5	1	The County Mouse and the City Mouse	5
2	Angel Child, Dragon Child	5	2	City Critters	5	2	The Cat Who Became a Poet	5	2	Alexander, Who Used to Be Rich	5	2	Heartland	5
3	The Tree House	5	3	May Way for Ducklings	5	3	A Cloak for the Dreamer	5	3	Kids Did It! In Business	5	3	Leah's Pony	5
4	Rugby and Rosie	5	4	Urban Roosts	5	4	Picasso	5	4	The Cobbler's Song	5	4	Cows in the Parlor	5
5	Teammates	5	5	Two Days in May	5	5	The Emperor's New Clothes	5	5	Four Dollars and Fifty Cents	5	5	Just Plain Fancy	5
6	The Legend of Damon and Pythias Unit Wrap-Up	5	6	Secret Place Unit Wrap-Up	5	6	Roxaboxen Unit Wrap-Up	5	6	The Go-Around Dollar	5	6	What Ever Happened to the Baxter Place?	5
									7	Uncle Jed's Barbershop Unit Wrap-Up	5	7	If You're not from the Prairie... Unit Wrap-Up	5
Number of Lessons		6	Number of Lessons		6	Number of Lessons		6	Number of Lessons		7	Number of Lessons		7
Number of Instructional Days Allocated		30	Number of Instructional Days Allocated		30	Number of Instructional Days Allocated		30	Number of Instructional Days Allocated		35	Number of Instructional Days Allocated		35
Extra Instructional Days			Extra Instructional Days			Extra Instructional Days			Extra Instructional Days		2	Extra Instructional Days		8
													STAR TESTING	5

Unit 5, *Storytelling*, will be used in extended year programs

## Definitions

### Pacing Schedule

The purpose of a pacing schedule is to ensure that teachers in all classrooms, grade levels, and schools know when, and in what sequence, each lesson is taught. This ensures that all students receive instruction in the same content areas. The district has established and delivered to all Reading First schools a district-wide pacing schedule for the adopted reading/language arts program by grade level (and tracks if a year-round school) in accordance with the district academic calendar. The district also distributes the pacing schedule to appropriate personnel in order for district staff to be informed about the district's expectations.

### Instructional Time

The district has determined that all classrooms must have the minimum time allocations for most students and that at-risk students must have extended time for more instruction and practice.

Each school complies with and monitors implementation of minimum instructional time for the adopted reading/language "basic core" program:

K	60 minutes
1-3	2.5 hours

Each school provides the following extended time for at-risk students who need additional instruction and practice:

K	30 minutes
1-3	60 minutes

*Fewer than one child in eight who is failing to read by the end of first grade ever catches up to grade level.*

Juel, 1988,1994; Lyon & Chhabra, 1996

## Curriculum-Embedded Assessments

**Develop and implement assessment plan for all Reading First schools based on valid and reliable instructional assessments from the recommended list, which includes a frequently used program monitoring assessment based on the instructional program.**

The next Assurance focuses specifically on the effects of instruction on students. This Assurance requires the frequent use of a curriculum-embedded, program-monitoring assessment system to determine student progress and the effectiveness of instruction. Just as the use of the pacing plan and adherence to instructional minutes help ensure that the content of the program is taught, the curriculum-embedded assessment system is crucial to helping the teacher regularly assess student learning results and continually improve the delivery of instruction.

This type of an assessment system is generally referred to as criterion-referenced. It is brief and focuses on the content most recently taught in the completed unit or theme. This provides insight on the specific needs of particular students and what has been successfully taught. The professional literature and common sense indicates that to be sure of achievement, teachers need to know *frequently* whether they are meeting the needs of student groups.

Teachers must also use the data to make decisions about pace, content, and materials. The curriculum-embedded assessments serve to diagnose the adequacy of the teaching system. Without this tool, diagnostic systems are unable to improve teaching if they focus solely on individuals and are disconnected from a comprehensive, reading/

## California's Reading First

### ROUND 1 AND 2 SUBGRANTS

9 Regional Technical Assistance Centers

54 Reading First LEAs using state-provided, curriculum-embedded assessments

73 Local Educational Agencies [LEAs] 654 schools

309,540 K-3 students approximately 70% (216,678) English learners

	HOUGHTON MIFFLIN READING Coaches: 347			OPEN COURT READING Coaches: 568		
	LEAs	Schools	Classrooms	LEAs	Schools	Classrooms
Round 1	3	34	292	10	292	8,216
Round 2	45	252	5,104	15	76	1,865
Round 3	48	286	5,396	25	368	10,081

## Tips: Assessment

There is no more important tool than a curriculum-embedded assessment system to improve teaching and learning. Yet this system is often misunderstood, under-utilized, and misused. In our district, teachers initially understood that they would be held individually accountable for the data but were worried that the data would be used as a judgment of their teaching rather than focused on improving instruction.

Teachers of diverse learners were concerned because their students had historically done poorly as a group. When these teachers initially began looking at their students' scores, they tended to become frustrated, disappointed, defensive, indifferent, and quiet. Their reactions were justified. In the past, we had used diagnostic measures to improve learning without providing adequate initial and ongoing coaching and support.

I don't think our district is alone in needing to deepen knowledge of how the assessment system can be used to drive instruction and professional development. In recent decades, as educators, we have made mistakes and used data to drive discussions of individual accountability for teachers, without implementing the appropriate administrative and systemic support components such as teacher professional development, district-wide commitment, and other types of skillful on-site support. Without appropriate support to teachers and to schools, we will continue to face strong reactions and resistance to the assessment system. In our District, we have worked closely with the teacher's union to gain their support of the assessment system.

District leaders must actively support the use of this system to improve instruction. These leaders must avoid using the system to penalize teachers. Posing thoughtful questions will establish and reinforce the positive use of this system. These questions might include: 1) How are you taking positive and timely action to utilize the assessment data? 2) How is the school using the data to improve instruction? 3) If I visit your school, what activities will I see that support the positive and active use of the assessment system? 4) Do you have data that show how you worked with teachers to improve instruction? 5) Do you have data that show an improvement in student achievement?

Ronni Ephraim, Superintendent  
Local District D, Los Angeles USD

language arts program. Reading First teachers cannot afford to wait for the end-of-year assessments, or even for the tri-semester progress data, to make improvements in their instruction.

**Assure that all school sites will support regular, collaborative, grade-level teacher meetings to discuss use of the instructional program, student results on the selected assessments, and will receive additional training.**

## Collaborative Dialogue

The assessment system is specifically designed to assist teachers in collaborating with grade level colleagues to refine and deepen instruction in the subsequent unit or theme. Teachers, through engaging in this collaborative dialogue, utilize the data for planning whole and small group instruction. An example of informed instruction occurs when a teacher identifies students who are not fluent on the fluency test and plans small group support using the program materials on fluency. Optimally, the teacher is able to collaborate with colleagues across classrooms, as an act of teaching refinement, when appropriate. The assessment system supports grade level teachers working together to interpret the data and agreeing on specific teaching strategies to be rehearsed and then emphasized in the next unit or theme. The assessment system can also help to identify the learning needs of teachers and plan highly relevant professional development. The data are essential to the design of site-based or district-wide professional development or coach trainings which occur in teacher classrooms. In these settings, the focus of training is to assist teachers with improving instruction in specific areas.

**Support full implementation of the district's State adopted reading/language arts instructional program and protect the daily instructional time from disruptions for a minimum of 2.5 hours for Grades 1-3, 2.5 hours and 1 hour for Kindergarten, through the use of a pacing schedule.**

**Guide the monitoring of student progress based on the instructional program assessment and others approved by the district; and use the results to make program decisions for the purpose of maximizing student achievement.**

**Insist on and ensure the full implementation of the adopted reading/language arts program for K-3 teachers.**

**Assure that coaches are adequately prepared to serve as a peer coach to teachers implementing the adopted reading/language arts program.**

**Hold regular meetings with the reading coach; and conduct classroom observations with coach on a regular basis.**

*Those who are the best readers in high school, who read more and enjoy reading, tend to be those who learned to read well in first grade.*

Biemiller, 1977

### Teacher-Centered Strategies

Through adhering to the Assurances and measuring student achievement, we shift the focus toward teacher-centered improvement strategies, as defined by Jeanne Chall (The Academic Achievement Challenge). The process of implementation should begin to open doors and highlight the differences in teaching as a factor of achievement. We have found that low levels of achievement may reflect a lack of organized, comprehensive, and consistent instruction. Achieving success is truly more about the teaching than it is about the students. Some instructional programs allow teachers to assume a less active, or indirect, role in teaching. This leaves less direct instruction, or explicit teaching, which is related to low levels of student achievement. A coherent academic focus, sustained over time, using a common program, has been shown as an effective method to improving teaching. If we improve teaching, we improve student achievement!

If we accept that teaching contributes to the level of student achievement, the qualifying scores of our Reading First schools reflect that teachers are not consistently delivering high quality instruction in every classroom. We know, from observations and data, that there is wide variation across classrooms and grade levels, in the same schools and across schools. This reflects differences in instruction, not differences in students. Moving to a full and specific implementation of a comprehensive program means that we are asking that the content and processes be uniform in all classes. This allows us to organize the system to deliver high quality, standards-based instruction in all classrooms and to focus classroom and grade level efforts to consistently address the needs of diverse students using program-specific, research-based methods.

Betsy Eaves, Associate Chief Administrative Officer,  
Reading First California Technical Assistance Center,  
Sacramento County Office of Education

### Roles & Responsibilities of Site Administrators

Leadership Assurances focus on administrator roles and responsibilities, specifically for managing the support needs of teachers in order to sustain school-wide success. These include monitoring and supporting program-specific collaborative planning time, technical assistance to teachers in the form of coaches or other support persons, coordination of instruction across other intervention programs which may be colliding with the reading program innovation, and ongoing learning through collegial meetings and trainings.

One of the most important findings in successful districts is that teachers who plan and take time to prepare for instruction are those who teach most effectively. Reading First Assurances ask site administrators to ensure planning time. Specifically, this means making time for grade-level meeting time for K-3 teachers, to plan instruction, coordinate resources, analyze data, and participate in site-based professional development. School administrators and teachers must create shared responsibility for these activities and accept joint accountability for professional improvement.

Skillful leadership requires on-going technical assistance in classrooms and across schools. One option that Reading First districts have used is to hire coaches (teachers on special assignment) to assist other teachers with implementation and how to be successful with diverse student groups. However, coaches and instructional support providers (district specialists and/or instructional program experts) do not become automatic precursors to success. Experience with coaches indicates that site administrators must take an active role in working with the coach and other support providers to ensure that the system of improvement for teachers is actually working as designed. District and site administrators must take several actions to provide instructional leadership and sustain the focus, momentum, and the time-consuming work to monitor and encourage teachers to effectively instruct.

One action to take is to establish the explicit expectation for each teacher to fully, and skillfully, implement the adopted instructional program. Typically, coaches or other district instructional support staff, do not have the authority to enforce compliance of teachers with the explicit expectation. If the coach, or other support staff, become the enforcer—the school's work will seriously falter. The site administrators, on the other hand, can be specific and direct about instructional expectations. Site leaders must be able to assess levels of implementation and assume an active role in supporting improve-

## Tips: Leadership Support

Support is essential. Often, in the organization of school districts, there is one line of administration that is responsible for curriculum and instruction and another line of administration that supervises schools. Regardless of how the responsibility is split or shared across the district's administration, the curriculum leadership and the person who supervises the principals of the Reading First schools must be knowledgeable about the structure and goals of Reading First. Otherwise, the message received by the principal will be "...this is just a grant that we are expected to do on the side and not a system of reform for the sake of the students we serve."

If this is the case, it is likely that principals say "...the district expects me to implement this grant program and to manage other categorical programs, but the way it looks to me these programs are different and are in conflict." Or sometimes principals say "...we have planning days, but I keep getting items that have to be put on the staff meeting agenda that we are required to discuss so we are going to use some of our Reading First time to cover other business."

Our principals, through AB 75 training and district follow-up efforts, are assuming more responsibility for their teachers' full implementation of the adopted program and in actively using the data from each 3 to 6 week assessment period. Also, principals are enthusiastically assisting their site coach in giving support to all teachers and are supporting grade-level team meetings. Both actions are contributing substantially to our effort of improving classroom instruction.

Phyllis Young, Director,  
North Sacramento Elementary School District

*Only if the leadership has deeper understanding of the instructional program, can it have a system that can address access and equity. Knowledge is key.*

Louise Waters  
Associate Superintendent, Oakland USD

ments to instruction. As the teacher becomes more skillful in teaching the specific content and comfortable with the structure, site leaders will need to have even greater levels of knowledge, skill, and understanding of the instructional program to deepen the impact. This cannot happen overnight, but the drive for continuous improvement must become the mantra of the site leadership. The more knowledgeable the site administrators, in general, the more effective the coach, or other instructional support people, can be in enhancing teacher competency in the instructional program content and strategies and in providing positive encouragement and assistance.

Another action for site administrators is to explicitly establish the purpose of the assessment system and to provide appropriate support to teachers. Active and frequent use of the assessment data, focused on improving instruction, by administrators and teachers will create shared accountability for student achievement results. This means that the site administrators must understand the entire system, know what is being assessed, and appropriately interpret and utilize the data. The site administrators need to track the progress of classrooms and assign support staff (coach or others) to assist teachers with meeting the needs of student groups.

A third action for the site administrators is to implement and monitor grade-level meeting structures and schedules. These grade-level meetings should be designed to encourage collaborative planning and collegial support. Coaches will play an important follow-up role by sharing key strategies, assisting teams of teachers with planning instruction, and refining teaching strategies, and posting the outcome of the meetings.

In schools where leadership is knowledgeable about content, where the site administrators are familiar with the structure, purpose, and use of the assessment data, and where there is active support for making continuous improvements in instruction, higher levels of implementation, skilled teaching, and student achievement are found. Also, there is a parallel finding. When district leadership is active, participatory, and focused on support for its site administrators, schools are high performers.

**Use and support only supplemental materials, technology programs, or staff development programs that support the scientific research-based, adopted reading/language arts instructional program.**

**Assure the LEA's Reading First Program is coordinated with all other district and site level Language Acquisition, Title I, School Improvement, and Special Education programs.**

## Reading/Literacy Coach

### Definition of Position:

Teacher is appointed to a special assignment, under the supervision of the district's coordinator; and serves to support and assist K-3 in the use of the adopted reading/language arts program.

### General Qualifications:

Has a valid California teaching credential; three years or more of successful classroom teaching experience; and recent, relevant training in scientifically research-based beginning reading. Demonstrates skill in working with adult learners.

### Typical Duties and Responsibilities:

- a. Supports up to 30 teachers in the effective use of the adopted reading/language arts program
- b. Conducts demonstration lessons and assists with planning and pacing of the adopted instructional program
- c. Conducts focused observations and provide specific feedback to teachers
- d. Assists classroom teacher in diagnosing reading problems and planning appropriate instruction
- e. Facilitates teacher grade level meetings
- f. Assists with formal and informal classroom monitoring and diagnostic assessments
- g. Provides formal and informal staff development related to both research and instructional components and strategies based on the reading/language arts program and teaching needs identified by the monitoring assessments
- h. Prepares reports for the district's coordinator related to work activities

## Coherence with Other School Site Programs

There is a particular emphasis for the Reading First schools that relates to the need for coherence of support programs with the adopted reading/language arts program. In the past, categorical programs were separate structures—often with separate programs for teaching and learning. Reading First schools must focus on delivering a coherent program to the students served. In the early starts for most Reading First schools, separate reading systems remain in use with students in special education programs. The use of tutorial programs is usually not coherent with the adopted instructional program nor based on the current research on teaching beginning reading to diverse students. Reading First districts and schools are guided to create coherent and systematic reading and language arts systems that meet the needs of all students and do not confuse, or sidetrack, learning due to past practices or augmenting the adopted instructional program.

*Reading First requires an active, direct mode of teaching each day. Teachers must have adequate time to plan and prepare for this type of teaching.*

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## District Leadership and Instructional Coherence

Leadership and instructional coherence require more than full implementation of the instructional program. By sustaining the district leadership's focus on implementation of *all* Assurances, it is possible to overcome the challenges and uncover specifically what is preventing Reading First students from achieving—especially when the research tells us they can!

As district leaders, actions need to be taken to protect against distractions by many, and various, forms of resistance. District leaders need to understand why implementation is so important, anticipate questions and concerns, be armed with solid research, educate staff, teachers, parents, and their communities, and most importantly, support teachers as they assess their own results in student learning and make improvements to their individual teaching strategies. In districts where the superintendent and other key district and site leaders actively support the intent of the Assurances, we see far more progress occurring in the schools.

Alice R. Furry, Chief Administrative Officer  
Reading First, California Technical Assistance Center  
Sacramento County Office of Education

## An Observation

I have noticed common characteristics among Superintendents and Districts achieving extraordinary results. These Superintendents provide hands-on instructional leadership. They are well grounded in the curriculum. There is a clear focus on learning for every student. They work closely with principals. And, they have worked through the Reading First Assurances, kept the board involved and informed, and developed and sustained a strong commitment to a coherent reading instructional program.

Glen Thomas, Executive Director  
California County Superintendent  
Educational Services Association

## Conclusion

California's Reading First is a system of standards-based content, effective teaching strategies, learning expectations, planning, collaboration, coordination, pacing, assessment, data analysis, professional development, instructional support such as coaching, and leadership. The focus of this system, and its collective efforts, is the improved achievement of students who will either fail or succeed in their education based on their reading and writing levels by the end of third grade. All Reading First efforts should be done for the sake of the future lives of each child in schools where leadership and fragmented, unfocused instruction have prevailed for too long. The Reading First efforts model what the general public assumes is the right of all students—to learn how to read proficiently and read for the love of reading.

Betsy Eaves, Associate Chief Administrative Officer,  
Reading First California Technical Assistance Center,  
Sacramento County Office of Education

October 2003

# A Topside Perspective

## A Superintendent's Reflections on Reading Reform

In the late 1990s, the Los Angeles Unified School District was on the verge of a crisis. Over 360 of the district's nearly 450 elementary schools were performing below the 40th percentile. This meant that 80% of these students were performing one or more years below grade level which portends academic failure. In general, the district lagged behind other large cities in the state and country. While high percentages of Hispanic and African American student groups have, historically, performed at a "below basic" level, those in LAUSD were among the lowest. The district also faced significant language issues, given that more than 40% of students were English language learners. Despite the efforts of district leaders to make improvements, the serious challenges facing them were numerous and increasing. There were few, if any, true signs of productive reform.

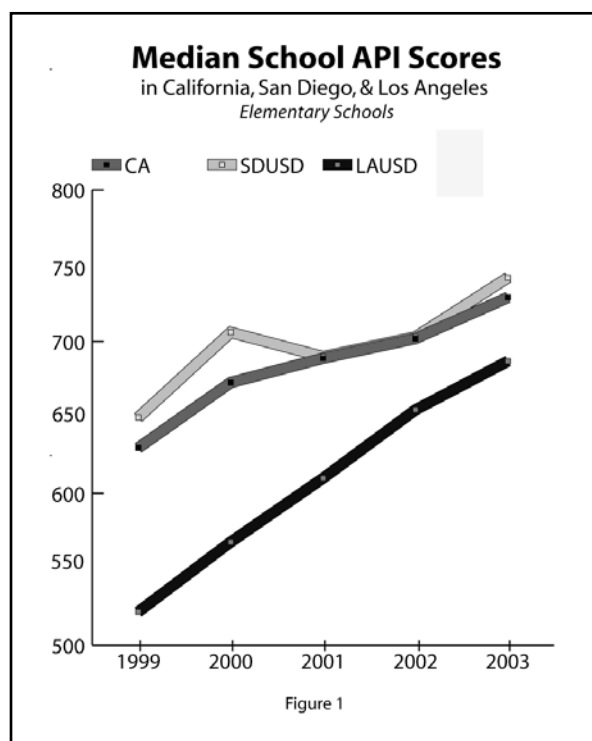
At the same time, students serious about learning often found themselves attending schools that did not have the necessary foundation in place to support standards-based instruction. Schools were overcrowded, using outdated textbooks, and lacking in basic materials and resources. Beyond the classroom, there was talk of breaking up and reorganizing the district. Budget shortfalls, combined with critical needs that couldn't be met, made the situation seem irreconcilable. The need for new or additional schools (specifically for 200,000 "seats and desks" for students), air-conditioning in classrooms, and a huge backlog of unfinished maintenance projects, complicated the situation. There was increased pressure on teachers to produce greater achievement—and even proposals for merit pay to inspire teachers to provide stronger incentives (and penalties).

The pressure to bring about change was escalating. Parents were vocal about frustrations with academic performance, inconsistent teaching, and school conditions. Not surprisingly, a Los Angeles Times poll (2000) reported that the majority of parents were dissatisfied with LAUSD. While there was intense talk about the need for improvement, there was little agreement on what that really meant. In fact, most

efforts to create more broad-based, coordinated, and systemic change quickly became polarized or were met with extreme resistance.

In 1999, under interim leadership, the district began to make improvements with a disciplined focus on improving teaching and learning. I assumed the role as the Superintendent for LAUSD on July 1, 2000, just as the district had been reorganized into eleven mini-districts. My goal was to make serious improvements in student achievement and to eliminate the achievement gap.

Over the past three years, we have made steady and remarkable gains in closing the achievement gap across nearly 450 elementary schools. Our test scores, on the new California Standards Test, have increased at double the rate of schools statewide (see Figure 1). Most compelling is the improvement of student achievement in every category (i.e., reading and mathematics at the elementary grades). We have moved over 60,000 students to their respective grade level per year.



I understand that many of our Reading First schools in California are facing similar issues and challenges. In order to help others achieve similar successes and gains in student achievement, I have been asked to share my approach and some of the keys to our recent success in LAUSD. The Los Angeles Unified School District was the first district to implement a prototype of the Reading First model. Through this model, and our efforts to drive serious change, we have made steady and remarkable gains in closing the achievement gap across nearly 450 elementary schools.

It is essential to think about the improvement process as a “large-scale change” and to recognize that it presents all of the elements that make any reform difficult and frustrating as well as revitalizing, motivating, and hopeful. The first critical element to success was creating a strong sense of urgency and continuously communicating a real and compelling need for the change. According to National Assessment of Educational Progress, in California only 21% of our state’s students are reading at grade level or above. Of those, only 5% are considered advanced. That alone was enough to provide us with both a highly compelling reason for change as well as a great sense of urgency. However, in California’s Reading First schools, the reason and urgency is most powerful. These schools are failing 50% or more of their 2nd and 3rd grade students. In the Los Angeles Unified School District, along with dismal academic results, many of our students face a reality much worse than failing to achieve. Many face gangs, violence, hunger, and little or no parental support.

Next, we started with a vision which included more classrooms, better instruction, improved test scores, and higher quality teachers. Soon our plan began to define the specific actions critical to making this vision a reality. These included creating a coherent academic focus, using student data, and ensuring collaborative planning, focused professional development, and coaching. In addition, it included developing active and knowledgeable leadership and providing coordinated support.

Building a strong team of leaders to help communicate our vision and goals, define a new culture, and ensure that all of our actions remained focused, coherent, and aligned with an integrated strategic plan was critical to our success. We

knew this required a serious commitment from not only the leadership team, but from all district staff and teachers. We recognized from the onset that having only a handful of committed leaders would not be enough to keep the district moving forward. And, we quickly learned that a big part of our daily focus would be to get rid of the things that get in the way of teaching and learning.

A most important element of success was our commitment to the full implementation of our adopted reading/language arts instructional program. This meant we standardize the instructional program and whole-heartedly eliminate other programs and extra materials. We continued to use only the intervention programs built into the adopted program. This was a big change from previous practices, where schools and teachers used a variety of instructional programs and teaching methods, and it was virtually impossible to assess either teaching or learning until the end of the year.

As part of this full implementation, we were serious about the active and regular use of data by all levels, teachers, grade level teams, coaches, experts, principals, district, and central office staff. The assessment data tells us how individual students are learning and also provides a roadmap that helps us identify common professional development needs for teachers, coaches, and administrators. It is your x-ray or diagnostic tool. I think of the 6-8 week skills assessments as a focusing event. It helps the system be responsible, since such data are transparent to all staff. The key to managing the data is reflected in the importance of staying the course with the core work. Kids need to get quality instruction in the classroom. And you cannot assume there is enough knowledge to do the work. And there is no more important instructional work than to enable a child to learn.

One of our goals was to provide the support necessary to improve teaching and learning. That support goes well beyond just increasing expectations. We have 600 coaches in the district. We have one expert for every seven coaches in order to continue to improve our coaches and our teachers. We focused on coaches, the ability of school administrators to serve as instructional leaders, and ultimately created shared accountability between administrators, coaches, and teachers. We encouraged planning, going as far as providing teachers

with an additional stipend for planning. And because of this, we made a commitment to working collaboratively, learning together, and using assessment data to plan instruction.

Another crucial element of success is site-based professional development. To have an effective program implementation, keep training your teachers and administrators. We provided additional professional development for our teachers. Our teachers really responded to this—as over 80% voluntarily attended the Governor’s Reading Institutes at the Beginning, Advanced, Mastery I, and Mastery II levels during the summer/off-track. And our focus went beyond the teachers. Along with in-depth professional development directly related to the instructional program, our district required that administrators study and know the reading/language arts instructional program so that they are able to lead this important work. We held evening sessions and had over 95% attendance. We required administrators to attend professional development each year. Everyone on your staff needs to have the higher level of knowledge in order to do the management of the work.

I am passionate about reforming urban education and improving achievement for our kids. My vision, as well as day-to-day efforts, is for the sake of our students. The lessons we have learned, from implementing the Elementary Literacy Plan in the Los Angeles Unified School District, have been applied to a variety of other instructional initiatives aimed at improving student achievement. The key elements of the elementary reading initiative, a coherent curriculum, standards-based materials, embedded professional development and coaching, periodic diagnostic assessments, proactive technical assistance, and active and knowledgeable leadership have provided a firm foundation for our other instructional improvement initiatives. Our K-12 mathematics plan and our secondary literacy plan include these key components of our theory of action for positive change and sustained improvement. The 39,000 teachers in the district have also become passionate about reaching our students and eliminating the achievement gap. If we can increase student achievement and make such tremendous progress in closing this gap in LAUSD, a district with significant challenges, I am confident that you can make similar, if not greater, progress in your districts.

Roy Romer, Superintendent  
Los Angeles Unified School District

October 2003

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# A Local Perspective

## *The 10 Things I Learned About Literacy Initiatives*

In 1999, the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) began an Elementary Literacy Initiative. We recognized, fortunately, that with 450 elementary schools this implementation would not happen overnight—or even within a year or two. So we started with 30 schools and focused on K-2 classes. In 2000, we included 333 new schools with the continued focus on K-2. Full implementation across all K-5 classes, in 363 schools, did not begin until 2001.

I learned many things during what turned out to be the biggest learning curve of my career. *Lesson one is that this work is not easy and requires relentless dedication and energy.* It is complex and takes a multi-talented team. There are so many pieces to this puzzle, and sometimes the pieces don't seem to fit together. No single person can do it all. Above all, whoever you have on your team must be dedicated to this work and willing to put in the time to really learn about the instructional program that your district has adopted and about each of the learners that will be part of the work. For LAUSD, this meant that we had to put together a team of initiative leaders who were willing to study together in order to learn the work well enough to become truly committed to the program.

Our team was tired of reading disheartening news stories about our failures. We believed, when we started this District-wide Reading Initiative, that everyone would come on board. After all, don't educators share a powerful desire for our students to succeed? But, a very wise friend helped all of us to understand that it is competence that brings commitment. No one becomes committed to that which they are not good at doing. And to become good at this work you have to learn the materials, organize professional development for teachers, coaches, principals, support staff, directors, and others. You have to become the guard gate for coherence. You have to learn how to use the data in a positive way that promotes learning. And this takes a lot of time. All too often we see leadership continue to wear too many hats. The leaders of this initiative must have, and then carefully protect, the time to dedicate to this work!

*Lesson two is that the leadership team, once formed, has to work differently.* Organizing support networks and collegial groups keeps everyone thinking about taking our successes one step further and continuing to improve the work. Our superintendent tells us that we should be mentoring others to take our jobs! He sees our coaches as his farm team for future administrative jobs. I am an example of this, as I was given an opportunity to move from the Central Office, where I made policy, into a position where I implement policy.

The lesson here is that professional growth requires strong support networks to challenge and continuously ask how we can improve our work. I have been lucky to be supported by many state-wide leaders who mentored me early in my career in this work. For example, across our District we have formed linkages between the Language Acquisition Branch and District Reading, Mathematics and District Reading. We did this so that we are not doing this work in isolation and to ensure that we all know, and support, each other's work. Sometimes the work keeps you so busy that you don't make time for debriefing or evaluating progress. Sometimes you don't want to hear from others because it may not be what you want to hear. But, the more time that is set aside to ensure that support networks and collegial groups have opportunities to meet at District office, at schools, with parents, the more you will benefit from the voices heard.

*Lesson three is a difficult one. We had to realize that we did not all have the same strengths, knowledge, and skills.* And, implied, we have to be able to admit this without the fear that we will be seen as “less than” capable of leading the initiative. Our team had a variety of people with distinct expertise such as Language Acquisition, standard English learners, differentiation for Gifted learners, and the adopted reading/language arts program. Recognizing that we all have different strengths, and given the complex demands of this type of implementation, we need to find time and ways to learn from one another. For us, as well as all busy people, the biggest struggle was making the time for grade level meetings. This

is no different than the struggle at Central Office and Local District to ensure that our leadership teams were meeting.

*My fourth lesson is the old adage, “fail to plan... then plan to fail!”* The need for coherence is not to be taken lightly. Outside providers, such as Immediate Intervention Underperforming Schools Program (II/USP), Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) Program, and others must be willing to understand and support your District Reading Program. Students who go to Resource Programs cannot learn one sound spelling system in their regular classroom and another in their resource room! This only dilutes the messages to our students, our effectiveness, and our ultimate impact. Intervention programs need to align and provide opportunities for students to gain deeper knowledge rather than new systems that keep them at a beginning point over and over again. And now, as you can imagine, every single salesperson working with LAUSD now claims that their product aligns, magically, with our reading/language arts program!

*The fifth lesson involves courage and taking a stand.* When you hear information that is wrong, and you certainly will, be prepared and willing to take it on! Initially, there was a lot of blame shifting and the proverbial “passing the buck.” When faced with scrutiny or pressure, the school would shift the focus to the Local District office, the Local District office would point fingers at the Central Office, and so on. The most common issue was the instructional program’s ability to address English Language Learners. And, yes, the programs have strong materials for English Language Learners. This helps to show the critics that you are willing to engage in the conversation and help come to agreements together but not willing to succumb to the fear factor.

What does the data tell us about our work? *Lesson six is that data tells us a lot, so collect and analyze the data.* Roy Romer, our Superintendent, collects data monthly. We ask our teachers to assess students every six weeks. We ask teachers and principals to analyze this data and to reflect on their practices, their professional development, and their next steps or plans. For those of us in leadership roles, who are planning and designing initiatives at the District level, we must also look at the data. We must reflect on the success of our practices and support, as we are accountable to our teachers and

principals for our plans to work. The data tells us whether our professional development is achieving the results we are aiming for, whether our work is on target, and how we need to refine our work to improve student achievement. This will create shared accountability and a positive and productive approach to improvement.

We have learned that the data belongs to everyone. In our district, each school’s data are analyzed at the local district level. We are required to prepare a local district plan and discuss this with Superintendent Romer. There are action plans required by all! As our superintendent reminds us, “Why weigh the hog if you’re not going to feed it?”

*Lesson seven builds on the last lesson. You can’t evaluate what you don’t know!* Going back to the words of advice that competence brings commitment. This applies to the use of data. We must understand what the data really means.

*Lesson eight, try to balance home and work.* It is easy to become consumed by this work. As we said earlier, this work is not easy. It requires relentless dedication, time, and energy. Members of the literacy team will need to stay focused, reduce attendance to non-aligned conferences, special committees, and dual roles unless they are willing to make up the time spent off-focus.

*Lesson nine is the road to improved student achievement through adult learning.* It takes a tremendous amount of time to train leadership and to train adults. There are the constant voices of resistance. You will hear many say that we are out of the classroom and school all too often and that the coaches are out too much for training. We fought many battles regarding the need for adults to understand this work in order to lead it. There are no short-cuts on this one: the adults must understand the work in order for it to improve student achievement. However, not all of the work is about learning the reading program. It is also about the adults learning to discuss the student data and challenge results that are less than desirable. In my local district the adults are now asking for help in guiding team meetings that get to core discussions about beliefs about students.

And finally, there is a lot more to do! Lesson ten reminds us that we learned some key lessons that we will use to guide us over the next few years. Above all, we must get smarter about

our work. We must learn from our successes and failures and stop “reinventing the wheel,” “changing horses mid-stream,” “throwing up our hands in frustration,” or using other ill-conceived strategies and bad clichés.

We are improving our coaching model. We will avoid “drop-in demos” and “drop-in observations.” We will continue to make data-driven, focused decisions. We will provide more support to our teachers through identifying grade levels, or specific teachers, to work with on an in-depth basis, over a period of time. Our goal is to change the professional development story and role of the coach. We will build in greater accountability for our coaches to ensure they are effectively supporting their teachers. We will shift toward increased content-focused coaching and greater reflection on coaching practices. We know that we must learn to interpret the data better. For example, testing fluency and teaching fluency are not the same thing. We also want to align our data to coherent action.

We recognize, and will be proactive in dealing with, “the data dip” of Year 4. There are those who have reacted strongly and wanted to run out and get another program. There will be the questions of whether our reading/language arts program is going to get us to our student achievement goals. We

know that as we get better at the work, we will continue to get better results. As teachers, our level of knowledge needs to be exemplary, and we need to be forceful about our own learning needs. We cannot keep our learning needs a secret because of our fear. And, as our teachers get smarter, so must our Initiative leaders, directors, principals, and staff. We can’t hold people accountable for that which we are not willing to teach.

As we continue along in our quest to close the achievement gap, we must remember what this work is all about. It cannot be seen as a separate initiative. We cannot shy away from the tough conversations! We have students who still need more time, more attention to the most important standards...BIG IDEAS, and more expert teaching. Commitment follows competence. It takes patience and discipline to develop and empower people. It is, in fact, like growing bamboo. Once the seed is planted, the farmer must water it daily for four years before the tree breaks ground. Then it grows 60 feet in 90 days! Executives who nurture people can get similar results. How, you ask, can such rapid growth be possible? It results from miles of roots that develop in those first four years. Preparing people to perform is the task of leadership! (Adapted from Pam Robins, 2003.)

Ronni Ephraim,  
Superintendent, Local District D  
Los Angeles Unified School District

October 2003

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# California Reading First Plan

## *Assurance Statements of Local Education Agency (LEA) and School Site(s) for Reading First Subgrant*

### **LEA LEVEL ASSURANCES: REQUIRED**

We, the superintendent and members of the Board of Education, agree to:

Establish a well-defined district vision with goals and objectives for student achievement (including the belief that all students can read at grade level if adequately taught).

Require, in Year 1, or the first year the teachers work at a Reading First school site, participation of all teachers (K-3 and K-12 special education) in a State approved AB 466 program (with LEA responsible for 80 hours of practicum).

Require, in Year 1, or the first year the principals work at a Reading First school site, participation of all principals (K-3 elementary schools) in State approved AB 75 Module 1 curriculum.

Require in Years 2 and 3, all teachers participate in a comparable AB 466 professional development program for advancement of skills in use of adopted program and instructional strategies.

Provide, with technical assistance from state and regional centers, ongoing training/follow-up sessions for K-3 and special education teachers, coaches, coordinators, and principals.

Adopt and fully implement the district's State adopted K-3 instructional reading/language arts program for K-3 teachers and special education teachers; including the alternative Spanish version (if selected).

Assure the adopted reading/language arts program will be fully implemented and the daily instructional time will be protected from disruptions for a minimum of 2.5 hours for Grades 1–3, and 1 hour for Kindergarten, through use of a pacing schedule.

Use and support only supplemental materials, technology programs, or staff development programs that support the scientific research-based, adopted reading/language arts instructional program.

Develop and implement assessment plan for all Reading First schools based on valid and reliable instructional assessments from the recommended list, which includes a frequently used program monitoring assessment based on the instructional program.

Assure that all school sites will support regular, collaborative, grade-level teacher meetings to discuss use of the instructional program, student results on the selected assessments, and will receive additional training.

Develop and conduct an internal evaluation on the effectiveness of its Reading First Program. Make regular site visits to monitor the level of implementation of the adopted reading instructional program and adherence to the purposes of its Reading First Program.

Assure the C&I administrators and Title I administrators reinforce established district policy guiding the consistent implementation of the adopted instructional reading program, including instructional time, use of scientific research-based instructional strategies, and use of selected assessments.

Assure the LEA's Reading First Program is coordinated with all other district and site level Language Acquisition, Title I, School Improvement, and Special Education programs.

Assure the LEA's district-wide Reading First Leadership Team meets regularly to advise and support the implementation of its Reading First Program.

Assure that private schools have been contacted regarding the LEA's Reading First Program, and if appropriate, services will be coordinated in compliance with Section 9501 of the No Child Left Behind Act.

### **LEA LEVEL ASSURANCES: OPTIONAL**

Use funding to hire reading coaches (1:30 teachers) and/or content experts (1:15 coaches).

Assign an appropriate administrative credentialed staff member (with school administration experience and reading/

language arts knowledge) to serve as the Coach Coordinator (this is optional if the district's plan does not include reading coaches; if the plan includes coaches, this position is required).

Provide coaches sufficient professional development and support for increasing knowledge and experience.

Support full access of coaches in all classrooms (if this option is taken).

### **SCHOOL SITE ASSURANCES: REQUIRED**

The principal and vice principal, as instructional leaders, agree to:

Establish a well-defined school vision (supporting district vision) with goals and objectives for student achievement (including the belief that all students can read at grade level if adequately taught).

Support full implementation of the district's State adopted reading/language arts instructional program and protect the daily instructional time from disruptions for a minimum of 2.5 hours for Grades 1–3, 2.5 hours and 1 hour for Kindergarten, through the use of a pacing schedule.

Require that all teachers (K-3 and offer to K-12 special education) participate in year 1, or in the first year the teachers work at a Reading First school site, the State Board approved AB 466 program (with LEA responsible for 80 hours of practicum).

Require in Years 2 and 3, all teachers participate in a comparable AB 466 professional development program for advancement of skills in use of adopted program and instructional strategies.

Be involved in, and knowledgeable of, the instructional delivery of the program.

Organize and support regular, collaborative, grade level teacher meetings to discuss use of the instructional program and student results on the selected assessments, and to develop action plans for student interventions and/or additional teacher training.

Guide the monitoring of student progress based on the instructional program assessment and others approved by the district; and use the results to make program decisions for the purpose of maximizing student achievement.

Attend, in Year 1, or the first year the principal works at a Reading First school site, the AB 75 Principal Training Program for Module 1 based on the district's State adopted reading/language arts instructional program.

Insist on and ensure the full implementation of the adopted reading/language arts program for K-3 teachers.

Ensure that any supplemental materials, technology programs, or staff development programs will be in alignment with the scientific research based, adopted program.

Assure that the school's Reading First Program is coordinated with staff and advisory committees responsible for Language Acquisition, Title I, School Improvement, and Special Education programs.

### **SCHOOL SITE ASSURANCES: OPTIONAL**

Assure that coaches are adequately prepared to serve as a peer coach to teachers implementing the adopted reading/language arts program.

Hold regular meetings with the reading coach; and conduct classroom observations with coach on a regular basis.

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# Reading First Service Providers

## to LEAs and Partnering Agencies

### California Technical Assistance Center at the Reading Lions Center, Sacramento County Office of Education

#### Lead Administrators

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### California County Superintendents Educational Services Association

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# References and Acknowledgements

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