

Model Reading Intervention Program, Grade 4: 2001-2002

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Program Description

In 1996, then-governor George W. Bush and the 75th Texas legislature announced an initiative with the goal of having all children reading at or above grade level by the end of third grade, and continuing to read on grade level throughout the remainder of their school career. The purpose of the Model Reading Intervention Program (MRIP) for the intermediate grades was to (1) assist schools in meeting this challenge, and (2) provide funding for effective scientific, research-based reading instruction to enable students to accelerate to grade level or beyond through direct instructional strategies.

Records indicate that students in the district with reading difficulties are lacking in the key reading skill areas of decoding, comprehension, and fluency. The MRIP implemented in the Austin Independent School District (AISD) during the 2001-02 school year combined a decoding program, *SRA Corrective Reading*, with a comprehension and vocabulary program, *Scholastic Read 180*.

The AISD received a total of approximately \$256,000 to implement the MRIP for 4th grade students identified as struggling readers. Of this amount, approximately \$103,500 was allocated to payroll costs, \$6,200 was allocated to professional/consulting services for teacher training, \$28,000 to the purchase of materials and supplies, and \$119,000 to other expenses.

Identifying Students for Participation

Students were identified for possible participation in the program on the basis of having failed the 3rd grade reading portion of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) test administered during the 2000-01 school year, and/or having limited proficiency in English. The students were selected from elementary school campuses with some of the highest TAAS Reading failure rates in the district, that were not already receiving support from other reading grant programs. Parents of prospective participants were contacted and provided with information regarding the program, its purpose, and requirements for participation. All students selected for participation were required to have a contract, signed by a parent or guardian, indicating agreement to the following:

(1) daily attendance by the student, (2) positive student behavior, and (3) regular parent involvement.

Number of Participating Students and Campuses

A total of 117 students from nine AISD elementary campuses took part in the program.[♦] Although it had been intended for the program to begin during the first week of school, delays in getting program equipment and materials to campuses necessitated later start times than expected. Because of differences in start times, the actual program duration time varied across the nine campuses, with an average duration of 5 months. Specific campuses, and the number of participating students from each, are reflected in Table 1.

Table 1. Participating AISD Elementary Campuses and Number of Students at Each

AISD Elementary Campus	Number of Students Participating*
Allan	13
Campbell	12
Cook	13
Harris	15
Jordan	15
Langford	15
Ortega	6
Pecan Springs	15
Pickle	13
TOTAL	117

*Participating students include those who were eligible and took part in the program for at least half of its duration on their campus.

Major Components of the MRIP

Components of the program were selected based on the identified needs of AISD's struggling students in grades 3-5. Assessment data indicated these students were having particular difficulty with decoding, reading fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. These areas were targeted by the three components of the program:

- *SRA Corrective Reading*, which focuses on decoding strategies;
- *Scholastic Read 180*, which focuses on reading fluency, comprehension, vocabulary, and spelling skills;

[♦] All students who were invited to participate joined the program. There were 3 students who withdrew prior to having been in the program for at least half of its duration on their campus. In addition, 4 participating students were later identified as eligible for special education services and thus also withdrew from the program.

- *Write Time for Kids*, which focuses on developing nonfiction reading and writing skills in four categories: narrative, expository, persuasive, and visual presentation.

The SRA Corrective Reading component involved 30 minutes of direct instruction per day to assist students in developing phonemic awareness and understanding of letter-sound correspondence, skills which were then applied to stories designed to correct common mistakes. Scholastic Read 180 required 90 minutes of daily activities: 20 minutes for whole class literacy instruction, 60 minutes for three small group rotations – instructional reading (software), modeled or independent reading (audiobooks and paperbacks), and small group instruction – and a 10-minute, whole-class wrap-up. The writing component emphasized (1) the steps in the writing process: Prewriting, writing, revision, editing, and publication, and (2) the application of developing skills in the reading and writing of nonfiction in the *Write Time for Kids* program.

Taking the three major components together, a total of 2 hours, 45 minutes per day was required to implement the entire program. Scheduling of Language Arts for participating students was done either as an entire block, or broken into segments in order to accommodate other scheduling requirements of the fourth grade curriculum.

Professional Development Activities

Participating teachers took part in several professional development sessions designed to prepare them to implement each of the major program components. Specifically, they received training in the use of the SRA Corrective Reading program (one full day), the Read 180 program (one full day), and the Writing Process (two full days). Additional meetings were held, following the training sessions, to discuss implementation issues and concerns. A mentor teacher, who also participated in all professional development sessions, visited each classroom to offer guidance to teachers throughout the year.

Initial Attitudes of Participating Students, Parents, and Teachers

As the program got underway at each participating school, teachers administered surveys to their students with six questions regarding student enjoyment of reading. Responses generally indicated positive attitudes toward reading, whether the material was self-selected or teacher-selected.

Parents of participating students also completed a survey questionnaire as the program began, with questions eliciting their opinions about the potential of the program for helping their children with reading and language skills, their intentions to participate actively in the program,

and their expectations about being kept informed by the teacher as to the progress being made by their children. In general, responses indicated that parents began the program with very positive attitudes toward the program. Furthermore, they expressed their intentions of being actively involved in the program during the year, through contact with teachers and through interaction with their children.

A survey designed to assess the initial attitudes of teachers selected to implement the program revealed generally positive feelings about the program and its potential for impact on student reading achievement. Responses to open-ended questions on the teacher survey did suggest, however, that teachers were concerned that the program was starting up well into the school year and how this might impact their ability to successfully implement all program components. Coordinating the scheduling of Language Arts blocks with other fourth grade teachers, after the school year was already well underway, represented another expressed concern.

Initial Reading Assessment

Participating students were assessed prior to the start of the program. The SRA Decoding Placement Test provided teachers with information regarding the appropriate instructional level for their students. This test measures oral-reading rate and accuracy, placing test-takers at one of four levels: A, B1, B2, and C. All students selected for participation in the MRIP were placed in the B1 or B2 decoding groups. These levels represent poor readers in grades 4-12 who do not read at an adequate rate and confuse words.

Additional assessment data were provided by the administration of the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI). This is a criterion-referenced test designed to measure reading comprehension. Results are reported as scale scores, and are used by teachers to match students to text material they can read with confidence and control. Scale scores, known as Lexile measures, range from Beginning Reader (a Lexile score less than 100) to a score of 1500. Students participating in the MRIP had an average initial Lexile score of 297.4, corresponding, approximately, to a first grade reading level. For reference purposes, students reading on the fourth grade level typically exhibit a Lexile range of 600 to 900.

Monitoring of Student Progress

On an on-going basis throughout the school year, teachers monitored the progress of students, modifying their instructional levels and strategies to fit the needs of individual students.

The Read 180 Instructional Reading Software maintained a database of students' daily work, from which a variety of detailed reports could be generated. These reports provided teachers with information such as current Lexile scores, vocabulary and spelling test scores, and comprehension test scores, which could be used by teachers to identify specific areas needing directed instruction focus during Small Group Instruction sessions. In addition, the SRA Corrective Reading component included maintaining daily records of student performance. These could be used to identify areas requiring special focus for each student.

Parental Involvement

Parents were required to sign an agreement, at the outset of the program, which included, as a requirement for participation, monthly contact with the child's teacher. This requirement could be met, in part, through written or telephone communication, but at least three personal parent-teacher conferences had to be held.

Many of the participating teachers reported problems, initially, with parent attendance at their monthly evening meetings. Consequently, alternative plans were made in an attempt to increase participation, including offering day-time sessions, tying the conferences to an already-scheduled school-wide event, or having the children themselves involved in a presentation to their parents about what they were doing in the program. Many of these solutions proved effective in building parental involvement.

End-of-year Student Achievement

At the end of the school year, data were collected to assess student reading achievement. A final administration of the SRI provided year-end Lexile scores, which were then compared to initial Lexile scores as an indication of growth in reading comprehension. The average year-end Lexile score across all MRIP students was 404.5, representing an increase of 107.1 Lexiles. The year-end average score corresponded to a 2nd grade reading level.

In addition, the results of the reading portion of the 2000-01 Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) test were examined and compared to 2001-02 test results. There were 84 students, participating in the MRIP, who took the English version of TAAS Reading in 3rd grade, 2001. Of these, 5 students (5.95%) achieved a passing score of 70 or better. The average 2001 Texas Learning Index (TLI) score for the 84 students was 57.8. There were 19 students who took the Spanish version of TAAS Reading in 2001, 10 of whom passed. In 2002, all MRIP students took the 4th grade TAAS Reading test in English. A total of 107 students took the test;

51 (47.7%) passed, including 13 taking it for the first time in English. Seven of the 13 had failed the 3rd grade Spanish version in 2001. The mean TLI score on the 4th grade TAAS Reading test was 67.2. This represents an average increase in TLI of 9.4 from the previous year. Two of the nine schools did not see an increase in average TLI scores for participating students. These results are summarized in Table 2 below. It should be stressed that the numbers of students reflected for individual campuses are quite small. Therefore, drawing conclusions about particular schools might be unwarranted.

Table 2. TAAS Reading TLI Results by Participating Elementary School

AISD Elementary School	2001			2002		
	Mean TLI	n	# Passing*		n	# Passing*
Allan	61.4	13	1	68.4	12	9
Campbell	57.4	11	1	70.6	12	7
Cook	57.7	11	1	74.6	13	8
Harris	53.7	12	0	67.8	13	7
Jordan	57.6	8	1	64.1	14	4
Langford	57.6	14	1	54.1	15	1
Ortega	63.3	3	0	61.0	4	0
Pecan Springs	57.1	11	0	63.6	11	6
Pickle	-----	1	0	78.4	13	9
Overall	57.8	84	5	67.2	107	51

Source: AISD District Database

* # Passing refers to the number of students who passed the English version. In 2001, some students took the Spanish version. Those students are omitted here, since TLI results are not available for the Spanish version. In 2002, all students took the test in English.

The population of students at these nine schools who had failed either version of the TAAS Reading test in 2001, but who had not participated in the MRIP, and who took the TAAS Reading Test in English in 2002, was identified. Their scores for both years were examined and compared to the MRIP group. There were 34 students who had failed the English version of the test in 2001, with an average TLI score of 55. In 2002, a total of 53 students took TAAS Reading in English, scoring an average TLI of 67.3. Of the 53 students, 26 passed (49.1%), including 12 taking it in English for the first time.

End-of-year Attitudes of Participating Students, Parents, Teachers

Surveys were administered at the end of the year to assess attitudes of students, parents, and teachers involved in the program, and comparisons were made between these and initial

attitudes. Questions on the student survey, which addressed their enjoyment of reading, were identical to those on the initial survey. Questions on the parent and teacher surveys were reworded to reflect their retrospective perceptions of the success of the program in achieving intended results, and participation throughout the year in program implementation. Results of the year-end student survey indicated, once again, positive attitudes toward reading, with average ratings on each of the six items greater than 3.5, on a 5-point scale. An analysis of end-of-year responses to the 8-item parent survey yielded similar results. Attitudes at the end of the year, regarding the impact of the program on various student outcomes, communication from the MRIP teacher, and their own involvement in the program were generally favorable. Average scores on each of the 8 items exceeded 3.8 on a 5-point scale.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Research evidence has indicated that students who fall behind in reading early on in the elementary grades have a difficult time catching up (e.g., Francis et al., 1966; Juel, 1988, 1994). Juel (1994), for example, has claimed that students who fall behind in the first grade have only a one in eight chance of catching up to their grade level peers. While a passing rate on the TAAS Reading test of almost 48% among the MRIP students might seem quite dramatic, given that just under 6% had passed the year before, it must be compared to that of students who did not participate in the program. For the group of students from the same 9 campuses who had failed the English version of the test in 2002, a passing rate of 49.1% was observed, with an average gain in TLI score from one year to the next of more than 12 points. The average gain experienced by the MRIP group, in comparison, was 9.4 points. Thus, it appears that a significant effort was being made to raise the reading achievement of *all* students who had failed the TAAS Reading test in 3rd grade, and that substantial strides were made.

It is impossible to say whether the program would have had more of an impact on student reading achievement had it been in effect from the first week of school. Certainly several of the participating teachers believed so. Another factor which might have unintentionally limited the success of the MRIP program was the experience level of the teachers involved. Classroom observations conducted this year, along with the individual school achievement results, suggest that veteran teachers, with more experience in conducting simultaneous group activities in the classroom, were more successful in their implementation of the program. Results might have been even more dramatic had only veteran teachers been involved in implementation of the

program. The available data indicate, however, that the MRIP is no more effective in increasing TAAS Reading passing rates than approaches used with other 4th grade students. There may be other beneficial outcomes, however, associated with the MRIP and how it was implemented, that would point to its value. Anecdotal data from principals and teachers at participating schools suggested that the program had not only been effective in raising student reading achievement, but had also had a positive impact on student motivation and attendance, and reduced disciplinary problems in the classroom. These outcomes were attributed to the program's structure, as well as the built-in feedback to students on their reading progress.

References

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