

Teaching every child to read proficiently is a daunting task. Fulfilling this important responsibility requires that teachers have declarative, procedural and conditional knowledge of effective, research-based instructional practices, a willingness to implement these practices, and a relentless focus on student progress.

Reading First is an effort to harness converging evidence from scientific reading research and make it accessible to teachers through ongoing professional development, high quality instructional materials, and valid and reliable reading assessments. All 50 states, the District of Columbia, American Samoa, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs are participating in Reading First. Over 3,835

level or district-level cohorts. In addition to endorsement courses and additional professional development sessions, teachers participate in bi-monthly study groups to review assessment data and plan instruction to meet student needs.

### Reading First Works!

As with any project of this magnitude, numerous challenges have been encountered; however, positive things are occurring for educators and children. Kindergarten teachers at Bluff Elementary, Montezuma Creek Elementary, and Mexican Hat Elementary (San Juan School District) can attest to phenomenal success achieved last year. Their students, with the exception of three

# Reading First Works: Blazing a Trail for Reading Success

schools in 1,106 districts nationwide have received competitive Reading First subgrants. There are over 75,000 teachers and 1.2 million students in Reading First schools. (These figures do not include teachers from non-Reading First schools nationwide who are participating in professional development efforts sponsored by Reading First).

In Utah, there are currently 16 Reading First schools in 6 participating districts (Ogden, Salt Lake, Granite, Duchesne, North Sanpete, and San Juan) and approximately 232 teachers serving 4,767 K-3 students. An additional 850 educators from non-Reading First schools statewide participated in the Utah Reading First Summer Reading Academies.

First year efforts in Utah Reading First schools focused on the initial implementation of new basal reading programs and the revised Utah Elementary Language Arts Core Curriculum, the administration and analysis of new reading assessments including DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Early Literacy Skills) and TPRI (Texas Primary Reading Inventory), and professional development. University courses, which will eventually lead to Utah Level I Reading Endorsements, were initiated in January 2004. K-3 classroom teachers, ESL teachers, special educators, reading specialists, principals, and reading coaches are attending these courses as building-

children at one school, were all recognized as established readers on the spring DIBELS benchmarks. I spent several days in San Juan District in April and marveled at high levels of student engagement. Children were confident in their abilities as readers and writers! The dedicated kindergarten teachers at these remote, rural schools indicated they have been empowered by the knowledge and skills they have gained through professional development activities.

San Juan District is fortunate to have full-day kindergarten sessions, which support a three-hour literacy block each day. Ogden District also has full-day kindergarten sessions and North Sanpete District has extended one session of kindergarten at each Reading First school to a full day this year.

Monique McDermott, a reading coach in San Juan District, believes that assessment training provided a major impetus in moving their literacy efforts forward last year. Regular review of ongoing benchmark and progress monitoring assessment data added focus to professional



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discussions at study groups, grade level team meetings, and planning sessions at the district, school, and individual classroom level.

Rosanne Henderson, principal of North Star Elementary in Salt Lake District, believes that Reading First's emphasis on the explicit teaching of research-evidenced practices is contributing to increased student performance at North Star. She states, "Teachers are now aware of and implementing more effective strategies. Coaching, support, and accountability have increased implementation."

The reading coach at North Star, Susan Miller, points to several factors related to Reading First that she feels have

Kathy Stone, Reading First Coordinator in Duchesne District, echoed sentiments about powerful, focused professional development efforts made available through Reading First as aiding teachers' implementation of scientifically-based reading research. She agrees that the implementation of DIBELS has enabled teachers to continually adjust instruction based on student needs on a weekly, bi-monthly, or monthly basis.

Ogden District instituted a Reading First Leadership Team that meets every Wednesday morning at 7:00 a.m. The team includes district administrators, principals, the district's Reading First coordinator and reading coaches. Ogden Reading First Coordinator, Greg Lewis, indicates that these meetings ensure a consistent focus on Reading First efforts in Ogden's four Reading First schools.

Educators who make a commitment to actively participate in professional development and who continually search for and strive to fully implement effective practices can help children gain competence as readers. This requires that we get everyone involved in Reading First to the last part of the "Hokey Pokey." In other words, as Dr. Sharon Vaughn stated at the National Reading First Conference in Minneapolis in July, "We can't just implement the parts of effective reading instruction that we like the most or want to do. We have to put our whole self in and shake it all about!" ■

**Reading First Works!**



had a positive effect on the school. First, Susan indicated that professional development efforts that have been focused at the school level and based on the school's unique needs have made it more meaningful and effective. Second, the use of DIBELS has made the implementation of a data-driven assessment-instructional cycle something that is both doable and powerful. Mrs. Miller believes that teachers at North Star have become a cohesive group with an increased focus on student achievement. Teachers are becoming wise consumers of information and materials and the teachers' emphasis on explicit instruction is assisting students in becoming more engaged, effective learners.



# Progress