

Committee on Education and Labor
Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Subcommittee

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Delaware's Comprehensive Approach to Literacy

As Delaware's Department of Education's Director of Reading

First, I am honored to present testimony about the work we are

doing to create a seamless, comprehensive literacy program for

all children in Delaware. We have benefited from federal

support, especially for Early Reading First and Reading First.

Our Early Reading First projects have made a difference
for very young children who experience high levels of risk of
literacy failure. The University of Delaware was awarded two

Early Reading First grants and data for their first cohort of students indicated that these children performed as well or better than the general population of children their age in language and early reading in kindergarten. These children were “at risk” when they began preschool. Many were not only low income, but also came from homes where English was not the primary language spoken. Thus, systematic, explicit instruction in oral language and beginning reading skills allowed these children to enter school prepared to succeed in the Reading First curriculum.

Reading First in Delaware has not been just a paradigm change in teaching reading, but is a model that requires systemic changes at the school and district level. For Delaware these have included

- Increased daily instructional time for the teaching of reading
- Design of assessment systems that include screening, progress monitoring, diagnostic assessment, and evaluation of outcomes
- Differentiated instruction based on these data
- Additional intensive intervention for students at high levels of risk
- Common planning time for teachers to review data and plan instruction
- Full-time literacy coaches who support teachers to improve their instruction

Enacting these components of Reading First required extensive professional development for the teachers, coaches, and principals as well as continuous monitoring and reflection.

Our literacy coaches are comfortable and competent working in classrooms alongside teachers, providing formative feedback. They also have strong partnerships with building principals as instructional leaders. Our accomplishments in this area are extensive, but they have been hard won.

Our professional development has evolved each year. We began with LETRS trainings for all teachers, which is a professional development program developed by Dr. Louisa Moats. We moved to book studies and formal trainings for coaches which were then redelivered to teachers. We then brought teachers and coaches together in teams for intense study of differentiated instruction.

Along the way, we evaluated our efforts. Our state team worked school by school each year with Dr. Sharon Walpole, a University of Delaware professor who has had extensive

experience in Reading First. We learned together to analyze data, set goals, and design ongoing professional support for teachers. We now have fourteen schools from six districts in the program. Unfortunately, this is the last year of funding, but we have made good use of these federal dollars.

Evidence-based instruction became the catalyst for ongoing change in Delaware. We have preschool-grade-level expectations, the *Early Learning Guidelines*, that have been nationally recognized and that are aligned with our kindergarten grade-level expectations. We revised our K-3 literacy standards so that they were consistent with the research that underlies Reading First. Many districts increased their attention to coherent professional development in early reading.

In 2007 the state chose to require a Response to Intervention Model and based the state regulations on lessons

we learned from the Reading First program. Implementation of the RTI model is now occurring in every elementary building. The Reading First team was instrumental in the planning of much of this professional development. Reading First administrators and coaches presented at these trainings, sharing their expertise in areas such as scheduling and staffing. This year the training is available on DVDs to reach more schools and teachers. We are offering technology-based support so that a broader group of teachers can ask questions and have their concerns addressed.

We are working now to include middle and high school teachers and administrators. We are offering trainings in an instructional framework which incorporate the strategies that most impact learning: extended thinking, vocabulary, summarizing, non-visual representations, and advance

organizers. This model called “Learning Focused” ensures that comprehension strategies, vocabulary instruction, and writing to inform are part of all lessons.

Delaware is a small state, but the challenges of bringing teaching in line with current research and of evaluating the effects of teaching on student learning are large. Early Reading First and Reading First have provided us opportunities to design and provide professional support for teachers and administrators that is coherent and ongoing. We have leveraged federal dollars well. Our current focus on professional support for all classroom teachers in Delaware to have the knowledge and skills to use data to design and evaluate differentiated instruction is the direct result of opportunities that federal support for high-quality, research-based professional development have provided.

We hope that you will consider ways to continue to support our professional development efforts.