

A Description of Foundation Skills Interventions for Struggling Middle-Grade Readers in Four Urban Northeast and Islands Region School Districts

Recent research shows that evidence-based reading instruction emphasizing foundation reading skills can help the lowest-performing middle-grades students with identified learning disabilities. Reading experts recommend that schools conduct diagnostic assessments of, and implement intervention programs for, foundation reading skills. Until recently, limited information was available about whether school districts are implementing these recommendations. Existing assessments and intervention programs were documented in Worcester, MA, Yonkers, NY, Providence, RI, and Nashua, NH.

— CAROLE URBANO AND JUDITH ZORFASS, EDC, PROJECT TEAM

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

- Document existing assessments of and intervention programs for foundation reading skills in four districts:
 - Phonemic awareness.
 - Knowledge of high-frequency sight vocabulary words.
 - Ability to decode words.

METHODOLOGY

- Review public documents published by districts about the diagnostic tests they administer to students, the foundation skill interventions they provide, and their methods for monitoring student progress.
- Conduct in-depth, follow-up interviews with key literacy and special education informants in each district.

AUDIENCE & APPLICATION

- Help both state-level leaders and local school districts in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of foundation skill intervention programs.
- Findings are especially relevant to low-income urban districts, which tend to have disproportionately high numbers of students with learning disabilities.

FINAL PRODUCTS

- An Issues & Answers Report published by the Institute of Education Sciences, which may be found at: http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/northeast/pdf/REL_2008042.pdf
- The report describes:
 - diagnostic assessments and procedures used by districts,
 - existing interventions,
 - assessments used to monitor progress, and
 - a list of research questions for future study, derived from the findings.

What Are Fast Response Projects?

Fast-Response Projects are short-term projects that respond to regional and national needs and priorities and provide research-based knowledge to inform policy and practice. They use methods such as research syntheses, mining of existing data sets, and descriptive studies.



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Every district used the standards-based state test for initial screening. There are many published tests available to diagnose difficulties with foundation skills for use with middle-grades students, and three diagnostic tests were used consistently across the districts. Variation existed in the use of other diagnostic tests.

Many different reading intervention programs are available to schools to build foundation skills. Two interventions were used by all sites. There was also variation in the use of programs across districts. Professional development was described as an intervention.

Two districts monitored enrolled students' progress at key points during the school year. Every district used its state assessment, comparing scores across years. Informal measures were used in each district.

Decision makers may want to consider these factors in their own planning and program implementation:

- building upon the district's Reading First initiative,
- using Response to Intervention (RTI) and a three-tier reading model to create a framework for programming,
- recognizing the need for cross-department collaboration,
- having enough highly qualified teachers,
- recognizing time and scheduling constraints, and
- ensuring fidelity in program implementation.

Contact Information

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