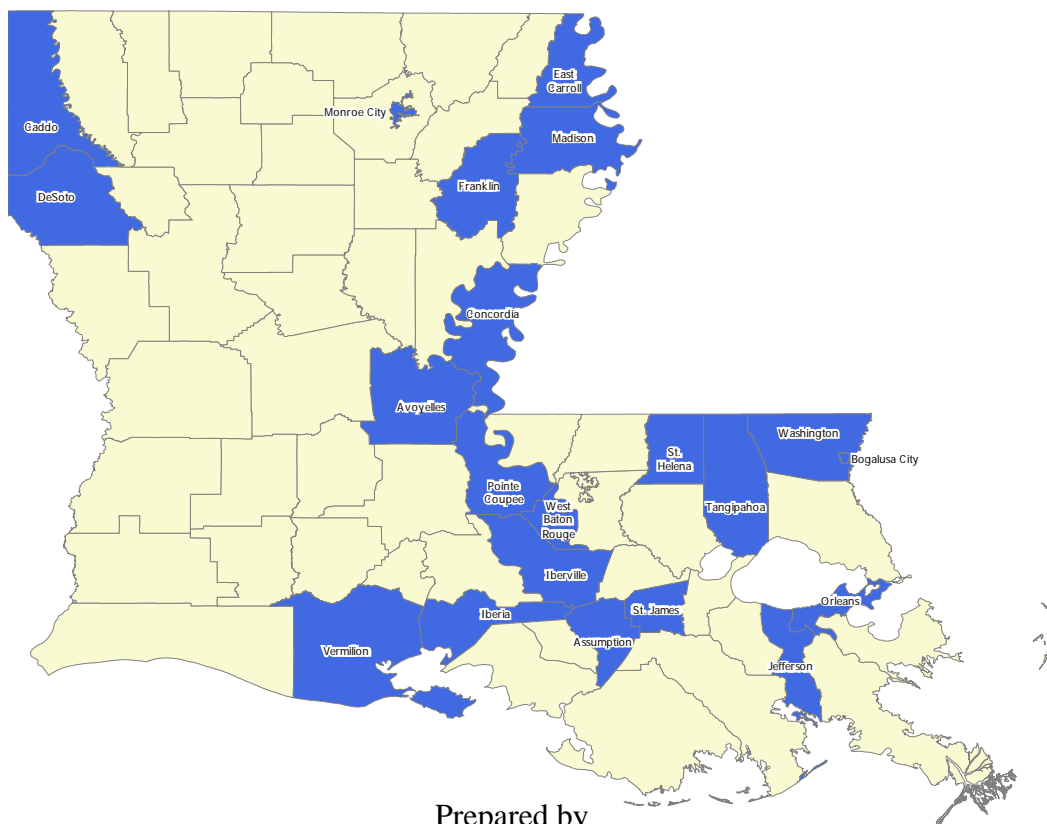


# Louisiana's Reading First Program

## 2006 Annual Report



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December 31, 2006

## Table of Contents

1.	Introduction.....	1
1.1.	Reading First Program Background.....	1
1.2.	Overview of the Reading First Program.....	1
1.3.	Annual Report Organization.....	2
2.	Student Achievement.....	3
2.4.	Methodology.....	3
2.5.	Evaluation Questions.....	6
2.5.1.	Reduction in the Percentage of Students Reading Below Benchmark.....	6
2.5.2.	Increase in the Percentage of Students Reading Above Benchmark.....	6
2.5.3.	Subgroup Performance Gap Closure.....	7
2.5.4.	Effectiveness.....	12
2.5.5.	Reading First Compared to non-Reading First.....	18
2.5.6.	What is the difference between Reading First and non-Reading First programs?.....	21
2.5.7.	Effect of Structured Pre-K Programs.....	27
2.5.8.	The Effect of RF on iLEAP Scores.....	28
3.	Program Implementation and Professional Development.....	30
3.1.	Background.....	30
3.1.1.	SY 2004-05. Year 2: “House-Building”.....	30
3.1.2.	SY 2005-06. Year 3: “Moving In”.....	31
3.2.	RF Model Implementation in SY 2005-06.....	32
3.3.	Evaluation Design Employed in Measuring RF Implementation.....	33
3.3.1.	Evaluation Questions.....	33
3.3.2.	Data Sources.....	34
3.4.	Findings.....	35
3.4.1.	Findings Relative to Student Assessment Procedures.....	35
3.4.2.	Findings Relative to RF Opportunities to Learn.....	38
3.4.3.	Findings Relative to Increases in Teacher Content Knowledge.....	52
3.5.	Recommendations Relative to RF Implementation.....	54
4.	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) Analysis.....	59
4.1.	Overview.....	59

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4.2.	Purpose.....	59
4.3.	Key Findings.....	59
4.4.	SWOT Factors .....	62
4.4.1.	Strengths .....	62
4.4.2.	Weaknesses.....	62
4.4.3.	Opportunities.....	63
4.4.4.	Threats.....	63
4.5.	Recommendations.....	64
4.6.	Conclusions.....	65
5.	Special Education Referral Rates.....	66
5.1.	Findings.....	66
5.2.	Summary .....	68
6.	The Effects of the Storms .....	68

## Acknowledgments

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## Louisiana's Reading First Executive Summary

As America enters the new century full of hope and promise, studies show that too many of our most needy students are being left behind. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), nearly 40 percent of America's fourth graders continue to read below the basic level on national reading assessments; one out of every three college freshmen must take a remedial course before entering regular level courses. These numbers are even bleaker in the inner cities and poor rural areas where 68 percent of low-income fourth graders cannot read at a basic level. The academic achievement gap between the rich and the poor, Caucasian and minority students is not only wide, but in some cases is growing wider still. (See NCES Web site at <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/>.)

Over the years, Congress has created a number of educational programs intended to address the educational problems without asking whether or not the programs produce results or knowing their impact on local needs. This "program to solve every problem" approach has begun to add up – at a cost of \$120 billion a year. Yet, after spending enormous amounts of money on education, the U.S. has fallen short in meeting its goals for educational excellence.

With the passage of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, the federal government is saying there are no more excuses. A basic premise of Reading First is that all of America's children can learn to read well by the end of third grade when given instruction that is tailored to their needs. In Reading First, federal funds must be targeted to improve student achievement and enhance teacher quality through extensive professional development. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 2002 requires that now more than ever these funds must be spent on effective, research-based practices and programs. Louisiana is eligible to receive approximately \$124.7 million in support over six years, pending the state's successful implementation and congressional appropriations.

While legislation targets large urban areas with high poverty and high numbers of children who are reading below grade level, rural districts are eligible as well; moreover, ESEA stipulates that states must provide local education agencies (LEAs) with funding of sufficient size and scope to do the job – to make an impact on children's achievement. Stipulations in another section of the Reading First Final Guidance require states to provide professional development in the five essential components of reading instruction to all teachers. Additionally, teachers must understand how to use assessment to inform instruction for all children, including English language learners, struggling readers, children with disabilities, and children from all racial and ethnic populations. Louisiana Reading First provides state-level training for Regional Education Service Center (RESC) Reading First coordinators and local reading coaches, interventionists, and administrators, and regional-level training through the RESCs for teachers, reading coaches, and administrators.

Through intensive professional development efforts that are the heart and soul of the Louisiana Reading First (RF) program, educators across the state are learning how to use student assessment data to identify areas where students can improve and how to adjust instruction according to student needs. They now feel better equipped to apply research-based strategies that

result in increased student achievement (as evidenced by the SWOT survey responses of 1,512 administrators, reading coaches, interventionists, and K-3 and special education teachers regarding the core reading program). As a result of the state- and regional-level training, school-based reading coaches are learning how to facilitate job-embedded professional development and assist principals with the implementation of school-wide practices that substantially accelerate learning for struggling readers.

Overall, there has been a strong commitment to improving the reading outcomes of all Louisiana students. State administrators and regional-, district-, and school-level staff, for example, worked industriously to have RF in place to begin the 2005-06 school year, only to have the momentum disrupted by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Despite the calamity, a strong sense of support grew across the state, and the thrust to change literacy practices was extended into non-RF schools.

This evaluation draws on multiple sources of evidence to document the progress of RF and non-RF students. Achievement findings are based on our analyses of data from state-mandated assessments (DIBELS and iLEAP). In addition, data were collected through interviews, exploratory school visits, and surveys. Focus groups were conducted with state staff and RESC RF coordinators.

Results show that RF schools are beating the odds – for instance, data reveal that RF schools outperform non-RF schools each year on DIBELS measurements (i.e., the actual performance and achievement gains of RF students are higher than non-RF students). Findings also show that in Louisiana RF schools, students are reading more, teachers are teaching differently, and special education referrals are decreasing. Gains in RF schools are especially striking for minorities. These results are more stunning in light of demographics that describe many Louisiana RF schools as having a greater concentration of minorities and students living in poverty.

Equally important, the large majority of school districts are showing a desirable increase in low risk students and a decrease in at-risk students as measured using data from the DIBELS assessments. Detailed charts for grades K-3 are included in the evaluation report, providing more thorough statistical results. For grades 1-3, for example, the gains in these grades (although notable) are not as dramatic as in kindergarten; although the percent of students reading below benchmark decreased eight percent from Spring 2005 to Spring 2006 for each grade level, the percent of students reading below benchmark at the end of second grade is actually higher than had been the case with those same students a year earlier at the end of first grade. What is highly significant – and very favorable – about the pattern of results for grades 1-3 is that when students enter a grade better prepared, they finish better prepared a year later. In this way, the dramatic gains in kindergarten are likely to lead in a few years to equally dramatic gains in grade 3 reading achievement.

If the favorable trends of the last two years continue over the next few years, Louisiana is poised to see major improvements in K-3 reading achievement. However, given its current success with basic reading skills, especially in kindergarten, Louisiana RF should now redouble its commitment to help schools tackle roadblocks that stand in the way of greater progress and sustainability efforts.

The Center for Child Development recommends that:

- Regional Education Service Center RF coordinators spend more time in schools working on-site with school-based reading coaches;
- Teachers be supported (for example, through professional development) in how to design small group instruction and reading centers to meet the needs of all children, including struggling readers as well as accelerated learners;
- Coaches network to share ideas and resources with coaches in other schools working with the same core program with the intent of sharing this information with teachers;
- The LDE monitor and support quality embedded professional development;
- The LDE give assistance to districts and schools in clarifying the role of the reading coach and setting priorities (provisions should be made, for example, to reduce administrative responsibilities, freeing the coaches to spend more time to support improved instruction);
- State-, regional-, and local-level staff burnout and turnover issues should be investigated;
- The LDE create additional opportunities for district and school administrators to collaborate and support each other;
- The LDE continue to emphasize the importance of collaborative learning at the school and district levels (e.g., peer observation, modeling, conferencing);
- The LDE utilize information on teacher content knowledge to inform professional development;
- The LDE develop a plan and timetable to address sustainability issues such as funding for schools to continue implementing the principal elements of RF, and;
- The LDE support additional analysis and research related to the effects of the RF program on special education referrals and identifications, grade level retention, and longitudinal effects of the program using the statewide mandated assessments (i.e., iLEAP, LEAP, and the GEE) and the results of the K-12 reading initiative.

While none of this is easy, ensuring that all children receive effective reading instruction in the early grades continues to be of critical importance to Louisiana educators. After Louisiana RF demonstrated promise in classrooms across the state, the program expanded to support additional schools – the initiative has grown from funding 87 schools in 2005 to 111 schools in 2006-07. Dollar for dollar, data show that investment in teacher development increases student achievement more than anything else. There is gathering momentum in the area of literacy in Louisiana. This statewide movement, anchored by scientifically based reading research, IS rapidly achieving, at a minimum, grade-level reading for all of Louisiana’s RF school children.

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Reading First Program Background

The Reading First (RF) program is grounded in scientific research and is part of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*. The *No Child Left Behind Act*, signed into law in 2002, has expanded the federal role in education and set requirements that affect every public school. At the core of *No Child Left Behind* is RF, a high-quality evidence-based initiative, designed to close the achievement gaps between different groups of students by ensuring that more children receive effective reading instruction in the early grades. Funds are dedicated to help states and local school districts eliminate the reading deficit by establishing high-quality, comprehensive reading instruction in kindergarten through grade 3. Built on a solid foundation of research, the program is designed to select, implement, and provide professional development for teachers to use scientifically-based reading programs. It also ensures accountability through ongoing, valid and reliable screening, diagnostic, and classroom-based assessment.

## 1.2. Overview of the Reading First Program

Reading First is authorized under Title I, Part B, Subpart 1 of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* for the purpose of helping state and local educational agencies:

1. Establish reading programs for students in grades K-3 that are founded on scientifically based reading research, thereby ensuring that every student can read at or above grade level by grade 4;
2. Offer professional development and other support so that teachers have the knowledge and tools they need to identify and overcome their students' specific reading barriers;
3. Select and administer screening, diagnostic, and classroom-based instructional reading assessments;
4. Select or develop effective instructional materials to assist teachers in implementing the essential components of reading instruction; and
5. Strengthen coordination among schools, early literacy programs, and family literacy programs to improve reading achievement for all children (NCLB, 2001).

The federal Reading First program was established in 2002 through a \$900 million Congressional appropriation (USDE, 2002 <http://www.ed.gov/programs/readingfirst/index.html>).

The mission of Louisiana's Reading First program is

“to elevate and sustain teacher and student content knowledge and performance of PK-16+ education, specifically in the area of reading, through standards-based, scientifically based reading research learning supported by quality professional development.” (LDE, 2002. p. 66).

In Louisiana RF is administered by the Curriculum Access Section of the Division of Educational Improvement and Assistance which is housed within the LDE Office of Student and School Performance.<sup>1</sup> The same section administers two other reading initiatives:

1. the K-3 Reading and Math Initiative, a legislatively-mandated and state-funded program that has been in place since 1997, and
2. the PK-12 Reading Initiative.

### **1.3. Annual Report Organization**

This annual report is an update from earlier published reports, but it also includes previously unpublished information. Section 2 presents the student achievement results for the 2005-06 school year which have previously been published and presented to the Louisiana State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education on August 16, 2006. The information presented in August was summary in nature and covered the complete school year – there are no updates to this information; however, detailed results and discussion are included in this report.

Section 3 covers information about professional development and program implementation. Although SY 2005-06 was officially the third year of the RF program in Louisiana, it was actually the first full year of program implementation at the school and district levels. SY 2003-04 was a year of critical capacity building in which the state began developing the infrastructure to administer a district application process; SY 2004-05 was a year for building infrastructure and laying the foundation for scientifically based reading instruction. Even though there is ample evidence suggesting that substantial progress was made in implementing the RF program during SY 2005-06, this section will describe in detail the status of state-, district-, and local-level implementation efforts and the impact of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita on these efforts.

Section 4 presents the results of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) survey that was completed by 1,512 RF administrators, reading coaches, interventionists, and K-3 and special education teachers in January of 2006. The survey data were gathered and analyzed to illuminate the student achievement and professional development data discussed in earlier sections of the report and to make informed decisions about program planning and technical assistance that foster continuous improvement.

Section 5 presents the results of an analysis of special education referrals within the context of the RF program. This section presents previously unpublished information regarding the effects of the RF program on the referral rate to special education.

Finally, Section 6 briefly discusses the effects of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita on the RF program. It is important to describe the context in which the longitudinal evaluation will be impacted over the current and subsequent school years. Looking forward, evaluating the RF program will be greatly complicated by the effects of the storms on Louisiana's public schools and, in particular, the New Orleans area.

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<sup>1</sup> Though the Division of Educational Improvement and Assistance administers the RF program, the eight Regional Educational Service Centers (RESCs) play a crucial role by employing the Regional Reading Coordinators who facilitate program implementation around the state. The RESCs are administered by a division within the Executive Office of the Superintendent.

## 2. Student Achievement

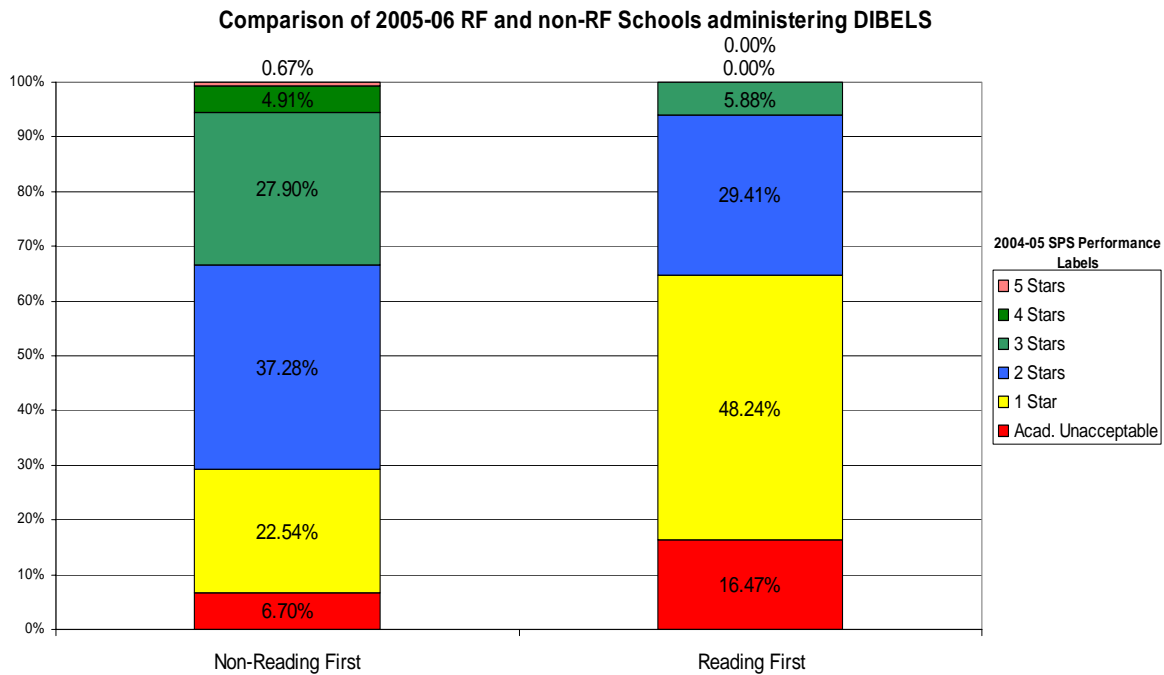
This section presents the 2005-06 student achievement results from Louisiana's RF program. It addresses student reading growth and performance based on Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) test results. The DIBELS test is aligned with Louisiana's plan for RF implementation which is modeled on the National Reading Panel's *Teaching Children to Read*. This report will also assess the effectiveness of the program as measured by increasing the number of students reading on benchmark.

### 2.4. Methodology

The essential measures for this study were collected as part of the normal RF program activities. DIBELS is the primary test metric used within the RF program to determine the reading abilities of students within the program. DIBELS is also used by a large number of other schools that were either mandated to use the assessment (required to be 4% in each school district) or have chosen to use the assessment as part of their normal literacy assessments. These well documented testing methods are fully explained in the DIBELS Administration and Scoring Manual, which can be accessed from the University of Oregon's Web site (<http://dibels.uoregon.edu>). For the purposes of this study, no changes were made in the established techniques. Scores from the teachers and benchmarks established in previous research were accepted without change. As noted elsewhere in this report, DIBELS benchmark assessments are mostly administered by school or district assessment teams created specifically for that purpose. The Louisiana Department of Education requires that students be assessed by a staff member who is not directly responsible for delivering reading instruction to that student.

DIBELS measures of student performance were collected from all schools administering the tests in Louisiana. This included all RF schools in Louisiana and included virtually all Louisiana RF students. In effect, the data set represents the total population of RF students. Reading First schools were not matched with demographically similar schools. Schools in the RF program were initially selected into the program because they were low performing and high poverty. The schools that were compared to the RF schools in the report were either required to administer DIBELS or voluntarily have chosen to use the assessments as part of their literacy program. Due to the manner in which the comparison group was formed, it is similar in neither demographics nor school performance. As the following graph demonstrates, the comparison schools' School Performance Score Labels show a distinctly different distribution. Note that the School Performance Labels are for the previous school year (2004-05) because the labels for the 2005-06 year were not available at the time that this report was written.

**Figure 1: Performance Labels for RF and non-RF Schools in Data Set**



The data were collected into four datasets – one for each grade K-3. The datasets were created by matching all Louisiana data that is stored on the DIBELS Data System (DDS) Web site (<http://dibels.uoregon.edu>) with the LDE’s Student Information System (SIS). In addition to matching students in SIS, the datasets also included (and were limited to) students with assessment results for all three of the benchmark assessment periods. All Louisiana schools that use DIBELS are required to have their data entered into the DDS. Each dataset contained both academic ability and demographic measures. Demographic measures in all four datasets included school district, ethnic group, gender, participation in Reading First (yes or no), free or reduced lunch enrollment (yes or no), Full English Proficiency (Fully or Low), and special education (gifted, special education, or regular education). Each demographic measure was designed to identify groups of students according to the requirements of the No Child Left Behind legislation.

Academic measures were based on skills that are needed at the grade level. In Kindergarten, the measures include initial sound fluency (ISF), letter naming fluency (LNF), phoneme segmentation fluency (PSF), nonsense word fluency (NWF), and word use fluency (WUF). The first grade dataset includes LNF, PSF, NWF, WUF, retell fluency (RTF), and oral reading fluency (ORF). For second and third grades, the datasets include NWF (second only), WUF, ORF, and RTF. The datasets are characterized by enormous size - with 66,569 students included in the study group - and constantly moving targets. Each of these two characteristics will be discussed in more complete detail below but each provides both opportunities and challenges to data analysis. The large study size combined with the use of escalating benchmarks makes normal statistical significance testing inappropriate. In addition, the normal development pattern of any child precludes using the same benchmark and, in many cases, the same measure.

The census of students demands specific analysis techniques. Naturally, descriptive measures of proportion and averages were calculated. However, many studies might do additional tests of significance. Significance tests determine the likelihood that an effect seen in a sample is also in the population. Since this study used a population (DIBELS administering schools in Louisiana), significance tests are meaningless. In addition, these same tests have a tendency toward finding significance in very large samples. It is not that the tests are wrong. In very large samples, the tests may find real differences that are not very important. For example, thousands of library records may show that a child is more likely to choose a red book than a blue book while very few children go to the library hoping for a red book. The difference is real but not important.

There is a growing movement in social science to add tests of importance to tests of significance. With this dataset, it is essential to consider tests of importance as a primary measure of Reading First effectiveness. Effectively, the question was not *if* there was an effect of the program. Rather, the goal of this study is to describe the effect and then test the importance of that effect. These tests of importance were used to measure how much of the variation in the scores were due to Reading First rather than just differences between children.

There are two types of measures and each has specific tests. The first are the actual scores given to students. These continuous measures are valuable for forecasting trends using regression techniques. The accepted measure of importance is the r-square. Roughly, the r-square predicts the amount of variance explained by the relationship between variables. The second test involves the proportion of students meeting benchmarks. Tables of crosstabs allowed us to look at the effect of one benchmark on the next. The test of significance for crosstabs, the chi-square, is particularly sensitive to large sample size. One of the most popular tests of importance is Cramer's V.

Unlike tests of significance, tests of importance do not produce bright line yes or no answers. The result is more or less important. For the purpose of this study, an r-square over 0.25 was considered a reasonably important effect. For Cramer's V, several levels are normally useful. If Cramer's V =

- 0.25 or higher Very strong relationship
  - 0.15 to 0.25 Strong relationship
  - 0.11 to 0.15 Moderate relationship
  - 0.06 to 0.10 Weak relationship
  - 0.0 to 0.05 No or negligible relationship.
- (<http://faculty.quinnipiac.edu/libarts/polsci/Statistics.html>)

The goal of this study was to look at key variables to determine measurable effects of the Reading First program. Some measures may be more useful to the teacher than for program evaluation. Ideally, a measure at one time period should produce a reasonable variation at the second time period. If a majority of the students in the second time period are all performing the same, is that an effect of the program or just an effect of childhood? This study concentrated on variable relationships where there were effects from one period to the next or between groups within the dataset (e.g., Reading First versus non-Reading First students). It was in these relationships that we were able to see what effect could be found, then test the importance of that effect.

There are two other unavoidable facts that must be addressed in this evaluation: Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. While a complete assessment of the impact of these disasters on Louisiana's education system is beyond the scope of this report, the changing distribution of students is accounted for to the extent possible. The biggest change in population in the RF program is the loss of the Orleans School District and the 14 RF schools located there. While literally every school in the state of Louisiana was impacted directly or indirectly by the storms, the true impact is difficult to assess. In order to account for the changing RF population, any comparisons made to the previous year will only include schools that fully participated in RF in both school years.

## **2.5. Evaluation Questions**

The following subsections provide brief answers to the evaluation questions that are most important to determining the effect of the RF program on student achievement. Each subsection will present summary results that were used to determine an answer to the question. More detailed results related to student achievement are included in subsequent sections and the detailed statistical analyses are available in a separate appendix.

### **2.5.1. Reduction in the Percentage of Students Reading Below Benchmark**

This section addresses the following question:

- *To what extent has the number of RF students in grades 1-3 who are reading below benchmark been reduced?*

Specifically, this question will be addressed in the context of those students who are explicitly reading, so the results will be presented for first, second and third grade students. While there are DIBELS components to address the pre-literate skills of kindergarten students, they are not truly reading. Within the context of DIBELS assessment, the spring ORF results will be used. DIBELS classifies students into one of three categories: Low Risk, Some Risk, and At Risk. Only students who are classified as being low risk are considered to be on benchmark, so the results here are the percentages of students in each grade that were classified as some risk or at risk.

**Table 1: Decrease in Percentages of Students Below Benchmark**

Percentage of Reading First Students Below Benchmark - DIBELS Oral Reading Fluency			
Grade	Spring 2005	Spring 2006	Percent Change
First	51%	43%	-8%
Second	63%	55%	-8%
Third	66%	58%	-8%

As the results in the table demonstrate, there is clearly a reduction between Spring 2005 and Spring 2006 in the percentage of students that were performing below benchmark as measured by the DIBELS Oral Reading Fluency measure.

### **2.5.2. Increase in the Percentage of Students Reading Above Benchmark**

This section addresses the following question:

- *To what extent has the percentages of RF students in grades 1-3 who are reading above benchmark been increased?*

Again, this question will be addressed in the context of those percentages of students who are explicitly reading, so the results will be presented for first, second and third grade students. While there are DIBELS components to address the pre-literate skills of kindergarten students, they are not truly reading. Within the context of DIBELS assessment, the spring ORF results will be used. DIBELS classifies students into one of three categories: Low Risk, Some Risk, and At Risk. Only students who are classified as being low risk are considered to be on benchmark, so the results here are the percentages of Reading First students in each grade that were classified as low risk.

**Table 2: Increase in Percentage of Students on Benchmark**  
Percentage of Reading First Students  
On or Above Benchmark -  
DIBELS Oral Reading Fluency

Grade	Spring 2005	Spring 2006	Percent Change
First	49%	57%	+8%
Second	37%	45%	+8%
Third	34%	42%	+8%

In a similar manner as the decrease in below benchmark students, there is a complementary increase in the percentages of students who are reading on or above benchmark.

### 2.5.3. Subgroup Performance Gap Closure

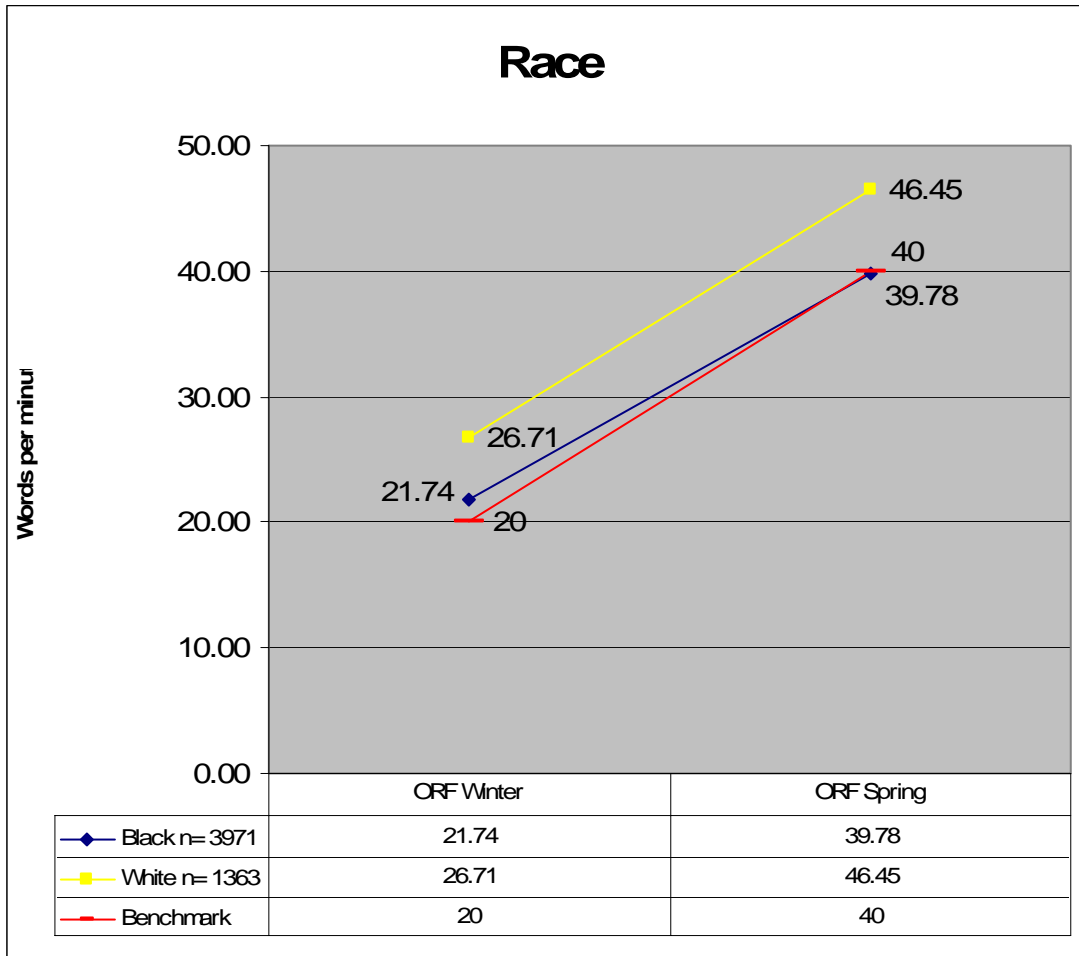
This section addresses the following question:

*To what extent has subgroup student performance (i.e. Special Education, Poverty, Gender, Limited English Proficiency, or Racial Subdivisions) been improved, and to what extent has the gap closed between schools with low performing students and schools with traditionally higher performing students?*

The NCLB legislation, of which the RF program is a part, clearly expects all subgroups to make progress and expects subgroups with a performance gap to make even greater progress, thereby, closing the gap. Previous reports have shown that students in the Louisiana RF program exhibit differential performance between various subgroups. Results from this year and the previous year show that the gaps between most subgroups are decreasing while in others the gap remains unchanged. A complete detailing of all subgroups and gaps is included in subsequent sections in this report. This section will present a variety of results that summarize and demonstrate the changes in gaps within the RF program.

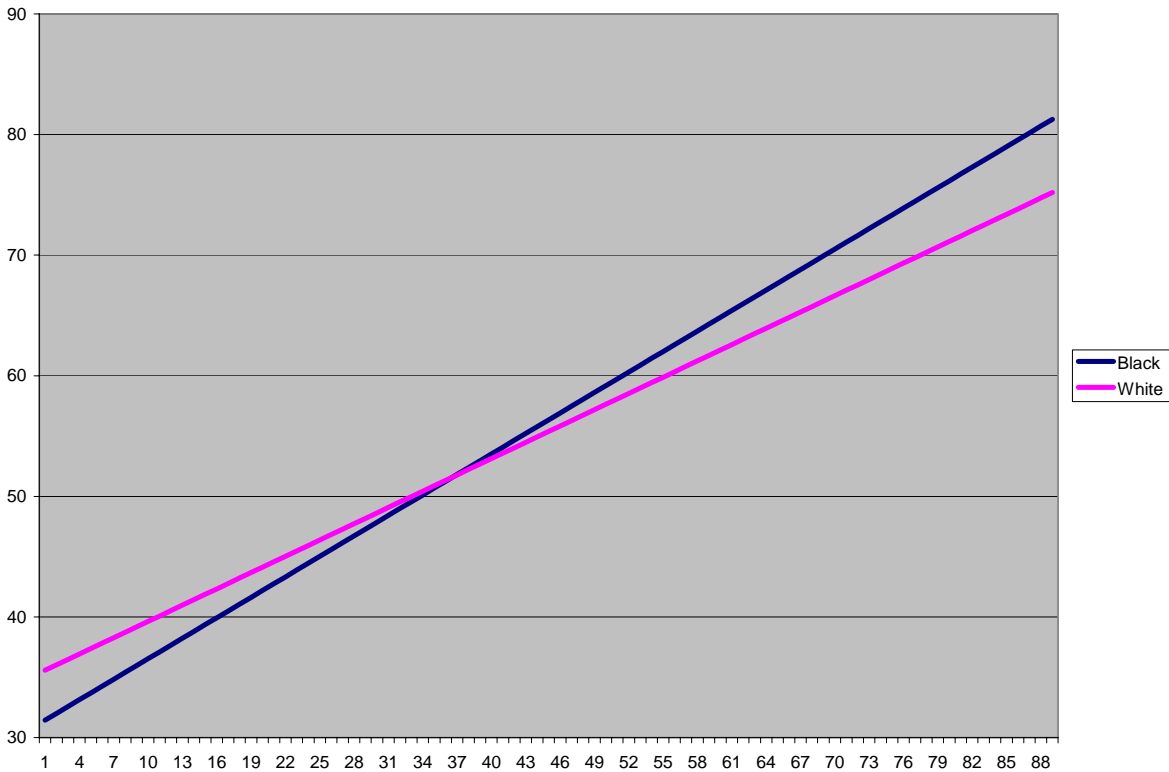
The results for first grade oral reading fluency by race are illustrative of the results that are seen for the other grades. While the absolute gap in ORF grows slightly from the winter to the spring (5 to 6.5 words per minute), the relative gap as defined by the gap divided by the benchmark value narrows (25% of benchmark to 16% of benchmark) as shown in the following graph.

Figure 2: Growth in First Grade ORF by Race 2005-06



While looking at the absolute and relative gaps based on the means provides some insight into the dynamics of the group, a deeper analysis can be conducted using regression. Using only the means of the groups of interest, the analysis is weighted down by the unequal group sizes (i.e., 1,363 white and 3,971 black students). By performing a regression analysis for these two subgroups of students and then plotting the line defined by the regression coefficients, we compared the growth slopes as shown in the following graph. The graph shows that while black students begin the year scoring lower than white students, the black students benefit more from RF than white students. That is, their regression line had a steeper slope indicating that they benefited more from the program even though their scores at the end of the year, on average, are still lower than scores for white students.

**Figure 3: Regression Comparison in Growth in First Grade ORF by Race 2005-06**



These results are repeated almost universally for historically underperforming subgroups, including Free or Reduced Lunch status, special education, gender, and limited English proficiency. Students who are enrolled in the Free or Reduced Lunch programs benefit more than those who are not, students classified as special education benefit more than those who are not, and students with limited English proficiency benefit more than those who are fully proficient. In all cases, while the gap is closing and the rate of growth is greater for underperforming groups, the absolute performance of these subgroups shows that the gap, though smaller, still exists.

There is one interesting exception to these results in case of gender. Historically, girls outperform boys, so based on the previous results we would expect the gap to close between boys and girls as demonstrated by greater growth rates for girls based on the regression analysis. In kindergarten, the slope for boys indicates greater growth, but the regression lines do not cross. In first grade, girls appear to benefit more than boys do, but in second and third grade this trend is reversed, showing that boys are benefiting more than girls and the gap is narrowing. These differential growth rates are shown in the following series of graphs.

Figure 4: Kindergarten 2005-06 PSF Regression Lines

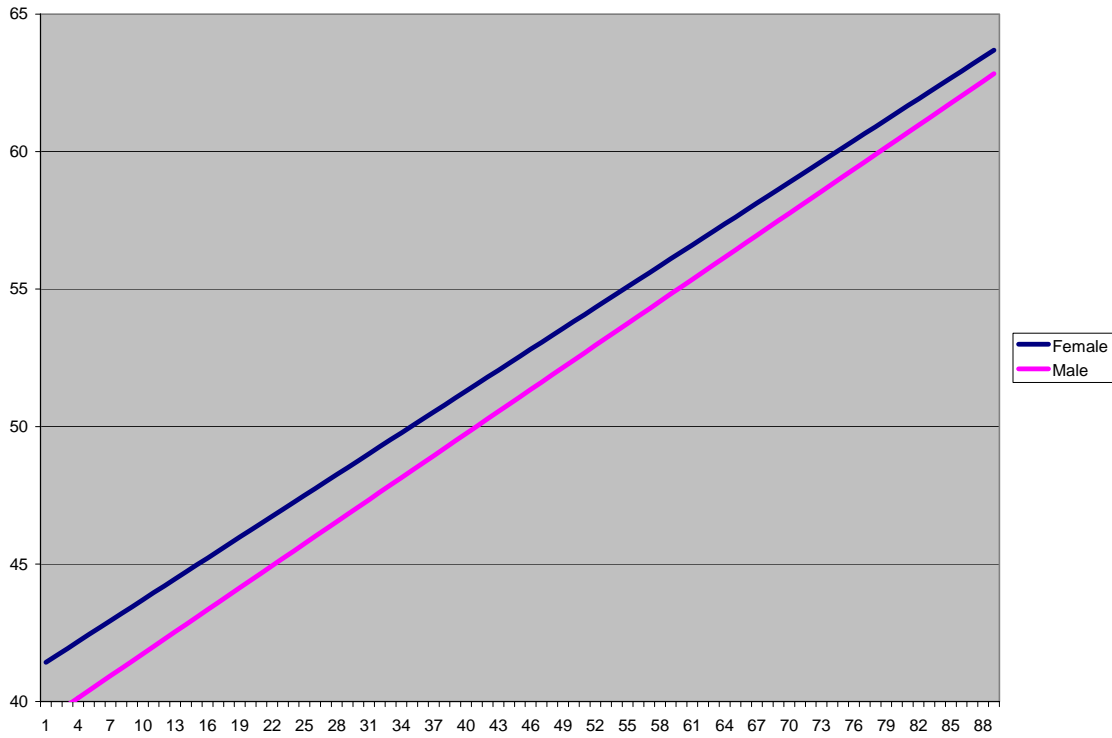
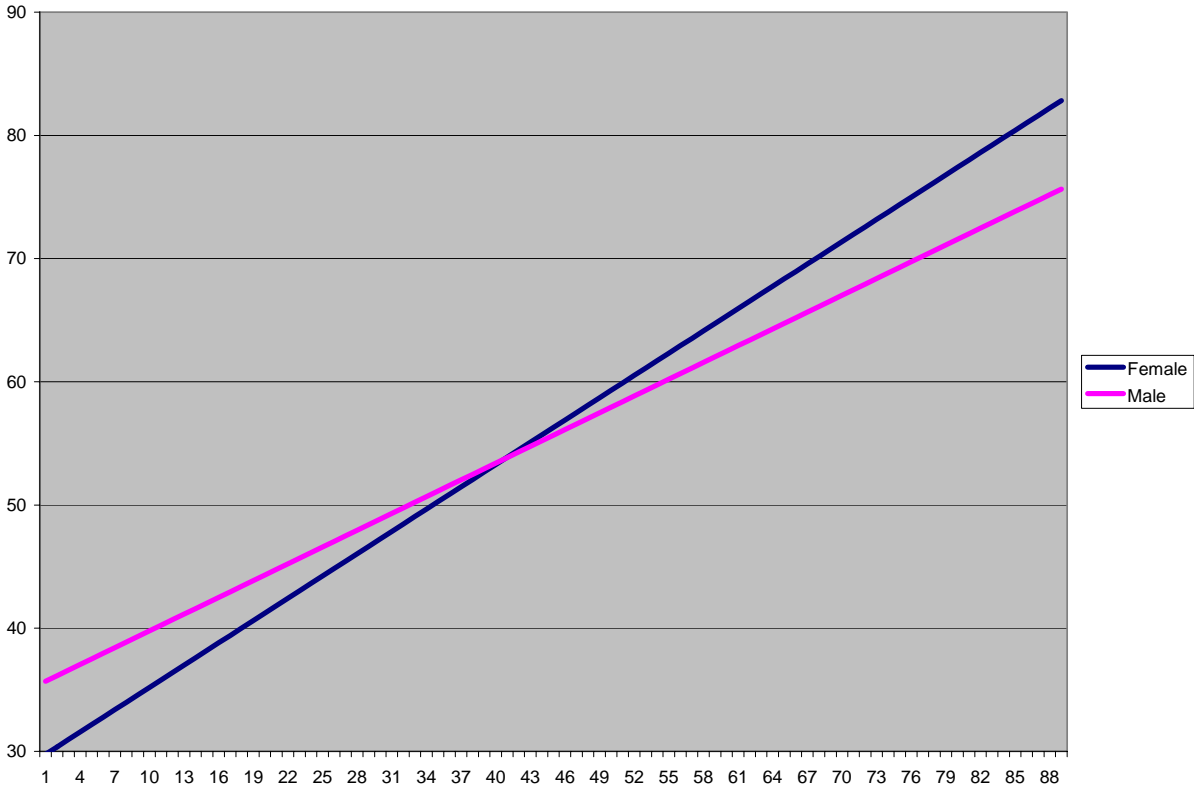
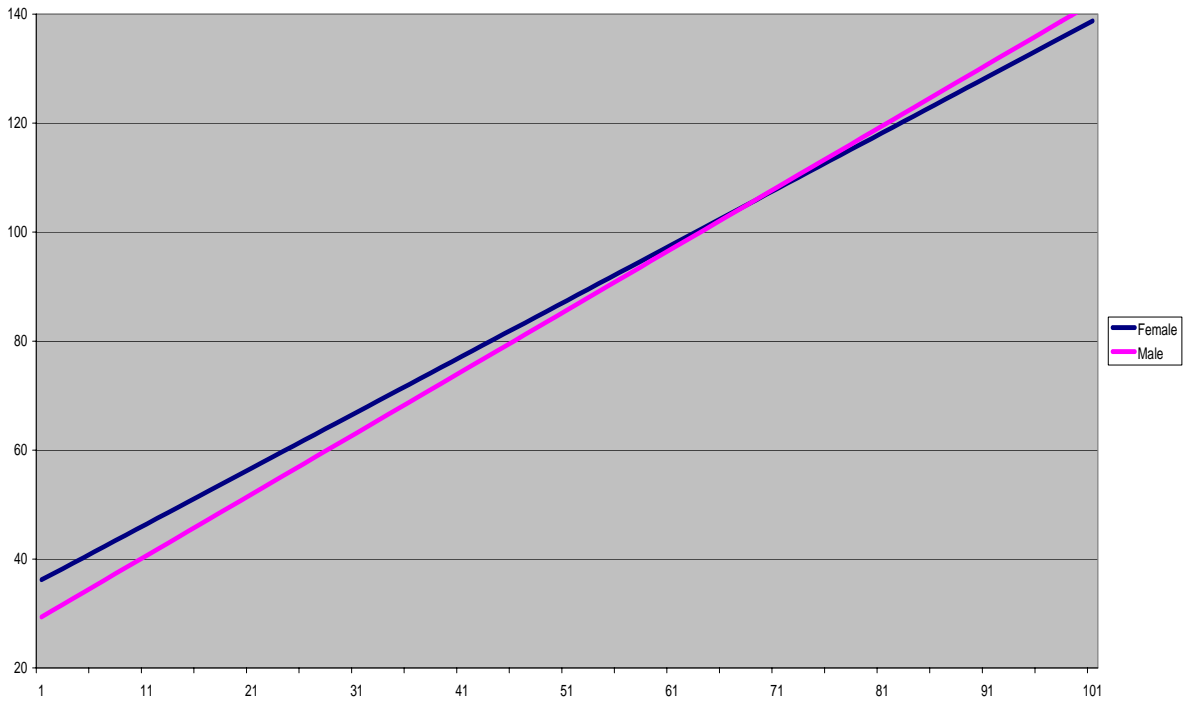


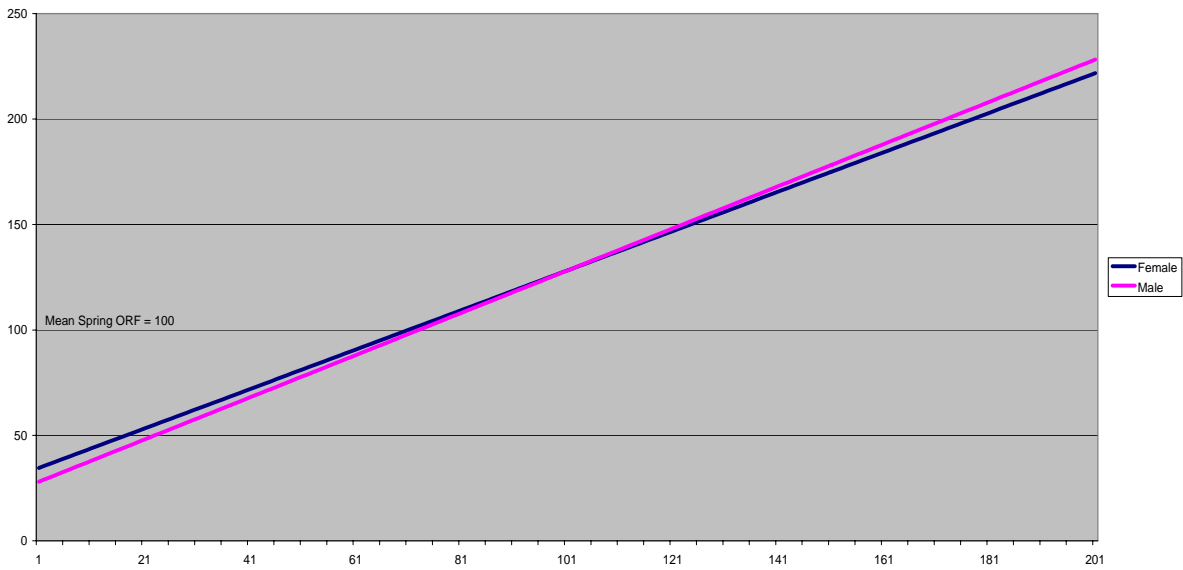
Figure 5: First Grade ORF Regression Lines



**Figure 6: Second Grade 2005-06 Regression Lines**



**Figure 7: Third Grade ORF 2006 Regression Lines**



As in other subgroups, the narrowing gaps indicate progress, yet the gaps still exist.

### 2.5.4. Effectiveness

This section addresses the following evaluation question:

*How has RF been effective in addressing the reading needs of students in high poverty and low performing schools?*

As was the case in the previous year's report, effectiveness will look at within year effectiveness as measured by the DIBELS Effectiveness Index (DEI). The DEI is a simple aggregate measure of change in simultaneous distributions that is based on a fall to spring cross tabulation of DIBELS components (the definition of the DEI can be found in the appendix). The results for the second year of implementation for the RF program are similar to the first year's results. There are some changes in the aggregate results that are likely due to the maturing of the program. In addition to examining the DEI, it is also informative to look at the changes in the distribution for both years. This is most easily done with a graph showing the change in at risk and low risk percentages from one year to the next on a simple quadrant chart. First, the DEI results will be presented, followed by a quadrant chart for each grade.

#### 2.5.4.1. DIBELS Effectiveness Index (DEI)

The DEI was calculated based on the within year results to give an indication of whether the overall distribution of students has changed. The DEI results in a number between -2 and + 2 with each end of the range implying either all students moving to the at risk category (-2) or all moving to the low risk category (+2). Given the size and scope of RF in Louisiana, it is highly unlikely that either value will be attained. More generally, all results greater than zero (i.e., positive numbers) can be construed to imply a positive change in the distribution, and all results less than zero (i.e., negative numbers) can be construed to indicate a negative change in the distribution. The following table summarizes the effectiveness results within RF for each grade.

**Table 3: DIBELS Effectiveness Index by Grade 2005-06**

Grade	DEI (2004-05)	DEI (2005-06)
Kindergarten	1.27	1.32
First	0.36	0.34
Second	-0.44	-0.36
Third	0.12	0.24

Again, the 2005-06 results are very similar to the previous year, but do show a positive trend in all grades except for first, where the difference is very small. Perhaps most important to note is that the effectiveness appears to be increasing even in kindergarten where the children who entered in 2005-06 are essentially the same as those who entered in 2004-05, meaning that neither group had any pre-existing reading instruction and all basically started from the same place in their development. In other grades within the program, there are varying degrees of participation and similarity to previous years of literacy instruction.

The following table displays effectiveness by grade and school district. It appears that many of the districts that showed the most effectiveness in the first year of implementation, are now dropping toward the middle of the pack, while others that appeared less effective the previous year are now relatively more effective than their RF peers. This is likely due to a number of

factors including timing of implementation, different cohorts, and additional difficulty in building on previous results once the “low-hanging fruit” have been harvested. Truer measures of longitudinal growth, performance, and effectiveness will have to wait until the full four years of the program have been executed for a single cohort of students. In order to allow for comparisons to the previous year, last year’s effectiveness table is re-produced here.

Table 4: DIBELS Effectiveness Indices for the 2004-05

2004-05 School Year	<i>Effectiveness Index</i>			
District	K	First	Second	Third
Assumption	1.40	0.11	-0.48	0.29
Avoyelles	1.59	0.57	-0.87	-0.13
Bogalusa City	1.41	0.98	-0.27	0.61
Caddo	1.09	0.55	-0.43	0.09
Concordia	1.35	0.77	-0.48	-0.03
De Soto	1.13	0.79	-0.18	0.36
East Carroll	1.20	0.26	-0.27	0.30
Franklin	0.69	0.17	-0.43	0.26
Iberia	1.61	0.41	-0.70	0.16
Iberville	1.71	0.49	-0.35	0.31
Jefferson	0.63	-0.06	-0.61	-0.04
Madison	0.96	0.75	-0.34	0.37
Monroe City	0.52	0.49	-0.76	-0.39
Orleans	0.33	-0.15	-0.55	-0.22
Pointe Coupee	0.57	0.59	-0.75	-0.05
St. Helena	1.26	-0.37	-0.46	-0.17
St. James	1.60	0.34	-0.73	-0.08
Tangipahoa	1.45	0.38	-0.12	0.24
Vermilion	1.60	0.55	-0.38	-0.17
Washington	1.52	-0.19	-0.13	0.09
West Baton Rouge	1.70	0.16	-0.44	0.09
<b>Louisiana RF</b>	<b>1.18</b>	<b>0.36</b>	<b>-0.44</b>	<b>0.09</b>

Table 5: DIBELS Effectiveness Indices for the 2005-06

2005-06 School Year	<i>Effectiveness Index</i>			
District	K	1st	2nd	3rd
Assumption	1.81	0.33	-0.44	0.34
Avoyelles	1.56	0.68	-0.14	0.78
Bogalusa City	1.43	0.49	-0.59	0.14
Caddo	1.26	0.46	-0.48	0.19
Concordia	1.37	0.33	-0.60	0.09
De Soto	0.87	0.02	-0.51	0.20
East Carroll	0.54	0.18	0.00	1.06
Franklin	1.53	0.33	0.06	0.79
Iberia	1.44	0.14	-0.30	0.23
Iberville	1.73	0.26	-0.45	0.22

2005-06 School Year	<i>Effectiveness Index</i>			
District	K	1st	2nd	3rd
Jefferson	0.36	-0.16	-0.52	-0.30
Madison	0.65	1.08	-0.24	0.45
Monroe City	0.89	0.88	0.10	0.73
Pointe Coupee	1.09	0.45	-0.63	-0.11
St. Helena	0.90	-0.01	-0.51	-0.44
St. James	1.88	0.73	-0.42	0.00
Tangipahoa	1.46	0.07	-0.14	0.30
Vermilion	1.52	0.57	-0.36	0.17
Washington	1.43	0.00	-0.40	0.13
West Baton Rouge	1.94	0.88	-0.52	0.45
<b>Louisiana RF</b>	<b>1.32</b>	<b>0.34</b>	<b>-0.36</b>	<b>0.24</b>

The patterns in effectiveness are relatively consistent from the first to the second year, yet there is one difference in particular that is interesting to note. In the first year of implementation, the second grade effectiveness index was universally negative. The results for the second year of implementation show some variation indicating that there was improvement in a few of the districts' effectiveness indexes, even though the overall state effectiveness for second grade is negative. The CCD continues to research this second grade specific issue to provide insight and understanding into these results.

#### 2.5.4.2. Quadrant Charts

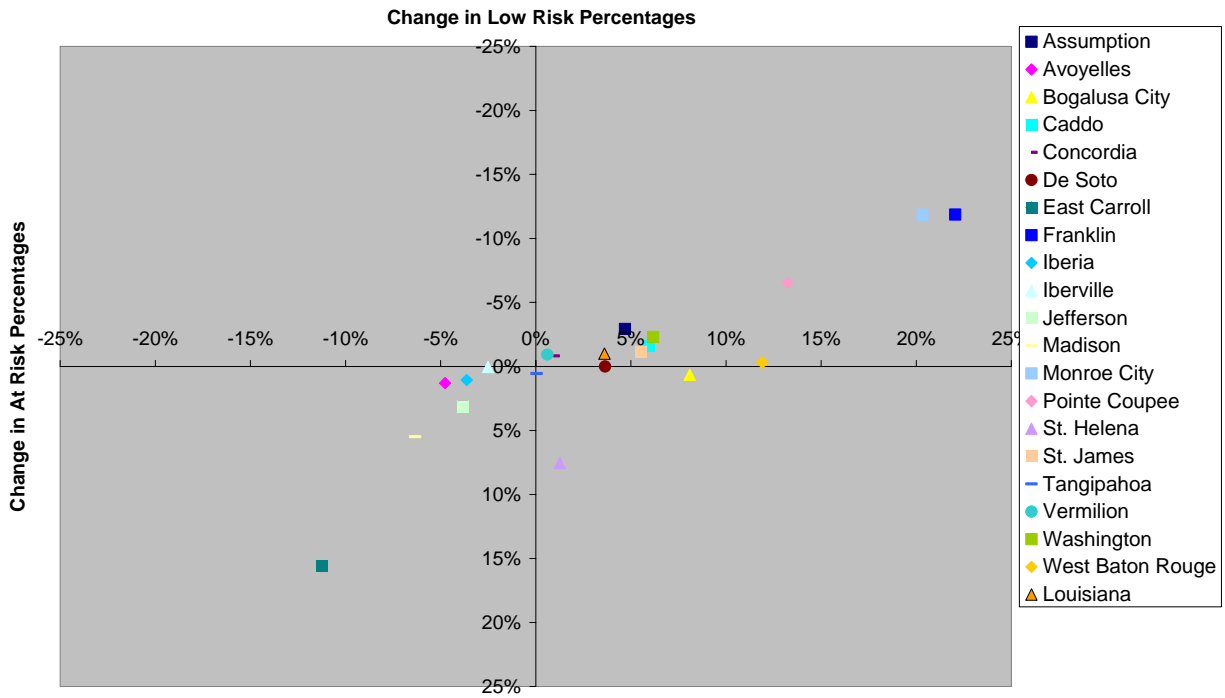
The quadrant charts to follow provide relatively straightforward visual representations of effectiveness across multiple years. While the within year DEI provides some insight into within grade and within year results, the quadrant charts provide some measure of progress from year to year. In each of the charts, the change in the percentage of students considered low risk is plotted along the horizontal or x-axis and the change in the percentage of students considered at risk along the vertical or y-axis. Zero for each axis is plotted in the middle, which generates a chart that has four quadrants. The results as plotted on these charts are readily interpreted for each entity represented (the charts included here are for school districts).

Each quadrant can be easily interpreted as a type of effectiveness. For example, the upper right quadrant would be considered the "good" quadrant indicating both an increase in low risk student percentages and a decrease in at risk percentages from one year to the next. Similarly, the lower left quadrant would be considered "bad" indicating an increase in at risk percentages and a decrease in low risk percentages. The remaining quadrants indicate mixed results where one measure improved while the other did not.

The first chart is for kindergarten PSF (the most important indicator of future reading success at the end of the kindergarten year) and shows a general overall improvement from the first year of implementation to the second. Each district is shown along with the overall results for the state showing up in the upper left or “good” quadrant of the chart.

**Figure 8: Kindergarten Phoneme Segmentation Fluency Cross-year Effectiveness**

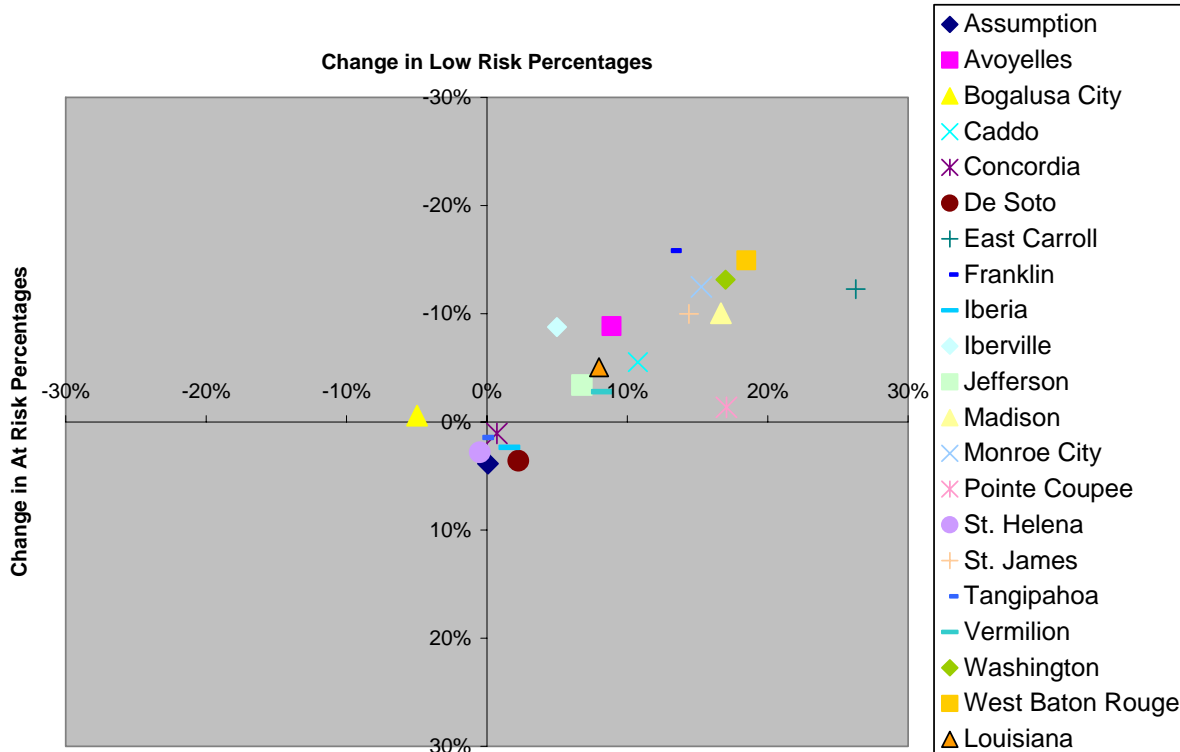
Kindergarten Districts Spring 2005 to Spring 2006 Performance



The next chart shows the change in percentages from the spring of 2005 to the spring of 2006 in first grade Oral Reading Fluency. The results comparing year to year appear even more positive for first grade than for kindergarten. In addition, the first grade students in the second year of implementation had one year of RF instruction in kindergarten, which would reasonably be expected to improve the first grade while simultaneously making it more difficult to show further improvement in kindergarten.

**Figure 9: First Grade Oral Reading Fluency Cross-year Effectiveness**

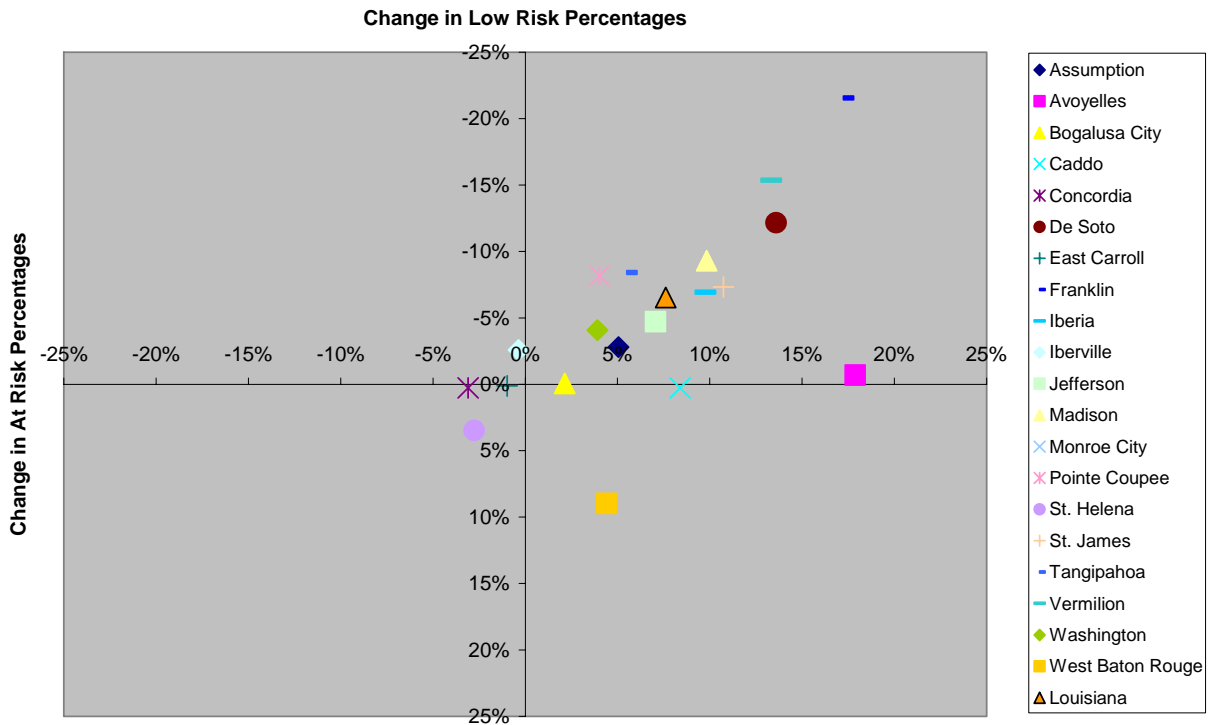
**First Grade Districts Spring 2005 to Spring 2006 Performance**



The quadrant chart for second grade appears to look much the same as the one for first grade. Overall, the state shows an increase in students in the low risk category and a decrease in the students reading in the at risk category. There are some exceptions, but generally the results show that RF is effectively increasing the number of children considered to be reading on benchmark as measured by DIBELS.

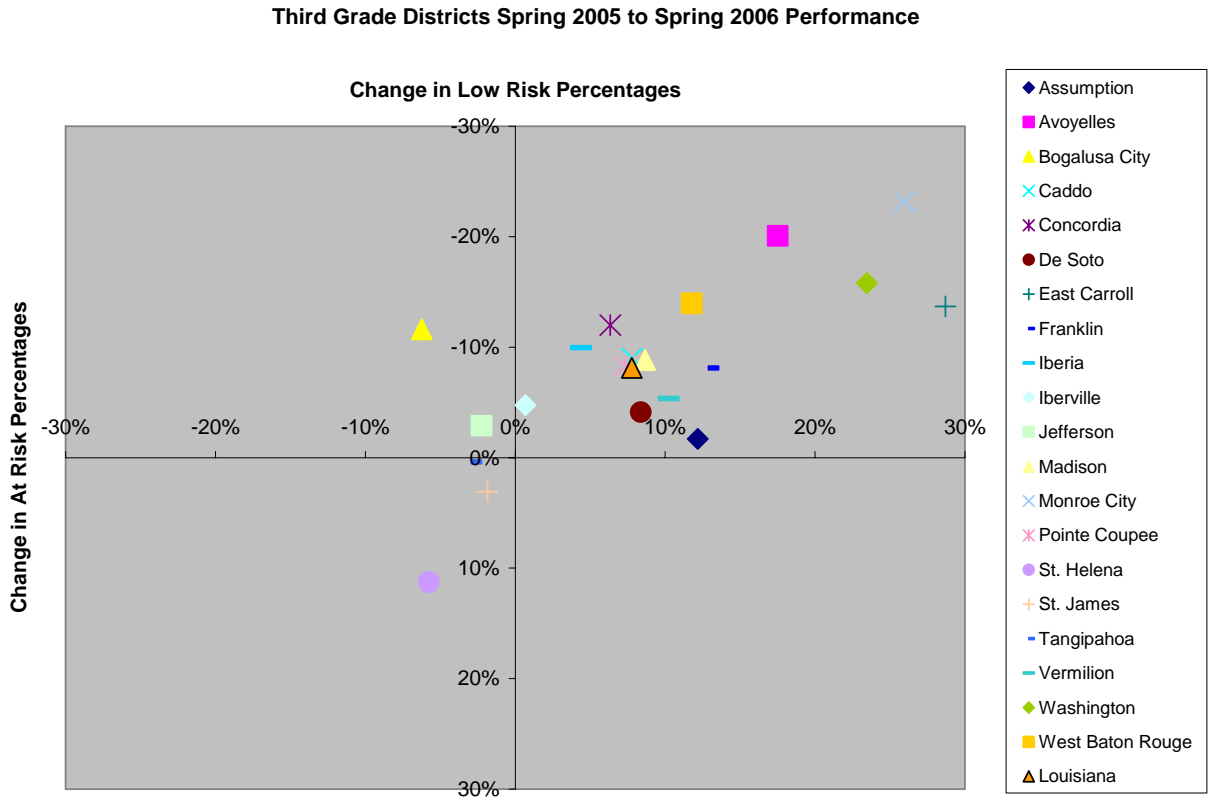
**Figure 10: Second Grade Oral Reading Fluency Cross-year Effectiveness**

**2nd Grade District Spring 2005 to Spring 2006**



The third grade results are very similar to the two preceding grades. A large majority of school districts is showing the desired increase in low risk students and the desired decrease in at-risk students.

**Figure 11: Third Grade Oral Reading Fluency Cross-year Effectiveness**



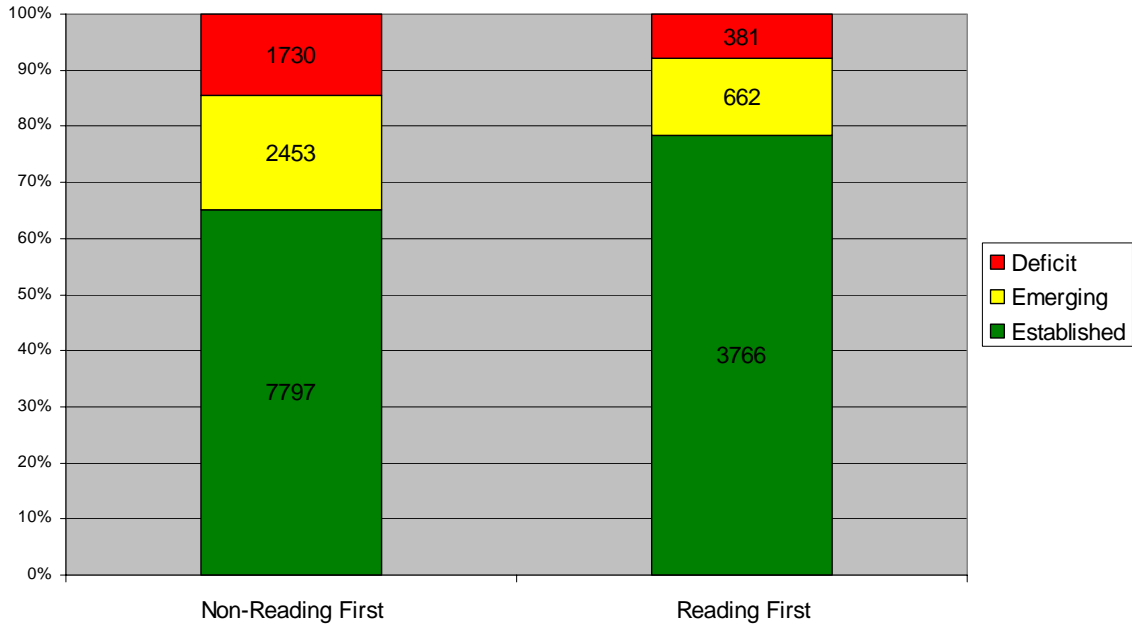
**2.5.5. Reading First Compared to non-Reading First**

This section addressed the following evaluation question:

*What are the differences between performance in Reading First and non-Reading First students, schools, and districts?*

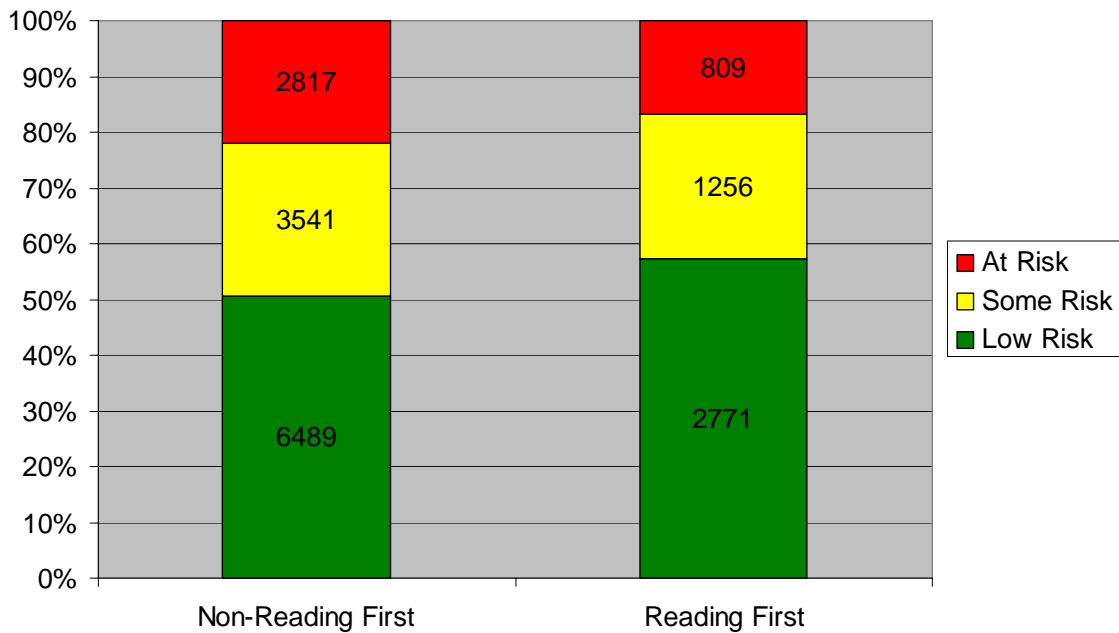
In the first year of implementation, DIBELS results had shown that there was a greater percentage of kindergarten students on benchmark in RF schools than in the non-RF schools that administered DIBELS. In the first, second and third grades there was approximately the same percentage of students in each DIBELS category in each grade. In the second year of implementation, kindergarten still shows that a greater percentage of students is on benchmark as measured by the DIBELS PSF test. After the second year of implementation, the results now show that there is a greater percentage of students on benchmark in first, second and third grade as well. All differences are statistically significant and additional analyses conducted also characterize the importance of the RF program in explaining these differences. The following set of graphs shows the comparison of distributions by grade.

**Figure 12: Kindergarten Comparison of RF and non-RF Students**  
**Kindergarten Spring 2006 Phoneme Segmentation Fluency**  
**RF vs. non-RF**

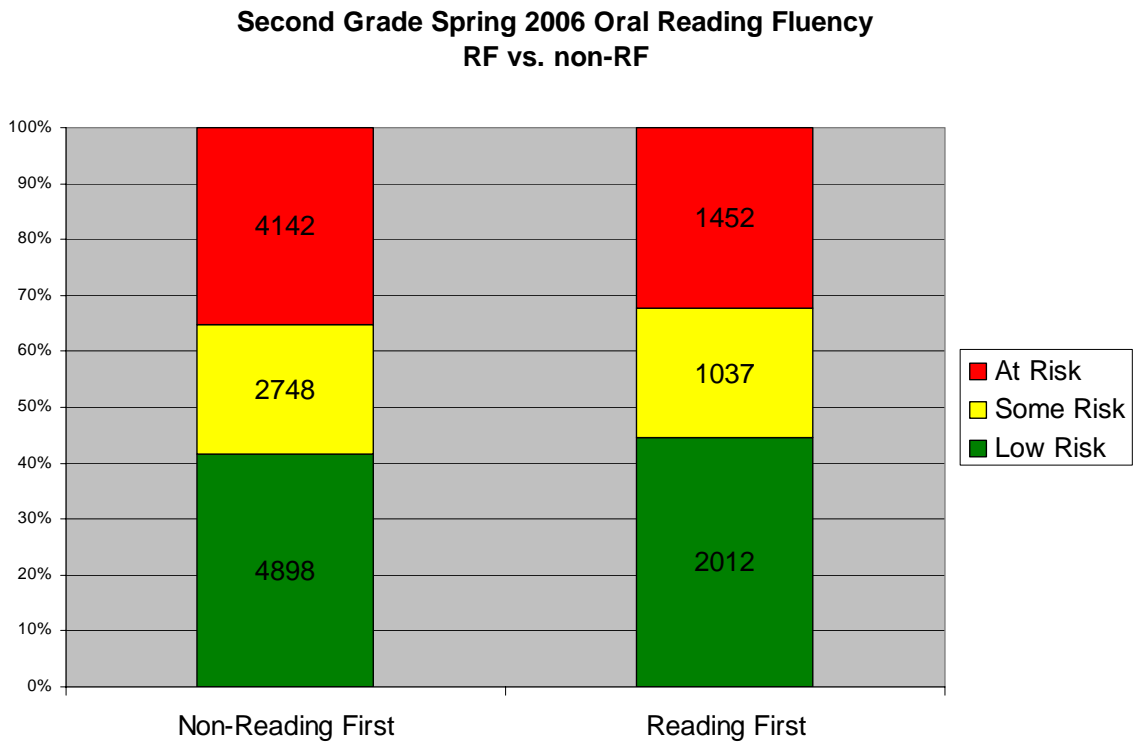


**Figure 13: First Grade Comparison of RF and Non-RF Students**

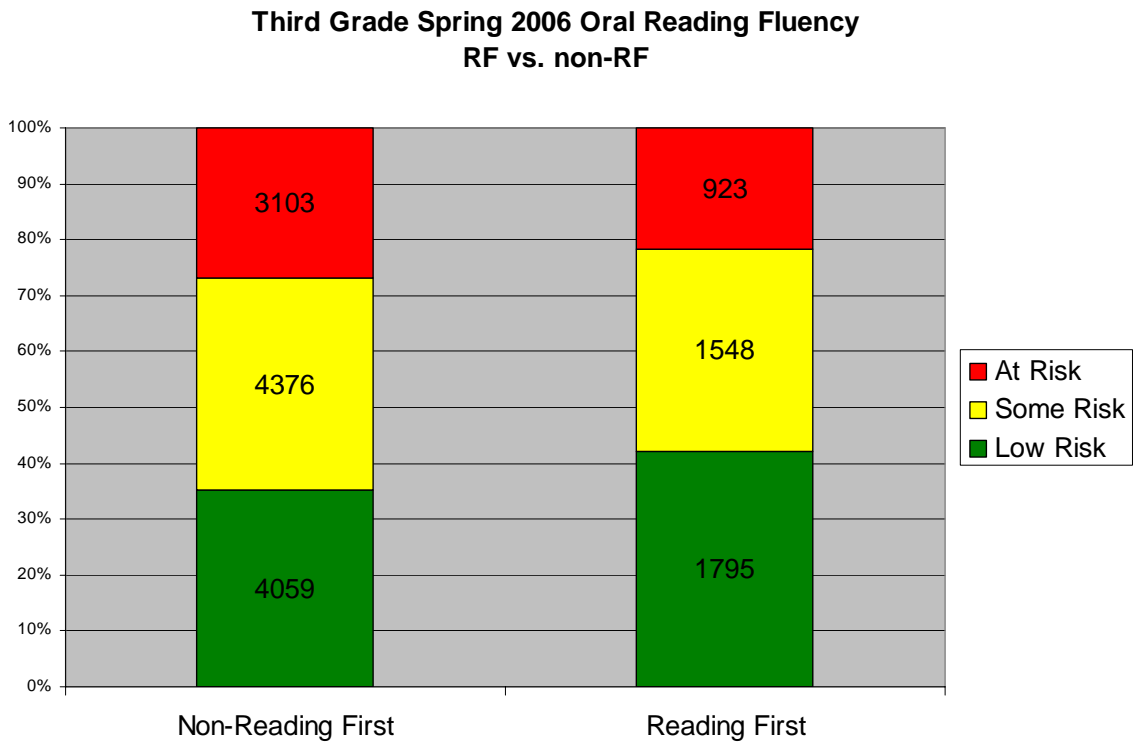
**First Grade Spring 2006 Oral Reading Fluency**  
**RF vs. non-RF**



**Figure 14: Second Grade Comparison of RF and non-RF Students**



**Figure 15: Third Grade Comparison of RF and non-RF Students**



### 2.5.6. What is the difference between Reading First and non-Reading First programs?

In general, results pointed in the same direction. Students' scores increased more in Reading First schools. An important consideration is that students in the Reading First program usually started each year at or below students in non-Reading First schools. By the end of the year, Reading First students generally excel over their non-Reading First peers. For example, Table 6 shows scores from kindergarten. In this case, all students were testing at the same level. By spring, Reading First students started to pull ahead on all measures. This trend continued into the first grade (see Table 7). Students in the Reading First program started with higher scores and continued through the end of the year. The differences between the two groups were somewhat moderated by the upper limits of the measures.

**Table 6: Kindergarten DIBELS Measures in Louisiana**

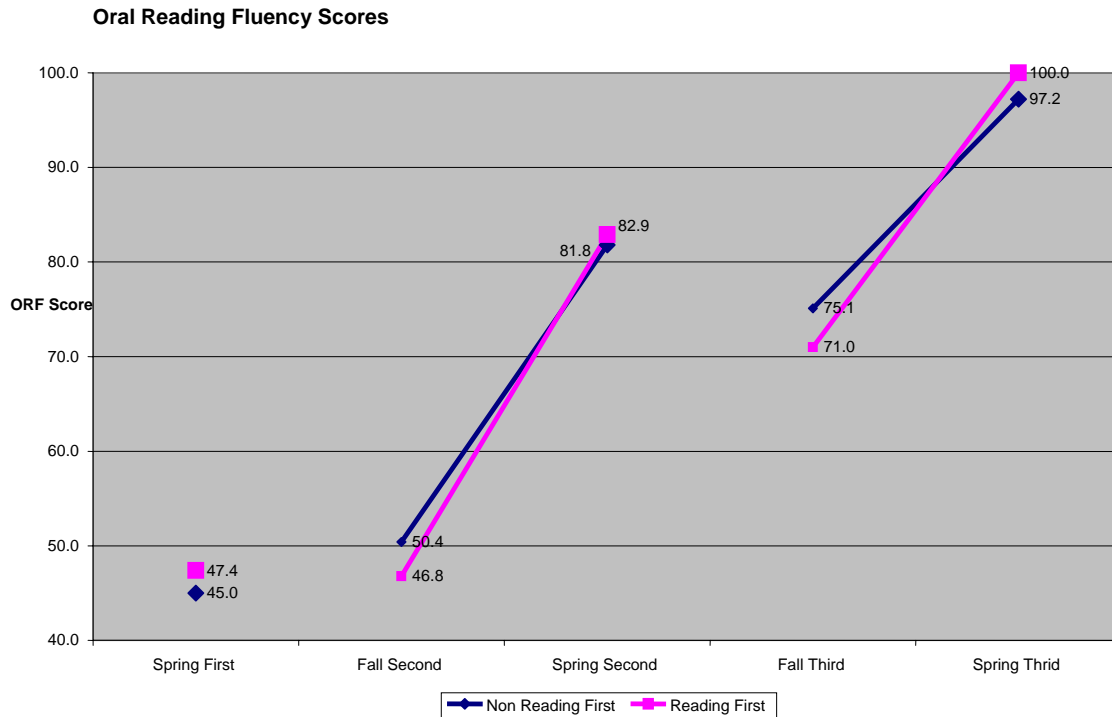
Kindergarten	Non-Reading First		Reading First	
	N	Mean	N	Mean
<i>Fall Scores</i>				
Initial Sound	11971	10	4809	10
Letter Naming	11980	16	4809	16
Word Use	11448	9	4808	7
<i>Spring Scores</i>				
Letter Naming	11980	40	4809	44
Word Use	11896	37	4807	38
Phoneme Segmentation	11980	37	4809	44
Nonsense Word	11980	28	4809	34

**Table 7: First Grade DIBELS Measures in Louisiana**

First Grade	Non-Reading First		Reading First	
<i>Fall Scores</i>				
Word Use	12645	28	4832	30
Phoneme Segment	12847	34	4836	40
Nonsense Word	12847	29	4836	36
<i>Spring Score</i>				
Word Use	12785	47	4830	50
Phoneme Segmentation	12842	47	4836	51
Nonsense Word	12847	59	4835	71
Oral Reading	12847	45	4836	47

Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) measures more clearly exhibited this trend. As shown in Figure 16: Oral Reading Fluency Scores for Grades 1, 2, and 3 in 2005-06, Reading First students showed a bigger summer drop but returned higher ORF scores by spring. While these were not cohorts, there may be a greater drop in Reading First scores over the summer. A possible explanation may lie in the demographic differences between the Reading First and non-Reading First populations. A later study may consider these differences. In the end, students in Reading First programs may have started lower but accelerated to higher overall scores.

**Figure 16: Oral Reading Fluency Scores for Grades 1, 2, and 3 in 2005-06**



As discussed in the methods section above, a census of more than 66,000 Louisiana students meant that all measures were significant.<sup>2</sup> While these results cannot be generalized to non-DIBELS schools, they absolutely represent the studied schools for the 2005-2006 school year. However, are all these variables important? A variable is considered “important” if in addition to being significant, the measure is useful in predicting. The Cramer’s V and r-square measure relative importance of variables and are the only measures considered for the remainder of these results.

While the overall effect of Reading First was clear, Reading First showed a rather weak improvement to the spring DIBELS scores. Whenever the whole study group was lumped together as one, the Reading First program had only a marginal effect on spring scores. The real effect of the Reading First program was more evident in the differential effect on subgroups in the population – in particular, at risk subgroups. The next section considers two typical subgroups – ethnic and the Free/Reduced Lunch program. These two subgroups were chosen for two reasons. First, both subgroups represent problem areas for educators. How does one provide a worthwhile education to dramatically different populations? Second, the Reading First program had a high percentage of students in the affected groups. Third, the results from these groups, while typical, are clear.

<sup>2</sup> Significance tests ask how well the sample represents the population. In a census, the sample *is* the population. Therefore, all differences are significant.

### 2.5.6.1. Ethnic Background

When dividing the students by ethnic background, only Black and White students could be reasonably tested in all grade levels. Since the vast majority of students are in these two groups, the remainder of this section will concentrate on only these two groups. A major area of concern is the ability of a program such as Reading First to close the gap between segments of the population. Considered in total, these data lead to the simple conclusion that Reading First helps to close this gap.

While all students increase their test scores in Reading First, the results from this study clearly indicate that the program tends to help groups with lower test scores more. In fact, across all grades, Black students in Reading First schools were more likely to pass benchmarks than White students in non-Reading First schools. As displayed in Table 8, when a student was judged at risk in the fall test, Black Reading First students were less likely to stay at risk in spring tests than White non-Reading First students were. Similar results were found in students considered low risk or established in fall tests. These students were more likely to still be low risk or established in the spring if in the Reading First program. Moreover, tests indicate a moderate to strong effect of the Reading First program.

**Table 8: Percent of Students Considered “At Risk” Or “Deficit” In Fall Still “At Risk” Or “Deficit” In Spring Tests**

Spring Test	Black Reading First	White Non-Reading First	V*	N
Kindergarten ISF	16.30%	25.80%	0.26	2402
First Grade PSF	9.40%	11.40%	0.11	2322
Second Grade ORF	91.20%	92.80%	0.07	2779
Third Grade ORF	71.10%	83.50%	0.17	3500

\* V represents the importance of the Reading First program impact on Black Students

Now it is time to look at some typical results. Of particular interest are those students who scored at the upper and lower benchmarks. What happened to these students? Ideally, the Reading First should do a better job raising students out of the lowest benchmark and keeping them in the upper benchmarks. In the overwhelming majority of tests, this was found to be true. The rest of this section will look at two examples -- first and third grades.

On the first grade level, the best analysis came from the comparison of letter naming fluency (LNF) to phoneme segmentation fluency (PSF). Analysis of at risk students in fall LNF tests indicates that students are not just moving out of the deficit category for PSF; they are moving into the established category (see Table 9). For students who were judged at risk in LNF, there was a ten percent difference between Reading First and non-Reading First students in the PSF deficit class. Since the goal was to keep students out of deficit, lower percentages are better here. Fourteen percent of Black students in Reading First schools were in deficit in PSF compared to 24 percent in non-Reading First schools. Five percent of White students in Reading First schools were in deficit in PSF compared to 15% in non-Reading First schools.

**Table 9: First Grade Students Considered “at Risk” in Fall Letter Naming Fluency Tests**

Ethnic Group		PSF Winter		
		Deficit	Emerging	Established
Black N=1153	Non-Reading First	24.3%	26.9%	48.8%
	Reading First	13.6%	16.4%	69.9%
White N=941	Non-Reading First	14.5%	20.1%	65.4%
	Reading First	5.2%	13.0%	81.8%

The same group of students (at risk LNF) also displayed a difference at the other end of the scale. More Reading First students were rated as established in winter PSF tests. Seventy percent of Black Reading First students (from at-risk LNF) were rated as established in winter PSF compared to 49% in non-Reading First schools. White students had similar results of 82% for Reading First and 65% for non-Reading First students. The results indicated a strong effect of the Reading First program for Black students ( $v = 0.18$ ) and a weak effect for White students ( $v = 0.10$ ).

On the other side, the students who scored in the less risk category for LNF were more likely to be in the established category for PSF if they were in the Reading First program. (See Table 10.) The gain achieved by Black students in the Reading First program (10 percent over non-Reading First students) was greater than White students in the Reading First program (six percent over non-Reading First). Here a more modest effect of the Reading First program was found with a moderate effect for Black students ( $v = 0.14$ ) and a weak effect for White students ( $v = 0.08$ ). The measurable effect here might have been reduced by the large percentage of students who were in the established group.

**Table 10: PSF Winter Crosstabulation with Students at Low Risk in LNF in Fall**

Ethnic Group		PSF Winter		
		Deficit	Emerging	Established
Black N=5526	Non-Reading First	3.5%	15.9%	80.6%
	Reading First	1.1%	8.2%	90.7%
White N=5586	Non-Reading First	1.0%	8.3%	90.7%
	Reading First	.2%	3.0%	96.8%

In third grade, the test was Oral Reading Fluency (ORF). Again, we looked at what happened to students who were considered at risk and low risk in Fall ORF tests. Table 11 summarizes these results.

The percentage of students in the at risk category was reduced in the Reading First program. Eighty-four percent of the students in both ethnic groups remained at risk in non-Reading First schools. In Reading First schools, that number was reduced to 71% for Black and 70% for White students. Tests indicated a strong effect of the Reading First program with a V of 0.17 for each ethnic group. Students considered low risk in the fall had a slightly different effect. In non-Reading First schools, 63% of Black students and 73% of White students remained low risk. In Reading First schools, 78% of Black students and 81% of White students remained low risk. In this case, the Cramer V measure indicated a stronger effect of the Reading First program for Black students: 0.15 or a moderate affect for Black students while White students had a weak affect of 0.07.

**Table 11: Third Grade Oral Reading Fluency Tests**

			ORF Spring*		V
Ethnic Group			At Risk	Low Risk	
At Risk	Black	Non-Reading First	84.3%	0.7%	0.17
	N=2196	Reading First	71.1%	3.4%	
	White	Non-Reading First	83.5%	0.3%	0.17
	N=1404	Reading First	69.9%	3.2%	
Low Risk	Black	Non-Reading First	1.7%	63.3%	0.15
	N=2924	Reading First	0.4%	77.5%	
	White	Non-Reading First	0.8%	72.7%	
	N=3876	Reading First	0.0%	81.1%	

\*For clarity, the “some risk” category was not reported.

**2.5.6.2. Free or Reduced Lunch Students**

Free or Reduced Price Lunch (FRL) program participation was considered an adequate proxy for economically disadvantaged students. In this section, it is possible to consider the effect of the Reading First program on these students versus those who are not considered disadvantaged. Overall, students in the FRL program performed below their non-FRL counterparts. However, as in the scenario above, an FRL student in Reading First performed better than a non-FRL student in non-Reading First schools. As summarized in Table 12, a consistently lower percentage of FRL Reading First students stayed in low benchmark categories. The importance of the program indicated a weak to strong effect.

**Table 12: Percent of Students Considered “At Risk” Or “Deficit” In Fall Still “At Risk” Or “Deficit” In Spring Tests**

Spring Test	FRL Reading First	Non-FRL Non-Reading First	V*	N
Kindergarten ISF	33.6%	36.9%	0.15	2561
First Grade PSF	8.8%	9.4%	0.10	2433
Second Grade ORF	60.0%	60.1%	0.14	2779
Third Grade ORF	22.0%	68.3	0.17	3753

\* V represents the importance of the Reading First program on FRL Students

Again, the remainder of this section will consider the effect of the Reading First program on first and third grade students. These results are typical yet maybe a little more clear than normal. In particular, the question was, “What happened to students judged in the two extreme benchmark classes?”

As summarized in Table 13, first grade students who had been rated at risk in fall PSF tests were 13 percent more likely to be in the established PSF group if they were in a Reading First program. FRL students in non-Reading First schools were less likely to be in the established category than the group as a whole (54.8% FRL to 57.1% overall). These data support the finding of a moderate effect of the Reading First program (V = 0.14). Students judged low risk on the fall LNF tests produced similar results. Here, 96 percent of the Reading First students

were judged established on the spring PSF test compared to 94 percent for non-Reading First students. Tests of importance indicated a moderate relationship between the Reading First program and spring test scores.

**Table 13: What happened to students in fall Phoneme Segmentation Fluency tests?**

PSF_FALL	Free or Reduced Lunch		PSF Spring		V
			Deficit	Established	
Deficit	FRL	Non-Reading First	12.3	55.0	0.10
		Reading First	8.8	68.3	
		N=2062			
Established	FRL	Non-Reading First	0.1	93.8	0.09
		Reading First	0.1	96.2	
		N=7402			

Third grade students in the FRL programs indicated a moderate to strong effect of the Reading First program. (See Tables 14-15.) FRL students considered at risk in the fall were less likely to stay at risk in the spring if they were in a Reading First school (84 versus 71 percent still at risk, respectively). The Cramer’s V of 0.17 indicates a strong effect of the Reading First program. Students considered at less risk in the fall were more likely to stay at less risk if they were in a Reading First program. Seventy-seven percent of FRL students remain at less risk in Reading First schools compared to 65 percent in non-Reading First schools. Here a Cramer’s V of 0.13 indicated a moderate effect of the program.

**Table 14: Reading First \* ORF Spring Crosstabulation, % within Reading First, At Risk Students**

	At risk students	ORF Spring		
		At Risk	Low Risk	Some Risk
FRL	Non-Reading First	83.9%	.5%	15.6%
	Reading First	70.6%	3.3%	26.1%
Total		79.8%	1.4%	18.9%

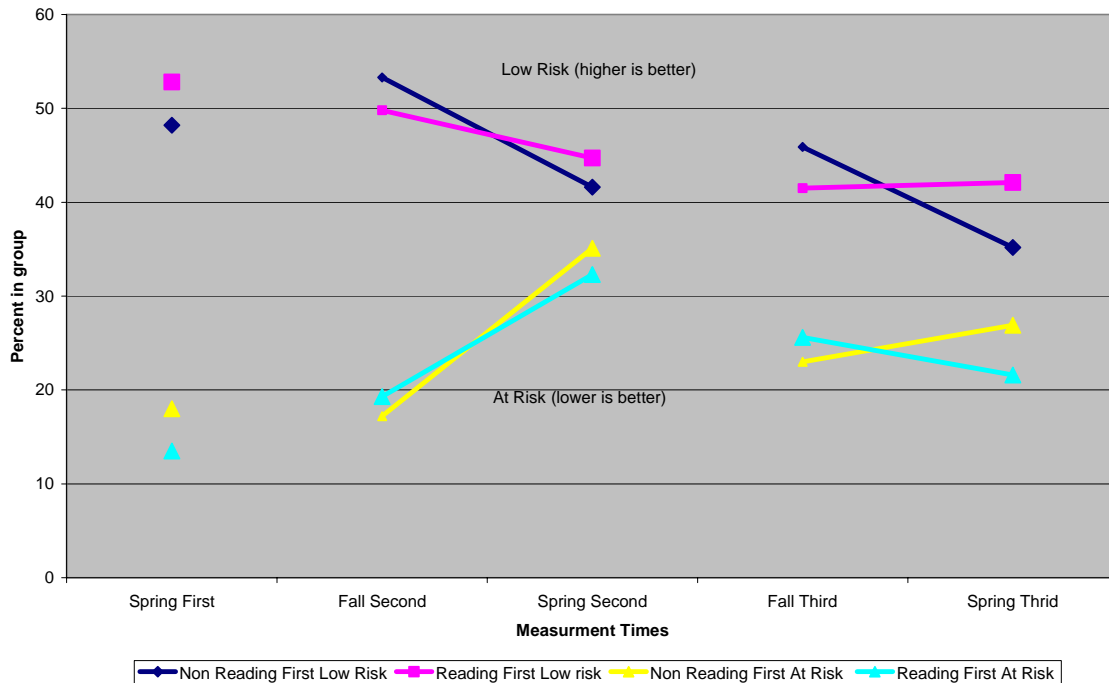
**Table 15: Reading First \* ORF Spring Crosstabulation, % within Reading First, Less Risk Students**

	Less risk students	ORF Spring		
		At Risk	Low Risk	Some Risk
FRL	Non-Reading First	1.1%	65.0%	33.8%
	Reading First	.3%	77.7%	22.0%
Total		.9%	69.1%	30.0%

**2.5.6.3. Second Grade**

Previously in this report, there was a concern over results from the second grade DIBELS scores. As displayed in Figure 17, there was a clear drop in those at ORF low risk and a rise in students at risk. However, this was not an effect of the Reading First program. Reading First students did better than non-Reading First students did at this time. While the general trend of more students at risk and fewer low risk students was disturbing, there was evidence that this was a general trend for Louisiana students and that Reading First helped to combat the problem. Historical evidence does not yet exist to consider the long-term nature of this problem.

**Figure 17: Second Grade Oral Reading Fluency Scores**



**2.5.7. Effect of Structured Pre-K Programs**

This section addresses the following evaluation question:

*What impact can structured Pre-K programs that subscribe to the implementation of high quality LA 4 type standards have on RF and non-RF students, schools, and districts?*

The goal of structured prekindergarten programs is to have all children who participate be ready to start school. The state of Louisiana has implemented one such program that is known as LA 4. The initial pilot year for the LA 4 program was the second half of the 2001-02 school year, and the first full year of implementation was 2002-03. Because of the limited numbers of participants in the pilot year, it is not possible to compare that cohort within the RF program. The LA 4 and RF programs only overlap in some parishes, and only some of the schools in those parishes are also implementing RF. Neither LA 4 nor RF districts were selected in order to facilitate a match between programs, so matching students is limited to those who happen to participate in both.

The data for comparison was based on first identifying all districts that had at least five students who participated in both RF and LA 4. This resulted in a data set for kindergarten that included 1,379 students, where 354 had previously participated in LA 4. In the first grade, there was a

total of 1415 students with 466 from LA 4. In second grade, there were 1,325 students where 262 also participated in LA 4.

A comparison of children who participated in both LA 4 and RF with children from the same districts who participated only in RF shows a statistically significant result. (See Table 16.) For kindergarten students from LA 4, there are 7% more students on benchmarks and 6% fewer at risk than would be expected. As shown in the following table, the results for first and second grade are similar to kindergarten, showing that students who participate in LA 4 show significantly better results than those students who had RF alone.

**Table 16: DIBELS Performance for Students that Participated in RF and in both RF and LA 4**

		<i>Reading First</i>	<i>Reading First + LA 4</i>
<b>Kindergarten</b>	Low Risk	73%	80%
(RF n=1025)	Some Risk	16%	14%
(RF+LA4 n=354)	At Risk	11%	5%
<b>First Grade</b>	Low Risk	53%	57%
(RF n=949)	Some Risk	26%	24%
(RF+LA4 n=466)	At Risk	21%	19%
<b>Second Grade</b>	Low Risk	46%	53%
(RF n=1063)	Some Risk	21%	28%
(RF+LA4 n=262)	At Risk	32%	19%

The results show statistical significance at each grade level as measured by a chi-square measure.

### **2.5.8. The Effect of RF on iLEAP Scores**

Determining the effect of the RF program on iLEAP scores is problematic because this is the first year where the iLEAP has replaced the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS). Both the ITBS and now the iLEAP are administered to every third grade student in Louisiana public schools. The iLEAP does include portions of the ITBS, so there are some points of comparison.

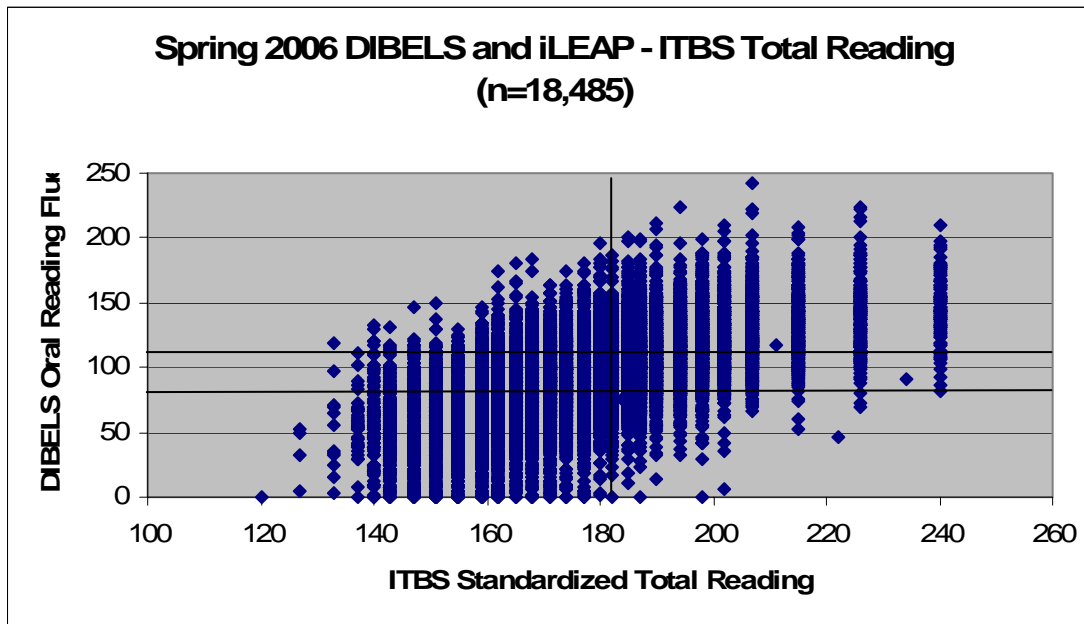
A correlation analysis was performed for all students who had both an ITBS and a DIBELS score. This resulted in a correlation coefficient of 0.62, which is similar to what other states have seen when correlating DIBELS with their high stakes test (see Table 17) and very similar to the correlation calculated in the previous year. While the third grade ITBS is not, strictly speaking, a high stakes test (i.e., grade level promotion is not dependent on the ITBS), the analysis provides some indication that an increase in average DIBELS scores for third grade students would correlate with an increase in ITBS scores.

**Table 17: Correlations of DIBELS to State Mandated Tests**

State	Correlation Coefficient	Number of Students
Louisiana (ITBS Reading Score, 2005)	0.64	14,899
Louisiana (ITBS Reading Score, 2006)	0.62	18,485
Arizona (AIMS, 2005) <sup>3</sup>	0.74	241
Florida (FCAT-SSS, 2002) <sup>4</sup>	0.70	1,102
Colorado (CSAP, 2002)	0.80	58
North Carolina (NC End of Grade, 2003) <sup>5</sup>	0.73	38

Figure 18 displays the data for all 18,485 students who have scores for both DIBELS and ITBS. The two horizontal lines correspond to the DIBELS low risk benchmark (110 words/minute) and some risk (80 words/minute) benchmark. The vertical line corresponds to the national 50<sup>th</sup> percentile score for spring 2005.

**Figure 18: ITBS Total Reading Scores and DIBELS Oral Reading Fluency, 3rd Grade Spring 2006**



Subsequent analyses will be conducted to examine the change in students’ scores on the iLEAP by students who did participate and students who did not participate in the RF program.

<sup>3</sup> Wilson, J. (2005). *The relationship of Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) Oral Reading Fluency to performance on Arizona Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS)*. Tempe, AZ: Tempe School District No. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Buck, J., & Torgeson, J. (2003). *The relationship between performance on a measure of oral reading fluency and performance on the Florida Comprehensive Test*, Florida Center for Reading Research.

<sup>5</sup> Barger, J. (2003). *Comparing the DIBELS Oral Reading Fluency Indicator and the North Carolina end of grade reading assessment* (Technical Report). Asheville, NC: North Carolina Teacher Academy.

### 3. Program Implementation and Professional Development

#### 3.1. Background

Although SY 2005-06 was officially the third year of Reading First in Louisiana, it was actually the first full year of program implementation at the school and district levels. To fully understand this seeming “disconnect,” it helps to briefly review program implementation over the past several years, using a “house-building” analogy.

SY 2003-04. Year 1: “Time to Move.” Reform initiatives typically begin when agencies receive the funding necessary to launch and sustain the initiative. When the USDE approved Louisiana’s RF application in March 2003, the LDE began developing the infrastructure necessary at the state level to administer a district application process and to support successful applicants.

- In January 2004, the agency assembled an RF staff, and recruited regional reading coordinators to build capacity at the local levels; however, the instructional approach mandated by the USDE was so revolutionary, that few educators in Louisiana—including LDE employees—had the content knowledge necessary to use scientifically based strategies for assessing and instructing students. The LDE’s new reading hires were trained in early literacy assessment (DIBELS) and instruction (LETRS) alongside teachers employed by the first two RF districts (Orleans and Assumption).
- By the close of SY 2003-04, 21 districts were awarded RF grants. Though they immediately began recruiting reading coaches and purchasing core programs for implementation in SY 2003-04, there were few opportunities for children to benefit from RF resources during the program’s first official year.

In retrospect, SY 2003-04 was a critical staging year: a year when the USDE signaled to states and districts that “It’s Time to Move,” a year of critical capacity building, but not delivery.

#### 3.1.1. SY 2004-05. Year 2: “House-Building”

If districts were sent a “time to move” message in SY 2003-04, then SY 2004-05 was a time of “house-building.” Teachers whose pre-service training prepared them in the more traditional methods of reading instruction (e.g., balanced literacy or whole language instruction) and who had employed those strategies throughout their instructional careers were suddenly stripped of their familiar tools and routines.

In SY 2004-05, a rudimentary foundation for RF implementation was laid at the school level, revolving largely around training teachers in the new instructional strategies they would be expected to implement and putting new materials into their hands.

Roughly half of all K-3 instructional staff in RF schools attended mass trainings in scientifically based assessment (DIBELS) and foundational concepts of early literacy instruction (LETRS) during the summer of 2004. Additional trainings were staggered throughout the year for those faculties that could not attend before school started. In addition to these state-administered trainings, districts trained their teachers in the specific core programs that they had adopted.

Core programs were implemented at the start of SY 2004-05, but districts delayed (following the LDE’s advice) purchasing the programs used for targeted student interventions to allow teachers time to make good decisions about materials that best met the needs of their students.

For the first time ever, students were assessed using DIBELS in the fall, winter, and spring for benchmarking purposes, and the state began training principals and reading coaches to interpret the results. Though the benchmark results enabled school staff to determine what interventions their students needed, districts were not required to progress monitor students who received interventions rather than overburdening school staff already on a steep learning curve.

Most schools began SY 2004-05 with site-based reading coaches;<sup>6</sup> however, few had more training in or experience with scientifically based instruction than the teachers they were expected to coach and mentor. Though the LDE conducted intensive follow-up training<sup>7</sup> in all five components of early literacy instruction (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension) throughout the school year, coaches and principals did not complete the fifth follow-up component (comprehension) until April 2005.

SY 2004-05 was a critical year for building infrastructure: laying a foundation for scientifically based instruction. Continuing the “house-building analogy,” instructional staff moved into the house that RF built during SY 2004-05; they had a foundation at their feet (LETRS) and new windows through which to observe their students (DIBELS), but “home” was nonetheless, a very uncomfortable place to be.

### **3.1.2. SY 2005-06. Year 3: “Moving In”**

SY 2005-06 should have been the first year of full RF implementation. By the end of SY 2004-05, the great majority of school and district staff had received foundational training in scientifically based literacy and assessment, had experienced a full year of hands-on practice with their core reading programs, had identified the supplemental programs they needed, and were ready to both benchmark *and* progress monitor their Tier 2 and 3 students. During the summer of 2005, the LDE offered a series of train-the-trainer (TOT) institutes aimed at further developing the local capacity needed to deepen and extend program impact.

Hurricane Katrina made landfall on August 29, 2005. Consequent flooding in New Orleans forced the permanent closure of 14 RF schools; in late September, Hurricane Rita destroyed yet another RF school. No RF school escaped the storms’ disruption. Of the 87 RF schools that survived the storms, 53 (61%) were temporarily closed at least one day due to Hurricane Katrina and 33 (38%) due to Hurricane Rita.

Nearly two of every three RF schools (62% or 54 schools) reported an influx of students dislocated by the storm. The unanticipated surge in enrollments created an immediate assessment burden, because students arrived without school transcripts or DIBELS results upon which to base intervention decisions. Core and supplemental materials that met instructional needs before the storms were suddenly in short supply, class sizes swelled, and interventionists struggled to serve additional students. Because RF grant awards were based on pre-storm enrollments, districts were forced to tap into other funds to meet storm-related expenses. Staffing and purchasing strategies were short-term, because no one—the parents, the schools, or the state—knew how long children would be dislocated.

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<sup>6</sup> Monroe City’s RF grant application was approved so late in SY 2003-04, that the district was not able to hire coaches until December 2004.

<sup>7</sup> Via Monthly Coaches Meetings and Quarterly Leadership Meetings

RF program implementation was disrupted at the state level, as well. Though the Curriculum Access staff had planned a year-long series of professional development activities, such training is typically conducted as drive-in workshops or institutes delivered by nationally-recognized trainers. Because hotel rooms statewide were filled by hurricane evacuees (leaving no room for RF trainees) and schools were grappling with displaced students, the RF program suspended all state-administered training for RF coaches and administrators from September to February 2005. Professional development continued, however, at the local levels. Regional reading coordinators conducted monthly reading coaches meetings with coaches in their respective service areas, and two regional LETRS training sessions that were planned before the storms were conducted as scheduled (one in Monroe, the other in Avoyelles Parish).

The RF program also redirected much of its regional coordinators' time to training non-RF staff to administer DIBELS. This was in accordance with NCLB mandates that state programs serve all schools (not just those with RF grants) and with the BESE's desire to implement DIBELS statewide.

The RF program resumed its series of face-to-face Quarterly Coaches and RF Leadership Meetings in February 2006. Responding to a need for deeper literacy training for RF faculty members who deliver intervention activities (whether they be paraprofessionals or certified teachers employed as interventionists), the RF program also launched a series of monthly interventionist training sessions in late March 2005.

There is ample evidence that the RF program made substantial progress in implementing the RF Model during SY 2005-06, as will be described in detail in the following sections; however, it is misleading to say that RF schools completed their third year of implementation. This observation is important because the gains that RF schools appear to have made in improving student reading outcomes probably underestimate the potential effectiveness of the initiative under ordinary circumstances. If, for example, RF schools had begun Year 1 (SY 2003-04) with coaches and curricula in place, had schools experienced only the typical student/teacher turnover, and had professional development and technical support not been interrupted by natural disasters, reading instruction and student performance in RF schools might have looked quite different this year. We will never know.

### **3.2. RF Model Implementation in SY 2005-06**

Louisiana's RF Model provides the framework for a comprehensive school reform initiative that equips participating schools with the curricula (core and supplemental reading programs) and assessments (DIBELS) to conduct scientifically based reading instruction. It also sets up a tiered, top-down system of ongoing professional development and technical assistance to build and sustain instructional capacity beyond the life of the RF grant itself. As noted in last year's (2004-05) RF evaluation report, Louisiana's overall RF model can be visualized as a structure with four pillars of support to students and faculty:

1. An Enhanced Curriculum, consisting of scientifically based core (basal) and supplemental reading programs, a minimum of 90 minutes of dedicated time for core instruction, and targeted interventions for struggling readers;

2. Frequent, Ongoing Student Assessment using DIBELS for both benchmarking and progress monitoring purposes;<sup>8</sup>
3. Instructional Support for Students and RF School Staff in the form of interventionists (who provide data-driven, targeted reading support for struggling readers), site-based reading coaches (who support teacher learning through job-embedded professional development), and regional reading coordinators (who mentor coaches and provide technical assistance to schools and districts); and finally
4. Ongoing Professional Development in early literacy instruction and assessment, as well as strategies for reorganizing schools into professional learning communities that routinely utilize data-driven decision-making and practice job-embedded professional development.

The first two pillars of support were implemented in SY 2004-05, though it can be said that their implementation was extended and enlarged in SY 2005-06. In terms of curriculum, all RF districts implemented BESE-approved core reading programs in SY 2004-05, and most districts purchased some (if not all) of their supplemental reading programs by the end of the school year. Moreover, RF districts not only met but also exceeded the federal mandate of 90 minutes of protected instructional time for reading.

Finally, all RF schools met state mandates for benchmarking all of their students in SY 2004-05, although there was some controversy surrounding which (if any) students with exceptionalities should be exempted from DIBELS. Reportedly, all RF schools were progress monitoring their Tier 2 and Tier 3 students by the end of SY 2004-05, though the frequency with which they did so is not easily established.<sup>9</sup>

### **3.3. Evaluation Design Employed in Measuring RF Implementation**

The evaluation questions, data sources, and research strategies employed during SY 2005-06 to measure RF implementation are described in this section.

#### **3.3.1. Evaluation Questions**

Because Louisiana's RF program essentially met its goals concerning enhanced curriculum by the end of SY 2004-05, implementation evaluation in SY 2005-06 primarily examined the progress the program is making in the critical area of *capacity building*. Attention focused on the extent to which schools and districts—assisted by the state—are developing the instructional capacity they will need to extend and maintain their gains beyond the term of the RF program. In SY 2005-06, this evaluation was guided by three questions.

1. To what extent have RF schools followed policies set by Louisiana's RF program for assessing students, and how might those policies shape the assessment capacity of schools?

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<sup>8</sup> Initially, RF schools were expected to benchmark all students in fall, winter, and spring. Progress monitoring was mandated every three weeks only for students receiving Tier 2 or 3 interventions.

<sup>9</sup> Schools were encouraged but not required to submit their progress monitoring data to the DIBELS Web site, to minimize the data-entry burden on school staff that already were stretched thin, trying to keep up with the pace of change.

2. To what extent did Louisiana's RF program fulfill its commitment to provide professional learning opportunities and technical assistance to Louisiana schools and districts in SY 2005-06?
3. To what extent has Louisiana's RF program helped teachers build content knowledge in scientifically based reading instruction?

### **3.3.2. Data Sources**

Findings associated with the three evaluation questions were primarily derived from the following sources of information:

#### **3.3.2.1. Survey Research**

An Implementation Survey was administered in May 2005 to all RF principals and coaches employed at the 87 RF schools still in operation after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The survey was anonymous to reduce pressure on school staff to overstate their progress in an attempt to meet state program expectations. Seventy of 87 principals responded to the principal survey for an overall response rate of 81%, and 108 of 113 coaches (96%) responded to the reading coach survey. The lower response rate among principals is partially attributable to the fact that, by the time the survey was administered, a number of principals had already announced their retirements or knew they would be transferred at the end of the year and therefore elected not to participate. The non-respondents did not differ appreciably from respondents in terms of either personal characteristics (experience or credentials) or school characteristics; therefore, their participation probably would not have affected the survey results appreciably.

#### **3.3.2.2. Research Regarding Faculty Opportunities to Learn**

Educators have long recognized that the frequency and quality of students' *opportunities* to learn are crucial in shaping their educational outcomes. The frequency and quality of the professional development opportunities that teachers, interventionists, and coaches receive are equally crucial factors in determining how quickly and thoroughly instructional staff becomes more adept at meeting the learning needs of their students. Three databases were constructed to track and measure the learning opportunities provided to instructional staff and administrators in RF schools and districts.

The *RF Staffing Database* contains records on all instructors (including both regular and special education teachers, interventionists, and coaches) and administrators employed by RF districts. The database is derived from two sources: faculty rosters obtained from RF principals and data extracted from the LDE's Profile of Education Personnel (PEP) database. Information is maintained on each individual's role within RF (e.g., kindergarten teacher vs. interventionist or reading coach), credentials (i.e., years of teaching experience, certification level, highest degree earned), and tenure at the school site for the purposes of faculty mobility analyses.

The *RF Professional Development Database* contains registration data on all professional development opportunities administered by LDE staff, including Quarterly Leadership Meetings, Statewide Coaches Meetings, Louisiana Reading Teacher Institutes (LRTIs), Training-of-Trainers Institutes, etc. It also includes registration data on all trainings conducted locally by regional reading coordinators, provided those registrations are entered into Coursewhere, the online professional development registration system adopted by the LDE several years ago. The

database was derived from two sources: sign-in sheets obtained from the RF state staff and extracts of the LDE's Coursewhere system. The *RF Staffing Database* includes information on professional development and technical assistance provided by regional reading coordinators to both RF and non-RF schools. This database is derived from data obtained from the Itinerary Database maintained by the LDE unit that oversees the Regional Education Service Centers (RESCs).

### **3.3.2.3. Focus Group Research**

Focus groups were conducted in March 2005 with five members of the Curriculum Access Staff and all seven regional reading coordinators.

### **3.3.2.4. Exploratory School-based Research**

CCD researchers, assisted by consultants with expertise in early-literacy instruction and assessment, conducted exploratory school visits to six RF schools in north Louisiana during the winter of 2005. The purpose of the visits was to inform the development of the previously mentioned Implementation Surveys and to field-test data collection methods for use in subsequent RF evaluation research. One data collection strategy involved using the Literacy Observation Tool (LOT) for classroom observation purposes. No findings are derived exclusively from fieldwork due to the exploratory nature of the research; however, the CCD staff gained insights during the visits that have contributed to some of the Center's recommendations for measuring program implementation.

## **3.4. Findings**

The evaluation questions and their associated findings are discussed, in order, in this section.

### **3.4.1. Findings Relative to Student Assessment Procedures**

*To what extent have RF schools followed policies set by Louisiana's RF program for assessing students, and how might those policies shape the assessment capacity of schools?*

When RF grants were awarded late in SY 2003-04, the RF program was faced with the daunting task of training thousands of K-3 teachers to administer DIBELS in preparation for the Fall 2004 benchmark assessments. To expedite the scale-up process, RF state staff directed districts to identify up to five educators per school who would be trained immediately and would function for at least the short run as school- or district-level assessment teams. The strategy was beneficial on a number of levels:

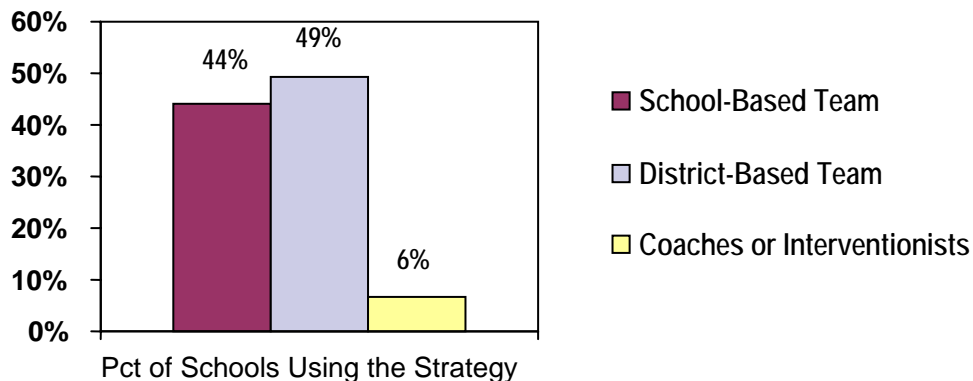
- First, the strategy made implementation more manageable for both the RF program and for local administrators because fewer assessors meant less immediate training for the state, and fewer teachers would be pulled from the classroom during benchmark testing;
- Second, assessment team members presumably would model testing techniques or otherwise mentor their peers when training was redelivered school-wide; and
- Finally, it was assumed that test administration would be more objective and consistent if a cadre of assessors (not the students' own teachers) administered DIBELS. This final consideration was particularly appealing to policy makers because DIBELS benchmark

scores are the outcome by which the performance of RF schools is measured (making DIBELS benchmark scores a high-stakes measure).

As mentioned in the introduction to this section, schools were not required to progress monitor students during SY 2004-05, though progress monitoring was mandated for Tier II and III students in SY 2005-06. Decisions regarding which staff would progress monitor were left to the discretion of school and district administrators, though it was assumed that teachers would eventually assume that responsibility,<sup>10</sup> as the developers intended.

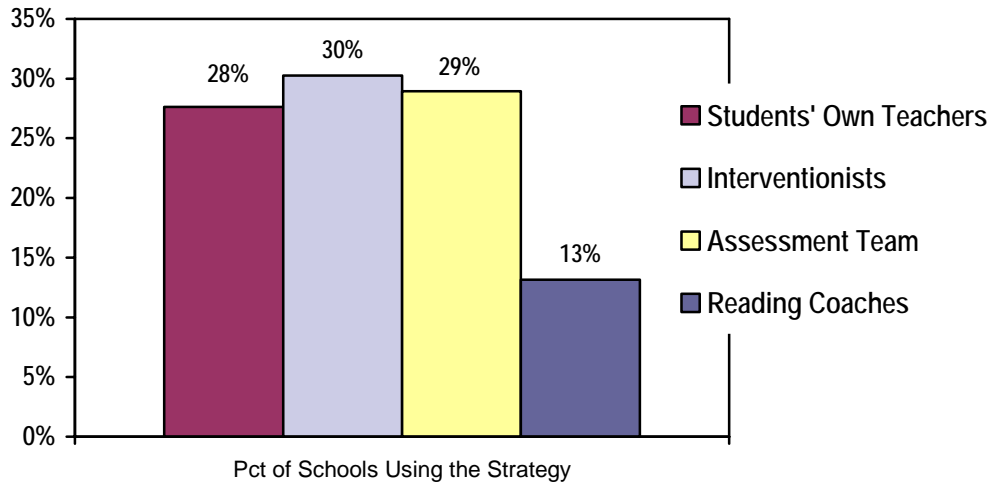
In SY 2005-06, the RF program staff sought more in-depth information on the consistency with which DIBELS was being administered as an indication of the scores' reliability. Implementation Survey respondents were therefore asked which of the following groups were responsible for DIBELS benchmark testing and progress monitoring at their schools: the students' own classroom teachers, interventionists, an assessment team comprised entirely of faculty members at the school, or an assessment team that included faculty members from other schools and/or the central office. Responses are summarized in Figure 19 and Figure 20.

**Figure 19: Strategies Used by RF Schools to Benchmark Test Students, Using DIBELS**



*Source: RF Implementation Survey, Spring 2006*

<sup>10</sup> When DIBELS was designed, the test developers deliberately designed the assessment as a series of screening tools, each of which could be administered by teachers in one minute or less within the classroom. According to DIBELS developer, Roland Good, the intent was to eliminate the excuse that teachers could not regularly assess students because the process took too much time.

**Figure 20: Strategies Used by RF Schools to Progress Monitor Students, Using DIBELS**

*Source: RF Implementation Survey, Spring 2006*

As noted in Figure 19, most RF schools still observed the RF directive that assessment teams administer DIBELS for benchmarking purposes, though the schools that employed this strategy in SY 2005-06 were evenly divided in their decision to use school- or district-level teams. Nearly half of all RF schools (49%) relied on district-based assessment teams, while 44% of schools utilized school-based teams.<sup>11</sup> At 6% of the schools, coaches and/or interventionists benchmark-tested students.

As noted in Figure 20, schools were less inclined to use assessment teams to progress monitor students. Roughly three in 10 RF schools (29%) used assessment teams for progress monitoring purposes, and virtually all of those used school-level teams. Interventionists progress-monitored students at 30% of schools, and teachers progress monitored students at another 28% of schools (as DIBELS developers recommend). At 11 schools (13%), only reading coaches progress monitored students.

Does a school or district's decision to use an assessment team or assign testing duties exclusively to coaches and/or interventionists have any relevance to capacity building in the area of student assessment? The answer to that question depends on the make-up of the team and the likelihood that the district is willing and able to employ reading coaches and interventionists when RF funding is no longer available. Clearly, if coaches and/or interventionists are a school's only assessors, and those positions are terminated at the end of the RF grant, the school will likely lose its most practiced and adept assessors. The same is true of district assessment teams if these members are drawn exclusively from staff whose continuation depends entirely on RF funding.

When, on the other hand, schools create school-based assessment teams composed of a cadre of staff whose employment is ongoing (e.g., a mix of classroom teachers and other personnel), it

<sup>11</sup> As defined by the implementation survey, school-based teams are composed entirely of educators employed at the school site, while "district-based teams" assigned to the school include assessors from other schools and/or the central office.

seems that such a cadre would be more likely to survive the end of the RF grant and could mentor other faculty, as well.

### **3.4.1.1. Reading Coach Participation in DIBELS Assessment**

According to the reading coach job description included in the RF State Plan, student assessment is one of the reading coach's many job responsibilities. Inasmuch as the RF program provides school-based coaches more ongoing professional development opportunities in scientifically based reading instruction and assessment than any other RF educators, they presumably are better prepared than their peers to administer DIBELS assessments and to interpret their results. Because coaches are not assigned to classrooms fulltime, they also are easier for a principal or district coordinator to "free up" for testing than teachers or interventionists who require substitutes.

The CDC included items in the implementation survey that address the amount of time that reading coaches committed to benchmark assessments and/or progress monitoring in SY 2005-06. All coaches but one reported benchmark-assessing students at their home schools in SY 2005-06, and 61 (57%) reported benchmark testing students at other schools as well. Nearly 2 of 3 reading coaches (63%) reported that they spent 3 days or less benchmarking their own students, although 25% reported devoting 5 or more days to the task.

Those coaches who reported benchmark testing students at other schools were asked how much time they spent on this activity during each benchmark cycle. Some coaches (14%) reported spending 1-2 days benchmarking offsite, while others (29%) devoted 3-5 days to the task. Another 18% of coaches reportedly spent 6-8 days benchmark testing away from their schools.

Overall, the amount of time that coaches devoted in SY 2005-06 to assessing students for performance-reporting purposes varied considerably from one school to the next. At one end of the spectrum, five coaches (5%) reportedly devoted no more than 2 days to DIBELS testing during the benchmark window as compared to the 17 coaches (16%) who reportedly devoted as many as 2-3 weeks (10-13 days) to the task during each benchmark window. This is a sizeable commitment of time when viewed across the entire school year: a cumulative 6-9 weeks or 16-25% of a typical academic calendar.

The Implementation Survey did not address the amount of time that reading coaches devoted to entering DIBELS data on the DIBELS Web site during SY 2005-06; however, anecdotal feedback gathered in the course of Quarterly Leadership Meetings suggests that many coaches are responsible for that task, as well. The percentage of time that coaches devote to all aspects of DIBELS assessment—including data entry—as compared to observing and modeling instruction will be explored in future Implementation Surveys.

### **3.4.2. Findings Relative to RF Opportunities to Learn**

*To what extent did Louisiana's RF program fulfill its commitment to provide professional learning opportunities and technical assistance to Louisiana schools and districts in SY 2005-06?*

Two of the four pillars of support that the RF program provides to schools and districts involve the provision of professional learning opportunities and technical assistance. At the outset of this discussion, it is important to note that the value of both activities is contingent upon two factors:

1. The state's commitment to providing professional learning *opportunities* that are high-quality, accessible, and meet the professional development needs of local staff; and
2. The commitment of school and district staff to *avail themselves of those opportunities*.

This section is devoted to a detailed discussion of professional development and technical assistance provided by Louisiana's RF program to schools and districts during SY 2005-06. The discussion is limited to activities that can be documented by registration data provided by the LDE in the form of registration data files and/or original sign-in sheets or by RF Implementation Survey responses. To this extent, this section may under-report the type of informal or ad-hoc professional development/technical assistance that research has demonstrated is extremely beneficial in promoting teacher learning, but which (unfortunately) is difficult to efficiently measure on a large scale. This section is organized as follows:

1. Section 3.4.2.1. Louisiana's RF Professional Development Framework. This section provides a brief overview of the tiered system of ongoing professional development that is the centerpiece of RF in Louisiana.
2. Section 3.4.2.2. Overview of State-Administered RF Professional Development Events (typically institutes and/or workshops). This section includes a description of RF Coaches Meetings, Quarterly Leadership Meetings, Louisiana Reading Teacher Institutes (LRTIs), and DIBELS training conducted at the state or regional levels.
3. Section 3.4.2.3. Job-Embedded RF Professional Development Provided by LDE Staff. This section is derived primarily from an analysis of RF Implementation Survey results, and describes job-embedded professional development provided at a local level by regional reading coordinators. The discussion is supplemented with regional coordinator itinerary data provided by the LDE division that oversees the Regional Education Services Centers (RESCs).

### **3.4.2.1. Louisiana's RF Professional Development Framework**

Beyond question, improved student performance in reading is the ultimate goal of RF, and student assessment results are its most important outcome. Nevertheless, the program's primary thrust is helping school and district staff members build their capacity to deliver high-quality, scientifically based reading instruction as a means of reaching those outcome goals rather than providing direct services to students. For that reason, the centerpiece of Louisiana's RF initiative is the professional learning model that guides the delivery of services to schools and district, and the extent to which that model is implemented—with fidelity—is a critical indicator of the overall initiative's success.

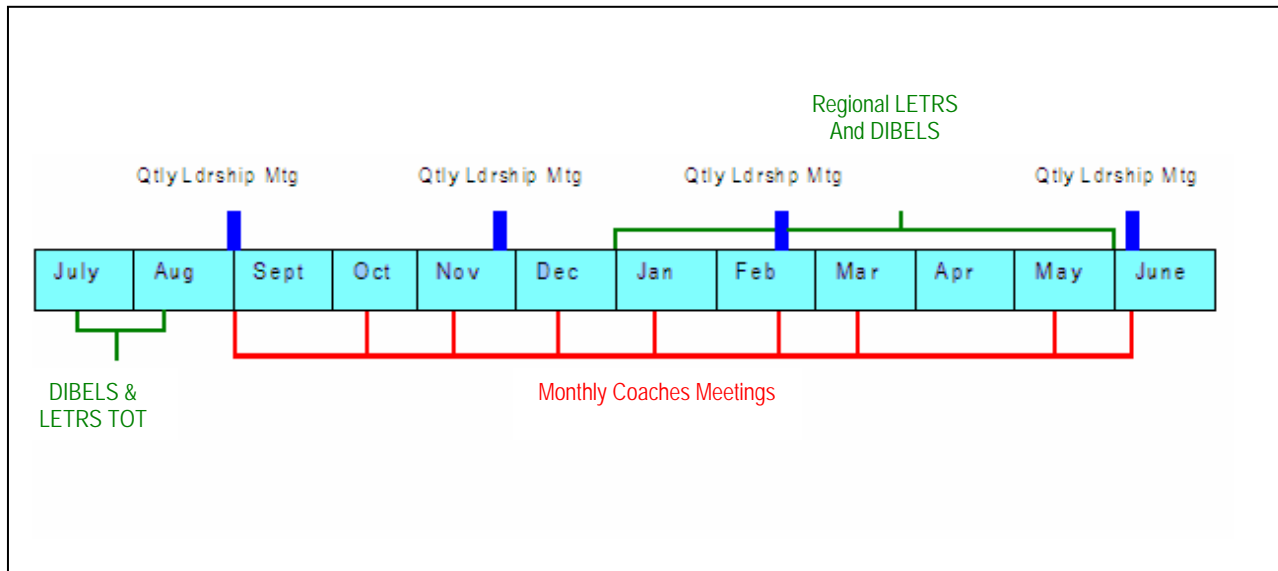
As noted earlier, the Louisiana RF State Plan establishes a top-down, tiered system of professional development that combines traditional modes of professional development (i.e., intensive off-site institutes) with reform strategies for supporting teachers through ongoing, job-embedded professional development (e.g., coaching/mentoring, study groups, data-driven instructional planning, etc.) at the local level. At the start of SY 2005-06, the RF program professional development schedule called for a year-long series of professional development activities that included:

- Quarterly Leadership Meetings, held at rotating locations around the state and attended by RF district coordinators, principals, and reading coaches;
- Monthly Coaches Meetings, held in rotating locations around the state and in conjunction with Quarterly Leadership Meetings when those trainings were offered;
- Training-of-Trainers (TOT) Institutes, in both LETRS and DIBELS to prepare a cadre of regional trainers to assist in the redelivery of training to RF and non-RF educators statewide; and
- LETRS and DIBELS Workshops, team-taught regionally in spring 2006 by regional reading coordinators and TOT completers. (See Figure 21)

In addition to these state-administered events, there was an assumption that regional coordinators would provide advice and technical assistance to individual schools and districts on an ongoing basis by helping district coordinators and coaches plan professional development for instructional staff, model/observe coaching, provide guidance while schools analyzed their DIBELS data, etc. It was also expected that schools would conduct job-embedded professional development (i.e., hands-on, collaborative faculty study during the work day) throughout the year.

Figure 21 maps the sequence of planned activities across the school year. We believe it is an accurate representation, though we had no formal, written RF professional development plan from which to work.

**Figure 21: RF Professional Development Calendar (Pre-Katrina)**

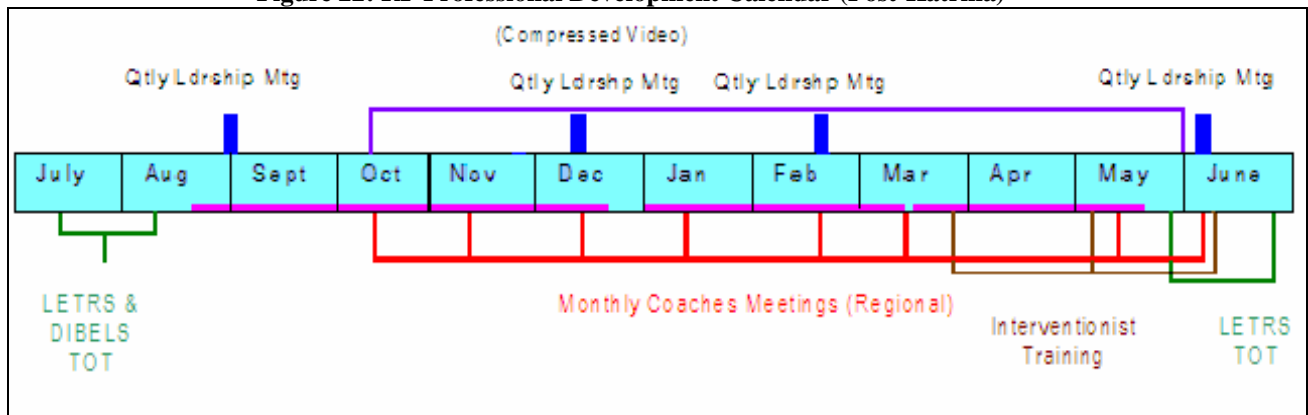


### 3.4.2.2. Professional Development Opportunities from a State-level Perspective

As mentioned in Section 3.1., the combined effect of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita was a near total disruption of RF professional development activities during the fall of 2005, as well as the

planned rollout of LETRS and DIBELS spring trainings for RF staff. Where in SY 2004-05, the RF program had regularly conducted meetings with nationally recognized trainers for RF coaches and administrators from all over the state, large-scale trainings of that nature were not possible in the months following Hurricane Katrina. Even if hotels had the meeting space to accommodate the professional development sessions, their sleeping rooms were fully booked with hurricane evacuees from September through December 2005. Two LETRS institutes that were organized by RF districts before the storms—one in Monroe, the other in Avoyelles Parish—were conducted as planned because they were regional events and required no overnight accommodations.

**Figure 22: RF Professional Development Calendar (Post-Katrina)**



The revised (post-Katrina) schedule of RF professional development activities is summarized in Figure 22. To salvage what it could of the 2005-06 professional development schedule, the RF program restructured Monthly Coaches Meetings as regional events conducted by regional reading coordinators, and reorganized the December 2005 Quarterly Leadership Meeting<sup>12</sup> as a compressed video conference so that participants would not have to travel. The compressed video format was not well received; however, and was not used again in SY 2005-06. By February 2006, hotel space was again available, enabling the RF program to stage Quarterly Leadership Meetings in February and June.

<sup>12</sup> The September Quarterly Leadership Meeting was cancelled.

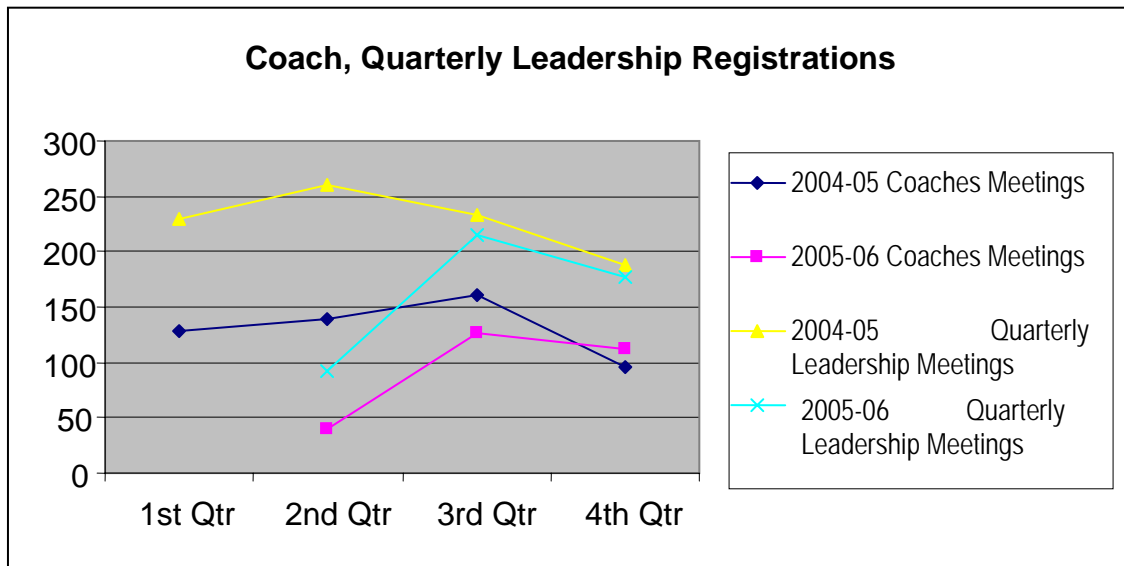
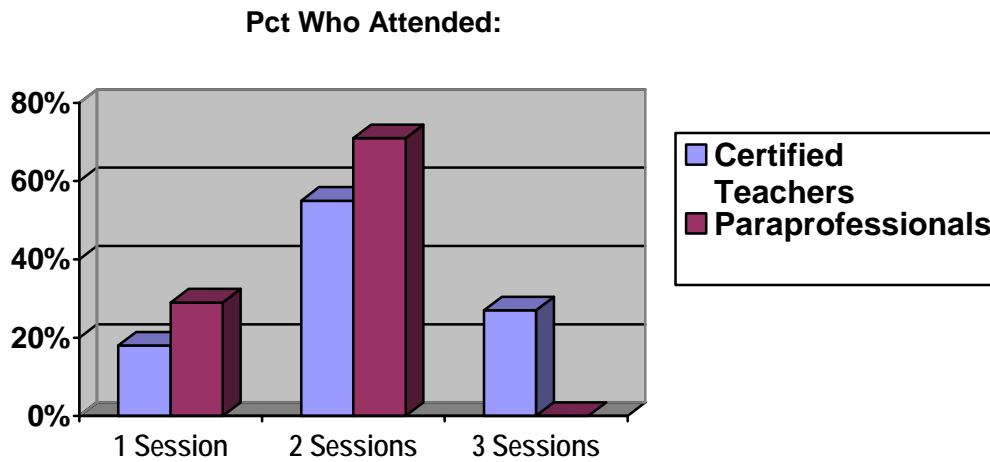
**Figure 23: Registration Trends: Coaches and Quarterly Leadership Meetings**

Figure 23 charts registrations for RF Coaches and Quarterly Leadership meetings in SY 2005-06; and registrations for SY 2004-05 are offered as a point of comparison. The registration totals for SY 2005-06 reflect the closure of 15 schools, which explains the consistently lower numbers during the second implementation year. The effect of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita also is evident, not only in the lack of 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter 2005 registrations, but in the very low registrations during the 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter of 2005 when the events were delivered by compressed video. The one consistent trend in registrations is a consistent drop in registrations for the 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter (June) events. This same end-of-year drop-off occurred when a training series for interventionists was held in Spring 2006.

Between March and June 2006, the RF program conducted a series of three workshops, each of which was delivered in three locations around the state (north, central and south Louisiana). Each day-long workshop was tailored to the needs of school-based staff who deliver interventions, whether they are certified teachers employed as interventionists or paraprofessionals working under the oversight of classroom teachers or interventionists.

An estimated 94% of certified teachers and 65% of paraprofessionals serving as RF interventionists attended at least one session. Though participant feedback was enthusiastic, registrations dropped off as the series progressed. According to informal feedback, many paraprofessionals were hard pressed to arrange childcare for their own children while they trained out-of-town. Finally, it was widely speculated that, had the final interventionists training occurred earlier in June, while instructional staff on 9-month contracts were still actively employed, attendance might have been higher. (See Figure 24).

The RF program experienced similar summer attendance problems with its June 2006 Quarterly Leadership and Coaches Meetings. The point in elaborating on meeting attendance is not to be overly critical of the RF program staff, who struggled valiantly to compress a full year of professional development into a narrow window of time, but because their experience contradicts the assumption commonly held by policy makers that summer is a convenient time and an excellent window of opportunity for scheduling professional development.

**Figure 24: Percentage of Interventionists Who Attended 1, 2, or 3 Days of Interventionist Training: SY 2005-2006**

*Source: Sign-in sheets provided by the LDE*

*Note: Paraprofessionals were invited to the third session, planned for August 2006. The percentage that attended is unknown at time of this report.*

### Competing Trends: From Targeted to Statewide Audiences, but from Statewide to Local Delivery

One significant difference between the RF-funded professional development that was delivered in SY 2004-05 and the training that was delivered in SY 2005-06 was a shift away from services targeted toward RF schools and districts, to a broader program of serving the state as a whole. Federal RF regulations require states to fund school-wide initiatives only within districts that are low-income and low-performing in comparison to the rest of the state, but they also require states to use other RF resources to serve *all schools*.

Most of the RF-funded professional development that was delivered during SY 2004-05 was offered exclusively to RF school and district personnel in order to prepare them to implement scientifically based instruction and assessment. At that point in time, the state program lacked the capacity to serve non-RF schools, as well. When Hurricanes Katrina and Rita affected half of the program's professional development calendar, LDE staff turned their attention to satisfying a pent-up demand for DIBELS training among non-RF districts. While hotels were full with storm evacuees, they shifted their attention to filling as many non-RF requests for DIBELS training as possible. What was initially a short-term strategy continued, even after hotels reopened, and its impact is clear in the training totals reported in Table 18.

Table 18 compares total RF professional development registrations in SY 2004-05 with total registrations in SY 2005-06. Each "registration" represents one day of professional development attendance for a single educator. The data should not be construed as representing the total number of staff trained, because some training extends over several days and many individuals

attended more than one event.<sup>13</sup> Though total counts of *educators* trained would be informative, the RF program did not consistently gather registration data at the level of detail needed to produce unduplicated counts of educators trained in SY 2005-06.

**Table 18: Number and Percent of Registrations, by Training Topic SYs 2004-05 and 2005-06**

Training Topic	2004-05		2005-06		Pct Change
	No	Pct	No	Pct	
Statewide Coaches Meetings	640	6.68%	277	2.76%	-57%
Regional Coaches Meetings	N/A	N/A	477	4.75%	N/A
Quarterly Leadership Meetings	807	8.42%	483	4.81%	-40%
LRTIs/LETRS	4,815	50.25%	170	1.69%	-96%
DIBELS	3,320	34.65%	7,998	79.59%	+240%
Interventionist Workshops	N/A	N/A	644	6.41%	N/A
<b>Total</b>	<b>9,582</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>10,049</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	

N/A=Not Available

*Source: LDE Regional Education Service Center (RESC) Itinerary Database, SY 2005-06, professional development sign-in sheets, and principal-reported rosters of staff trained in SY 2004-05*

The SY 2004-05 registration information summarized in Table 18 is derived from teacher-level information submitted by RF principals to the Curriculum Access Section in October and updated in December 2004. Because the SY 2004-05 training counts are based on a mid-year snapshot, they may somewhat underestimate total days of training provided (though little professional development occurred after the snapshot was taken). Data for SY 2005-06 are derived from registration counts reported by regional reading coordinators to the LDE unit that oversees Regional Education Service Centers (RESCs), and are based on workshop totals of participants. Supervisors reportedly verified the counts by comparing them to actual sign-in sheets.

Several points from Table 18 merit particular attention.

1. The drop in registrations associated with Statewide Coaches Meetings and Quarterly Leadership Meetings is directly attributable to the disruptive effects of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The number of registrations for coaches actually increased slightly between SY 2004-05 and SY 2005-06 when days of statewide and regional coaches training are combined.
2. The decline in Quarterly Leadership registrations is shaped by two factors: the cancellation of one Quarterly Leadership Meeting in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, and the closure of 15 RF schools<sup>14</sup>—again, as a direct result of the storms.
3. The number of DIBELS registrations more than doubled between SY 2004-05 and SY 2005-06, jumping from roughly 3,300 to nearly 8,000.

<sup>13</sup> For instance, 50 educators attending the five-day Louisiana Reading Teacher Institute would log 250 days of professional development. On the other hand, if 100 reading coaches attended the February Reading Coach meeting and 96 returned for the March 2006 meeting, the total number of staff trained would be 100, but the two meetings would generate 196 professional development days.

<sup>14</sup> Presumably, the 15 principals and 18 reading coaches assigned to these schools would have attended the final three meetings, had their schools been open.

4. As a result of the hurricanes as well as requests from policy makers to implement DIBELS statewide, Louisiana built more capacity in student assessment (primarily among non-RF schools) than in classroom instruction during SY 2005-06.
5. The RF program delivered far fewer days of early literacy (LETRS) training in SY 2005-06 (170) than in SY 2004-05 (4,815); however, there were far fewer staff to train in SY 2005-06 because so many were trained the previous year.

Literacy Capacity Within RF Schools/Districts: Spring 2006. There is no single authoritative source on the number of RF faculty members who have attended trainings in literacy instruction or assessment since the initiative began. To estimate the amount of capacity that was built through the end of SY 2005-06, we therefore took another approach. As part of the RF Implementation Survey, principals and coaches were asked what percentage of the faculty members at their respective schools was fully trained<sup>15</sup> in LRTI/LETRS<sup>16</sup>. Based on our analysis of survey responses, it appears that all of the RF instructional personnel in some 43% of RF schools were LETRS trained in the spring of 2006, and more than half were trained in another 50% of schools. In only two instances did principals report that fewer than half of their teachers were trained. One Region 2 principal (4% of Region 2 respondents) reported that no teachers were fully trained at her school, and one of three principals in Region 1 (33%) indicated that fewer than half of the school’s teachers were trained.

**Table 19: Percentage of RF Staff Who Are “Fully Trained” in LETRS**

Principal responses to the question “How many of your teachers were fully trained in LETRS?”								
		Region						
	LA	1	2	R3	4	6	7	8
None	1.47%		4.35%					
Less Than Half	2.94%	33.33%						
About Half	2.94%		4.35%				7.14%	
More Than Half	50.00%	66.67%	39.13%	33.33%	83.33%	50.00%	57.14%	54.55%
<b>All</b>	<b>42.65%</b>		<b>52.17%</b>	<b>55.56%</b>	<b>16.67%</b>	<b>50.00%</b>	<b>35.71%</b>	<b>45.45%</b>

*Source: RF Implementation Survey, Spring 2006*

In this context, the term “fully trained” means that teaching staff have attended the five days of LETRS training offered by the RF program in SYs 2004-05 and 2005-06. “Fully trained” should not be inferred as meaning that teachers who have attended five days of training (in most instances, five *consecutive* days of training) have received all the professional development they need in the five components of early literacy. Indeed, it is widely accepted within the staff development field that teachers typically retain approximately 10% of the immediate knowledge they build through traditional workshops and conferences (Sparks, 2002<sup>17</sup>) without ongoing, job-embedded follow-up.

<sup>15</sup> Fully trained means they have completed the entire five-day institute.

<sup>16</sup> The LETRS series developed by Dr. Louisa Moats consists of several days of professional development, spread over seven learning modules. When Louisiana’s RF program began, the LDE implemented an abbreviated version of LETRS (five days of training, covering seven modules), and named its series the Louisiana Reading Teacher Institute (LRTI) to distinguish it from Dr. Moat’s program. For simplicity’s sake (and because the LDE is transitioning its LRTI into the full-fledged LETRS), further mentions of literacy training in this paper will refer to “LETRS”—not LRTI.

<sup>17</sup> Sparks, D. (2002). High-performing cultures increase teacher retention. Retrieved December 23, 2006, from the National Staff Development Web site: <http://www.nsd.org/library/results/res12-02spar.html>

Principals play a crucial role in building instructional capacity at the school level, because effective principals are the instructional leaders of their schools. Principals who do not have a fundamental understanding of what effective, scientifically based reading instruction “looks like” are at a disadvantage in providing teacher feedback or collaboratively planning with their reading coaches. To capture a snapshot of capacity building among school administrators, we asked principals whether they had attended LETRS. The Implementation Survey also gathered information on principals and reading coach participation in LETRS trainings. Of the 71 principals who responded to the survey, approximately 78% said they had attended all five days of LETRS, and 17% said they had attended a LETRS Training-of-Trainers workshop.

**Table 20: Percentage of RF Principals Who Have Attended LETRS**

Principal responses to the question, “Which of the following professional development activities have you attended?”								
Training	LA	Region						
		1	2	3	4	6	7	8
LETRS (all 5 days)	<b>77.78%</b>	100.00%	81.82%	87.50%	66.67%	100.00%	63.64%	72.73%
LETRS TOT	<b>17.46%</b>	0.00%	9.09%	25.00%	16.67%	0.00%	27.27%	0.00%

*Source: Principal Implementation Survey, Spring 2006*

DIBELS Capacity Within RF Schools/Districts: Spring 2006. As mentioned previously, the Curriculum Access Section made an all-out effort in SY 2005-06 to deliver DIBELS training around the state, primarily in non-RF districts, based on the assumption that the great majority of RF personnel already had been trained. To test that assumption, we asked principals what percentage of teachers at their schools were “fully trained” in DIBELS (i.e., had attended the three days of DIBELS training provided by the RF program). As indicated in Table 21, nearly half of the principals who responded to the spring 2006 Implementation Survey (47%) indicated that their teachers were fully trained in DIBELS, and another 41% reported that more than half of their teachers were trained. Two principals—one in Region 2 and one in Region 7—said that none of their teachers were fully trained, and another two principals (one in Region 4, the other in Region 7) reported that fewer than half of their teachers were fully trained.

**Table 21: Percentage of RF Principals Whose Teachers Were Fully Trained in DIBELS**

Principal responses to the question, “How many of your teachers were fully trained in DIBELS?”								
	LA	Region						
		1	2	3	4	6	7	8
None	<b>1.47%</b>		4.35%				7.14%	
Less Than Half	<b>4.41%</b>			12.50%			7.14%	9.09%
About Half	<b>5.88%</b>		4.35%	12.50%	28.57%		7.14%	
More Than Half	<b>41.18%</b>	100.00%	39.13%	25.00%	<b>42.86%</b>	33.33%	<b>42.86%</b>	36.36%
All	<b>47.06%</b>		<b>52.17%</b>	<b>50.00%</b>	28.57%	<b>66.67%</b>	35.71%	<b>54.55%</b>

*Source: RF Implementation Survey, Spring 2006*

We also asked principals the amount of DIBELS training they had received, and determined that two-thirds of principals (66.67%) have attended the three days of DIBELS training, and several (8%) have attended the more advanced DIBELS Training-of-Trainers workshops (See Table 22). The percentage of principals who have completed DIBELS is lowest in Region 4 (16.67% or one out of six respondents) and highest in Regions 1 and 6, where all principals attended the three DIBELS training sessions that the state offers.

**Table 22: Percentage of Principals Who Have Attended DIBELS**

Principal responses to the question, "which of the following professional development activities have you attended?"								
Training	Region							
	LA	1	2	3	4	6	7	8
DIBELS (all 3 days)	<b>66.67%</b>	100.00%	86.36%	87.50%	16.67%	100.00%	54.55%	36.36%
DIBELS TOT	<b>7.94%</b>	0.00%	9.09%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	9.09%	0.00%

Source: *Principal Implementation Survey, Spring 2006*

Overall Quality of State RF Trainings

The CCD gathers participant feedback on all state-level training. The great majority of RF coaches and administrators who attended the SY 2005-06 trainings gave consistently high ratings for the expertise and the presentation skills of the trainers as well as the relevance of the sessions. We also included items in the Implementation Survey that delve into participant satisfaction with the *relevance* of RF state-level professional development to their work in schools. Those findings are summarized in Table 23. Nearly nine out of 10 principals (87%) agreed with the statement, "The Quarterly Leadership Meetings cover the information I need to know to implement RF effectively."

**Table 23: Principal Ratings of the Relevance of Quarterly Leadership Meeting Content**

Principal responses to the item, "The Quarterly Leadership Meetings cover the information I need to know to implement RF effectively."	
Strongly Disagree	1.45%
Somewhat Disagree	10.14%
<b>Somewhat Agree</b>	<b>49.28%</b>
Strongly Agree	37.68%
Don't Know	1.45%

Source: *Principal Implementation Survey, Spring 2006*

As previously mentioned, the CCD distributes end-of-training evaluation forms at all workshops and conferences administered by state RF program staff that consist of a series of closed-ended ratings on various aspects of the training's quality, as well as an invitation for suggestions and comments. Because participants sometimes commented that the content of their sessions was covered in previous trainings, we included an item in the Implementation Survey that asked principals whether they agreed with the statement, "the content presented during Coaches and Quarterly Leadership meetings is too repetitive." Responses are summarized in Table 24.

**Table 24: Is the Content of Coach and Leadership Training Too Repetitive?**

Principal responses to the item, "The content presented during Coaches Meetings and Quarterly Leadership Meetings is too repetitive."	
Strongly Disagree	10.14%
Somewhat Disagree	30.43%
<b>Somewhat Agree</b>	<b>42.03%</b>
Strongly Agree	11.59%
Don't Know	5.80%

Source: *Principal Implementation Survey, Spring 2006*

We were unable to explore this issue to a level that would allow us to more definitively explain this distribution of responses, but there are at least two plausible explanations. First, in SY 2005-06, Quarterly Leadership Meetings and Coaches Meetings were held on consecutive days and often featured external consultants who delivered essentially the same content to the coaches on one day, then to principals and district coordinators the following day. Breaking coaches and leaders into two groups enabled the RF program to reduce the overall size of sessions—a critical consideration in terms of facilitating interactive discussions and active learning as opposed to large sessions of uninterrupted lecture—however, there was relatively little differentiation *in pure content*. In some instances, professional development that was more coach-centered, was repeated on subsequent days for principals and district coordinators so that “everyone would receive the same message.” In such instances, consistency of message took precedence over differentiation to participant role and responsibilities.

Second, the complicated logistics required to plan and schedule large professional development activities (ranging from 100 to 250 participants) made it difficult for RF program staff to provide differentiated instruction for coaches and administrators who had varying levels of experience and expertise. Presumably, trainees who were certified in reading and/or had extensive prior experience in implementing a school-wide initiative could “pick up” on some training content more quickly than peers whose content knowledge or experience was not so deep. These more highly skilled participants might find some content unnecessarily repetitive, while others might find the repetition helpful in learning unfamiliar material.

There is some evidence that principals and coaches *did* vary in both experience and in reading content knowledge, at least according to their responses to Implementation Survey items that tap knowledge and preparation in areas relevant to RF implementation. (See Tables 25-27.)

- *Principal Experience.* As noted in Table 25, four RF principals (about 6%) were in the first year of their first principalship in SY 2005-06, while most principals (nearly 59%) had 4-10 years administrative experience. At the other end of the spectrum, five principals (roughly 7%) had 25 or more years of administrative experience.

**Table 25: Administrator Experience of RF Principals**

Principal responses to the item, "Of your total years of education experience how many years have you spent as an administrator?"		
	No	Pct
"1 or less"	4	5.88%
"2-3"	2	2.94%
<b>"4-10"</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>58.82%</b>
"11-24"	17	25.00%
"25 or more"	5	7.35%

Source: *Principal Implementation Survey, Spring 2006.*

- *Coach and Principal Certification.* One might assume that all RF principals are certified in elementary education, or that all coaches are certified in reading, but those assumptions appear faulty. When principals and coaches were provided a list of certification areas and asked in which areas they were certified, roughly 26% of coaches and 16% of principals reported that they were certified in reading (See Table 26.) About the same proportion (i.e., roughly 28% of coaches and 16% of principals) said they were certified in early childhood. Only seven of ten RF principals were certified in elementary education; presumably, at least some of the others were assigned to one of the program's K-12 schools.

**Table 26: Percentage of Principals and Coaches with Certification in Reading and Other Areas**

Principal and Coach responses to, "In which of the following areas are you certified?"				
	Coach		Principal	
	No	Pct	No	Pct
Reading	28	25.93%	11	15.94%
Early Childhood	30	27.78%	11	15.94%
Elementary Education	107	99.07%	49	71.01%
Special Education	6	5.56%	12	17.39%
Supervision of Instruction	20	18.52%	45	65.22%
Principalship	20	18.52%	66	95.65%
Other	23	21.30%	18	26.09%

Source: *Principal and Coach Implementation Surveys, Spring 2006*

- *Academic Preparation in Reading.* In SY 2005-06, there were few opportunities to study scientifically based approaches to reading at Louisiana colleges of education. We nonetheless assumed that the amount of coursework that coaches and principals completed in reading could serve as an indicator of their professional interest in the area, and might lay a foundation for subsequent professional development in scientifically based approaches. As noted in Table 27, relatively few coaches and principals (4 and 5 respectively) had completed five or less credit hours in reading, while at the other end of the spectrum, 60% of coaches and 45% of principals had completed more than 12 units. As expected, reading coaches had more preparation in reading than principals.

**Table 27: Percentage of Coaches and Principals With 1 to 12+ Academic Credits in Reading**

Principal and Coach responses to, "Approximately how many academic credit hours in reading have you earned by completing university coursework?"				
	Coaches		Principals	
	No	Pct	No	Pct
1-5	4	3.70%	5	7.25%
6-9	13	12.04%	16	23.19%
10-12	23	21.30%	12	17.39%
More than 12	65	60.19%	31	44.93%

*Source: Principal and Coach Implementation Surveys, Spring 2006*

Though the education profession has made substantial progress in recognizing the importance of differentiating instruction for children, staff developers have had less success in driving home the importance of differentiating instruction for adult learners. As RF launches its second cohort of schools in SY 2006-07, the challenge of adapting training to meet the needs of an even more diverse audience of teachers and administrators is likely to increase.

#### Professional Development Opportunities, From a Regional Perspective.

Louisiana's RF Plan provides for a tiered system of ongoing professional development support for schools and districts in the form of

1. Conferences for a statewide RF audience<sup>18</sup>, including Quarterly Leadership Meetings, Coaches Meetings, LRTI/LETRS Institutes, LETRS and DIBELS TOT (Training-of-Trainers) Institutes, and Interventionist Workshops;
2. Professional development follow-up for RF schools and districts at the regional level, delivered by regional reading coordinators (activities include workshops in DIBELS data analysis, "Para-Reading" or other localized paraprofessional training, practice in classroom observations using the Literacy Observation Tool, etc.); and
3. Regional or district-level professional development in early literacy assessment for both RF and non-RF schools and districts.

At this point, we find it useful to clarify the distinction between "state" and "regional" training. For the purposes of this discussion, we define "state trainings" as professional development activities that are organized and administered by Curriculum Access Section staff, using primarily contract trainers. "State training" would therefore include events such as the interventionist institutes in which the same contract trainers repeat a presentation at multiple locations around the state. We define "regional training" as professional development activities scheduled and conducted by RESC staff for schools and districts within their service areas. Our point in distinguishing between "state" and "regional" professional development has less to do with where the training occurs, and more with which organizational unit of the LDE must develop capacity in order to deliver the service effectively. Defined in this fashion, "state training" requires no capacity at a regional level; "regional training" does.

<sup>18</sup> As described in the preceding section. Although some "state-level" trainings are conducted at multiple locations (e.g., the Interventionist trainings conducted in north-, mid-, and south-Louisiana), these professional development activities are considered "state-level" because they are organized by state program staff in Baton Rouge and feature outside trainers who rotate from location to location, making the same presentation.

When Louisiana's RF program was first implemented in SY 2004-05, most professional development activities were "state training." The agency used contract trainers almost exclusively because the LDE lacked the in-house capacity to model or teach what was generally considered a markedly different approach to reading instruction. Throughout that first year of implementation, regional coordinators and members of the Curriculum Access Section staff were immersed in a variety of professional development activities aimed at building their professional knowledge and skills. For example, LDE staff assigned to the RF project attended DIBELS and LETRS institutes along with the first wave of local educators trained, and the consultant who provided follow-up training also reviewed the content in-depth with regional coordinators and Curriculum Access Section staff. As vacancies have occurred and new staff members have come on board, program leaders have strived to create similar professional development opportunities for new hires.

As SY 2004-05 wore on, three regional coordinators left the RF program in pursuit of other career opportunities. Staff turnover continued to plague the program during SY 2005-06,<sup>19</sup> with the net result that some regions had less capacity than others to meet professional development and technical assistance needs (See Table 28.)

**Table 28: Distribution of Regional Reading Coordinators and RF Participants in SY 2005-06 (Post-Katrina)**

	No of Reading Coordinators	Districts	Schools	Faculty
Region 1	1	1	5	109
Region 2	1	7	26	594
Region 3	1	2	13	223
Region 4	1	2	8	184
Region 5	1	0	0	0
Region 6	1	1	3	62
Region 7	0	2	14	399
Region 8*	1-2	5	18	324
<b>Total</b>		<b>20</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>1,895</b>

\* A second coordinator was hired in May 2005.

*Source: Faculty counts are based on rosters collected from RF Principals in Fall 2005 and updated after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita*

The uneven ratio of regional coordinators to RF personnel becomes increasingly important as professional development and technical support are centered in the eight RESC regions. As noted in Table 29, "regional training" accounted for 84% of all RF professional development registrations in SY 2005-06.

<sup>19</sup> Ironically, the more highly trained and experienced that state employees become in what is still a shortage area, the more motivated other education organizations are to recruit them.

**Table 29: Number and Percentage of Professional Development Registrations Generated at a “State” vs. a “Regional” Level in SY 2005-06**

Training Topic	Total Registrations	Pct
<b>"State" Training</b>		
Statewide Coaches Meetings	277	2.76%
Quarterly Leadership Meetings	483	4.81%
LRTIs/LETRS	170	1.69%
Interventionist Workshops	644	6.41%
<b>Subtotal</b>	1574	15.67%
<b>"Regional" Training</b>		
Regional Coaches Meetings	477	4.75%
DIBELS	7,998	79.59%
<b>Subtotal</b>	8,475	84.34%
<b>Total</b>	<b>10,049</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

Source: LDE Regional Education Service Center (RESC) Itinerary Database, SY 2005-06, professional development sign-in sheets, and principal-reported rosters of staff trained in SY 2004-05

### 3.4.2.3. Job-Embedded RF Professional Development Provided by LDE Staff

On average, how often during SY 2005-06 did you attend a principals' meeting conducted by a regional reading coordinator for RF planning or professional development purposes?

	LA	1	2	3	4	6	7	8
Never	24.29%	33.33%	13.04%	66.67%	14.29%		14.29%	36.36%
Once/Twice	22.86%	33.33%	39.13%	22.22%	85.71%	33.33%	7.14%	18.18%
Quarterly	42.86%	33.33%	30.43%	11.11%		66.67%	64.29%	36.36%
Monthly	8.57%		13.04%				14.29%	9.09%
Twice Monthly	1.43%		4.35%					

### 3.4.3. Findings Relative to Increases in Teacher Content Knowledge

*To what extent has Louisiana’s RF program helped teachers to build content knowledge in scientifically based reading instruction?*

While it is useful to know how many RF teachers have attended professional development in early literacy (i.e., LETRS and DIBELS trainings), their participation in workshops offers only limited insight into the amount of knowledge they are building in scientifically based reading instruction and assessment. The RF program did not administer end-of-training assessments of participant knowledge in SY 2005-06; indeed, *no assessments* of teacher knowledge in either of these areas could be found in SY 2005-06, even if Louisiana’s RF program had been able (logistically) to administer and score them. The CCD took steps in SY 2005-06 to address this lack of empirical data on teacher content knowledge (as will be addressed in a later section), but in the interim, the only sources of information on teacher content knowledge are responses to the Principal and Coach Implementation Surveys.

### 3.4.3.1. Content Knowledge of Teachers Based on Implementation Survey Responses

No Implementation Survey item specifically addressed the overall content knowledge of teachers; however, two items asked principals and coaches their perceptions of teacher ability in delivering effective interventions (which requires the ability to understand how to target instruction effectively to students) and in interpreting DIBELS results. The perceptions of both coaches and principals on these two dimensions of teacher knowledge are summarized in Table 30.

As noted in Table 30, half of all principals and coaches believe that more than half of the teachers at their schools had the knowledge and skills to effectively deliver interventions to their students, though a smaller percentage of coaches believed that all of the teachers at their school had these abilities. One principal was frank and did not have enough information to answer the question.

**Table 30: Principal and Coach Perceptions of Teacher Ability to Deliver Interventions**

How many of the teachers with whom you worked had the knowledge and skills to effectively deliver interventions?		
	Principals	Coaches
Less Than Half	4.29%	8.41%
About Half	7.14%	17.76%
More Than Half	50.00%	50.47%
All	37.14%	23.36%
Don't Know	1.43%	0.00%

*Source: Principal and Coach Implementation Surveys, Spring 2006*

### 3.4.3.2. Progress toward Empirically Measuring the Content Knowledge of RF Educators

As previously mentioned, the national movement toward using scientifically based approaches to reading instruction is so recent, that the CCD and the LDE have been unable to locate an instrument capable of measuring on a large scale the content knowledge participants acquire when they attend professional development in early literacy instruction that is administered by Louisiana's RF program. From an evaluative standpoint, it is nonetheless important to study the effectiveness of RF professional development in building the content knowledge of professional development participants. Moreover, national models for evaluating staff development consider assessment of participant content knowledge to be one of five crucial indicators of professional development impact.<sup>20</sup> From a more practical standpoint, a tool that can be used to assess how well teachers know and understand fundamental concepts of early literacy instruction could yield information valuable to reading coaches and RF program staff in planning professional development activities.

<sup>20</sup> The five levels (from simplistic to complex), are end-of-training participant responses, impact on participant content knowledge, impact on participant practice, impact on the school as an organization, and impact on student learning (Guskey, 2000).

For these reasons, the CCD began working in SY 2005-06 on the development of an Early Literacy Content Knowledge Inventory that can be administered to staff in RF schools and districts for the following purposes:

- To measure the impact of LETRS training administered by the RF program on the content knowledge of instructional staff and administrators;
- To generate information that can be used for personal, school, district, and/or state professional development planning purpose; and/or
- To identify individuals who are particularly strong candidates to become reading coaches or teacher mentors.

### Progress To Date

In December 2005, the CCD convened a group of educators with expertise in early literacy instruction and assessment for the purpose of developing a bank of items aligned with:

1. The five components of early literacy as recommended by the National Reading Panel;
2. The Louisiana Reading and Language Competencies, a set of knowledge and skill standards that graduates of Louisiana colleges of education are expected to demonstrate;
3. The Learning Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS), the foundational professional development that the Louisiana Department of Education (LDE) provides to Reading First school personnel; and
4. The Louisiana English Language Arts Content Standards and Grade Level Expectations (GLEs) for students enrolled in grades K-3.

In July 2006, the item writers finished developing a bank of 169 closed-ended items that measure knowledge in early literacy background knowledge, phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. Three parallel forms of a draft inventory, each containing 34 items, have since been developed. Each form measures knowledge in all six areas and should require no more than 60 minutes to complete.

The 169 items and three draft inventory forms will be reviewed by the end of January 2007 by a cadre of educators selected on the basis of their expertise in early literacy and/or familiarity with the Louisiana Reading and Language Competencies, K-3 ELA standards, and GLEs. The item bank and inventory forms will be updated, based on the reviewers' feedback, and piloted during Winter 2007 with a sample of educators with varying levels of preparation in early literacy for instrument validation purposes. The CCD's goal is to administer the inventory to a representative sample of RF teachers, administrators, and coaches by the end of SY 2006-07 for needs assessment purposes, and to pre-post test a sample of first-time LETRS trainees for evaluative purposes when that professional development resumes.

### **3.5. Recommendations Relative to RF Implementation**

Recommendation 1. *State policy makers should focus their attention in the final two years of the RF grant to amending state policy (both in BESE policy and in statute) to continue the principle elements of the RF Model, after federal funding ends.*

One strategy would be to propose legislation, amending RS 17:24.9 (the Quality Early Reading Initiative) in such a way as to preserve the principal elements of the RF program in state statute and BESE policy. Those elements would include:

- A tiered system of reading instruction consisting of dedicated, core reading time supplemented by targeted interventions for struggling readers; and
- An assessment system that includes both benchmark testing and progress monitoring components.

Another strategy would be for BESE to fold the state-mandated K-3 reading assessment into the state testing program, thereby removing the cost to districts of assessing K-3 students in reading. If the primary argument that district superintendents raise against replacing the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) is the cost of administering DIBELS, then eliminating that cost should ease transition to the new assessment and assure its continuation on an ongoing basis.

A third strategy would be to work with the LDE Office of Management and Finance to determine if and how funding for school-based content leaders (including reading coaches) can be provided under the Minimum Foundation Program (MFP).

*Recommendation 2. The RF program should charge the Reading Leadership Task Force with developing a plan for continuing the principal elements of Reading First, after the federal grant has ended.*

The plan should include:

1. Assessing current and ongoing training needs in early literacy instruction and assessment;
2. Recommending revisions in state statute and policy to maintain and extend instructional capacity; and
3. A recommended plan and timetable for weaning RF schools off of federal RF funding.

Although the K-12 Literacy Plan (which effectively replaces the RF State Plan) provides general guidance for the state's literacy initiative, it does not include specific provisions for ongoing needs analyses, policy revisions, or plans and timetables for transitioning from federal- to local support. The Reading Leadership Task Force, as defined by the RF State Plan, includes BESE members, district superintendents, university faculty, and other stakeholder groups whose support should prove influential in shaping policy.

It is important that the agency's RF leadership join the Task Force members in the planning process, unencumbered by the duty of conducting the meeting. It is therefore recommended that the agency secure an outside facilitator for Task Force meetings who has no perceived relationship with or stake in RF decisions and who therefore can be viewed as an objective agent for coordinating discussion.

*Recommendation 3. Members of the RF program staff should work collaboratively with members of the Title 1 staff and Division of Professional Development to develop a professional development program to teach school and district administrators how to manage federal and state moneys effectively to cover reading expenses currently funded with RF funds.*

The program should begin with presentations by experts on the subject (perhaps during a Quarterly Leadership Meeting), leading into a series of work groups during which principals and district coordinators—informed by their own budgets—collaboratively develop strategies that

can be applied in their respective districts. Progress should be supported between Quarterly Leadership Meetings through district or regional principal meetings facilitated by regional coordinators and/or technical assistance visits led by RF program staff.

*Recommendation 4. Regional reading coordinators should devote more time to providing job-embedded professional development and technical assistance to RF schools and districts, even if it means spending less time delivering DIBELS training in non-RF districts.*

Members of the Curriculum Access staff should consider meeting with the Regional Educational Services Center (RESC) leadership to determine how many days per month each regional reading coordinator should devote to serving RF schools and how many days to devote to non-RF training. At a minimum, the agency should consider setting a standard for the number of visits each school should receive for professional development and/or technical assistance purposes.

DIBELS training needs in regions that do not have a regional reading coordinator should be met by contracting with an outside vendor, much as the RF program has contracted with the Nicholls State University Center for Dyslexia or the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) in the past, to train RF teachers and administrators.

If DIBELS training demands exceed available training time, the LDE staff should consider the following options:

1. Rather than attempting to meet each non-RF district or principal request to train entire faculties, follow the same strategy used to build assessment capacity in RF schools during SY 2004-05 by training one five-member assessment team per school.
2. Set minimum/maximum guidelines for the number of teachers who will be trained before a workshop is conducted. Require schools/districts to confirm registrations in advance.

*Recommendation 5. The Curriculum Access leadership and the RESC leadership should develop a comprehensive strategy for meeting the ongoing professional development and technical assistance needs of RF schools and districts, with particular attention to the following.*

1. Provide follow-up content training for school-based instructional staff (including teachers, interventionists, and paraprofessionals) in the five components of early literacy where identifiable gaps in training exist. Priority should be given to schools with a large percentage of teachers who have not attended LTRS.
2. Provide authentic, job-embedded opportunities to build the content, pedagogical, and coaching skills of school reading coaches. Strategies might include creating opportunities for skilled, experienced coaches or other trainers to model cognitive coaching for less-skilled peers; assigning coaches to shadow while observing and providing feedback to teachers, then provide feedback to each other, etc.
3. Build professional development/technical assistance capacity in regions with regional reading coordinator vacancies or exceptionally large numbers of RF schools. Consideration should be given to contracting with a private individual or a university in high-need regions or allowing districts in the region to use their RF funds to secure training/technical assistance that schools in other regions are receiving from their regional coordinator.

4. Require regional reading coordinators to form study groups for their own ongoing professional development and create opportunities to collaboratively plan Monthly Coaches meetings or other RF professional development that is delivered in the regions. As RF professional development/technical assistance moves increasingly to the regional level, it is essential that the knowledge and skill-level of coordinators is consistently rich, and the quality of regional professional development experiences is consistently high.

Recommendation 6. *The Program Unit of the Curriculum Access Section should create additional opportunities for school and district administrators to collaborate across district lines to support program implementation. Strategies could include the following:*

1. Organizing some Quarterly Leadership and Quarterly Coaches Meetings as “Core-alike” activities, with opportunities for schools and districts that use the same core programs to network, problem-solve collaboratively, share successes, etc;
2. Encouraging school and district staff to become more active learners/step out of familiar routines by using professional development strategies that encourage groups to mix (there are a variety of quick and convenient strategies that can be used to randomly arrange participants for activities, such as “counting off,” “learning partners,” etc.); and
3. Creating more opportunities for RF schools/districts that are particularly successful in implementing best practices in early literacy instruction and assessment to pair with schools/districts that are struggling with their implementation for their mutual benefit.

Recommendation 7. *The RF Program should place more emphasis on the importance of systematic observations of instruction, assessment, and professional development. More specifically, LDE staff (regional reading coordinators and RF state staff members) should take steps to ensure that:*

1. *Principals and reading coaches are routinely observing core instruction as well as Tier II and Tier III interventions, and that information gleaned from those observations are used to inform professional development activities,*
2. *Coaches and principals build and maintain inter-rater reliability when conducting observations of instruction and interventions by periodically collaborating in their observations, then comparing and discussing their findings. From time to time, coaches and principals should collaborate with peers at other RF schools in these observations to further consistency of observations as well as personal professional growth, and*
3. *Reading coaches and principals improve their practice by engaging in peer observations. We recommend that coaches and principals spend at least one day per year, visiting another RF school or schools as a means of encouraging collaborative learning. to compare and discuss their school schedules, to discuss the strategies their faculties use to analyze and interpret their DIBELS data, etc.*

Regional coordinators should organize a monthly coaches meeting around a discussion of reflections from the visits (if school visits are assigned within a specified timeframe) or set aside a portion of Monthly meetings on an on-going basis to discuss visits conducted during that month.

Recommendation 8. *The RF Program should develop a plan for utilizing information from the Louisiana Content Knowledge Inventory (when its development is complete) to inform professional development planning and targeted technical assistance, particularly for those schools and districts where teacher content knowledge is lowest. Consideration also should be given to using inventory results to identify teachers and interventionists who might be groomed to become reading coaches.*

## 4. Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) Analysis

### 4.1. Overview

The SWOT Analysis is a strategic planning tool to evaluate the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats of a program or initiative. The SWOT was chosen by the Center for Child Development and the Louisiana Department of Education for its analytical, yet simple framework for gathering data to plan, develop, and support the Reading First (RF) program at the state, district, and school levels.

In January of 2006, all administrators, reading coaches, interventionists, K-3 teachers and special education teachers in each of the 87 schools in the 20 districts were asked to complete a SWOT survey to assess the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the RF program from their perspective. The survey data were gathered and analyzed to illuminate the student achievement and professional development data discussed in other sections of this report and to make informed decisions about program planning and technical assistance that foster continuous improvement.

Using the four categorical variables that define SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats), fifty-four response factors were identified and classified under the sub-categorical variables of *instruction*, *assessment*, *professional development*, and *funding*. The strengths are the positive attributes currently present in RF, the weaknesses are local issues or characteristics that need improvement and thereby limit the progress of RF, the opportunities are areas that could be developed if weaknesses were eliminated, and the threats are trends (both local and statewide) that threaten the future of RF.

### 4.2. Purpose

In March of 2003, the Louisiana Department of Education was awarded \$19.2 million for its RF grant and is expected to receive approximately \$124.7 million over the six-year life of the program. In the fall of 2004, the department began implementing the RF model. During this pilot year, numerous planning and implementation activities took place to establish the infrastructure of people, processes, and resources necessary to support the RF program in Louisiana. This infrastructure is dynamic and the SWOT tool provides LDE staff and policy makers with school implementers' perceptions of annual program progress to make the program adjustments and improvements needed to establish sustainability.

### 4.3. Key Findings

The quantitative results of this second-year study, which emerged from the SWOT survey responses of 1512 administrators, reading coaches, interventionists, and K-3 and special education teachers, provide evidence that the RF program is being implemented fairly well across the state. The staff responses in the 88 schools depict that the greatest strengths of the RF program are the a) teachers' increased program knowledge, b) consistency of core program implementation due to its spiraling curriculum and repetition of skills from each level to the next, and c) fidelity of interventions conducted in small groups of three to five students. As with the

current SWOT data, the most common strength from the 2004-05 results was the core program materials and resources. However, the furthestmost opportunity identified by 2005-06 respondents was DIBELS screening; in 2004-05, respondents cited the core program (addressing the five research-based reading components) as the greatest opportunity.

The extent of the professional development offered and implemented at the school level and the degree of technical support offered at the state, regional, and district levels could be factors for the following weaknesses or threats. Weaknesses in 2004-05 were program pacing (loss of instructional time as teachers strived to implement the core program) and the lack of materials or inadequacy of quality materials to address student needs. In 2005-06, a common weakness was the lack of individualized instruction provided by the core program (i.e., core program was either too challenging for at-risk learners or not challenging enough for benchmark students). Another widespread weakness was the lack of interventionists to assist in small groups within the classroom or within tiered interventions. This was due largely to the considerable number of students needing intervention or absenteeism of interventionists (and no substitutes). The greatest threat indicated by respondents in 2004-05 was the lack of technical support from the state, regional, and district levels (that is, vacant positions within the department and regional service centers, and lack of district reading coaches). In 2005-06, however, the main threat was the core reading program addressing too many skills or not enough skills within the lessons.

Based on two years of SWOT results, areas in need of improvement that are vital to the success of the Reading First program within the state relate to a) the core program and intervention instruction, b) scheduling of interventions, collaborative planning, and progress monitoring, c) funding and sharing of available resources, and d) professional development. Specifically, within the core program there is a need to standardize Tier I instruction by supplementing component areas of weakness with scientifically based reading research strategies and materials that meet the individual needs of students. Effective and efficient scheduling of Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions and more frequent progress monitoring (of benchmark students too) are also needed as well as meaningful and more focused time for teachers to use data to plan systematic and explicit lessons collaboratively. Additionally, RF staff should use funding for resources to secure supplemental materials that foremost address DIBELS progress monitoring and other informative assessment data that teachers can easily share. Moreover, all supplemental materials should complement, improve upon, and extend the classroom reading lessons. Finally, professional development provided at the state, regional, and district levels should continuously address the needs of RF instructional staff, especially as they relate to SBRR strategies, and sustainability issues such as joint funding and the sharing of available resources.

Table 31 provides a snapshot of the top Reading First strengths and weaknesses as well as the top opportunities and threats to the Reading First program. As in the text above, the results presented in the Table clearly show that respondents did not understand the meaning of external factors—that is, factors not under their control or influence. For example, certain respondents view the core program as an actual strength or weakness (an internal factor they have control over) while others view it as a potential opportunity or threat (an external factor they have no control over).

**Table 31: 2005-06 SWOT Results (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats)**

Strengths	Weaknesses
Core program (spiraling curriculum) (n= 568) All groups	Core program (not individualized – too challenging for at-risk or not challenging enough for benchmark students) (n=749) All groups
Interventions in small groups (3-5 students) (n=558) All groups	Lack of interventionists (n=223) All groups but Interventionists
Phonemic awareness and phonics knowledge (n=416) Interventionists and K-3 Teachers only	Scheduling of interventions (transitional time causing a loss of classroom instruction, or too short causing a loss of intervention remediation) (n=146) Interventionists and kindergarten Teachers only
Daily interventions within the classroom (n=306) All groups	Tier model (restrictive – no teachable moments or the use of different materials) (n=144) Administrators and K-3 Teachers only
Small group differentiated instruction within the classroom (n=249) All groups but Reading Coaches	Daily intervention (not consistent due to absences of interventionists) (n=75) Interventionists and K-3 Teachers
DIBELS screening (n=186) Reading Coaches and Administrators only	Lack of teacher preparation time (n=60) Kindergarten Teachers only
Opportunities	Threats
DIBELS screening (to identify and addresses needs early through small group instruction) (n=668) All groups	Core programs (too few or too many skills activities within component lessons) (n=287) Reading Coaches and K-3 Teachers only
Core program (five SBRR components) (n=551) All groups	Discontinuation of funding (the hiring and retention of personnel and replenishing materials) (n=251) All groups but Administrators
Ongoing professional development within the entire district (LETRS and DIBELS) & reading coaches at state level (n=192) All groups	Program fidelity (teachers losing instructional time) (n=211) All groups
Internal support (provided by administrative goal setting, reading coach, cooperative staff planning within the school and district) (n=147) All groups but Kindergarten and Second Grade Teachers	Inadequate quantity and quality of staff to implement program (n =153) All groups but Kindergarten Teachers
Funding (personnel and materials) (n=101) Unidentified	Teacher turnover/burnout (n=103) All groups

The problem here is the lack of clear distinction between internal (strengths and weaknesses) and external (opportunities and threats) factors. The meaningfulness of this SWOT analysis is based on the distinction between those factors that can be influenced on one hand and those that cannot on the other. Since the respondents did not understand the SWOT in a completely accurate way, the results are somewhat limited, but there are issues still worth talking about.

Note: In the following sections, the results will be presented as the percent of the total respondents. Parenthetically, the number of responses will be included followed by a description of the groups represented in that number. For example, the statement may be made that 20% (or 306 participants across all groups) responded a particular way. This means that the 306 people that responded represent at least one member of each group. If the statement were that 20% (or 308 reading coaches or administrators only) responded a particular way, this means that the 308

responses only came from the coaches or administrators. The percentages are always based on the total number of SWOT respondents. The identification of the source of particular comments is intended to enhance understanding and provide context for those comments.

#### **4.4. SWOT Factors**

##### **4.4.1. Strengths**

A review of the overall findings of 1512 respondents revealed several positive attributes of the RF program in Louisiana. Thirty-eight percent of the respondents (or 568 participants across all groups) mentioned the scripted, user-friendly, and spiraling structure of the core program and the consistency with which it addresses the five components of effective reading instruction as a major strength of RF. The second greatest strength identified by 37% of the respondents (or 558 participants) across all groups was the interventions provided in small groups of three to five students and which enabled interventionists to use scientifically based reading research strategies to address student needs and motivate student learning. The phonemic awareness and phonics knowledge students received from the core materials was recognized as a third strength by 28% of the respondents (or 416 K-3 teachers and interventionists). Additionally, 20% (or 306 participants across all groups) credited daily interventions within the classroom, seventeen percent (or 249 across all groups except the reading coaches) acknowledged small group differentiated instruction, and 12% (or 186 reading coaches and administrators only) revealed DIBELS screening as strengths of the RF program in Louisiana.

##### **4.4.2. Weaknesses**

A comprehensive review of the data gathered from 1512 respondents revealed issues and characteristics that limit the current and future growth opportunities of the RF program. Fifty percent of the respondents (or 749 participants across all groups) commented that the core program did not meet the needs of every student and, therefore, did not individualize. More specifically, some respondents stated that the core program was either too challenging for at-risk learners or not challenging enough for benchmark students. Additional core program remarks included concerns about the number of skill tests (either too few or too many), misalignment with DIBELS, non-systematic and fast-paced structure, complex use of the manual, length of writing and grammar lessons (either too short or too long), lack of independent practice, and lack of interesting materials for school and home use.

The second most common weakness identified by 15% of the respondents (or 223 participants across all groups but the interventionists) was the lack of interventionists needed to assist in small groups within the classroom and tiered instruction. Specific responses included the need to employ substitutes for absent interventionists so students could receive daily essential remediation. Scheduling of interventions was the third most recognized weakness identified by 10% of the respondents (or 146 interventionists and kindergarten teachers). Scheduling issues mostly focused on the kindergarten and special education levels, loss of classroom instructional time due to interventions overlapping or occurring during other content area classes, transitional time to and from interventions, and time needed to conduct progress monitoring.

Likewise, 10% of the respondents (or 144 administrators and K-3 teachers) recognized the restrictiveness of the RF program, stating that there was no time for field trips, special programs,

teachable moments, or the use of different materials. Finally, 5% of the respondents (or 75 interventionists and K-3 teachers) noted inconsistency of daily intervention (due to interventionist absenteeism), and 4% (or 60 Kindergarten teachers only) mentioned the lack of teacher preparation time as additional weaknesses.

#### **4.4.3. Opportunities**

The respondents mentioned several areas where RF can remedy its weaknesses. However, the top four of the five opportunities described here in this report are actually internal factors misunderstood as external factors by the respondents. This said, 44% of the respondents (or 668 participants across all groups) mentioned DIBELS screening as the greatest opportunity. Thirty-six percent of the respondents (or 551 across all groups) acknowledged the adoption of a five-component SBRR core program as an opportunity. More specifically, respondents listed application strategies and activities provided by the core such as test taking, higher order thinking, and comprehension. Additional responses related to the core included the use of factual information, organizational skills and sequenced routines, phonics and phoneme segmentation, exposure to all types of genres, multiple weekly reading passages, repetition of skills, vocabulary development, extra practice activities, centers, computer program targeted skills, and related resources.

Ongoing professional development provided at the district level (LETRS and DIBELS) as well as at the state level for reading coaches was a third opportunity cited by 13% of the respondents (or 192 participants across all groups). The internal support provided by administrative goal setting and the reading coach, and the use of cooperative school and district staff planning, whole faculty study groups, and teacher mentoring and observation was a fourth opportunity mentioned by 10% of the respondents (or 147 participants in all groups but Kindergarten and second grade). Finally, 7% of the respondents (or 101 unidentified participants) listed funding for personnel and materials as an opportunity.

#### **4.4.4. Threats**

A review of the SWOT data revealed five trends that threaten the RF program in Louisiana. 20% of the respondents (or 287 reading coaches and K-3 teachers only) cited the core program as the greatest threat. This threat, however, is questionable, since it is an internal factor (i.e., strength or weakness) that currently exists. Nonetheless, the most common reasons why respondents listed the core as a threat include the number of skills (either too few or too many), differentiated learning styles, the fast pace of the manual, the misalignment of core assessments and instruction with DIBELS, and the reading instruction block of time (either too short or too long). 17% of the respondents (or 251 participants except the administrators) said the discontinuation of funding (used to hire and retain personnel and replenish materials) was a threat to the RF program. 14% of the respondents (or 211 across all groups) documented program fidelity as a threat. In addition, 10% of the respondents (or 153 participants except the Kindergarten teachers) mentioned inadequate quantity and quality of staff to implement the program and assist with interventions and 7% (or 103 participants across all groups) indicated teacher turnover and burnout as threats.

#### **4.5. Recommendations**

Based on the summary of the SWOT factors above, the Center for Child Development recommends that the Department:

1. Continue to hire sufficient and qualified staff to answer and resolve questions and concerns;
2. Provide regular and consistent guidance on administering the RF program by conducting regular updates via the Internet; video conferencing; and meetings for specific groups such as district coaches, principals, and schools using the same core programs;
3. Create meeting agendas that reflect the needs of school personnel and identify exemplary practices at the school and classroom levels to highlight at meetings;
4. Collaborate with school districts and schools to strengthen the network of support for regional coordinators to prevent burnout and turnover;
5. Provide districts with support for joint funding and sharing of available resources to build sustainability of the RF program with the schools;
6. Address communication issues that arise for an intermediary who serves two levels of RF (LDE and school);
7. Consider ways to support and assist district coaches with several RF schools;
8. Clarify the role of the school coach/content leader and interventionist and continue to offer training in providing the coaches with guidance on effective ways to provide feedback to peers;
9. Continue to build support networks for principals, teachers, reading coaches, etc. to share information and ideas for addressing concerns (such as scheduling) that surfaced in the SWOT with colleagues in similar roles across the state and districts;
10. Continue to encourage school coaches/content leaders, interventionists, and administrators to attend the National Reading First Conference to increase their communication and collaboration with colleagues from other states;
11. Continue to provide principals with support on observation techniques that enable them to effectively monitor the implementation of the core reading program and classroom instruction;
12. Assist principals in their efforts to use shared decision making within the school to determine appropriate intervention strategies, etc;

13. Provide ongoing professional development for teachers on how to utilize the core program and supplemental resources to individualize instruction effectively within the 90-minute reading block and to increase program fidelity;
14. Capitalize on the strengths of LETRS and DIBELS training to show teachers how to use the tiered model and planning time more effectively.

#### **4.6. Conclusions**

Analyses conducted on the SWOT survey responses of 1,512 Reading First administrators, reading coaches, K-3 and special education teachers, and interventionists provide evidence that schools in Louisiana are implementing key Reading First components (e.g., the core program, DIBELS, daily interventions, etc.), albeit to varying degrees. While the results yielded several common strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, the findings are somewhat limited due to the lack of clear distinction between the internal and external factors. The distinction between a strength and an opportunity, as well as between a weakness and a threat, was difficult for the respondents to understand. In the future, an easy way to help respondents remember the difference is that strengths and weaknesses exist now; opportunities and threats are things that might happen in the future.

In addition to the misunderstanding, individuals also disagreed about whether a certain issue (e.g., core program) is a strength or a weakness or whether something that might happen (e.g., funding) is an opportunity or a threat. Although this occurrence is fairly typical in a SWOT analysis, focus groups can help to better understand the reasons for these differences. For example, are the differences attributed to the type of core program being implemented at the school site or with certain teachers?

All said, the common strengths identified across SWOT groups include the core program, small group interventions, and daily interventions within the classroom. Likewise, the key common weakness was the core program; no other weaknesses were identified across all groups. What makes this finding more unusual is that respondents also viewed the core program as either an opportunity or a threat.

Additional opportunities common across all groups include the DIBELS screening and ongoing LETRS and DIBELS professional development—factors that already exist and therefore seem like internal strengths rather than external opportunities. Finally, additional threats common across the SWOT groups were discontinuation of funding and teacher burnout or turnover. While this report aims to summarize the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in the Reading First program, the SWOT exercise itself demonstrates that each are interrelated. The key is to identify the most important drivers for change, and although the results are rather distorted, the SWOT still provides the basis for further investigation of the influencing factors such as the use of funds on the sustainability of the Reading First program.

## 5. Special Education Referral Rates

One of the key goals of the State RF and Federal RF plans is the reduction in special education referrals. The U.S. Department of Education lists three major performance objectives with associated performance indicators for the RF program, including the following:

- Objective 8.2 of 3: To decrease the percentage of kindergarten through third grade students in schools participating in RF who are referred for special education services based on their difficulties learning to read.
- Indicator 8.2.1 of 1: Referrals to Special Education: Decreasing percentages of RF K-3 students will be referred for special education services based on their difficulties learning to read.

Source: US Department of Education Performance Plan, accessed 2/2/2005, <http://www.ed.gov/about/reports/annual/2005plan/edlite-esea-readingfirst.html>.

The State RF Plan also includes a specific question to be answered by the external evaluator:

- “To what extent are referral rates for special education reduced as a result of *Reading First* activities?” Source: Louisiana Reading First Plan, accessed 2/2/2005, <http://www.doe.state.la.us/lde/uploads/2728.pdf>.

The federal objective is more limited than the state’s in that it is only looking for a reduction in referral rates for students with difficulties learning to read and not necessarily in the overall referral rate for special education. It may be reasonable to expect that a reduction in the referral rate for students with reading difficulties will lead to an overall reduction in the referral rate for special education, but one does not necessarily follow the other. Regardless, this section of the evaluation will look at determining the extent to which each question can be answered.

The key question for special education related to RF is simply:

***Was the percentage of RF K-3 students being referred to special education because of reading difficulties reduced?***

The following section will present the evaluation findings related to this question.

### 5.1. Findings

Both the 2002-2003 and 2003-04 years can be considered a baseline year for the evaluation of RF. Louisiana’s RF program began to receive funding during the 2003-04 year, but implementation of the program did not truly begin until the 2004-05 year. Since then, there are three or four years of data available for analysis. Regardless, there are data available regarding special education referrals for all years, but changes from the 2002-03 year to the 2003-04 year cannot be attributed to the RF program. The findings presented here will include all four years.

Of course, the analysis of student data in Louisiana must take into account the impact of the storms that impacted much of the state at the beginning of the school year. First, there are many schools in the state and within the RF program that were closed for significant periods of time and many of the students were displaced across the nation and within the state. The analysis of

referrals to special education across the years can account for the changing population in a number of ways. The results presented in this section will clearly indicate how the redistribution of population was addressed.

Within the RF schools, one can look at the total number of students referred to special education compared to the number referred for reading difficulties. Examining the percentage of total referrals that were for reading difficulties allows a comparison across the years that is relatively stable regardless of changing populations. While the population being described is different due to the storms, the year-to-year comparison will still provide some insight about the potential impact of RF on referrals. The following table shows the referral rate for RF schools over the past four years. The results clearly indicate that the percentage of referrals for reading difficulties has steadily been decreasing. The overall decrease in referrals is most likely attributable to the impact of the storms. While there may be an overall reduction in referrals for reading difficulties, the displacements caused by the hurricanes make it impossible to determine a relationship.

The baseline 2002-03 information has established that 53% of the 787 students in RF schools that were referred to special education were referred because of reading difficulties. For the 2003-04 school year, 49% of the 771 referrals were due to reading difficulties, and in the 2004-05 school year, 45% of the 559 referrals were because of reading difficulties. In the 2005-06 school year, 37% of the 375 referrals were for reading difficulties. There is clearly a steady downward trend in the referral rate for reading difficulties.

**Table 32: Referrals for Reading Difficulties in RF Schools**

<b>RF Schools Kindergarten through Third Grade</b>				
	<b>2002-03</b>	<b>2003-04</b>	<b>2004-05</b>	<b>2005-06</b>
All Referrals	787	771	559	375
Referrals for Reading Difficulties	419	375	253	139
Percentage	53.2%	48.6%	45.2%	37.1%

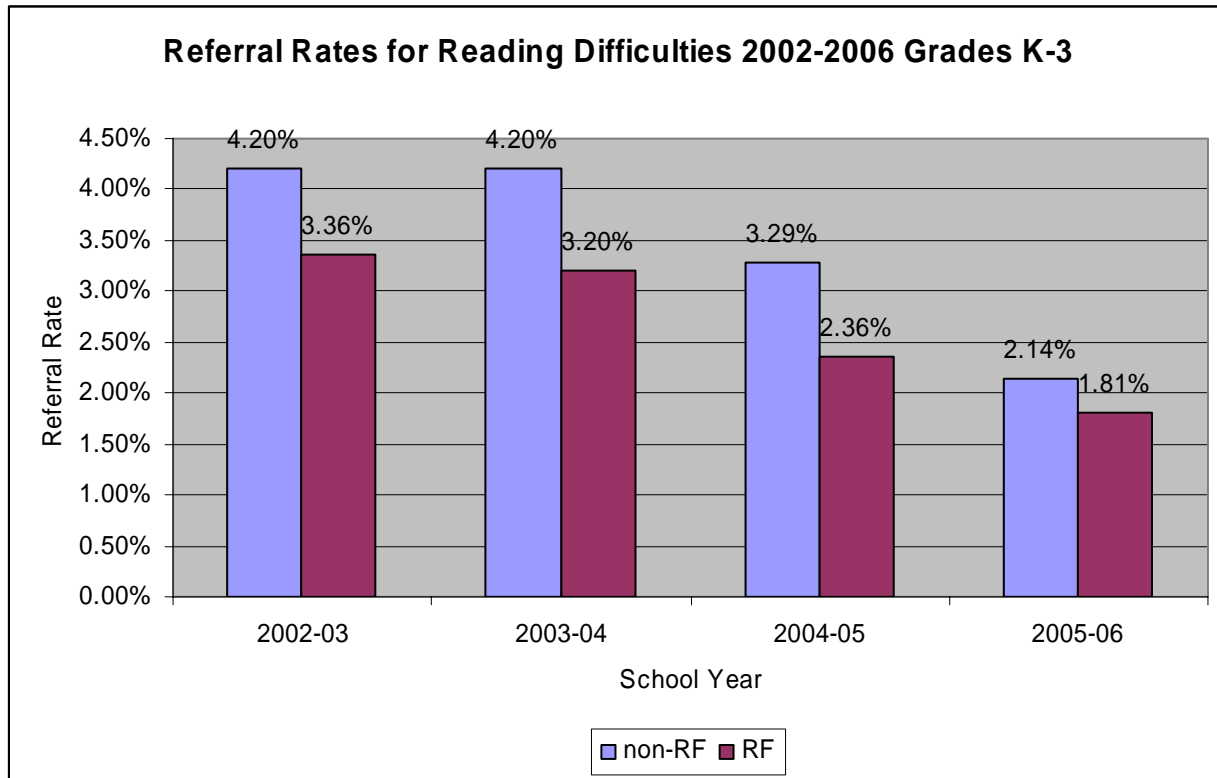
The same comparison for non-RF schools in the state of Louisiana is shown in the following table. Again, there is clearly a trend of referrals for reading difficulties being a smaller percentage of all referrals over time.

**Table 33: Referrals for Reading Difficulties in non-RF schools**

<b>Non-Reading First Schools Kindergarten through Third Grade</b>				
	<b>2002-03</b>	<b>2003-04</b>	<b>2004-05</b>	<b>2005-06</b>
All Referrals	5310	5225	4198	3968
Referrals for Reading Difficulties	2421	2272	1765	1146
Percentage	45.6%	43.5%	42.0%	28.8%

The overall referral rate can be calculated by taking the ratio of referrals to total enrollment. The following chart displays the referral rates for the total number of referrals and the number of referrals for reading difficulties.

Figure 25: Referral Rates for Reading Difficulties



## 5.2. Summary

Clearly, the referral rates in special education in both RF and non-RF schools have decreased over the last four years. The rate in RF schools continues to be lower than the rate of referral for non-RF schools. The number of referrals as a percentage of the total referrals continues to decrease and approaches the rate of referrals for non-RF schools. Additional years of implementation and analysis of the data will provide deeper insight into the impact that the RF program is having upon special education referrals in Louisiana.

## 6. The Effects of the Storms

After months of intensive planning from the state to school level, RF participants found themselves at the mercy of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita when the 2005-2006 school year commenced. On August 29, Hurricane Katrina displaced 186,000 public school students, 12,000 public school teachers, and 52,000 private school students (many enrolled in public schools where they relocated) in 6 Louisiana parishes. On September 24, just three weeks later, Hurricane Rita flooded New Orleans for a second time and the lower lying parishes, displacing or disrupting an additional 44,000 students. At the time of this report, nearly 18 months after the storms, the infrastructure for many of the RF students and their schools has not yet been re-established because of many complex issues. For the purposes of this report, it is important to note the changes that were caused by the storms and the ongoing effects related to school participation and enrollment.

Total enrollment within RF schools in the year before the storms was 20,878. After the storms, enrollment had decreased in RF schools to 18,412 – a loss of nearly 10% of the program’s participants. There were 14 RF schools in New Orleans that were closed for the year and one school in Vermilion Parish was closed and combined with a non-RF school. Of the 18,412 students that were enrolled in RF during the 2005-06 school year approximately 10% (1,769) of those students were displaced by the storms in some manner. This means that they were either out of school for an extended period of time, transferred out of an RF school, transferred into an RF school, or all of the preceding. Most (1,051) of these displaced students were from the Jefferson Parish School System. It is impossible to know the real effect that the displacement had on displaced students. In addition, the number of students displaced and who never re-enrolled in a Louisiana public school is large and their current status largely unknown. Even schools that were not directly impacted by the wind and rain of the hurricanes, were impacted by the many displaced students were enrolled in their schools at least temporarily.

Determining the true impact of these storms on students is beyond the scope of this evaluation, but assessing the impact of the RF program requires that certain changes be made to the analyses. While the current year data stands alone even with the heightened student mobility due to the storms, comparisons to previous years must be carefully conducted. For the multi-year comparisons in this report, the post-storm schools are used to select the comparison schools from the previous year. There were 87 RF schools in Louisiana in the 2005-06 school year. Data from the previous year is used for comparison from only the same 87 schools in order to avoid a “storm bias.”

Finally, it is interesting to note that while there was obviously a large impact on public schools in Louisiana, there was widespread progress within the RF program. A greater percentage of students are reading on benchmark in each subsequent year of the program despite the impact of the storms. This is a testament to the dedicated and hard-working educational staff within the state who persevered in the face of a truly unprecedented disaster to provide a strong educational environment for Louisiana’s children.