GREAT PLAINS INSTITUTE
OF READING AND WRITING

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SCIENCES

UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA LINCOLN

# 2007-08 ANNUAL REPORT

## NEBRASKA READING FIRST


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# OVERVIEW

The 2007-2008 Annual Progress Report provides an overview of student achievement and teacher implementation in Nebraska Reading First schools.

The report begins with a description of the demographic characteristics in Reading First classrooms, and compares them to the state population. Next, in an effort to understand the impact of student mobility on academic achievement, we examine spring and fall scores for mobile and stable students in 2007-08. A description of cluster characteristics concludes Section One of the report.

Section Two presents year-end academic achievement. Performance on significant tests and student risk level changes are reported. Achievement gap information compares the progress of specific categories of students. Vocabulary and comprehension for first, second, and third grade students are included in this section as well.

Section Three explores the achievement of special education students. Performance and growth for these students over the years of Reading First implementation is explored, and we discuss the unique challenges of measuring this population.

Section Four provides a closer look at the grade level performance of students in Reading First schools. The impact of Reading First on overall achievement is explored in two individual districts by looking at performance on district norm referenced STARS assessments, from the year prior to Reading First implementation through spring of 2007-08.

Teacher surveys and teacher log results are presented. These provide insight into the instructional procedures, focus, and teacher experiences in Reading First classrooms at every grade level. Finally, to understand the experience of students in Reading First, we track the assessment achievements of three students who have spent all four of their school years in Reading First classrooms.

**SECTION 1**

# STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS

## STUDENT DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

Some demographic groups experienced noticeable changes during 2007-2008. Round one schools displayed an increase of more than 10% in students qualifying for free/reduced lunch, while Round two schools increased in the number of English Language Learner students by more than 8%. All Nebraska Reading First schools report much larger percentages of students qualifying for free/ reduced lunch than the state average of 36.4%, and mostly larger percentages of students identifying with the three non-white minority categories.

Nebraska Reading First schools are educating students that are more culturally diverse and economically disadvantaged than the rest of the state.

| | State | Round I | | | Round II | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 2006-2007 | 2006-2007 | 2007-2008 | Change | 2006-2007 | 2007-2008 | Change |
| English Learners | 6.5% | 4.7% | 5.3% | 0.6% | 14.3% | 22.9% | **8.6%** |
| Special Education | 15.0% | 7.1% | 12.8% | **5.7%** | 3.9% | 10.8% | **6.9%** |
| Free/Reduced Lunch | 36.4% | 48.3% | 58.5% | **10.2%** | 56.6% | 56.1% | **-0.5%** |
| African American | 7.7% | 23.0% | 25.7% | 2.7% | 27.5% | 28.0% | 0.5% |
| Hispanic | 12.2% | 14.3% | 15.7% | 1.4% | 27.8% | 28.0% | 0.2% |
| Native American | 1.7% | 2.2% | 3.1% | 0.9% | 1.3% | 1.3% | 0.0% |
| White (non-Hispanic) | 77.0% | 59.8% | 54.3% | **-5.5%** | 42.6% | 42.0% | -0.6% |

*Numbers may not add to 100% due to rounding and overlapping categories
**State percentages were taken from the 2006-07 NDE report

## MOBILITY

For our evaluation of spring assessment data we take into account the mobility of students during the school year. Students are considered stable for the year end report if they were present for spring assessment and at least one of the previous assessment rounds. Those students who missed two assessment rounds during the year are considered mobile and are dropped from the year end reporting database. We include only the achievement data for the students who have been stable in our aggregate reporting of year-end results. For 2007-08 spring assessment 93% of students at all grade levels were stable.

We examined the link between mobility of Reading First students and the achievement data. We examined the scores of students who were present for fall 2007-08 assessment but left Reading First before spring assessment and compared them to the fall scores of students who were stable in the spring. At all grade levels, 7% to 9% of students present in the fall left before spring assessment.

These fall mobile students scored significantly lower on the fall assessments than their peers who remained for the rest of the year. The differences were most pronounced at second grade, where students who were present only for the fall round achieved fall oral reading fluency scores that were nearly .5 standard deviation lower than the scores of their peers who were stable at the end of the year. Students who became mobile before the end of the year started the year at significantly lower achievement levels than their peers who did not move.

In all grades, the mobile students who were present for only spring assessments during the 2007-08 year scored significantly lower (.6 to .7 standard deviation lower—a moderate effect size) than those stable students who were present for spring and at least one of the previous assessment rounds.

High mobility has a significant effect on spring academic performance, and the pattern of mobility is linked to student achievement in Reading First schools that is apparent even at the beginning of the year. While the data on mobile students is not included in the reports, schools should go to extra lengths to insure that students coming in are supported as quickly as possible, and these students should be supported in following years so they can catch up to their peers.

## STUDENT POPULATION BY CLUSTER

As in previous years, Reading First schools were grouped into clusters for analysis. Cluster analysis allows comparisons among schools that face similar challenges. Nebraska Reading First schools are clustered according to school size, minority group proportion, percentage of English Language Learners, percentage of students eligible for free/reduced lunch, and percentage of students qualified for special education.

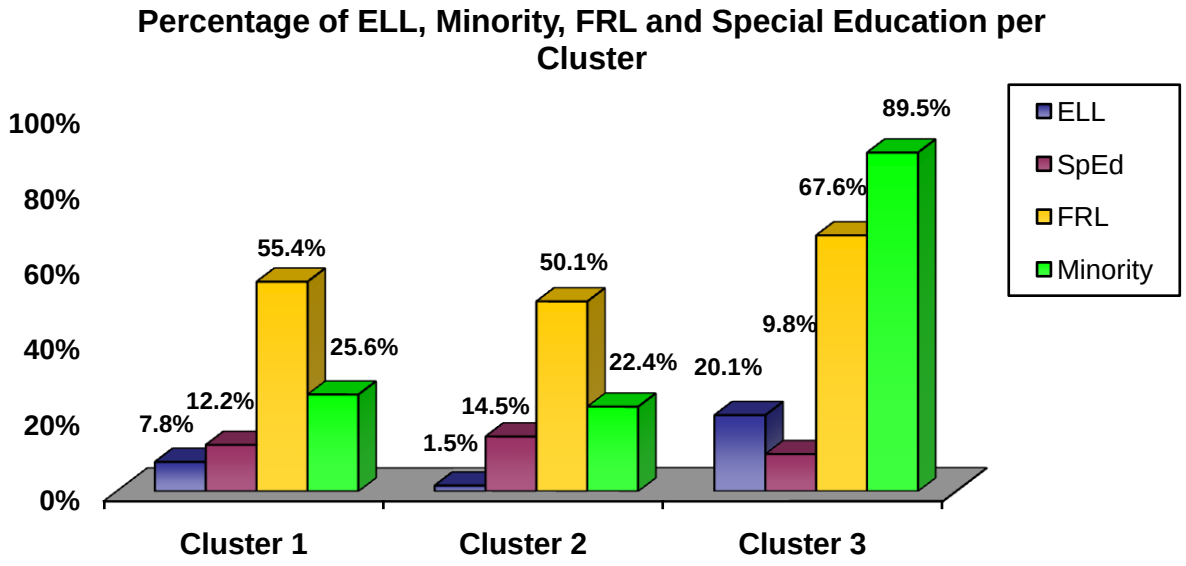
*Cluster 1* includes the smallest schools, where approximately 55% of students are eligible for free/reduced lunch, 25.6% belong to minority populations, 7.8% are English Learners (ELL), and 12% qualify for special education services. *Cluster 2* schools are larger, with fewer students qualifying for free/reduced lunch, slightly smaller percentages of minority and English Learners (ELL) and slightly more special education students. *Cluster 3* has the largest schools, with much higher percentages of minority students (89%) and more students qualifying for free/reduced lunch (67%). In this cluster 20% of the students qualify for ELL services and 9.8% qualify for special education.

***Cluster 1**: smallest schools, 55% F/RL, 23% minority, 7% ELL, 16% special education*

***Cluster 2**: somewhat larger schools, slightly smaller percentage of F/RL, minority, ELL, special education*

***Cluster 3**: largest schools, higher percentages of all diversity groups*

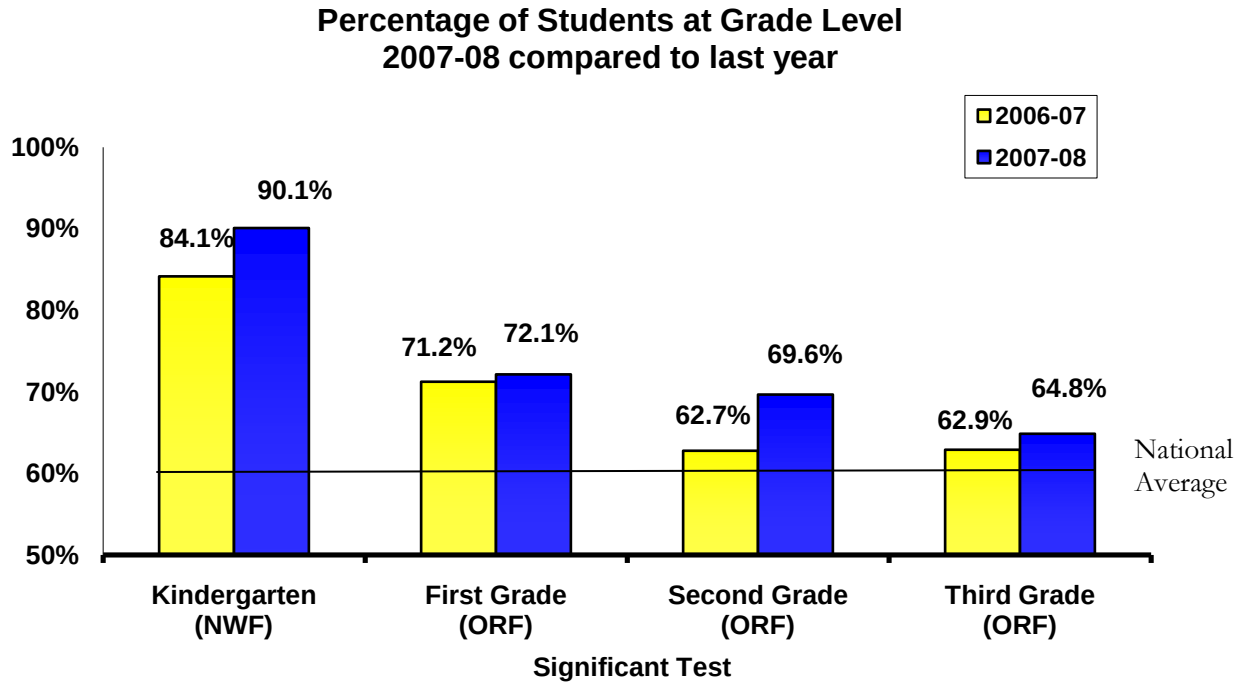
The following figure shows current population characteristics for each cluster. As noted earlier, the number of minority students varies dramatically across clusters. There is also noticeable variability in the percentages of English Learners (ELL) across the three clusters. All clusters report more than 50% of their students qualify for free/reduced lunch, a percentage that is well above the state average.



**SECTION 2**

# STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

The figure below presents percentages of students on grade level for each grade over the last two years. While each academic year represents a substantially different cohort of students a pattern of continuing improvement is apparent. The black line indicates the national average.




The significant test for the end of kindergarten, nonsense word fluency (NWF), is a measure of students' ability to apply phonics rules and blend sounds within word forms. Because the task uses pseudo words and there is no element of context to support the word reading, decoding is a relatively pure measure of skill in phonological processing. A higher percentage of students who completed kindergarten in 2007-08 scored on grade level for this measure than in the previous year, and classes in both years scored well above the national average for this skill. This is a strong predictor for of success in first grade, when students will need to use phonics to decode words quickly during text reading.

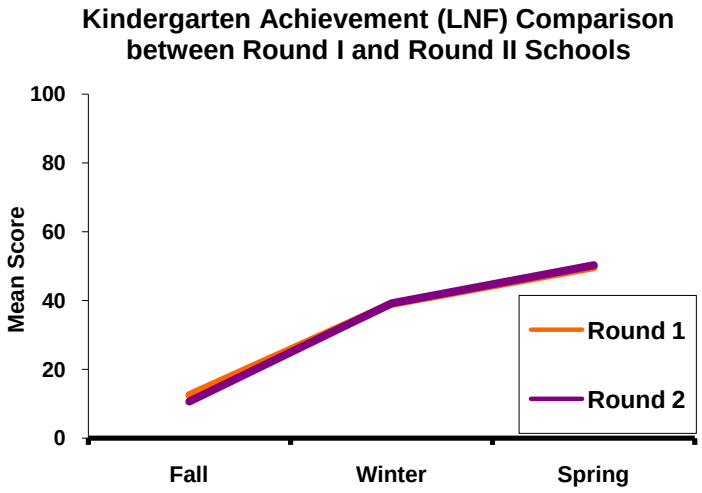
Once students become proficient at decoding words in isolation, first grade teachers shift their instructional emphasis to developing oral reading fluency (ORF). The ability to read connected text smoothly, accurately, and at an appropriate pace significantly predicts success in reading comprehension. For the last two years more than 70% of first graders were at grade level for this measure: a figure considerably higher than the national average.

Developing oral reading fluency remains a challenge as students move through grade levels and encounter increasingly complex texts. This challenge is evident in the percentage of second and third graders who are at grade level. More Reading First students achieve grade level than the national average, and there is a small but consistent growth in oral reading fluency across first, second, and third grade since last year. Establishing strong oral reading fluency skills is a challenge that Reading First teachers across the state continue to face.

The following sections present a detailed look at the progress in each grade level in 2007-08.

## KINDERGARTEN

A significant task during the kindergarten year is the mastery of foundational skills for later word decoding. One of the earliest of these skills is letter knowledge (measured by LNF). Proficiency in letter naming facilitates letter-sound match skills that contribute to fast and accurate blending of sounds within words.




The figure to the left shows the progress of kindergarten students in Reading First schools on Letter Naming Fluency. A score at or above 40 on letter knowledge in the spring indicates a low level of risk for difficulty, and kindergarten groups in both Rounds 1 and 2 achieved average scores above this cutoff. On average students in both rounds advanced at the same rate.

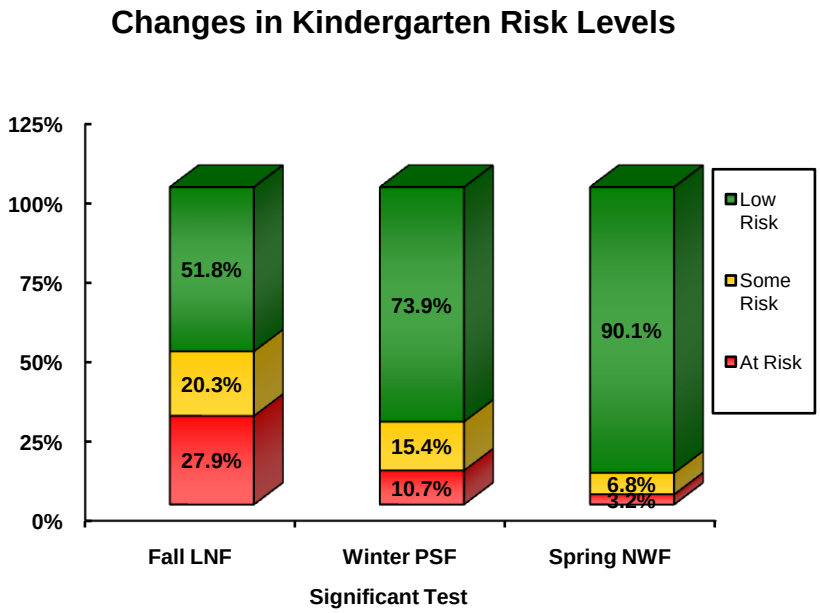
Once students master letter naming they move on to word based skills such as Phoneme Segmentation Fluency, a measure of the ability to isolate and manipulate individual sounds within short words, and Nonsense Word Fluency (NWF), a task that requires students to apply phonics rules and blending to nonsense words without the benefit of context. It is this measure (NWF) that is used to assess the level of student risk for reading difficulty at the end of the kindergarten year.

| | At risk | Some risk | Low risk |
|---|---|---|---|
| Nonsense Word Fluency score at the end of Kindergarten | 0-14 | 15-24 | 25 or greater |

Scores for each level of risk on Nonsense Word Fluency are established in the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) framework. These scores are listed in the table above.

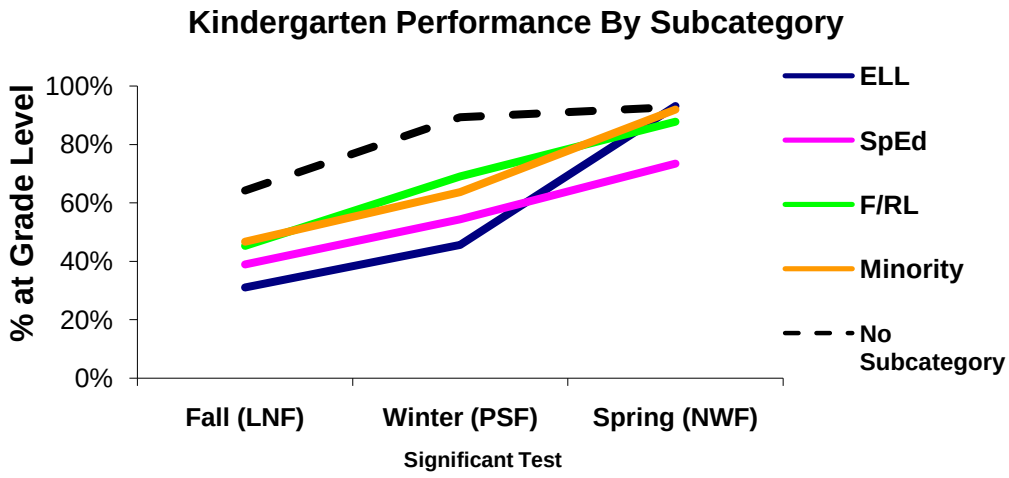
Since skill in decoding (NWF) provides a basis for decoding words within connected text, developing this skill is very important for success in first grade and beyond. Kindergarten teachers in Reading First classrooms make this skill a priority as the year progresses.

In the fall of 2007-08, nearly half of all kindergarten students were either at risk or at some risk for reading difficulty, as indicated by the red and yellow sections of the bars in the figure at right.




By the spring of this year, 90% of students in Reading First kindergarten classrooms were on grade level for Nonsense Word Fluency. This indicates remarkable skill growth during 2007-08, and should provide a sound basis for further word decoding skills.

KINDERGARTEN ACHIEVEMENT GAPS

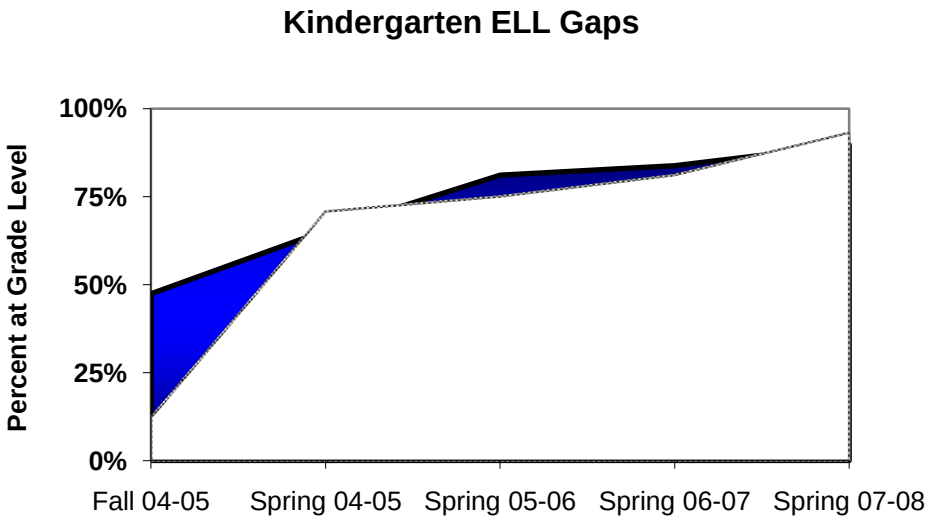



At the end of the 2007-08 school year only 10% of kindergarten students remained at some level of risk for difficulty with reading. To further examine these results,

performance is broken down by categories of students that have a higher risk for reading difficulties: students who are English language learners, those qualifying for special education services or for free/reduced lunch, and students from minority backgrounds. For purposes of comparison we added group comprised of mainstream students who do not fall into any of these categories. The previous figure shows the percent of students within each of these groups who are performing at grade level at the end of their 2007-08 kindergarten year.

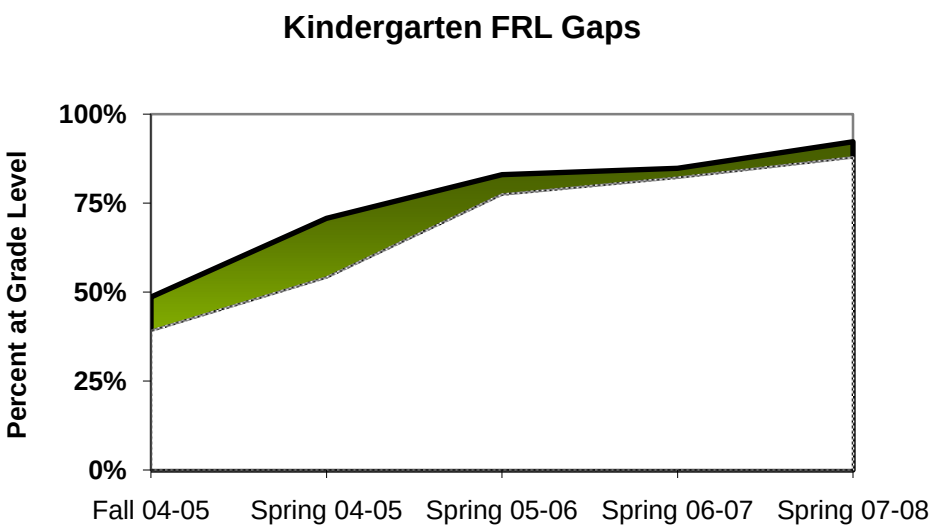
Students qualifying as English Language Learners started out with the smallest percentage on grade level in the fall. This group struggled in fall and winter of this year but posted a positive and encouraging gain in grade level skill by the end of the year, ending with a slightly higher percentage of students on grade level than the non-category student group. Minority students and those qualifying for free/reduced lunch also finished near the 90% mark. The category with the lowest percentage of grade level achievement is the group of students who qualify for special education services. However, these students improved dramatically during the course of the year, from 39% performing on grade level in the fall to 73% in the spring.

The following figures look at each of these category groups individually in comparison to all other students for each of the four years of Reading First implementation. Caution in interpreting these results is needed since each year of implementation presents a different group of students. Because some of the groups are fairly small, fluctuations are not uncommon. Overall trends in achievement are represented in these figures. The lower line of the fill area represents the achievement of the subcategory group. The solid line above the colored fill area represents the average percentage of all other students on grade level, and the colored fill area illustrates the gap between the two groups of students.

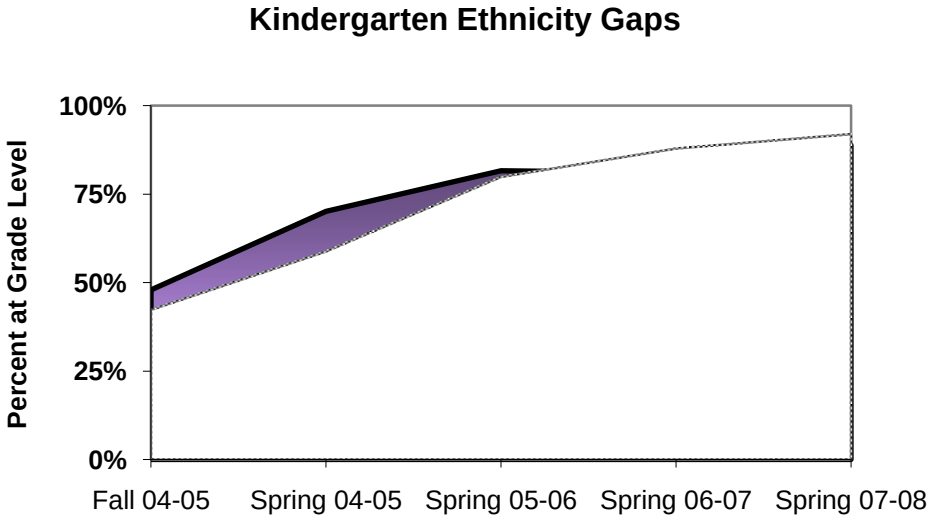



In the figure above it can be seen that English Learners (ELL) performed at a markedly lower level of achievement in the baseline assessment in 2004-05. That gap has progressively tapered in the following years, with English Learners (ELL) surpassing their grade level peers from all other

categories in the spring of 04-05, and performing at a slightly higher level than all other categories at the end of this 2007-08 school year.



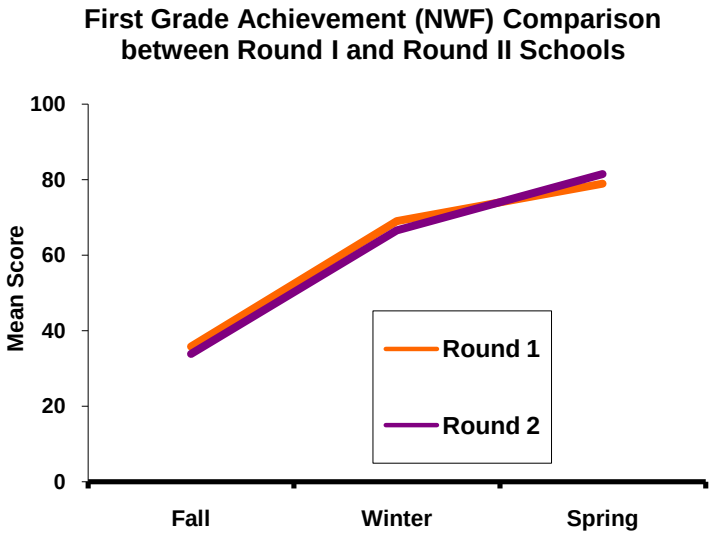

The gap between students qualifying for free/reduced lunch and all other students has also narrowed over the years of Reading First implementation, although these gaps were not as pronounced in the beginning as those for English Learners (ELL). In 2007-08 students who receive F/RL achieved at a rate nearly equal to that of their non-F/RL peers, finishing the year with only a 4% difference in percentage of students on grade level.




In the last two years of Reading First implementation, the gap between kindergarten minority students and their peers has closed. Children in the minority categories outperformed the combined group of all other kindergarten children at the end of the 2006-07 year and at the end of 2007-08.

## FIRST GRADE

First grade students are assessed in fall, winter, and spring on decoding (Nonsense Word Fluency NWF). This assessment asks students to use their knowledge of letter sounds to blend sounds together within a nonsense word. The ability to blend sounds together within words, quickly and accurately, contributes to fluent text reading, the next essential skill for beginning readers. This assessment is part of the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS).

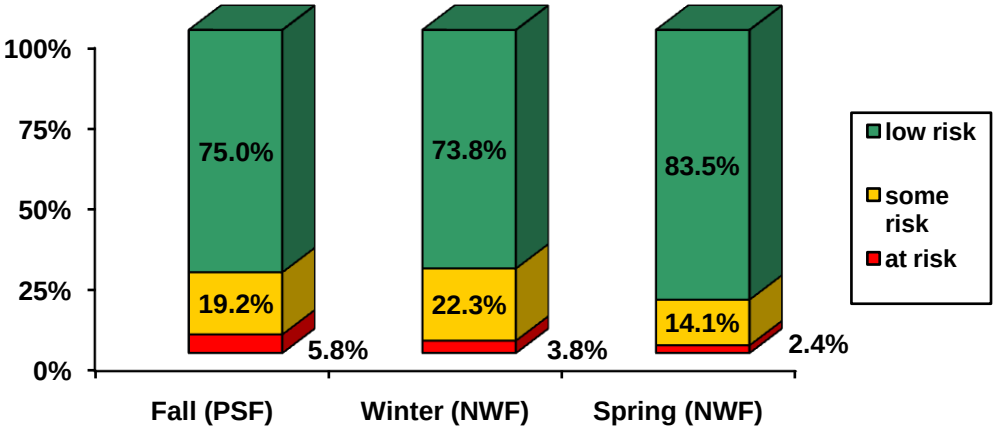



Scores at or above 50 indicate established skill in NWF. As shown in the figure at the right, average decoding scores for first grade students in both rounds are well into the established range. Round 2 schools surpassed Round 1 on measures of decoding in the spring, but the successful performance of all first graders is an indicator of the substantial work teachers have done to build their students' blending skills.

Risk level is measured according to the DIBELS benchmarks and cutoff scores for decoding. The table to the right gives cutoff scores for each level of risk at the end of the first grade year.

| | At risk | Some risk | Low risk |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1st grade NWF score at year end | 0-29 | 30-49 | 50 or greater |

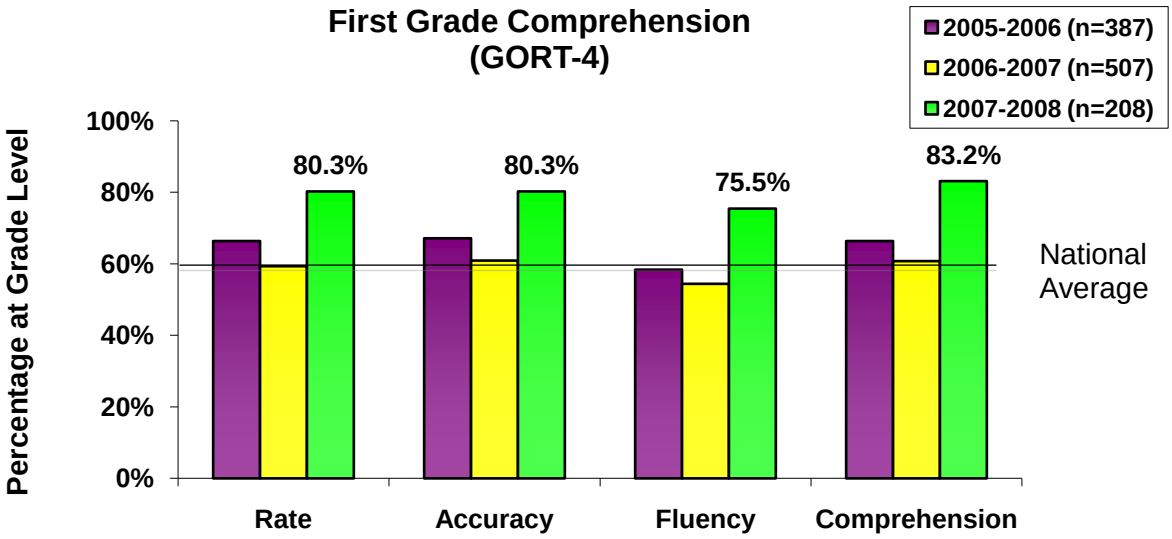
The percentage of first grade students at risk for difficulty in reading development has decreased over the year. In the fall, 25% of first grade Reading First students were either at risk or at some risk for reading difficulty. There is a clear carry over from the efforts of



kindergarten teachers, as entering first graders are very unlikely to be in the at-risk category. In the spring, the percentage of students at some level of risk was reduced to 16.5% (with only 2.4% at-risk compared with 25.0% nationally) as illustrated in the previous figure. This is impressive growth in Nonsense Word Fluency, an indicator of decoding skill within words, and should serve students well as they move into decoding more complex phonological word patterns connected text in a variety of genres of written material in second grade.

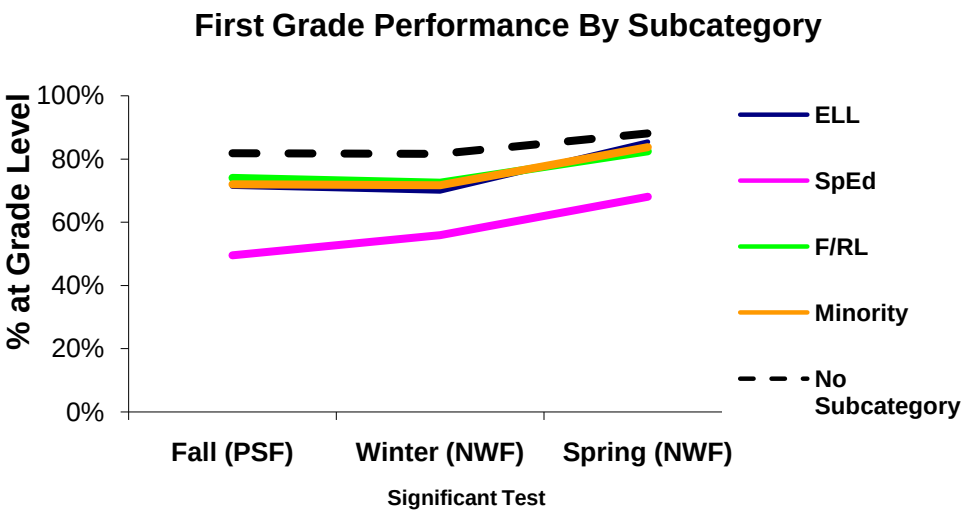
In the spring each year, a randomly selected sample of first grade students from Reading First schools complete the Gray Oral Reading Test (GORT-4), an individually administered measure of oral reading growth as it impacts comprehension growth. Rate and accuracy are combined to obtain a fluency score. Comprehension is assessed through answers to questions about each passage read.

As shown in the figure below, 2007-08 first graders performed at a higher rate than those in the previous two years on all measures of oral reading. The performance of this sample of first graders on oral reading and comprehension is impressive. As students move into second grade and master decoding tasks the emphasis in reading instruction switches to fluency as it contributes to comprehension. These results show an important readiness for second grade reading tasks.

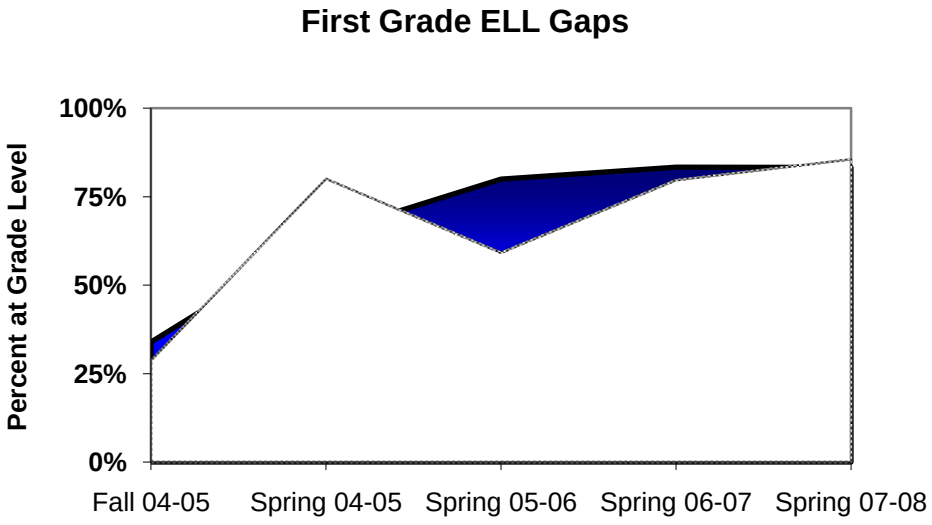


## FIRST GRADE ACHIEVEMENT GAPS

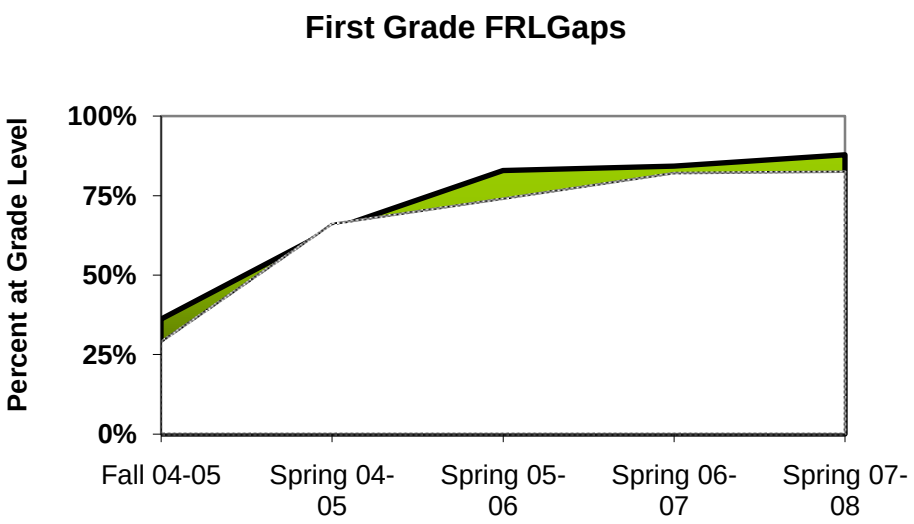
Students who qualify for free/reduced lunch, ELL, or who represent minority groups achieved similar percentages of grade level performance as those in the mainstream at the end of 2007-08. None of these groups were more than 5% below the mainstream students in their percentage of students at grade level, except for students who qualify for special education for whom the gaps narrow somewhat but do not close.



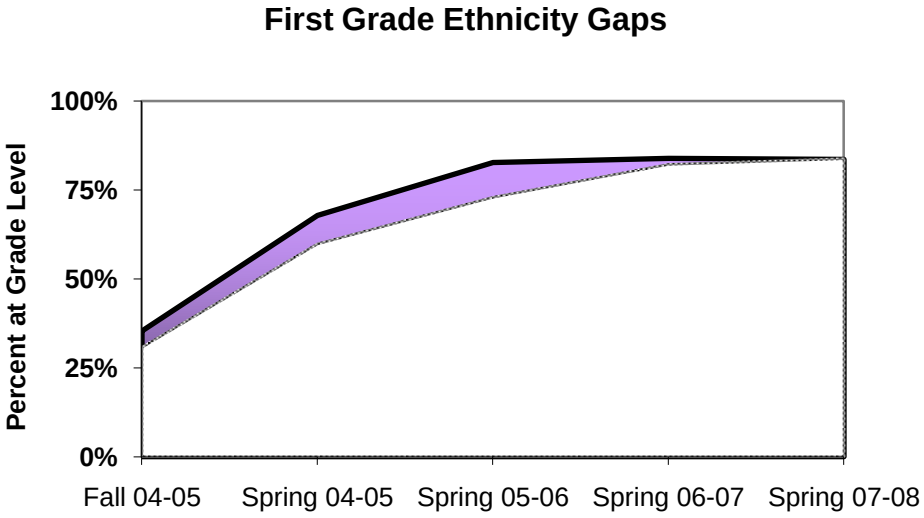

First grade English Learners (ELL) surpassed the achievement gap of previous years, with 3% more English Learners on grade level than their non-ELL peers. As shown in the figure at right, both ELL and all other students have increased their percentage on grade level dramatically since the inception of Reading First in 2004-05. In the fall of that year, only 28% of English Learners (ELL) and 34% of all other students demonstrated grade level performance. Clearly there is a pattern of growth in grade level skill for first grade students.



Like their kindergarten peers, first grade students qualifying for free/reduced lunch have demonstrated a consistent pattern of growth in grade level skill since the initiation of Reading First. At the end of 2007-08, more than 82% of free/reduced lunch students were at grade level.

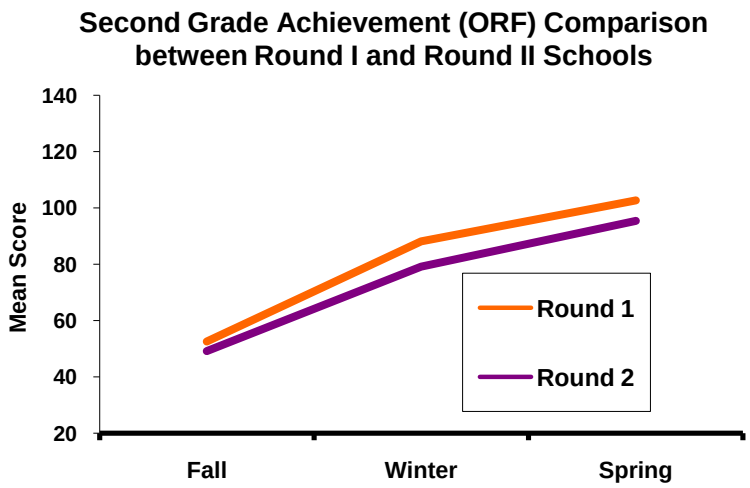



Similarly, minority group students have made steady progress closing the achievement gap with their non-minority peers. In 2007-08, a slightly larger percentage of minority group students were on grade level than all other students.




Four years of Reading First implementation have produced a pattern of diminishing gaps for English Learners (ELL), students qualifying for free/reduced lunch, and minority group students. This encouraging pattern can be seen in both kindergarten and first grade. Significant tests for these grades measure proficiency on essential basic literacy skills that should prepare students well for decoding the higher-level texts they will begin to encounter in second and third grade.

## SECOND GRADE

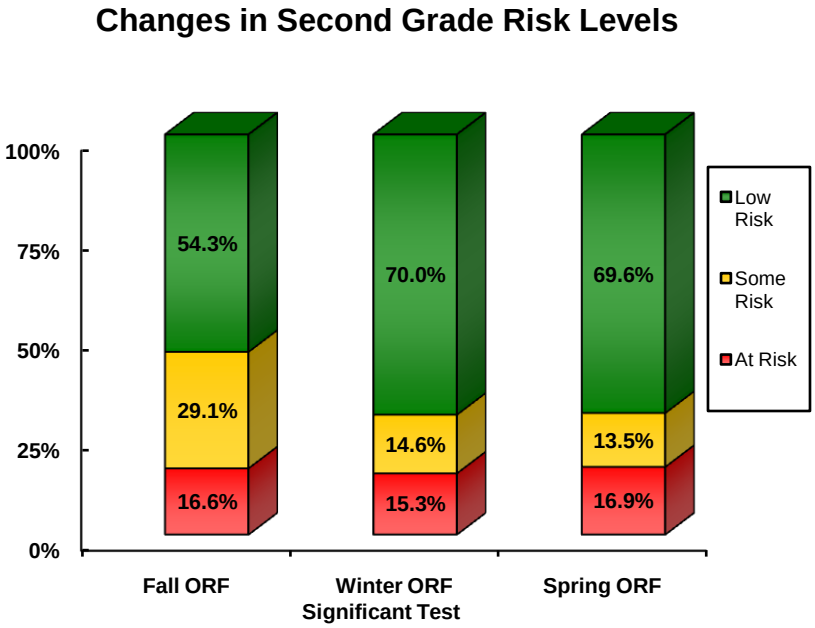



By the end of second grade, students need to be able to decode quickly and accurately so that they can read continuous text with appropriate rate and accuracy. The ability to do this is measured by the Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) subtest of the DIBELS.

Risk for reading difficulty is measured using oral reading fluency (ORF) scores. DIBELS has established cutoff scores for determining the level of risk as shown at right.

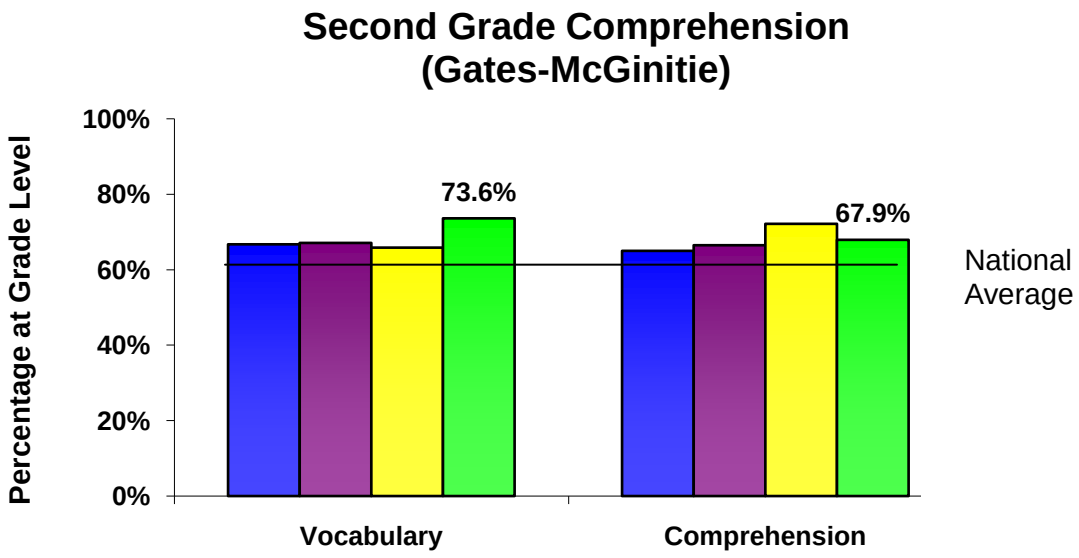
| | At Risk | Some Risk | Low Risk |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2nd grade ORF score at year end | 0-69 | 70-89 | 90 or greater |

Reading continuous text fluently is a necessary foundation for comprehending text in second and third grades. DIBELS has established a score of 90 or above as indicating low risk for difficulty in oral reading fluency. As shown in the figure below, on average Reading First second grade students performed above this cutoff score, with Round 1 students scoring an average of 103 correct words per minute while Round 2 students scored an average of 95. First Round students experienced higher growth in fluency from fall to winter, giving this group an overall significant advantage over their Round 2 peers.




In the fall of 2007-08, 47% of second grade students were either at risk or at some risk for reading difficulty based on Oral Reading Fluency, as illustrated by the red and yellow bars on the figure to the left. Second grade teachers have reduced this level considerably. Thirty percent of these students remain at risk as they prepare to enter third grade (compared with 40% nationally.) This indicates a need for a strong emphasis on fluency skill building from the start of the 2008-09 year.

In the spring, all second graders complete the Gates MacGinitie Reading Test for measures of vocabulary and comprehension. As can be seen in the figure that follows, results on these skill measures have remained consistent over the last four years, with two thirds to three quarters of students scoring at grade level. This is in line with the evidence from performance on the spring oral reading fluency (ORF).



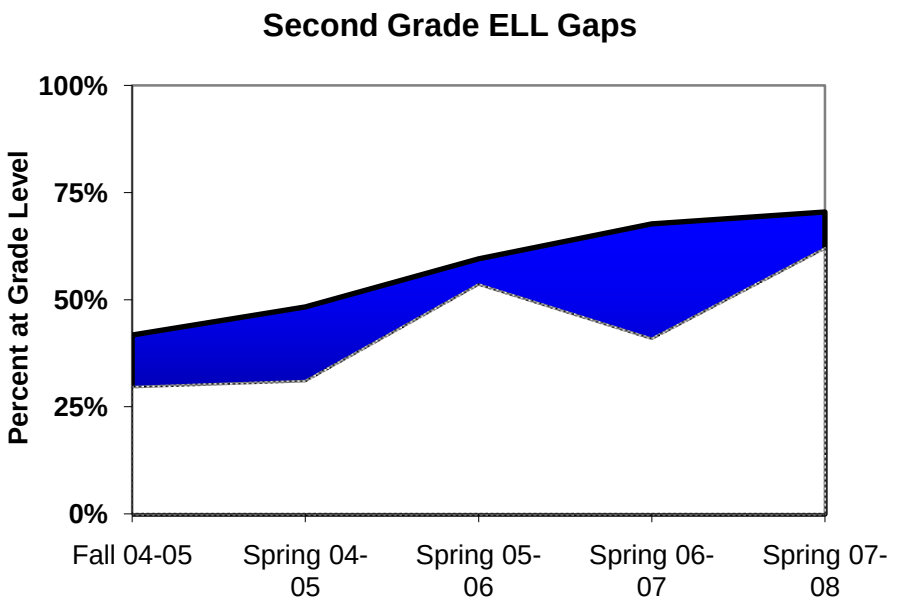

This year's students are somewhat stronger in vocabulary than in comprehension. Since vocabulary knowledge contributes to comprehension, it is encouraging to see success in this area. Students moving into third grade and beyond will need to be able to apply their reading skills to increasingly complex material in order to make sense of it and apply it to new texts and new learning tasks.

Continued emphasis on vocabulary and comprehension development is imperative. Developing skills and strategies in these areas requires different instructional inputs from teachers than those used for the development of early literacy skills. Perhaps these are less linear than development of letter naming, decoding, and blending skills. Nevertheless, additional and increasing focus on identifying, learning, and implementing strategies for vocabulary and comprehension is of vital importance if Reading First students are to maintain the advantage their early years of school provided.

## SECOND GRADE ACHIEVEMENT GAPS

When students enter second grade, the focus of reading instruction shifts from letter-sound correspondence and decoding in isolation to application of these in connected text. The ability to decode rapidly and accurately within connected text contributes to smooth and fluent reading. As students move on to higher grades and more complex text, this ability to read fluently facilitates comprehension of text. Second grade students are assessed on their oral reading fluency, and as shown in the figure below, development of this new skill changes the picture of the achievement gaps among groups.

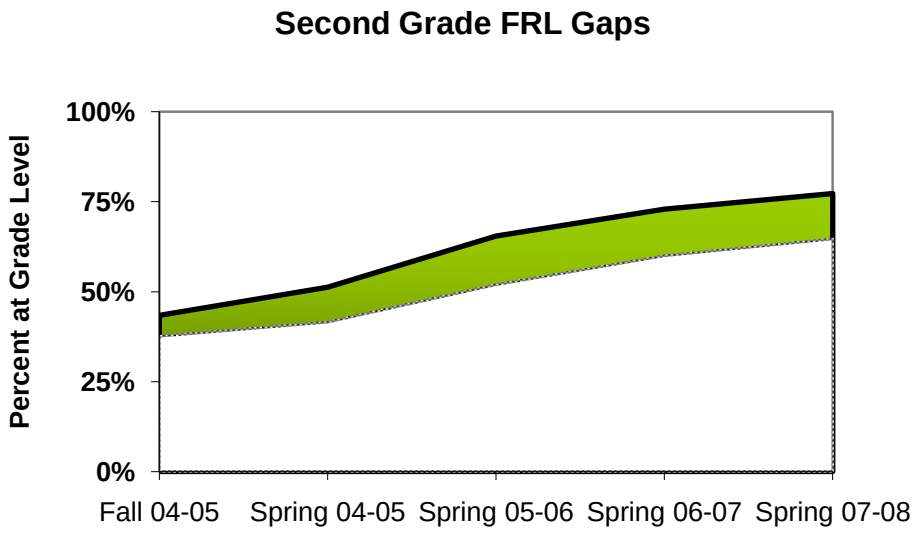
While 84% of mainstream students were at grade level at the end of 2007-08, the picture was different for English Learners, students qualifying for free/reduced lunch, and those from minority groups. The achievement level for these groups was nearly 20% lower. The percentage of special education students at grade level was 40% lower than mainstream students. Clearly, oral reading fluency is a skill that presents unique and novel challenges to all our students, and this challenge is most apparent in the groups that are at added risk.



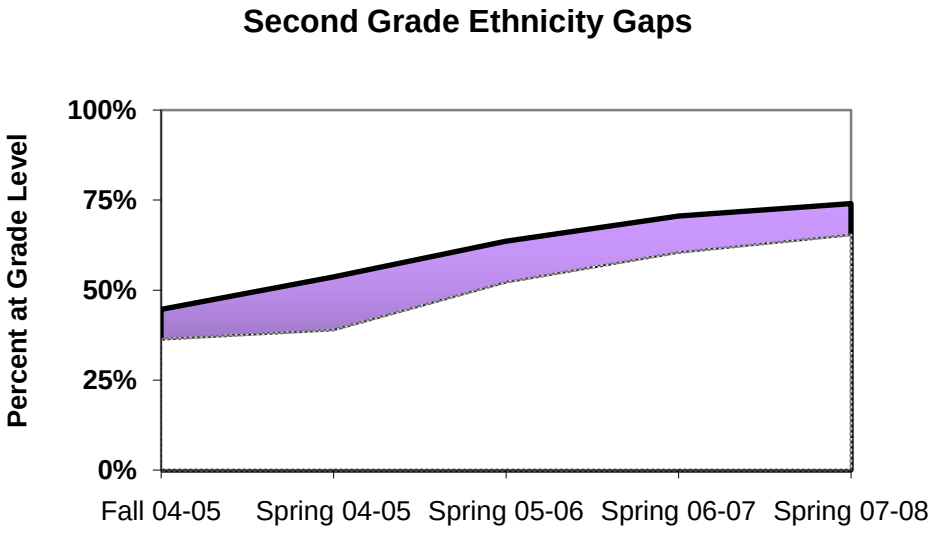

The achievement gap for English Learners (ELL) in second grade has varied considerably over the four years of implementation. The largest gap was in the spring of 2006-07, when 41% of ELL students were at grade level, compared to 68% of their non-ELL peers. The class of 2007-08 exhibited a

narrower gap in achievement: 62% of English Learners (ELL) were on grade level at the end of the year, compared to 70% of non-ELL students. The variability in these achievement gaps provides an indicator of exactly how challenging this particular reading skill can be to the relatively novice reader, as well as the relatively small number of English Learners in Reading First schools.

The achievement gap between free/reduced lunch students and their non-F/RL peers is not as broad or as variable over the four years of implementation as is the case with English Learners. For the last three years the gap in percentage of students at grade level has been about 13%, rising from 10% in the spring of 2004-05. Both groups started Reading First with a noticeably lower percentage of students at grade level, and it is noteworthy that the percentage of all second grade students at grade level has risen steadily over the last four years. Still, a persistent gap remains for students receiving F/RL.

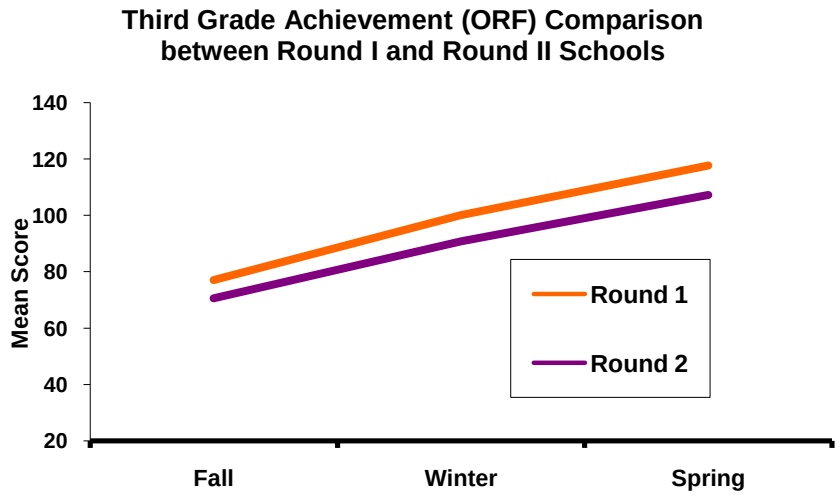



A similar trend can be seen when we compare students from minority groups to other second graders, as shown at left. For three years the percentage of minority students on grade level has been within 11% of peers. This group has steadily risen in achievement, but a persistent gap remains.



## THIRD GRADE

Third grade students are assessed on Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) three times during the school year. The ability to read smoothly and accurately with appropriate pace and expression contributes significantly to comprehension. For this reason, once the basics of word decoding are mastered teachers shift their instructional focus to reading fluency.

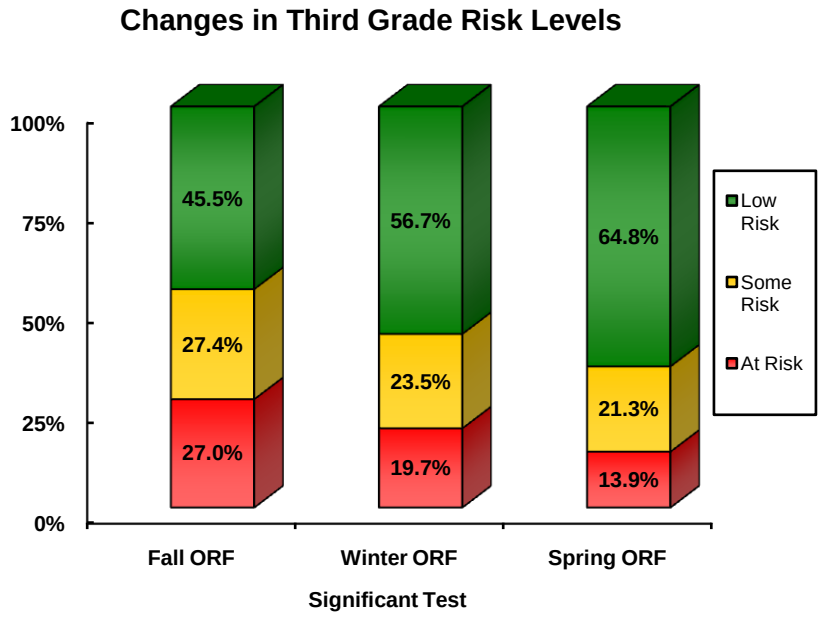



Third grade students must read at a rate of 110 correct words per minute to be considered proficient and at low risk for reading difficulty. As they finished the 2007-08 school year, Round 1 students read an average of 117.7 words per minute, while Round 2 students read an average of 107.2 words per minute. While this difference is not large, it is significant and meaningful because Round 1 students are reading above the benchmark on average while Round 2 students are just below this benchmark. Growth rates for Round 1 students are somewhat higher between fall and winter indicating that Round 1 schools have a more efficient start. Third grade students leave Reading First classrooms and move into the intermediate grades, where reading fluently for comprehension is vitally important for engaging with the complex subject area reading they will encounter next. These results indicate that there is still work to be done in some classrooms to bring all third graders to the level of fluency that will help ensure their success in later school reading.

Risk level is determined through oral reading fluency scores established in the DIBELS framework. The table to the right presents the scores for each level of risk at the end of the third grade year.

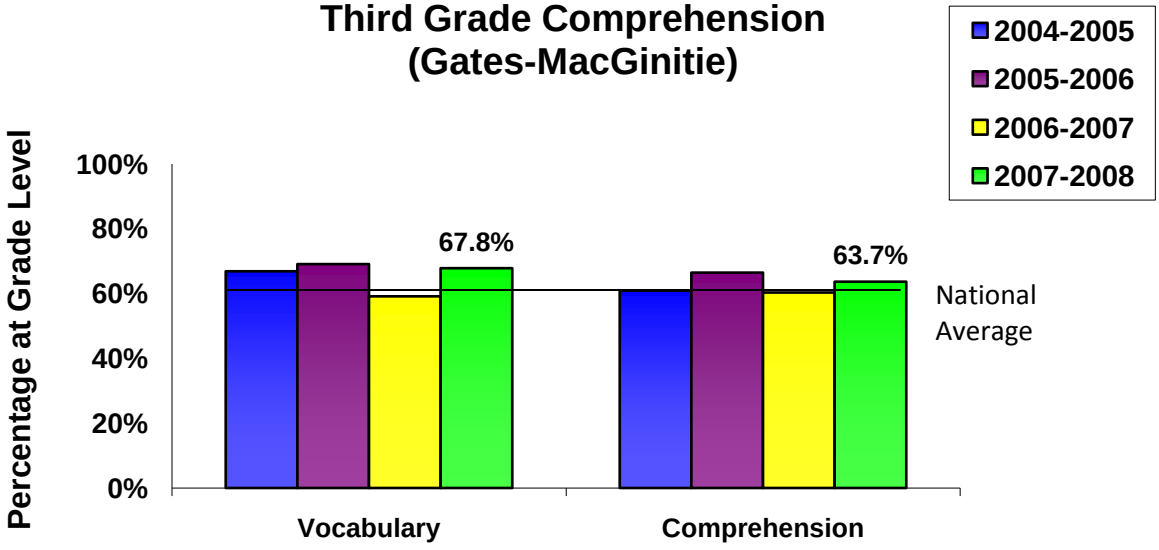
| | At risk | Some risk | Low risk |
|---|---|---|---|
| Correct Words Per Minute on ORF at the end of 3rd grade | 0-79 | 80-109 | 110 or greater |

In the fall of 2007-08, 55% of third grade students were at risk for difficulty based on Oral Reading Fluency. By winter that risk figure was reduced to 42% across all Reading First third grade classrooms.




While progress has been made, more than one third of the students who completed third grade in Reading First schools in 2007-08 remain at risk for reading difficulty. This can be seen in the figure at left. This corresponds closely with the number of second graders still at risk based on this skill. These students will continue to need support in developing reading fluency as they move into intermediate grades. The need to continue to focus heavily on the development of reading fluency in second and third grades is apparent.

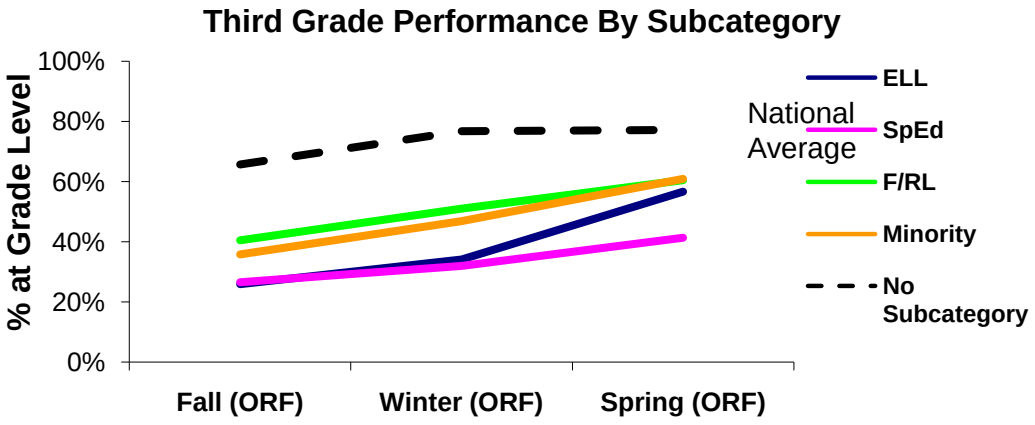
In the spring of third grade, all Reading First students complete the Gates MacGinitie Reading Test for assessment of vocabulary and comprehension proficiency. As with second grade, the number of students at grade level on these measures has remained stable over the last four years. Across different groups of third grade students, approximately two thirds are at grade level for vocabulary



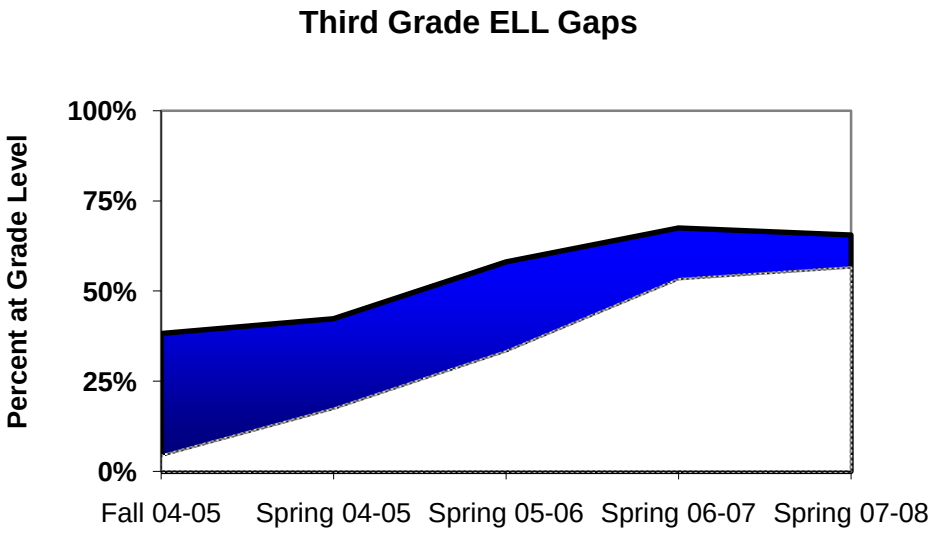
and comprehension. This is consistent with the risk level seen on the spring oral reading fluency measures.

## THIRD GRADE ACHIEVEMENT GAPS

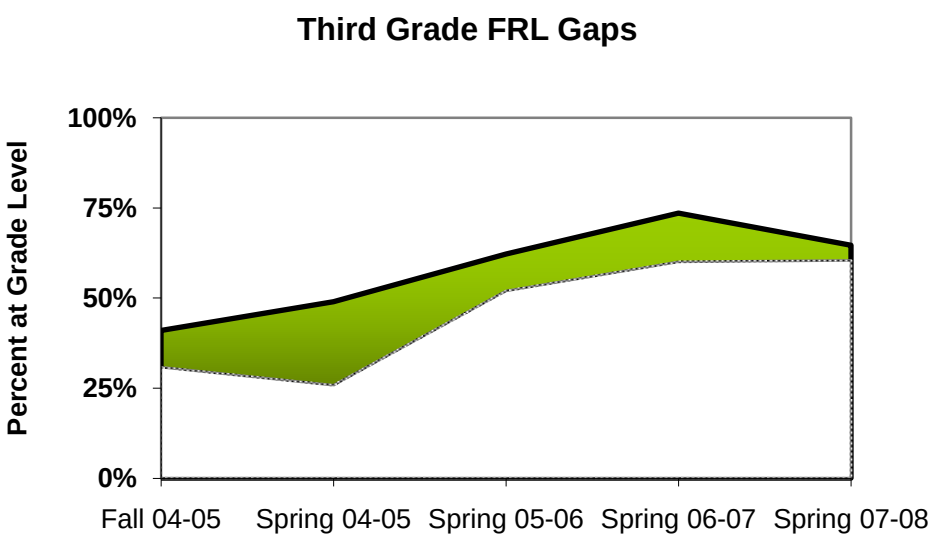
As in second grade, oral reading fluency (ORF) is the measure used to determine grade level achievement for third grade. Significantly fewer ELL students and special education students were at grade level than the other subcategories and the mainstream, (non-category) students. By spring, the percentage of ELL students at grade level was similar to that of free/reduced lunch students and minority students. Fewer special education students finished the year at grade level for this essential skill. Since reading fluency has a strong correlation with reading comprehension, it is critical that these skills be fostered and strengthened for special education students if they are to have equal opportunities for later school success.




Over the four years of Reading First implementation, ELL students have progressively narrowed the achievement gap in oral reading fluency. At the onset of Reading First in fall 2004-05 only 4% of ELL students performed on grade level for oral reading fluency. By the end of the 2007-08 school year over 56% of

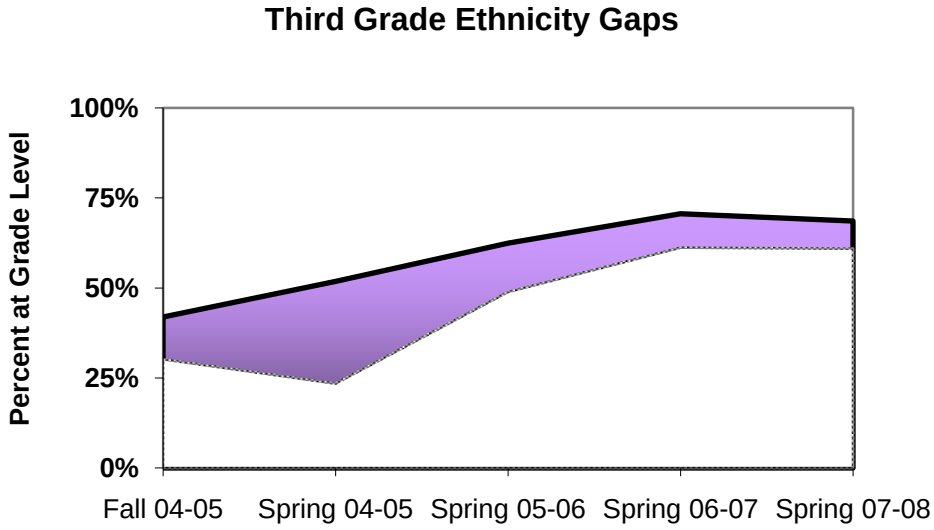


ELL students were on grade level for this task: only 9% fewer than their non ELL peers. This is tremendous growth and speaks to the emphasis third grade teachers have placed on oral reading fluency.



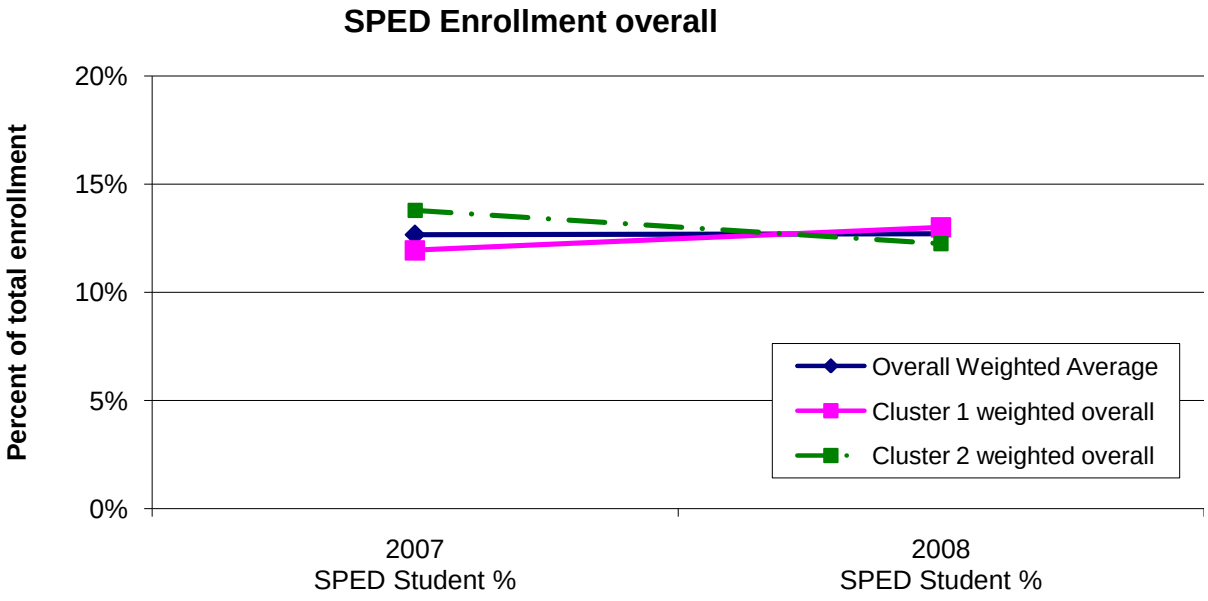

Students qualifying for free/reduced lunch have progressively decreased the achievement gap over four years of implementation. This spring, only 4% fewer students who receive F/RL reached grade level for oral reading fluency than their non-F/RL peers.

Students in the minority groups have also made strong and steady progress in reducing the achievement gap with their non-minority peers.

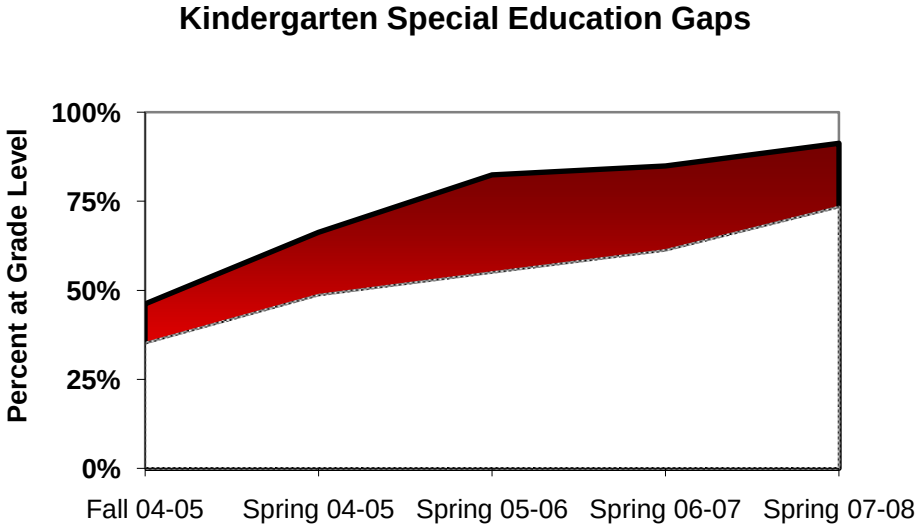


## SECTION 3

SPECIAL EDUCATION



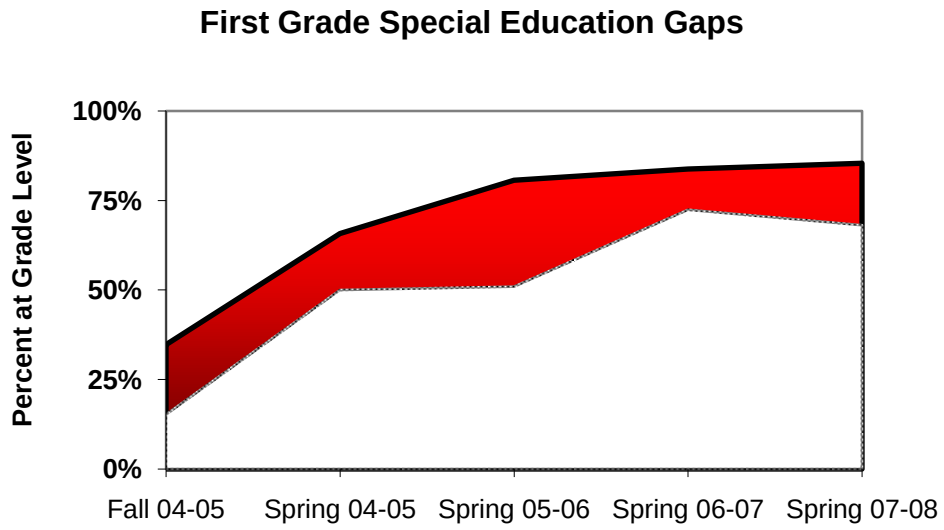

The percentages of students qualified for special education have remained mostly consistent over the past two years, as indicated by the blue line in the figure above. Accurate accounting of special education percentages is difficult, complicated by the variation in special education classification systems in different districts and reporting practices. Infact close to half of the year to year rschool reports had to be deleted from the enrollment analysis because of incosistency in reporting measures.



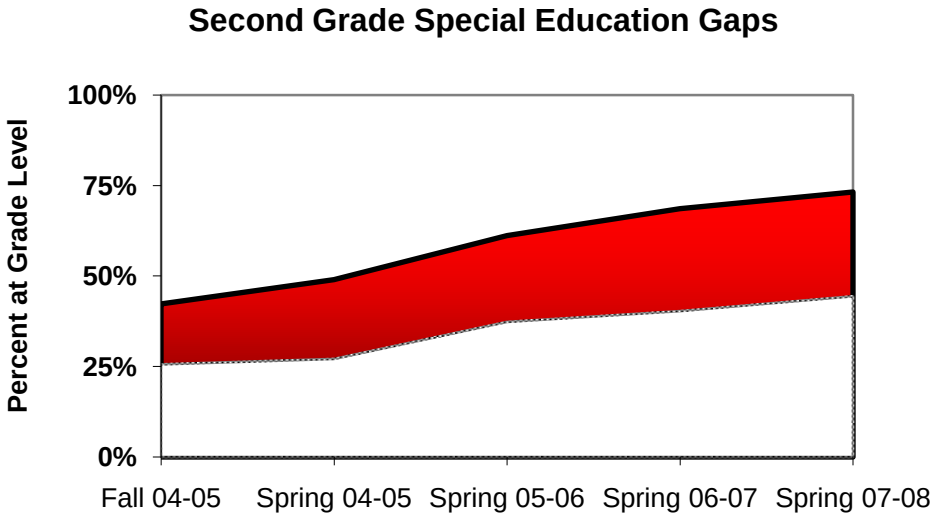

Achievement gaps remain but are narrowing for kindergarten children who qualify for special education services. Since implementation this gap broadened to its greatest difference (27%) in spring 05-06, and has decreased in the last two years. At the end of the

2007-08 school year, the gap between the percentage of special education students who are on grade level and that of their non-special education peers is 18%. At the same time the percent of Special Education students who meet grade-level demands have doubled over the four years of Reading First in Nebraska.

These students continue as the kindergarten category with the most persistent gap in achievement. Teachers and coaches must continue to find and implement parallel core curricula to teach these students successfully.




First grade students who qualify for special education have made impressive growth over the four years of implementation. The gap in special education achievement on first grade level work in 2007-08 is slightly broader than last year, but much less so than in 2005-06, and the overall percentage on grade level is much higher than in 2004-05. The fluctuations are probably linked to the small numbers of students identified and to changes in special education policy in some of the participating districts. However, gaps persist between the percentage of first grade special education students on grade level and their non special education peers. This pattern repeats across grade levels, and

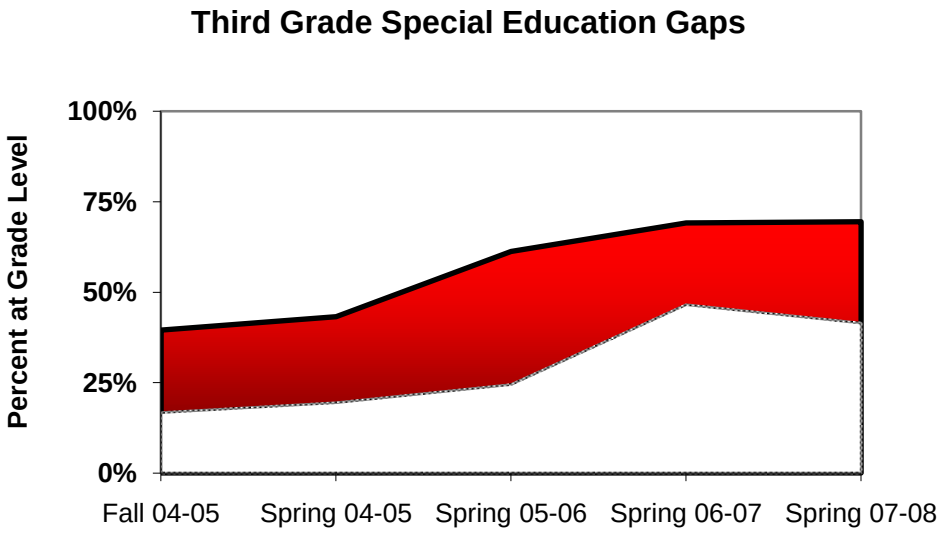


indicates the difficulties in basic skill development that are characteristic of students with special needs. This should lead teachers and coaches to continue exploring ways to individualize and focus instruction. Strength in the basic literacy skills developed and assessed in the early grades is vital to the successful development of comprehension skills later.

The achievement gap between second grade students qualifying for special education and their non special education peers has shown a small increase over the last three years. At the inception of Reading First, just over 25% of special education students were on grade level for oral reading fluency. Four years later, 44% of these students are on grade level. This is noteworthy progress. The percentage of special education students on grade level is nearly 30% lower than that of non special education students at the end of the 2007-08 school year.

Achievement gaps between special education students and their non special education peers were evident at first grade and kindergarten in 2007-08 as well. In second grade these gaps are more pronounced. This reveals a pattern of increasing differences in the achievement of special education students as time in school elapses. To date we have not been able to bring readers with special education needs up toward grade level as quickly as the other categories of students. This pattern will be seen in the third grade achievement gaps as well.

While third grade English Learners (ELL), free/reduced lunch students, and minority group students all finished 2007-08 within 9% of their peers on grade level, the same is not true for students qualifying for special education services. As in the previous grades, a pattern of persistent achievement gaps can be seen for special education students, as the figure to the left shows.




At the initiation of Reading First, only 16% of special education third grade students were at grade level for oral reading fluency. After four years of implementation, this has increased to 41% performing on grade level: a marked improvement. When compared to non special education peers, 28% fewer special education students achieve at grade level. This repeats the pattern of consistent

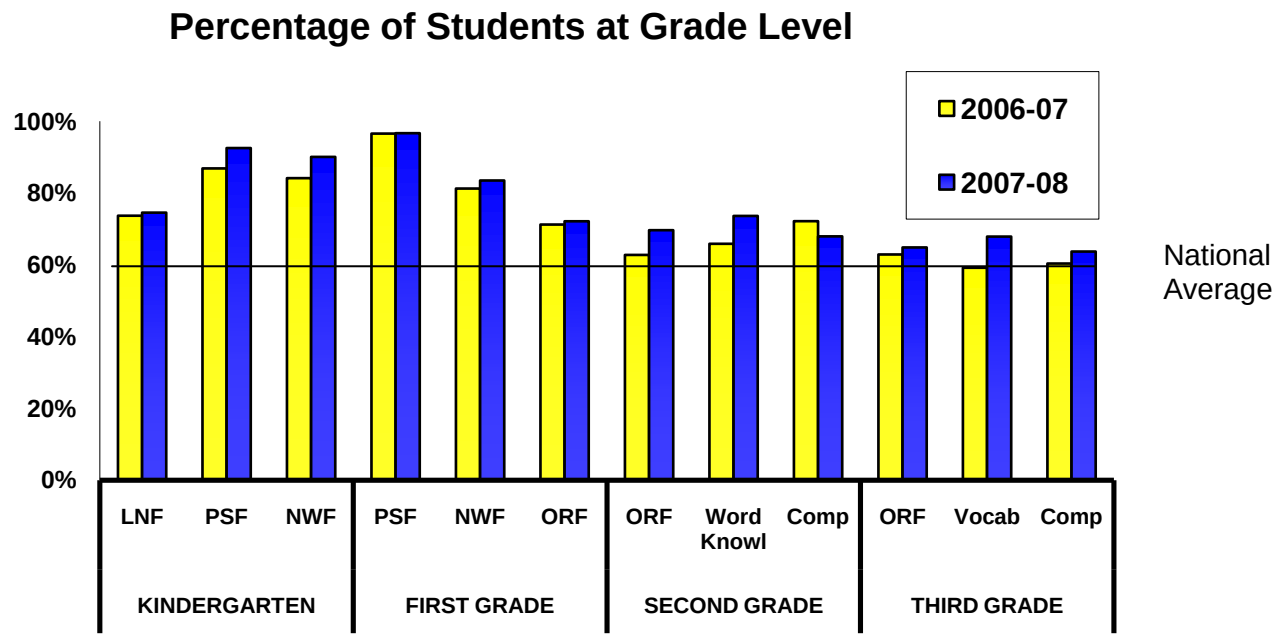
differences between special education students and their non special education peers across the grade levels.

At the end of the 2007-08 school year, the gap between special education students who are on grade level and that of their non-special education peers is slightly larger than it was before Reading First had started. At the same time the percent of Special Education students who meet grade-level demands have **doubled** over the four years of Reading First in Nebraska. All students have benefitted from Reading First grants.

## SECTION 4

## ACHIEVEMENT FACTORS ACROSS THE YEARS OF READING FIRST IMPLEMENTATION

The figure below presents the percentages of students who achieved at grade level for each of the assessments in the last two years. Results are similar over the last two years, with a slight flattening of achievement as students enter and complete grades two and three.



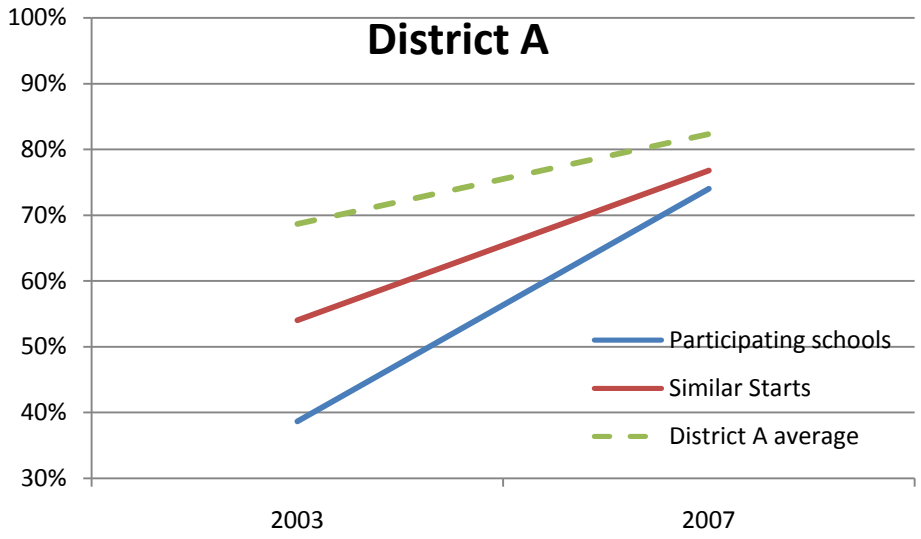

### A CLOSER LOOK AT ACHIEVEMENT: TWO DISTRICTS

Nebraska lacks a statewide assessment that is comparable between districts. This prevents clear comparisons between Reading First and non-Reading First schools. However, using STARS assessments, we uncovered some patterns of achievement in two larger school districts that included schools in and out of Reading First. Both districts have a standardized assessment in place and

contain both schools that do and do not participate in Reading First . One of thesedistricts has embraced Reading First ideas beyond the designated schools while the other hasnot.

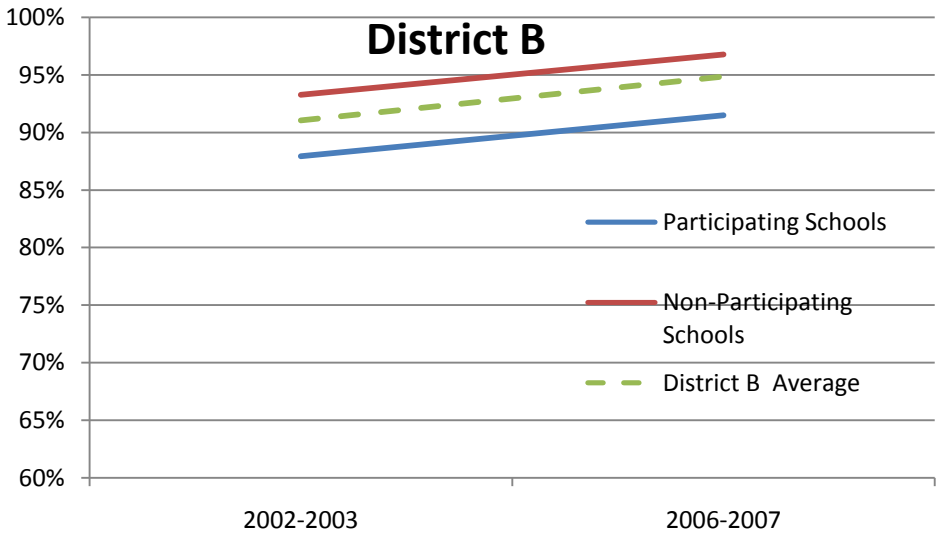
In order to gauge the impact Reading First has had for students in these districts we examined third grade STARS norm referenced achievement data from spring 2003, just prior to implementation of Reading First, and data from the spring of 2008

District A is an urban district with a total enrollment over 10,000. More than 50% of District A students belong to ethnic minorities, 60% qualify for free/ reduced lunch, 15% receive Special education services, and above 10% are ELL. As shown in the figure that follows, students in Reading First schools in District A started out at a great disadvantage when compared to their district peers. While less than 40% of students in Reading First schools were on grade level at the start of implementation, in similar non Reading First schools in the district more than 50% of students were on grade level, and the district average started 30 percentage points higher.




After four years, more than 70% of Reading First students were on grade level very close to the average for similar schools in the district, and within ten percentage points of the district average. While all the students in this district made noticeable improvement over the period, the slope of growth was much steeper for Reading First schools. Teachers in these schools have brought the neediest students very close to the district average for grade level achievement over the years of Reading First implementation.

District B is a smaller district of over 1,000 students. While these districts have similar percentages of special education students, district B has less than 10% of ELL and free/reduced lunch students of District A, and only 13% of District B students belong to ethnicity groups.




District B students started with a higher percentage of students on grade level than District A, as can be seen in the figure to the right. The gaps between Reading First schools, non Reading First schools, and the district average have remained constant over the four years of implementation. As with District A, all schools improved grade level achievement percentages over the four years. The constant impact is evidence of the benefits of transferring Reading First practices to non Reading First schools.

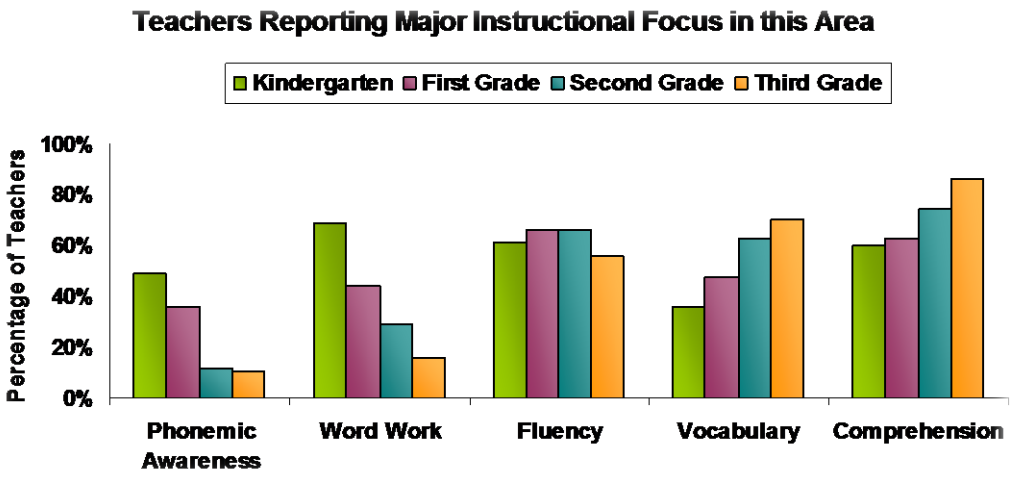
These two districts are very different geographically and demographically. It is noteworthy and commendable that District A, which started with only one third of Reading First students on grade level, showed dramatic growth over the course of implementing Reading First practices. Now, three quarters of their students are on grade level; a figure that is very close to the district average.

District B's Reading First students have kept pace with their district peers and have prevented the achievement gap from increasing. District B officials have taken steps to implement Reading First practices in all their schools, not just those involved in the Reading First grant. This could explain the concurrent improvement of all the students in the district. If so, this is strong support for implementing these teaching tools and strategies with all early readers.

## SECTION 4

# TEACHER LOGS

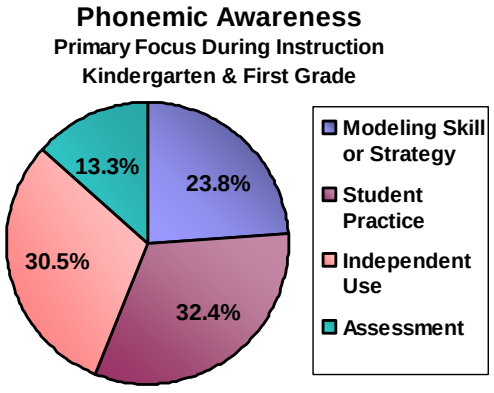
To provide an overview of a typical day of reading instruction, classroom teachers in Nebraska Reading First schools complete instructional logs in the fall, winter and spring.



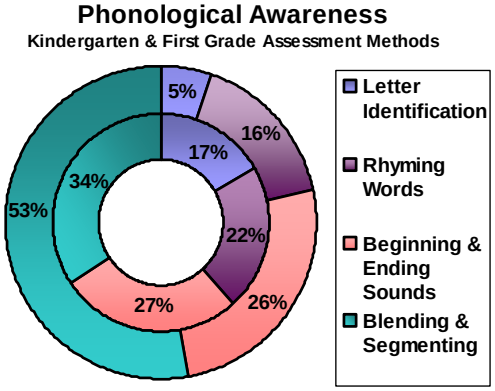

These logs ask teachers to report *for that particular day* the focus and format of their reading instruction, the domain-specific skills and strategies included, and the instructional materials used. As illustrated in the figure above, some clear trends in reading instruction across grade levels are evident. While teachers in all grades report including all five major domains of reading, more kindergarten and first grade teachers are focusing on phonemic awareness and word level work (e.g. phonics) while more second and third grade teachers are focusing on vocabulary and comprehension. Meanwhile, the focus on fluency remains essentially steady across all grade levels. Both of these trends are desirable and indicate that Nebraska's Reading First teachers are using research to support and inform their instructional focus and practice. Both phonemic awareness and word work are foundational skills for higher reading achievement, so heavy focus in these two areas in the early grades is necessary. As students achieve automaticity in decoding teachers can begin to shift focus to specific instruction in vocabulary expansion and comprehension strategies. The log responses from second and third grade teachers demonstrate this shift in focus. Because fluency is highly correlated with decoding as well as with vocabulary and comprehension, it should remain an important focus across the entire reading instruction continuum.

## PHONEMIC AWARENESS

Kindergarten and first grade teachers reported most instructional activity in phonemic awareness. Across both rounds and all clusters, student practice with teacher feedback and student independent use were the most reported uses of classroom time for developing phonemic awareness as shown in the figure to the right. Assessment was much less likely to be the focus of the day's instruction. Approximately one-fourth of kindergarten and first grade teachers



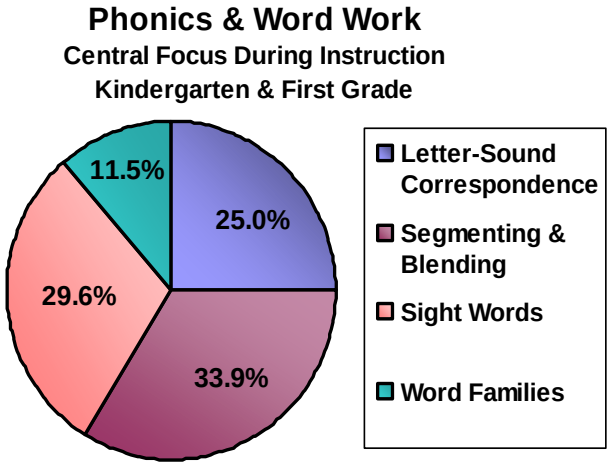
reported placing strong emphasis on modeling the skill/strategy.

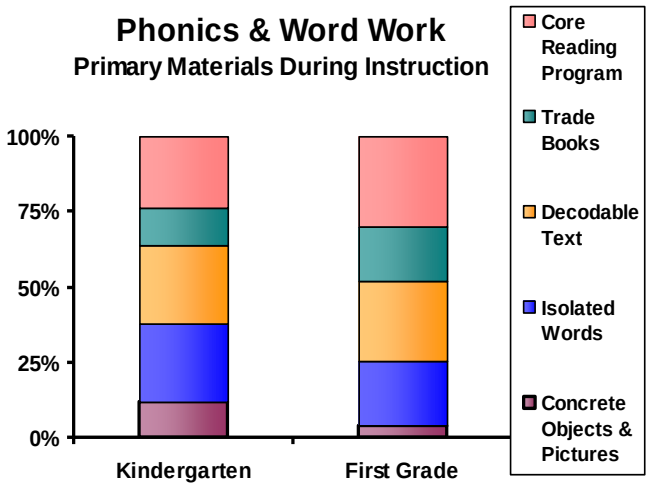



To build phonological awareness, most kindergarten and first grade teachers used blending and segmenting activities, followed by identifying beginning and ending sounds. Letter identification is employed by many more kindergarten teachers, as shown in the inner ring of the figure to the left; than first grade teachers, whose preferred instructional strategies are shown in the outer ring. This is appropriate since the majority of students can already identify all the letters. An analysis between Round 1 and Round 2 schools found both cohorts reporting very similar patterns of use. An analysis by cluster also revealed little difference between schools except for Cluster 3 schools, which tended to place more emphasis on assessing rhyming words and less on letter identification than other schools.

## PHONICS & WORD WORK

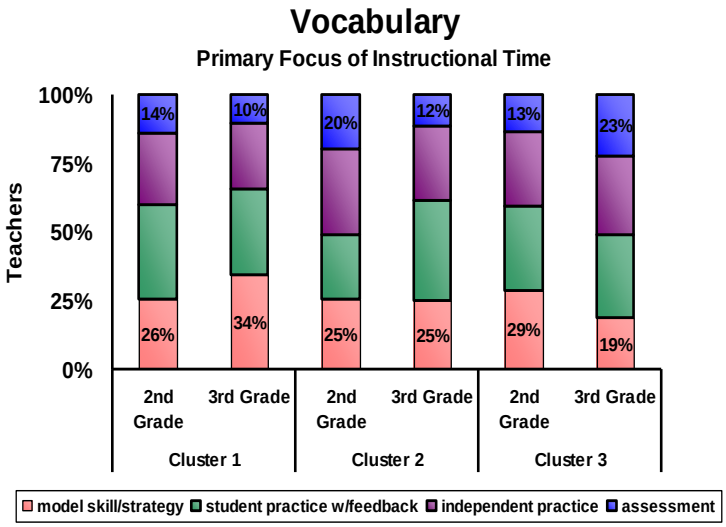
As with phonemic awareness, most of the teachers who reported word level work as a major focus of instruction were in kindergarten and first grade classrooms. These teachers reported considerable emphasis on segmenting and blending words, followed closely by emphasis on sight words. One-fourth of teachers spent significant time on letter-sound correspondence; using word families to teach decoding was less popular.



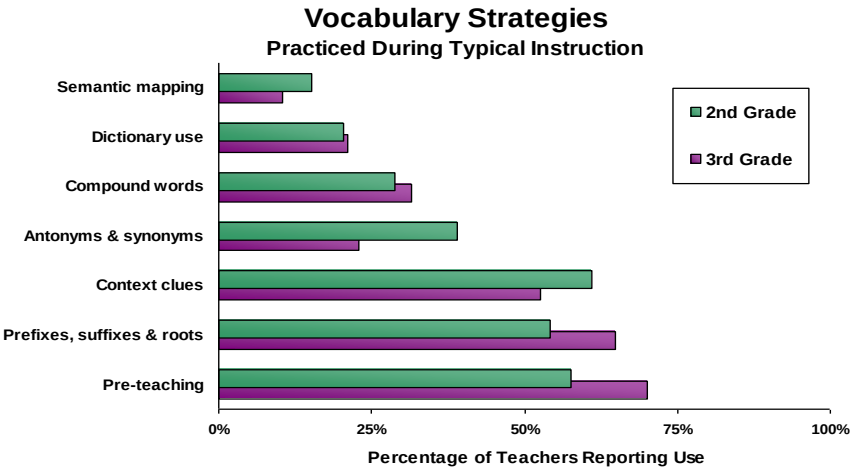




Comparison of kindergarten and first grade responses suggests that emphasis on the core-reading program eventually replaces most use of concrete objects for phonics instruction. Round two first grade teachers were the heaviest users of trade books. Despite small differences in material use we conclude that Reading First teachers in these early grades are using a healthy blend of materials to help students master decoding and word identification.

## Vocabulary

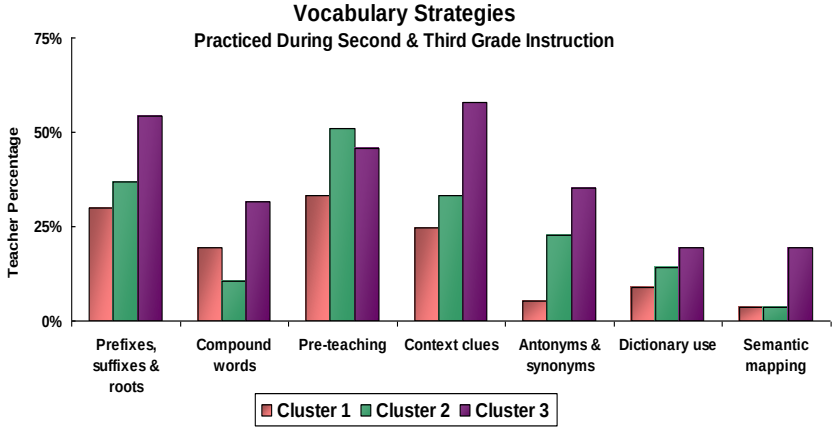



Focus on vocabulary instruction rises significantly by second and third grades with more than 60% of teachers in these grades reporting major emphasis on this domain, most commonly during whole group instruction. An analysis by cluster in the figure to the right shows how this emphasis breaks down. Third grade teachers in cluster one were almost twice as likely to model the skill or strategy for students than their counterparts in cluster three schools, where student assessment received more attention. Since the goal of vocabulary instruction is not only to learn the vocabulary words, but also to also understand and practice a variety of strategies that make vocabulary acquisition more successful, inclusion of a modeling component when teaching vocabulary is critical to student success.




An examination of reported practice activities in the figure below shows that while teachers are using a variety of strategies in their classrooms, some are receiving considerably more attention than others. The high percentage of reported pre-teaching is encouraging, as is the intense focus on prefixes, suffixes and root words. However, the low levels of focus on semantic mapping, especially the drop in third grade, is troubling since the ability to make connections between words within the same semantic families will become essential in the later grades.

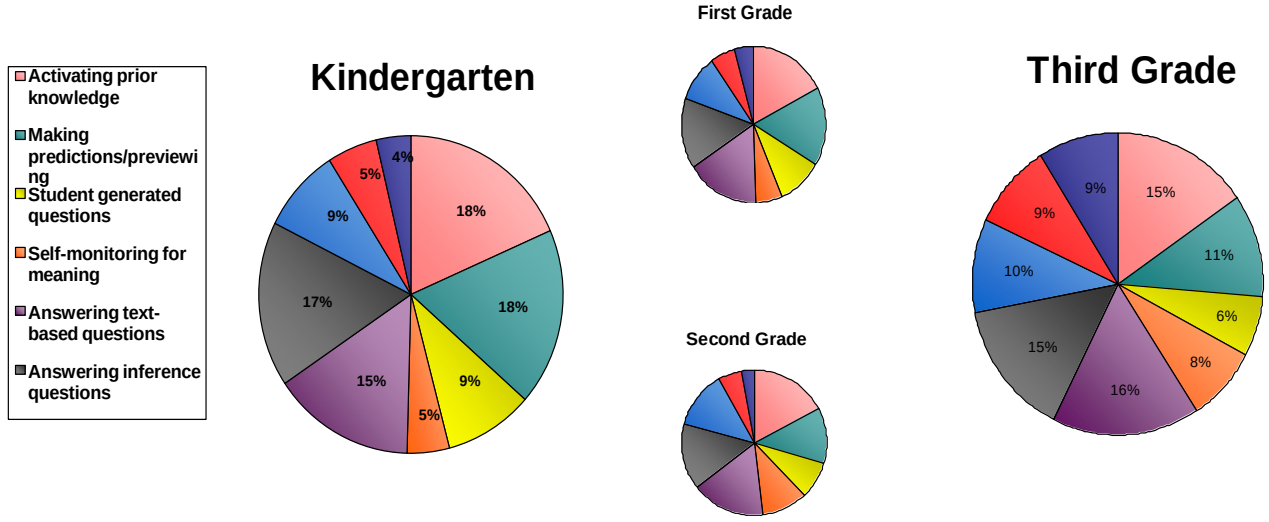
While both Round 1 and Round 2 schools demonstrated essentially identical patterns in strategy practice, significant differences were apparent between school clusters. Cluster two schools, those with larger ELL and low-income student populations, were the largest users of pre-teaching.



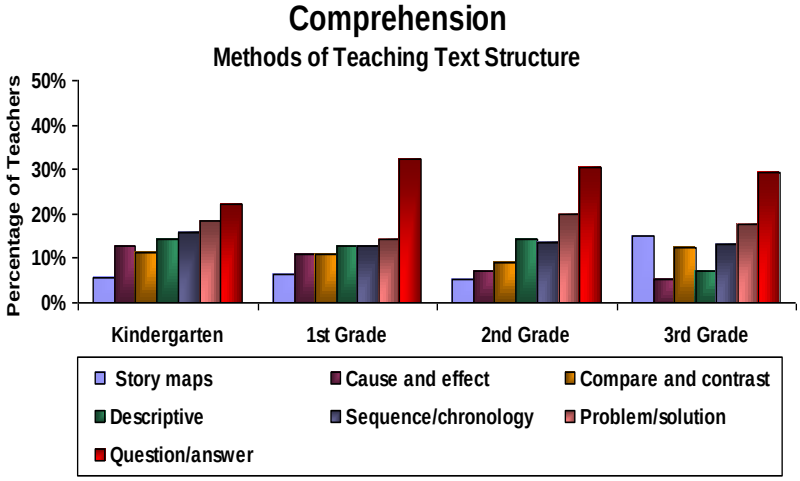
Teachers in cluster three focused heavily on the strategy of using context clues and prefix/suffix knowledge to determine word meanings. While teachers from all clusters report some dictionary use for learning vocabulary, it bears noting that teachers in cluster one have drastically reduced their use of this strategy from last year (reported at 50% in 2006-2007.) While dictionaries can be helpful in clarifying a word's meaning, the prerequisite of correct spelling compounded by the potential confusion of multiple meanings make this a difficult task without substantial teacher modeling and monitoring.

## Comprehension

A majority of teachers at every grade level reported a major focus on comprehension during their reading instruction. Comparison across grades reveals very little change in teacher focus from kindergarten through third grade. Activating prior knowledge, guided reading, and answering text-based and inference questions are the primary instructional activities. By third grade, teachers are




including more graphic organizers, an excellent comprehension tool, and more summarizing with mental imagery.

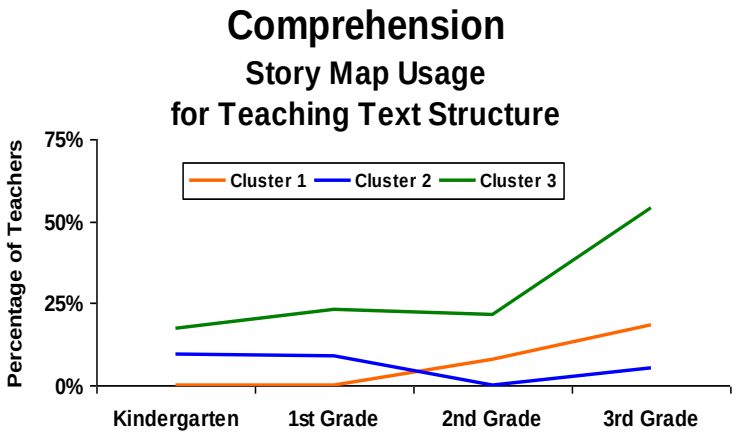


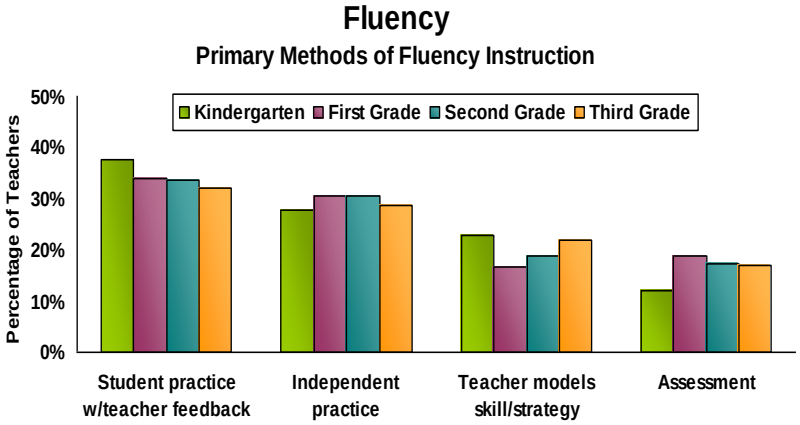

Teachers in Cluster 3 are the most frequent users of graphic organizers. These teachers also report a balanced use of text-based and inference questions (14%.) Teachers in Cluster 2 reported using more text-based (20%) and inference (18%) questioning than the other groups. Teachers in Cluster 1 place more emphasis on activating prior knowledge and making personal connections (18%) than other teachers and also use the most

student-generated questions (11%.)

Comprehension logs indicate that teachers at every grade level are using a balanced variety of formats to teach text structure, although still reliant on traditional question & answer format as shown in the figure to the left. The potential learning benefits of the question and answer method depend greatly on the purpose of the reading (narrative or informational), the types of questions being asked (text-based versus inference) and who is generating the questions (the curriculum or the students.)

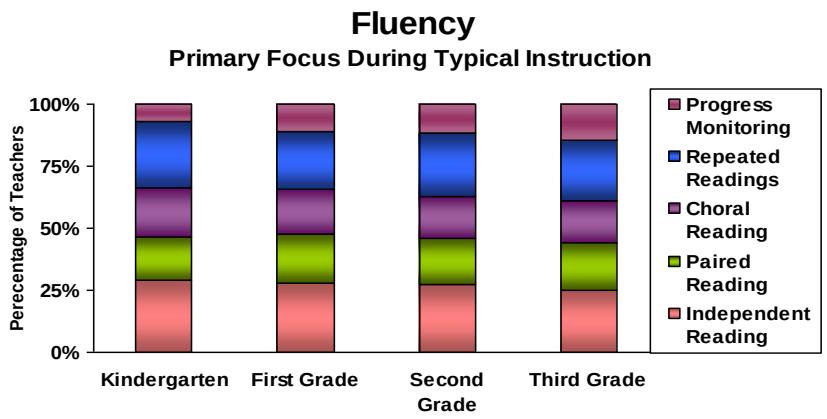
It is encouraging to note that story maps, an activity that promotes more complex organizational thought, are introduced as early as kindergarten and increase in frequency of use by 3rd grade. A comparison of Round 1 and Round 2 indicates that by second grade, Round 2 teachers are using more story maps to teach text structure than Round 1 teachers. An analysis by cluster, shown in the figure at right, illustrates that the trend for early and increasing use of story maps is taking place primarily in Cluster 3 schools.



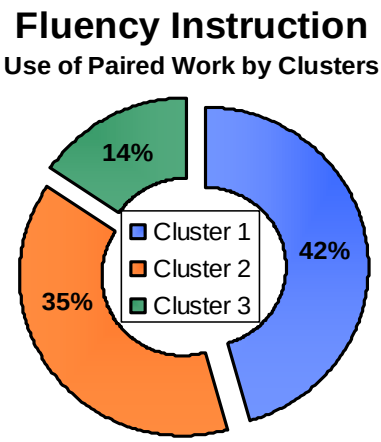

### Fluency

From kindergarten through third grade most teachers report that fluency receives some focus within the daily reading curriculum. The means by which teachers integrated this instruction is illustrated in the figure to the left. The strong emphasis that teachers are placing on student practice well supported by current research showing that such practice has a significant positive effect on both fluency rate and accuracy. In contrast to this encouraging news, less than one-fourth of teachers are focusing on modeling fluent reading for their students. Demonstration of reading fluency is critical to many students' understanding and recognition of fluent reading. Without purposeful modeling by the teacher, disfluent readers are more likely to struggle to master this aspect of reading proficiency.




During fluency instruction, most teachers report focusing on independent reading and repeated readings, although choral reading and paired reading techniques were also used. Overall, the percentage of teachers emphasizing progress monitoring appears to increase by grade level, allowing students to gradually take on more responsibility for managing their progress in the later grades. In a cluster analysis, teachers in Clusters 2 and 3 reported most of the progress monitoring activity.

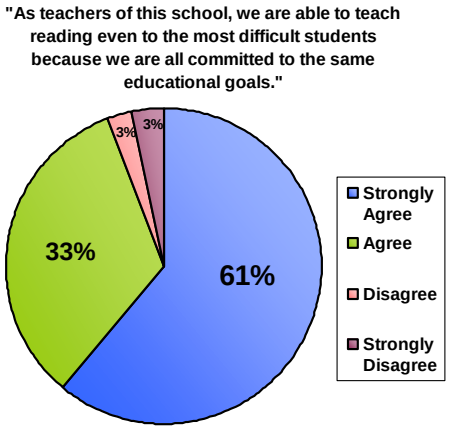
Analysis of the most prominent instructional formats showed teachers still preferred whole group and small group. This is evident in all the other categories covered by the logs as well. However, fluency instruction had the highest percentage of major focus on paired work; almost double that reported for any other domain (13%). This may be because paired fluency practice has many benefits including modeling and scaffolding by stronger readers, a potentially less stressful reading situation for struggling readers, and the freedom of the teacher to move about the room and observe many students' fluency performance.




Not all schools are taking advantage of this instructional format, however. As illustrated in the figure above, paired readings were most common in the smaller, rural Cluster 1 schools, followed by the Cluster 2 schools with large ELL and low-income populations. The format appeared much less frequently in Cluster 3 classrooms.

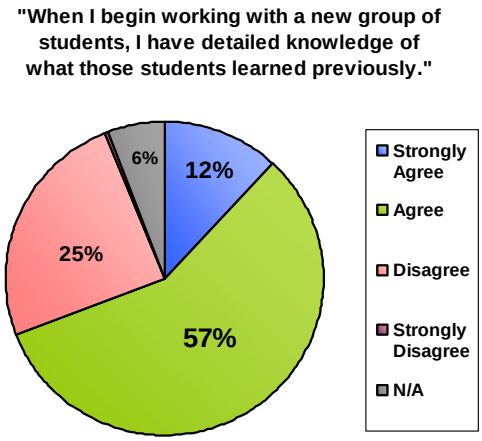
## Teacher Surveys

To gain insight into the perspectives teachers hold about their own schools, classrooms, and practices over the past year, Nebraska Reading First classroom teachers were asked to complete a survey. The 2007-2008 Spring Teacher Survey had a 95% response rate: 245 out of 264 eligible teachers responding. This survey covered issues related to school resources, teacher efficacy, collaboration, expectations, and Reading First training and materials.



Survey responses indicate that Nebraska's Reading First teachers maintain a strong sense of collective efficacy when it comes to teaching students how to read, as shown above. Across all rounds and clusters, 96% of teachers agree that they "…are definitely able to accomplish our reading goals at school since we are a competent team of teachers that grows every time we are challenged." Although slightly fewer respondents (86%) agreed that teachers "stick together and do not get demoralized by the day-to-day hassles of this profession," most teachers (96%) believe such issues can be overcome since "we as teachers can develop and carry out reading instruction improvement in a cooperative manner even when difficulties arise."

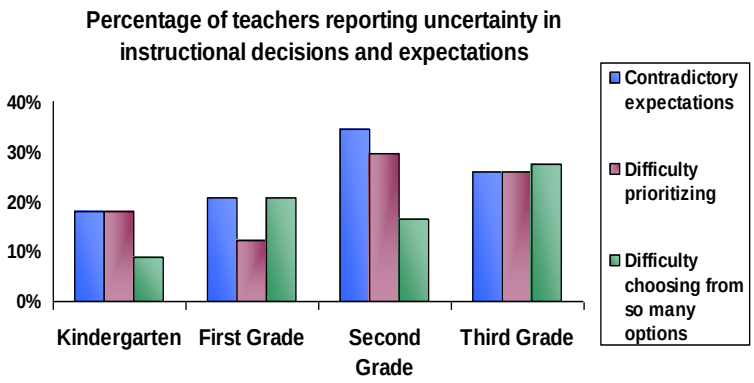
Given this strong sense of collective efficacy, it is not surprising that the majority of Reading First teachers report substantial collaboration with their fellow teachers. Two-thirds of respondents "frequently plan and coordinate instruction with my students' other teachers," and 71% agree that, "I have detailed knowledge of the content covered and instructional methods used by other teachers at this school." Reciprocally, 86% of teachers believe that "it's easy for other teachers in this school to know what students learned in my class." Despite these collaborative efforts however, the figure to the left illustrates that only 69% of teachers report having detailed knowledge about students before they begin working with them. While some of this is likely to due to mobility between schools, this could indicate a potential opportunity for more across-grade information sharing.




Based on survey responses, teachers appreciate the contributions that the Reading First program and staff have made to their schools. While opinion is split on whether Reading First required teachers to make major changes in their classrooms (45% yes, 50% no, 5% abstain) ***90%*** of teachers stated that they "strongly valued the kinds of changes called for by the district Reading First plan." Teachers were also unified in their agreement (95%) that making these changes helped their students reach higher levels of achievement. To achieve these changes, the Nebraska Reading First staff was credited by 90% of survey respondents with "providing me with many useful ideas and resources for changing my classroom practices."

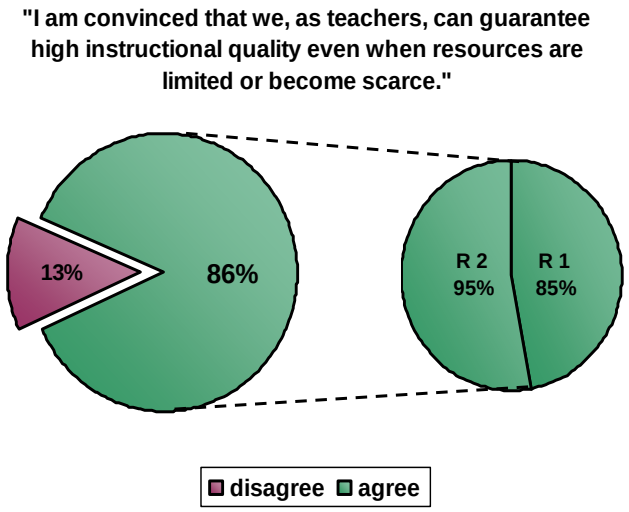
When asked about the general instructional policies they are expected to follow, teachers overwhelming report finding them consistent (96%.) The vast majority of survey participants also report being exposed to many examples of the types of student achievement that Reading First is aiming for (94%) as well as the kinds of classroom teaching the program seeks to foster (93%).

However, when asked about some specific aspects of expectations, a number of uncertainties were revealed. Approximately one-fourth of



teachers believe outside expectations for their reading instruction are often contradictory. About one-fifth of teachers also report having difficulty choosing out of all the options they hear about (18%) and feeling unsure how to prioritize their reading instruction (21%.) These expressions of uncertainty tend to be greater at the second and third grade levels, as seen in the previous figure; possibly indicating an opportunity for Reading First staff to provide focus and support in prioritizing and matching instruction to student needs.

With future federal funding for Reading First uncertain, teacher beliefs about the relationship between school performance and the resources needed to support it are especially pertinent. It is encouraging to note that 91% of teachers in Nebraska's Reading First schools believe they "can improve the reading achievement in our school in spite of system constraints." Even more teachers (94%) agree that "our team of teachers can come up with creative ways to improve reading instruction, even without support from others." When asked specifically about lack of resources, confidence drops but still remains high (86%) that "we, as teachers, can guarantee high instructional quality even when resources are limited or scarce." Round 2 teachers, or those who have participated in Reading First for the past three years, gave somewhat higher levels of positive response to these types of questions, shown in the figure to the left, than Round 1 teachers, who have participated for the past four years.



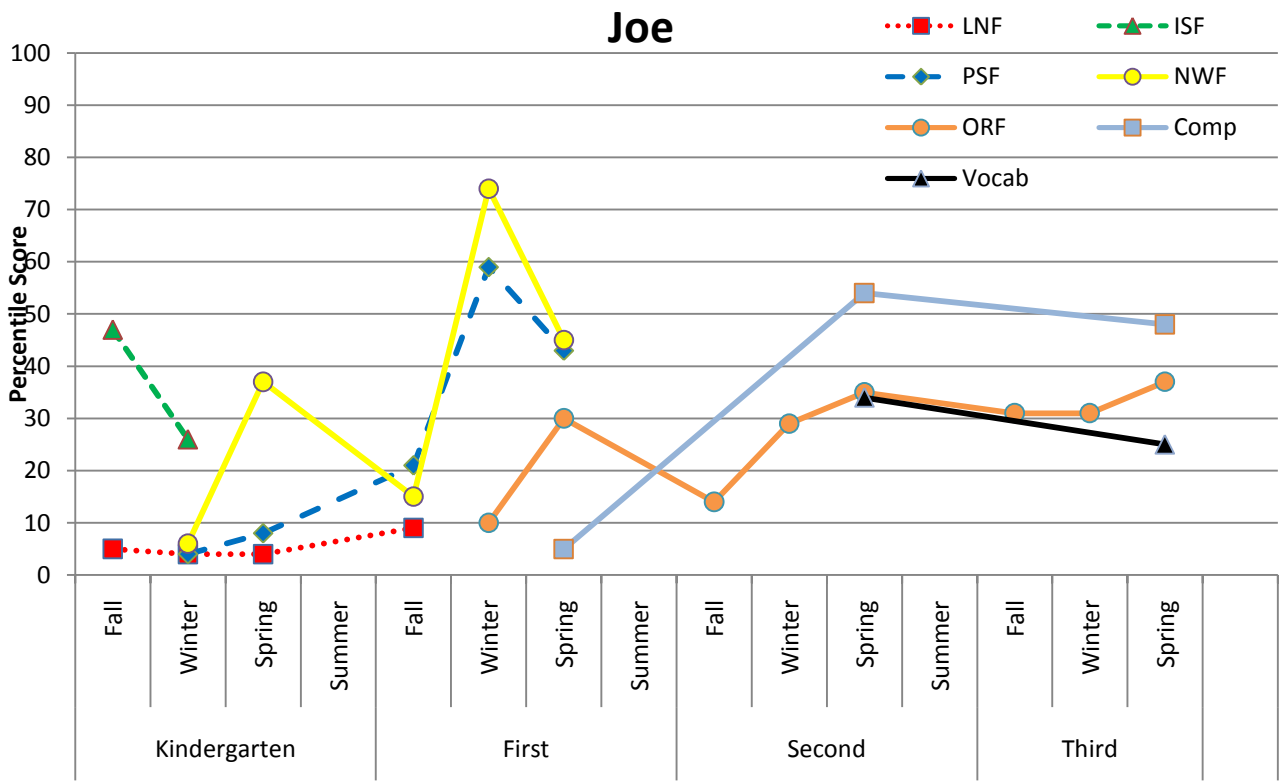
## A CLOSER LOOK AT ACHIEVEMENT: THREE STUDENTS

To understand the experience of students within Reading First classrooms we examined the performance of three students who have completed kindergarten through third grade in the same Reading First school, finishing third grade this year. To represent the diversity between Reading First schools, we chose a student from an urban district, another from a rural district, and a third from a small district with a high percentage of English Learners. All of these students were chosen to represent a demographic aspect prevalent in their district. The student names used here are **pseudonyms** and are used for illustration purposes only.

### JOE

Joe attends a small rural school. More than half of the students in Joe's school are English Language Learners. Joe is a level 3 English Learner. This places him at the intermediate level for learning English. Students at this level are typically able to understand narrative and descriptive passages written in familiar sentence patterns, but often have to guess at the meanings of complex or unfamiliar text styles. They use context and visual cues to determine meanings of unfamiliar passages or expressions. They can pick out main ideas and details, and can read a broader range of genres than students at lower levels of English acquisition.

The figure that follows presents Joe's performance on the assessments of Reading First, from his kindergarten year through third grade. The earliest assessments are letter knowledge (LNF), depicted in red, initial phonemic awareness (ISF) depicted in green, phonemic awareness (PSF) depicted by the blue dashed line, and decoding (NWF) depicted by the yellow line. The vertical axis gives Joe's percentile score, comparing him to other kindergarteners across the nation.




Joe's letter knowledge was very low throughout his kindergarten year, rising slightly in the fall of first grade, but still far below benchmark. Initial phonemic awareness also dropped during kindergarten, but when we measured word-based skills of phonemic awareness and decoding his performance was stronger. Joe's progress on decoding was erratic, perhaps because the lack of context on this skill was difficult for him as he grappled with language acquisition. We see a steep summer drop in decoding skill in the fall of first grade, and then a corresponding steep climb in the winter of first grade. More advanced phonemic awareness (PSF) shows more steady growth, perhaps due to the application of letter sound knowledge within real words. In the spring of first grade Joe's performance on these two word-based skills is nearly equal.

By the end of first grade the instructional focus has shifted to reading connected text. This remains the primary focus of instruction and Reading First assessment throughout second and third grade as well. From spring of first grade on, assessments focus on comprehension and oral reading fluency (ORF).

Joe's comprehension of text was assessed in the spring of first, second, and third grades. The solid light blue line depicts comprehension performance. As with his early reading skills, Joe's performance on comprehension tasks is very low in first grade, but climbs in second and third grade.

Joe's oral reading fluency, depicted by the orange line, also starts out low but climbs by the spring of first grade. Here again, as with decoding, we see a steep summer drop to the fall of second grade, but then consistent growth in oral reading fluency over the remaining measurement periods.

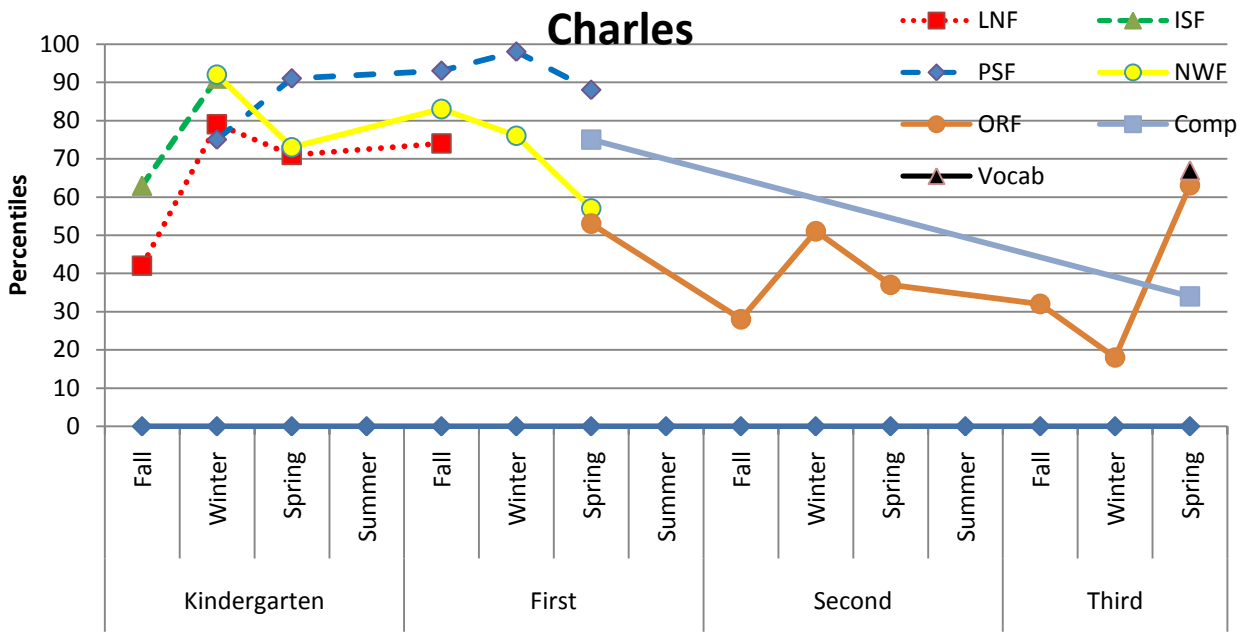
Along with comprehension, vocabulary is measured in the spring of second and third grades. This is an area of difficulty for Joe, and this may be partially due to his ELL level. Vocabulary skill is closely tied to comprehension success. For Joe, we see a pattern of lower gains in vocabulary proficiency; something to be addressed instructionally if he is to continue making grade level comprehension gains. The corresponding drop in Joe's third grade comprehension score could indicate that vocabulary difficulties are impacting his comprehension. It is encouraging to note that Joe's oral reading fluency continue to climb, since the ability to read smoothly, accurately, and quickly should contribute to comprehension. Improvement in vocabulary should affect his oral reading fluency scores as well.

For Joe, we see a pattern of lower gains at the beginning of an instructional period, followed by steady growth in skill over time. In some skills the impact of the summer break is apparent in the precipitous drop seen in the fall, but this is followed by a climb in score after the fall assessment period. As Joe enters fourth grade his comprehension and vocabulary skills are still tenuous. Improving these abilities will be essential from him to have success with the texts he will encounter in the next years of school. The same can be said for many fourth grade students in our state.

**CHARLES**

Charles' report of progress is presented in the figure that follows. Charles attends a larger school in an urban district where the majority of students are members of ethnic minority groups and qualify for free/reduced lunch, while less than ten percent of the students in his school are English Language Learners.

Charles made quick gains in the early reading skills: letter knowledge (LNF) and early phonemic awareness climbed dramatically from fall to winter of his kindergarten year, with no summer drop in letter knowledge. More advanced phonemic awareness skills (PSF) skills started high and remained fairly consistent over the measurement periods. Decoding achievement was high at the initiation of this assessment; this pattern of strong gains diminished slightly as grade level benchmarks continued to climb. When decoding assessment was replaced by oral reading fluency assessment at the end of first grade this pattern of diminishing gains increased.




It appears that Charles mastered the isolated skills of letter naming, initial sounds, and phonemic segmentation relatively easily; the word based and text based skills have been more challenging for him to maintain grade level gains as criteria for doing so increase. Comprehension was measured in the spring of first grade and of third grade, and there is a steep decline in his comprehension gains over this period.

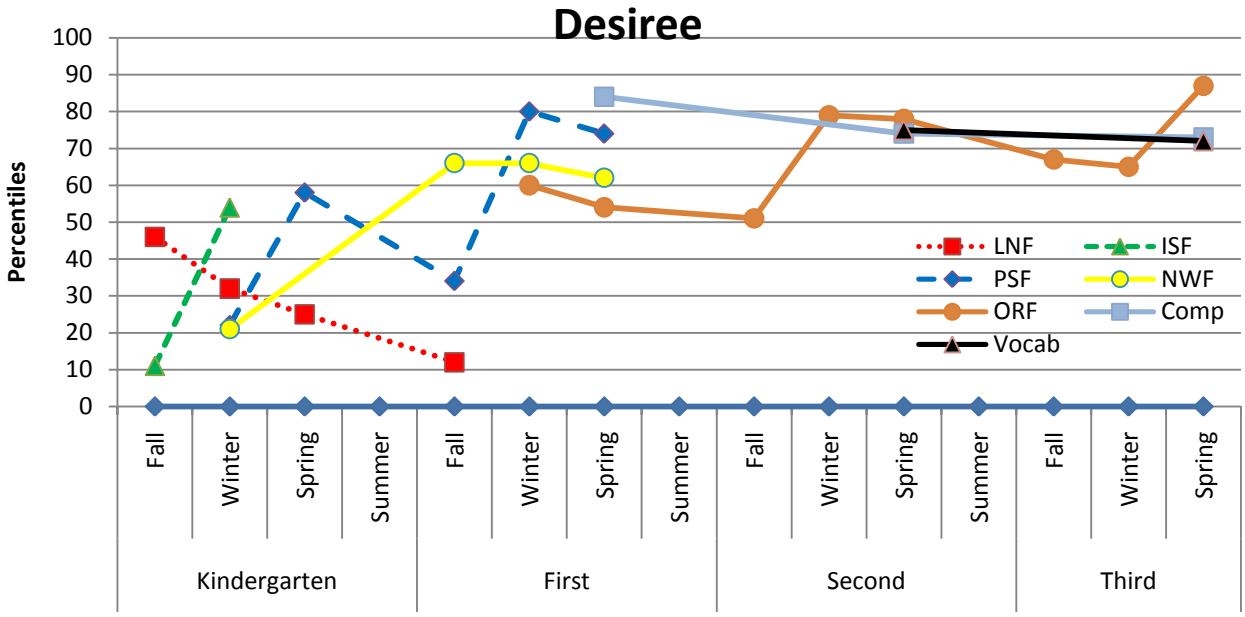
Across this same time period, Charles' oral reading fluency scores continued a trend of diminishing gains before spiking up sharply to their highest point yet at the end of third grade, potentially representing a motivational or skill breakthrough. At the end of third grade, Charles' vocabulary skills were measured. This score is nearly identical to his oral reading fluency score, while his comprehension performance at that same measurement period is much lower.

It is difficult to predict from these scores how Charles will perform in fourth grade and beyond. It does appear that grade level comprehension is a significant challenge for him. The spike in oral reading fluency and the concurrent vocabulary score may indicate future improvement in comprehension skill, or it may signal that Charles has not yet integrated smooth, quick, accurate oral reading fluency with actual grade level comprehension of text.

This is a pattern seen with many third grade Reading First students: gains in comprehension achievement over the second and third grade years are not as strong as previous gains. It reinforces the need for vigilance in comprehension and vocabulary instruction, so that students leave third grade prepared for the higher level reading and comprehension tasks that will be expected of them in fourth grade and beyond.

**DESIREE**

Desiree attends a small rural school, with a small percentage of minority students and English Language Learners. Desiree's early letter knowledge (LNF) scores were strong, but her grade level gains dropped steadily across her kindergarten year, with a significant summer drop in the fall of first grade. However, she improved quickly in early phonemic awareness (ISF) and decoding (NWF).




More advanced phonemic awareness (PSF) also improves steadily after a noticeable summer drop at the beginning of first grade.

This general trend of steady gains continues when measurement of oral reading fluency begins mid first grade. Like Charles and Joe, Desiree's comprehension gains decline from first grade on, but not as sharply. She ends third grade with stronger grade level comprehension than either of the other students reviewed here.

Desiree's vocabulary scores in second and third grade match her comprehension scores. This reflects the interconnection of these two constructs. Her oral reading fluency score surpasses both comprehension and vocabulary. If Desiree has made the connection between oral reading fluency and comprehension, then her oral reading fluency score could be an indicator of the direction of her future comprehension gains.

THREE STUDENTS, IN REVIEW

Joe's developing skill with English seems to impact his pattern of achievement on the reading assessments reported here. He starts with difficulty, but quickly gains grade appropriate skills. The

summer break can have a detrimental effect on his skill level, but he recovers by winter. Still, finding a way to reduce the impact of the summer break could accelerate Joe's growth each fall. As Joe approaches fourth grade he faces a significant challenge in developing grade level skill in comprehension and oral reading fluency, and especially vocabulary. These three skill areas support each other in the strong reader, all contributing to the successful reading and responding that will be expected of him for the rest of his school years. It seems reasonable to expect that Joe's pattern of slow but steady gains will continue. Intensive vocabulary intervention is absolutely essential for Joe, as it is for all students with similar language backgrounds.

Charles quickly developed grade level proficiency in the early and isolated skills of letters, sounds, and blending. However, he has not yet negotiated the shift to successful reading of grade level connected text. His grade level gains diminish in oral reading fluency and comprehension over the second and third grade year. But a spike in oral reading fluency at the end of third grade, and an equivalent vocabulary score may indicate that he is on the way to integrating his skills into a comprehensive approach to reading. He must do this in order to be successful with fourth grade text. Improving grade level comprehension, oral reading fluency, and vocabulary abilities is of primary importance for Charles, and are crucial to stopping the pattern of declining gains that appears in his Reading First assessments across second grade and most of third grade.

Of all the students reviewed here, Desiree finished her Reading First years with the highest level of grade level achievement. The close proximity of her comprehension, vocabulary, and oral reading fluency scores indicate that she is well poised for success in fourth grade. Without the hurdle of acquiring a new language, Desiree has been able to apply the instruction she has received to strong skill development.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Reading First schools continue to educate a more diverse population than the state average. The percentage of English Language Learners has increased in both Round one and Round two schools. There have been slight increases in ethnic minority group percentages, while the percentage of White non-Hispanic students has decreased. The percentage of students who qualify for free/reduced lunch has fluctuated over the last two years, but the figures for this year are higher than the state average for both Round one and Round two schools.

The impact of mobility on achievement is apparent when comparing fall scores of students who become mobile with scores of students who remain stable. Mobile students scored half a standard deviation lower on fall assessments than their stable peers. By spring this gap had widened. Students who were present only for the spring assessment scored .6 to .7 standard deviations lower on spring assessments than their stable peers: a moderate effect size. These results indicate the need mobile students have for quick initiation of focused instruction that will bring their achievement up quickly once they arrive at a Reading First school, and continuing support during their time in Reading First schools.

All grades have performed above the national average for the last two years, and there is improvement in these achievement scores from last year. Additionally, the achievement gap between English Learners (ELL) and their English-speaking peers has been consistently reduced over the years of Reading First implementation. In some grades English Learners (ELL) finished spring assessment at a higher achievement level than non-ELL students. Gaps have also closed for minority groups and for students who receive free or reduced lunch.

Vocabulary and comprehension scores for students in first through third grades are above the national average for grade level. These scores have remained relatively stable over the years of implementation; consistently above the national average. While scores flatten slightly at the end of second and in third grade, this year's scores are improved over last year's.

Special education gaps and percentages remain somewhat stable. When examined over the four years of implementation, special education achievement gaps have shown slow but consistent reduction, with special education students making continual improvements in percentage of students on grade level. This progress is encouraging. It illustrates the persistence of the learning difficulties that characterize students with special education needs.

Analysis of academic performance in individual districts and for individual students across the years of implementation reveals steady progress; the data shows that in Nebraska Reading First works.

## Appendix A

**Cluster One**

S
Z
X
F
P
D
C
O

**Cluster Two**

B
W
A
AC
T
E
U
AD
V
R
I
H
Y

**ClusterThree**

L
J
AB
M
Q
K
N
G
AA

**Appendix B**

Percentage of students at grade level by school, grouped by cluster