Teacher-Reported Literacy by 3 Classroom Practices
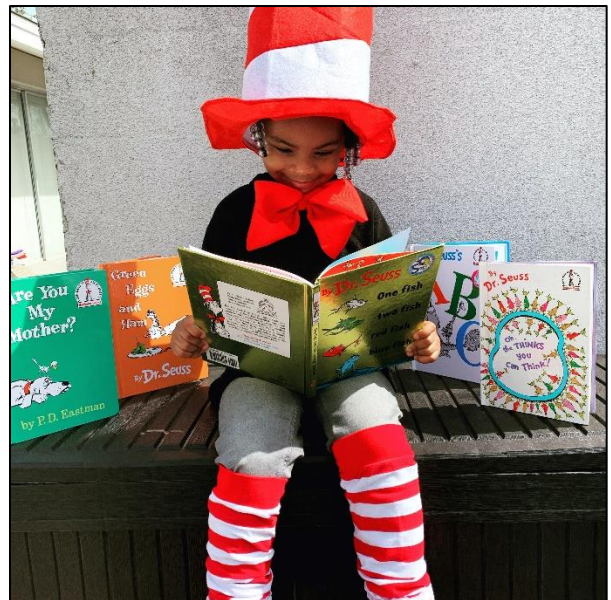
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Wide variation exists with respect to how Literacy by 3 is implemented. Though the Literacy by 3 program has been in the Houston Independent School District (HISD) since the 2014-2015 school year, there remains wide variation with respect to which aspects of Literacy by 3 are implemented in classrooms and to what extent the practices are utilized. The findings presented here from a fall 2018 survey reflect teacher-reported classroom practices that are part of Literacy by 3; provide the district information on how aligned classroom practices are with the Literacy by 3 model; and identify potential areas where more support for teachers may be needed. This study is meant to provide follow up to a study conducted by HISD following the first year of Literacy by 3 implementation (HISD, 2015).

Key Findings

- **Less than half of teachers reported spending at least 135 minutes a day on literacy practices.** About 41 percent of teachers reported spending the district-recommended 135 minutes a day on literacy practices in their classrooms. Fourth-grade teachers were most likely to spend 135 minutes a day on literacy instruction. Additionally, teachers with at least 10 years of experience in HISD were more likely to implement 135 minutes of literacy instruction per day in their classrooms.
- **Teachers attended a variety of literacy-related professional development opportunities and reported participating in 50 hours of literacy-related professional development, on average, in the year prior to the survey.** The most commonly attended training offered by HISD was the Foundations of Literacy by 3 training offered by HISD.
- Teachers spent the most time on small-group instruction/guided reading and writing instruction. They were most comfortable conducting teacher read-alouds in their classrooms and least comfortable conducting literature circles/book clubs with their students.
- Teachers who expressed greater comfort with Literacy by 3 and perceived greater curriculum support reported more frequent utilization of Literacy by 3 activities/tools.
- **Of the various literacy tools available to measure literacy achievement, Benchmark Running Records and Renaissance 360 were the most widely used by teachers.** Teachers of fourth- and fifth-grade students were more likely to report using Renaissance 360 and HISD Snapshot assessments/district-level assessments, when compared to teachers of earlier grades.

Study Purpose

The purpose of this study is to examine predictors of teacher attitudes and behaviors associated with HISD's Literacy by 3 initiative, which aims to ensure all students are reading on grade level by third grade. The Literacy by 3 framework provides guidance for teachers regarding how to organize their classrooms and instructional time. The framework recommends teachers:

- Spend 135 minutes of instructional time each day on literacy-related activities
- Utilize six key components:
    - Guided reading
    - Independent reading
    - Read-alouds
    - Word work/phonics
    - Writing instruction
    - Data-driven instruction

In trying to help HISD better understand how teachers are using this guidance, HERC administered a questionnaire to pre-kindergarten through fifth grade teachers who teach or provide support for reading, writing, language arts, or literacy, with questions asking:

- How teachers divide their instructional time
- The frequency of specific literacy instruction practices
- What tools are used to assess students' progress
- What supports teachers have or need to provide literacy instruction
- Teachers' tenure in the district, years of teaching experience, level of education, and whether they received specialized literacy training to help the district identify where more targeted resources may be needed

Data and sample

These analyses utilize data collected from a survey administered to teachers in fall 2018. Teachers in HISD were sent an email asking if they would participate in a study of Literacy by 3 to better understand instructional practices of teachers in HISD.[1] The final sample size is 324 kindergarten through fifth-grade HISD teachers who reported teaching or providing support for reading, writing, language arts, or literacy.

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[1] Though all survey items are not included in this analysis, results from all items are included in the appendix.
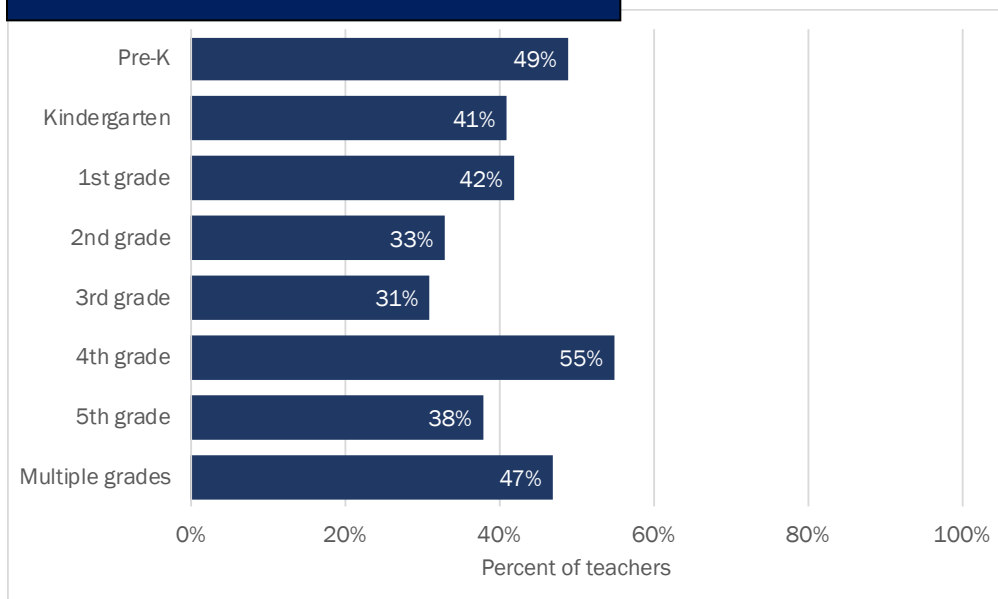
1 Less than half of teachers reported spending at least 135 minutes a day on literacy practices.

Across all grades, 41 percent of teachers reported spending the recommended 135 minutes a day on literacy practices in their classrooms.[2]

Variation exists across grade levels

On average, fourth-grade teachers were the most likely to report spending the recommended 135 minutes a day on literacy practices, with 55 percent reporting doing so. Second- and third-grade teachers were the least likely to report spending 135 minutes a day on literacy practices, with only 33 percent and 31 percent doing so, respectively.

Figure 1: Percent of teachers spending at least 135 minutes a day on literacy practices, by grade

Grade	Percent
Pre-K	49%
Kindergarten	41%
1st grade	42%
2nd grade	33%
3rd grade	31%
4th grade	55%
5th grade	38%
Multiple grades	47%

Percent of teachers

Source: Survey of teachers about literacy instructional practices, 2018-19

Variation by years of experience in HISD

Teachers with more years of experience in HISD were more likely to engage in the recommended 135 minutes of literacy instruction per day. Teachers with at least 10 years of experience teaching in HISD were more likely to report engaging in 135 minutes of literacy instruction per day in their classrooms, when compared to teachers with four or fewer years of experience in HISD.

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[2] For those teachers who do not have literacy scheduled for each day, the number of minutes spent on literacy for the purposes of this analysis reflects the average of the number of minutes spent on literacy each day over a week.
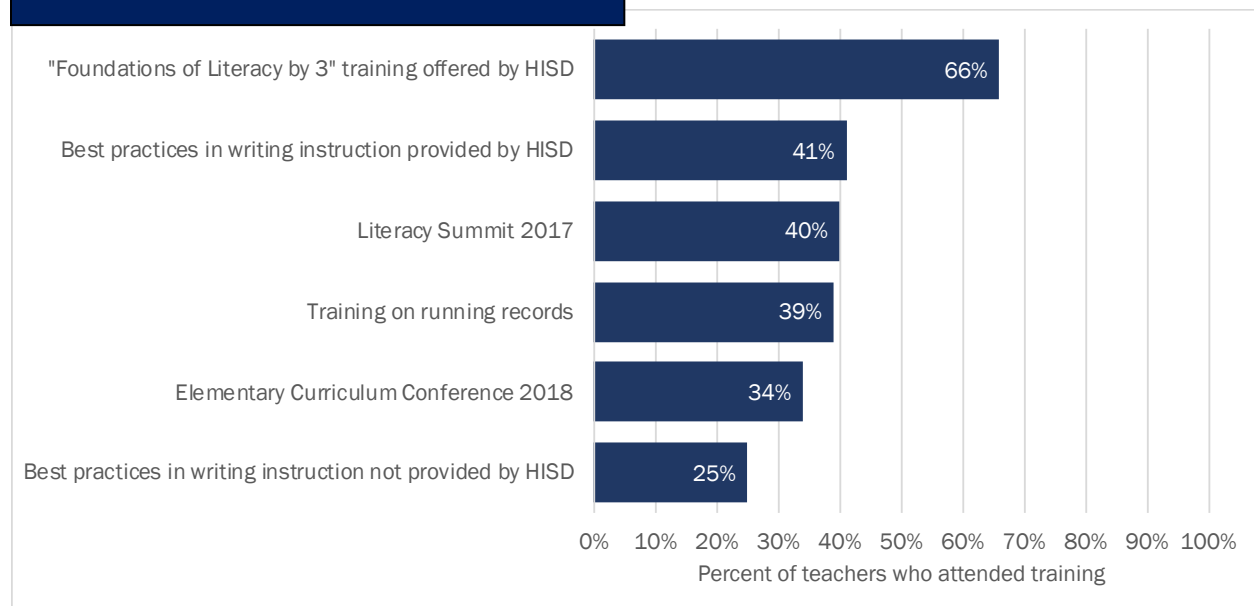
2 Teachers attended a variety of literacy-related professional development opportunities, with two-thirds attending specific Literacy by 3 training.

On average, in the previous year, teachers reported participating in 22 hours of literacy-related professional development opportunities offered by HISD and 28 hours offered through an external organization.

About 66 percent of teachers attended the Foundations of Literacy by 3 training offered by HISD in the past year.

In the 2017-18 school year, approximately 41 percent attended the a best practices in writing instruction provided by HISD and 40 percent of teachers attended the Literacy Summit in 2017. About 39 percent attended training on running records and 34 percent attended the Elementary Curriculum Conference in 2018. Twenty-five percent of teachers attended a professional development session on best practices in writing instruction provided by an external organization.

Figure 2: Percent of teachers who attended various professional development opportunities

Professional development opportunity	Percent
"Foundations of Literacy by 3" training offered by HISD	66%
Best practices in writing instruction provided by HISD	41%
Literacy Summit 2017	40%
Training on running records	39%
Elementary Curriculum Conference 2018	34%
Best practices in writing instruction not provided by HISD	25%

Percent of teachers who attended training

Source: Survey of teachers about literacy instructional practices, 2018-19

Teachers spent the most time on small-group instruction/guided reading and writing instruction. They were most comfortable conducting teacher read-alouds in their classrooms and least comfortable conducting literature circles/book clubs with their students.

3

Teachers reported spending the most time each day on small-group instruction/guided reading and writing instruction. On average, teachers reported spending 30 minutes a day on small-group instruction/guided reading and 23 minutes a day on writing instruction. In contrast, teachers reported spending 19 minutes a day on mini-lessons, independent reading, and read-alouds, and 18 minutes a day on phonics/word work.

Overall, 76 percent of teachers reported that they were mostly or extremely comfortable conducting teacher read-alouds in their classrooms. Additionally, 71 percent reported that they were mostly or extremely comfortable using data to make decisions. At least 60 percent of teachers reported that they were mostly or extremely comfortable conducting mini-lessons (69 percent), teaching word works/phonics (66 percent), doing independent reading (65 percent), doing guided reading (63 percent), and teaching writing instruction (61 percent).

In contrast to the activities listed above, only 39% of teachers reported that they were mostly or extremely comfortable conducting literature circles/book clubs with their students. In addition, 17% of teachers reported that they were not at all comfortable conducting them (see Appendix table: Comfort with Literacy by 3; Page 14.).

Figure 3: Percent of teachers mostly or extremely comfortable implementing various aspects of Literacy by 3

Teacher read-aloud	76%
Using data to make decisions	71%
Mini-lessons	69%
Word works/phonics	66%
Independent reading	65%
Guided reading	63%
Writing instruction	61%
Literature circles/book clubs	39%

Percent of teachers
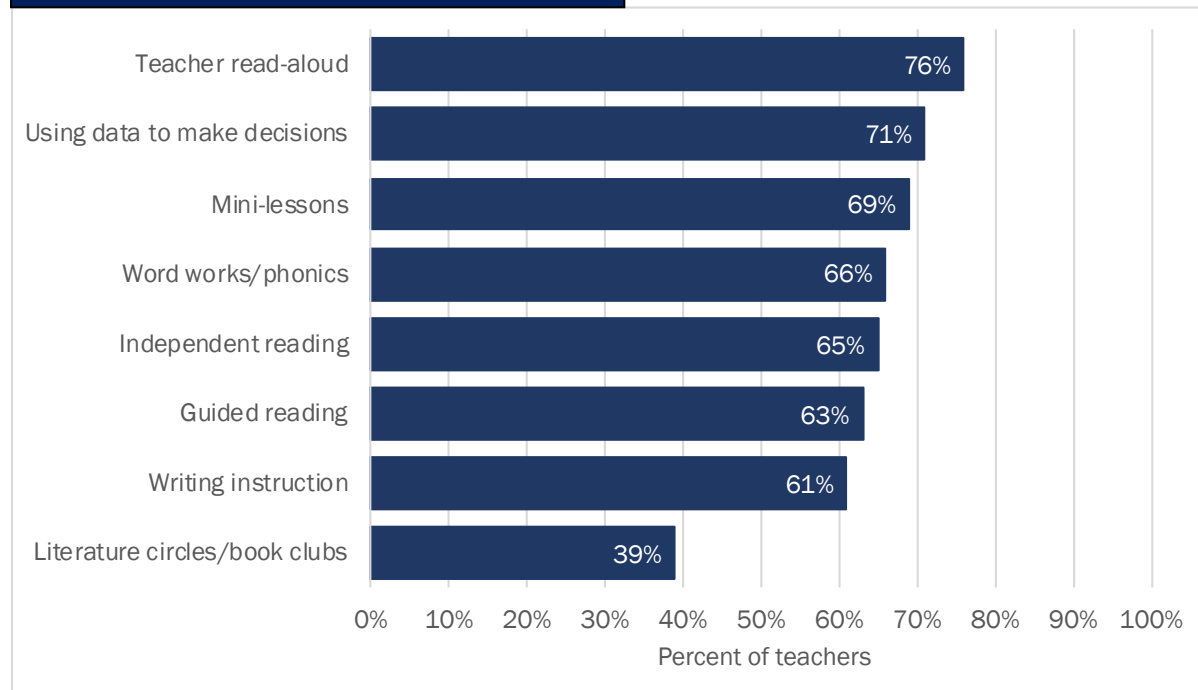
Source: Survey of teachers about literacy instructional practices, 2018-19

4 **Teachers who expressed greater comfort with Literacy by 3 and who perceived greater curriculum support reported more frequent utilization of Literacy by 3 activities/tools.**

Teachers who reported more comfort with administering various aspects of Literacy by 3 also reported:

- Engaging in more frequent phonics/word work activities and read-aloud activities with their students in the classroom

- Being more likely to use Benchmark Running Records in the classroom

- Greater curriculum support on their campus

- Finding the professional development opportunities offered by HISD surrounding Literacy by 3 to be helpful and informative

Teachers who reported they found the curriculum support to be user-friendly, helpful, and informative in facilitating, planning, and implementing of Literacy by 3 in their classrooms also reported:

- Engaging in more frequent phonics/word work activities with their students in the classroom

- Meeting with students one-on-one more frequently to provide feedback on writing

- Finding the leveled reading materials in their classroom to be diverse, of interest to students, useful, and organized

- Being more likely to use Renaissance 360 and HISD Snapshot Assessments/district-level assessments in the classroom

- Greater comfort with administering various aspects of Literacy by 3

- Finding the professional development opportunities offered by HISD surrounding Literacy by 3 to be helpful and informative.[3]

5 **Teachers who have received prior training or a certification in literacy/English instruction found greater value in professional development opportunities offered by HISD.**

Teachers who have received training or a certification in literacy/English instruction found greater value in professional development opportunities offered by HISD, such as running record training, "Foundations of Literacy by 3" training, and the Literacy Summit.

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[3] These results are from separate analyses used to predict whether comfort administering various aspects of Literacy by 3 and perceived curriculum support were associated with the practices listed above. These regression tables are available upon request. The questions used to create the comfort with Literacy by 3 and curriculum support scales are available in the appendix.

Benchmark Running Records and Renaissance 360 were the most widely used tools by teachers for assessing student reading behaviors, monitoring growth, and forming reading groups.

6

There are a variety of tools that teachers can use to measure literacy achievement and growth, and to guide classroom practices. Over three-quarters of responding teachers reported using multiple tools in their classrooms (77 percent used Benchmark Running Records, 76 percent used Renaissance 360, and 63 percent used HISD Snapshot Assessments/district-level assessments).

Some variation exists by grade level

Fourth- and fifth-grade teachers were more likely to report that they used Renaissance 360 and/or HISD Snapshot assessments/district-level assessments to assess student reading behaviors, form guided reading groups, and monitor reading growth, when compared to teachers of earlier grades.

Literacy assessment tools are used for multiple purposes

When asked how these tools were used, over 90 percent of teachers reported using Benchmark Running Records to assess student reading behaviors, form guided reading groups, and monitor reading growth (Figure 6). There are greater differences in how Renaissance 360 and Snapshot assessments were utilized, with more teachers using them to monitor reading growth and assess student reading behaviors than form guided reading groups.[4]

Figure 6: Benchmark Running Records were most widely used assessment tool by teachers for a variety of purposes.
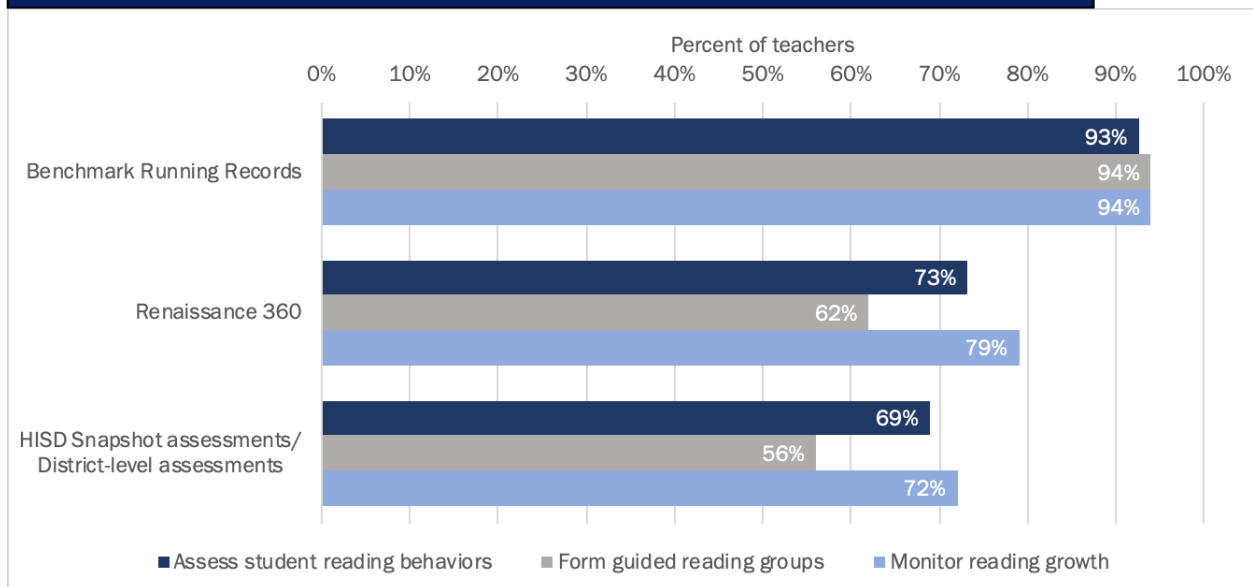
Source: Survey of teachers about literacy instructional practices, 2018-19

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[4] The results from various BRRs may not always be comparable and the district may want to use caution when comparing BRR results across campuses that use different BRR assessments (Thrash and Baumgartner, 2020).

Conclusion

While this brief focuses on teacher-reported classroom activities, it reflects the significant variation in student-literacy experiences across the district more broadly. Although some of this variation may be explained by differences between campuses resulting from a decentralized school district, it also suggests student exposure to literacy instruction, one of the most critical needs of students in HISD (as expressed by the district and reflected in Goal 1 of the HISD Board of Education), may be a source of instructional disparity between students.

In addition to providing a snapshot of the classroom literacy practices in the district, this brief provides information about challenges reported by teachers, providing an opportunity for areas of outreach and support to bolster literacy instruction across the district.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following are areas for potential teacher support:

Additional training in Literacy by 3 may be needed. If HISD has the expectation that teachers across the district utilize a set of common literacy practices, such as 135 minutes of daily literacy instruction, additional training may be needed to ensure all teachers understand the components of Literacy by 3 and how to implement them in their classrooms. This information should also be provided in the ELA/SLA unit planning guides.

Conduct outreach to teachers to find out what aspects of Literacy by 3 are not working. If teachers are not engaging with the Literacy by 3 practices as the Curriculum and Development Office intends, perhaps some aspects are less useful or harder to implement in practice. Hearing feedback from teachers about why they are not using various components of Literacy by 3 may help the district consider whether changes are needed to certain practices associated with Literacy by 3.

Ensure teachers have a support system for literacy instruction. As teachers who felt most supported also reported the greatest level of comfort in engaging with the components of Literacy by 3, it may be important to ensure that campus administrators understand Literacy by 3 and that instructional supports are offered to teachers, such as literacy coaches.

Current initatives

For the 2020-2021 school year, HISD has taken a number of steps to increase professional development for teachers around literacy. Importantly, all literacy teachers were re-trained in Literacy by 3 and the curriculum guide has been updated. Additionally, aligning with requirements of House Bill 3, Reading Academies are being offered to kindergarten teachers and principals in HISD throughout the 2020-2021 school year, with teachers in later grades receiving training in subsequent years.

Item level responses to literacy questionnaire

Literacy Practices

Phonics/Word Work

Table 1: Teachers' practices regarding Literacy by 3 strategies and recommendations for phonics/word work.							
	Never (%)	Sometimes (%)	Often (%)	Always (%)	Rating Average	Response Count	Skipped Question
After direct instruction for phonics/word work, how often do students have time to practice what they learned through work stations?	4.2	19.3	31.9	44.6	2.2	285	39
After direct instruction for phonics/word work, how often do students have time to practice what they learned through independent reading?	3.9	19.3	28.9	47.9	2.2	280	44
After direct instruction for phonics/word work, how often do students have time to practice what they learned through small group table?	1.8	17.5	30.5	50.2	2.3	285	39

Notes: Never=0; Sometimes=1; Often=2; Always=

Writing Instruction

Table 2: Teachers' practices regarding Literacy by 3 strategies and recommendations for writing instruction.							
	A few times a month (%)	Once a week (%)	A few times a week (%)	Daily (%)	Rating Average	Response Count	Skipped Question
How often do you meet with students for one-on-one-feedback for writing?	22.3	25.7	34.9	17.1	1.5	269	55
How often do you use mentor text to teach author's craft?	22.3	25.7	34.9	17.1	1.5	269	55

Notes: A few times a month=0; Once a week=1; A few times a week=2; Daily=3

Appendix

Read Alouds

Table 3: Teachers' practices regarding Literacy by 3 strategies and recommendations for read-alouds.							
	Never (%)	Sometimes (%)	Often (%)	Always (%)	Rating Average	Response Count	Skipped Question
During read-alouds, how often do you choose read aloud books that align with ELA/SLA TEKS standards?	-	6.5	21.1	71.8	2.6	291	33
During read-alouds, how often do you choose read aloud books that will build students' knowledge and vocabulary?	-	4.1	17.8	77.8	2.7	293	31
During read-alouds, how often do you choose mentor texts that can be used for reading and writing?	2.8	15.5	34.2	47.5	2.3	284	40
During read-alouds, how often do you model and demonstrate comprehension strategies when you read?	-	4.8	18.0	76.9	2.7	294	30
During read-alouds, how often do you encourage students to talk to classmates about the text?	-	9.2	20.5	70.0	2.6	293	31
During read-alouds, how often do you encourage students to listen to their classmates about the text?	0.0	7.8	20.8	71.4	2.6	294	30
During read-alouds, how often do you encourage students to think critically about the text?	0.0	5.7	22.0	72.3	2.7	296	28

Notes: Never=0; Sometimes=1; Often=2; Always=3; dash denotes cell is masked due to small sample size

Independent Reading

Table 4: Teachers' practices regarding meeting with Tier 2 and Tier 3 readers.							
	Never (%)	A few times a month (%)	1x a week (%)	2-3x a week (%)	Every day (%)	Rating Average	Response Count	Skipped Question
How often do you meet with Tier 2 readers?	-	3.8	6.9	70.3	17.9	3.0	290	34
How often do you meet with Tier 3 readers?	-	2.2	4.3	38.6	53.1	3.4	277	47

Notes: Never=0; A few times a month=1; Ix a week=2; 2-3x a week=3; 4=Every day; dash denotes cell is masked due to small sample size

Appendix

Leveled reading materials

Table 5: Teachers' practices regarding leveled-reading materials in their classrooms.							
	Strongly disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly agree (%)	Rating Average	Response Count	Skipped Question
Leveled-reading materials available to my classroom cover a variety of genres.	5.1	14.9	52.4	27.7	2.0	296	28
Leveled-reading materials available to my classroom are of interest to students.	3.7	15.9	54.4	26.0	2.0	296	28
Leveled-reading materials available to my classroom are useful for instruction.	2.1	13.3	56.7	28.0	2.1	293	31
Leveled-reading materials available to my classroom are organized by level.	2.4	10.9	52.0	34.7	2.2	294	30
Leveled-reading materials available to my classroom are organized by topic.	6.1	36.5	42.0	15.4	1.7	293	31

Notes: Strongly disagree=0; Disagree=1; Agree=2; Strongly agree=3

Table 6: Teachers' practices regarding Literacy by 3 in their classroom.							
	Strongly disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly agree (%)	Rating Average	Response Count	Skipped Question
English/Spanish Language Arts TEKS are a common thread throughout my daily literacy block.	3.1	8.8	51.5	36.6	2.2	295	29
Students in my classroom independently select books for independent reading.	-	7.2	50.5	41.6	2.3	293	31

Notes: Strongly disagree=0; Disagree=1; Agree=2; Strongly agree=3; dash denotes cell is masked due to small sample size

Appendix

Data-Driven Instruction

Table 7: Teachers' use of various assessments to measure student performance and facilitate the Literacy by 3 initiative.							
	Strongly disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly agree (%)	Rating Average	Response Count	Skipped Question
I use benchmark running records to assess student reading behaviors.	-	5.5	47.9	44.7	2.4	217	107
I use benchmark running records to form guided reading groups.	-	4.7	41.8	52.6	2.5	213	111
I use benchmark running records to monitor reading growth.	-	5.1	44.5	49.5	2.4	218	106
I use Renaissance 360 to assess student reading behaviors.	6.0	20.8	49.1	24.1	1.9	216	108
I use Renaissance 360 to form guided reading groups.	9.8	28.8	40.5	21.0	1.7	205	119
I use Renaissance 360 to monitor reading growth.	6.0	14.8	49.5	29.6	2.0	216	108
I use HISD Snapshot Assessments/district-level assessments to assess student reading behaviors.	10.2	20.9	47.1	21.8	1.8	206	118
I use HISD Snapshot Assessments/district-level assessments to form guided reading groups.	12.2	31.5	41.6	14.7	1.6	197	127
I use HISD Snapshot Assessments/district-level assessments to monitor reading growth.	9.8	18.1	53.4	18.6	1.8	204	120

Notes: Strongly disagree=0; Disagree=1; Agree=2; Strongly agree=3; dash denotes cell is masked due to small sample size

Comfort with Literacy by 3

Table 8: Teachers' comfort level with various aspects of the Literacy by 3 initiative.	Not very (%)	Somewhat (%)	Mostly (%)	Extremely (%)	Rating Average	Response Count	Skipped Question
Small group guided reading	6.6	14.4	43.2	35.8	2.1	257	67
Mini-lessons	-	12.1	43.6	43.2	2.3	257	67
Teacher read aloud	-	4.3	30.9	64.1	2.6	259	65
Independent reading	2.0	15.1	35.3	47.6	2.3	252	72
Literature circles/book clubs	17.4	27.2	33.9	21.4	1.6	224	100
Word work/phonics	3.9	13.6	37.6	45.0	2.2	258	66
Writing instruction	6.2	17.4	44.2	32.2	2.0	258	66
Using data to make decisions	3.1	9.2	39.1	48.7	2.3	261	63

Notes: Not very=0; Somewhat=1; Mostly=2; Extremely=3; dash denotes cell is masked due to small sample size

Curriculum Support

Table 9: Teachers' experiences and perceptions on curriculum support for the delivery of the Literacy by 3 Initiative.	Strongly disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly agree (%)	Rating Average	Response Count	Skipped Question
The structure and framework of the HISD ELA/SLA unit planning guides (UPG) facilitate ease of planning.	10.7	14.2	53.3	21.8	1.9	225	99
The "First 25 Days" document supported my implementation of Literacy by 3.	8.5	11.3	53.1	27.2	2.0	213	111
The instructional strategies outlined in the HISD unit planning guides (UPG) provide support for my planning and delivery of instruction.	7.6	11.7	57.4	23.3	2.0	223	101
The ELA/SLA unit planning guide is user friendly.	12.2	16.8	49.1	22.0	1.8	214	110

Notes: Strongly disagree=0; Disagree=1; Agree=2; Strongly agree=3

Professional Development

Table 10: Teachers' experiences and perceptions of Literacy by 3 professional development offered by HISD.							
	Strongly disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly agree (%)	Rating Average	Response Count	Skipped Question
The information I learned during Foundation of Literacy by 3 training prepared me to implement Literacy by 3 in my classroom.	6.5	13.4	57.0	23.1	2.0	186	138
The running record training provided an opportunity to practice administering a running record.	4.2	11.4	56.9	27.5	2.1	167	157
The running record training helped me to learn how to analyze student reading behaviors.	6.6	10.8	55.4	27.1	2.0	166	158
The Literacy Summit 2017 provided me with literacy instructional practices that I could implement in my classroom.	3.7	6.7	66.4	23.1	2.1	134	190
The HISD Literacy by 3 video resources are a useful model for good literacy instructional practices.	7.3	11.8	58.4	22.5	2.0	178	146
The Literacy by 3 lead teachers on my campus provide invaluable support.	9.8	9.3	55.5	25.4	2.0	173	151
The Literacy by 3 lead teachers on my campus provide information about best literacy practices.	9.1	9.7	57.4	23.9	2.0	176	148
I utilize non-HISD literacy resources to improve my literacy instruction.	4.2	6.3	56.3	33.3	2.2	192	132

Notes: Strongly disagree=0; Disagree=1; Agree=2; Strongly agree=3

About HERC. Focusing on the most pressing challenges facing the region, the Houston Education Research Consortium (HERC) is a research-practice partnership between Rice University and 11 Houston-area school districts. HERC aims to improve the connection between education research and decision making for the purpose of equalizing outcomes by race, ethnicity, economic status, and other factors associated with inequitable educational opportunities.

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