

Final External Evaluation

Building Communities that Support Children's Reading (BCSCR)

Award# S215G140114

Three Rivers Education Foundation, Inc.

Submitted by John Jarchow, Evaluator

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A. INTRODUCTION TO THE EVALUATION

A.1. Project Overview

Three Rivers Educational Foundation—a national nonprofit with a history of leading high-impact education initiatives—received \$10,831,464 in Innovative Approaches to Literacy funding for the project period of October 1, 2014 to September 30, 2017 (dates include the approved one-year no-cost extension) to implement *Building Communities that Support Children's Reading* (BCSCR). The project was collaboratively designed to address the literacy needs for more than 79,000 children in 81 high-need, high-poverty rural school districts across four states: New Mexico, Colorado, Texas, and Arizona. All districts have poverty rates (according to 2013 SAIPE figures) over 25%.

The goal of BCSCR is to demonstrably and sustainably improve the literacy outcomes among students attending the targeted school districts.

BCSCR includes book distribution and a variety of innovative, evidence-based community, parent, and school strategies for improving literacy outcomes. Key project activities were designed to provide sustainable solutions to gaps and weaknesses, maximizing teacher effectiveness, and promoting a community-wide focus on the importance of literacy.

All aspects of BCSCR are grounded in evidence-based strategies. BCSCR includes three key strategies:

1. School-based strategies (i.e., curriculum integration, professional development, book distribution, and reading achievement and readiness);
2. Community-based strategies (i.e., read-alongs, Little Free Libraries, community reading nights, and tutoring); and
3. Parent-based strategies (i.e., book distribution and parental workshops).

A.2. Purpose and Scope of the Evaluation

Evaluation by John Jarchow: Jarchow is a prior community college professor and department chair for 27 years. During that time he participated in a number of grant initiatives and was responsible for program evaluation for the curriculum areas assigned to his department. Since retiring from the community college Jarchow coordinated a 4-H grant funded student mentoring effort in local schools, and has also formed a non-profit (Books for Kids–AZ, Inc.) focused on youth literacy initiatives throughout Arizona.

The purpose of this evaluation is to review and validate the project findings prepared by the staff and leadership of the Three Rivers Education Foundation, Inc.

This evaluation addresses all components of the BCSCR project as described in the federally approved project proposal. The time span under consideration is the entire 3-year funding period, from October 1, 2014 through September 30, 2017.

A.3. Summary of Evaluation Conclusions

It is clear from a review of implementation data that the project **exceeded all objectives** as set forth in the project proposal evaluation plan. This project has brought, and continues to bring,

great benefits to the communities served. This project will have long-term, positive effects on the communities, schools, and individuals involved. However, to reach sustainability, consistent efforts in line with this project need to continue.

While every district named in the proposal participates in some aspect(s) of the grant offerings, not all districts are fully participating in all project components. Furthermore, for large districts with multiple schools, not all schools fully participate even if their school district, overall, participates in each project component. This represents an unmet capacity for literacy improvement in nearly every district, which should be addressed through project continuation.

There were unintended measurable benefits, most demonstrably with regard to tutoring. Even though the tutoring component was not designed to be a professional development process, it's clear from qualitative and quantitative data that it is an effective means of professional development in reading instruction.

Findings, data sources, collection methodologies, and analysis procedures per objective are described in detail in section B, below.

While the federal project was originally intended as a vehicle for book distribution, it is clear that the project design (as expanded by Three Rivers Education Foundation to include family and community events, professional development, classroom sets with curriculum materials, and tutoring) was ambitious, and has yielded profound results. This design is clearly transferable to low-income communities throughout the nation that reflect the communities eligible to participate in the BCSCR project. Further, in all probability the results would be replicable in more affluent communities, and to literacy needs outside of the targeted K-12 population.

B. EVALUATION OF PROJECT OBJECTIVES

Sections B.1–B.4 present findings for the GPRA measures, and section B.5 – B.6 present findings for the two additional project measures.

Data for the GPRA measures are based upon the 16,963 students who participated in the tutoring component of the project. Of these students, results for 11,445 students (67.5% of the total) are considered valid and are included in the analysis. A valid score is defined as the student received a minimum of 24 hours and a maximum of 32 hours of service, a pretest and posttest score, and no rush designations on the posttest.

B.1. Objective One Findings

Objective: The percentage of 4-year-old children participating in the project who achieve significant gains in oral language skills (GPRA 1). Of the 152 4-year-old children with valid scores served during the project period, 75% made significant gains in oral language skills.

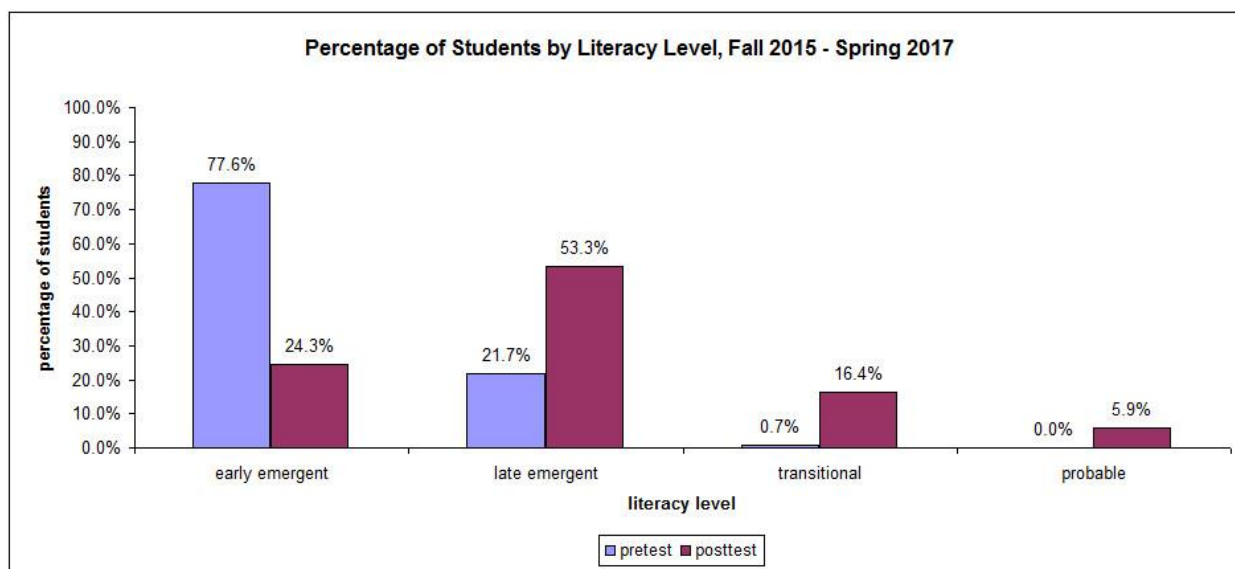
Significant gain: A significant gain is defined as an improvement of at least 50 scale score points on the assessment instrument from the pretest to the posttest. This is a conservative means of analysis because it does not recognize testing variation based on extraneous factors.

Scores used for analysis: This analysis includes all results for students with valid pretest and posttest results, as defined by receiving a minimum of 24 to a maximum of 32 hours of instruction, and a completed posttest with no rush flags on that assessment. Average pretest and posttest results were then calculated and compared.

All students who participated in this tutoring component received up to 32 hours of instruction in literacy skills, namely oral language skills, phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.

The data source for this finding is the students' pretest and posttest results on the STAR Early Literacy assessment by Renaissance Learning. Four-year-old students were administered the assessment at the onset and completion of the tutoring period, and growth represents the change from initial data to the exit data.

The following graph demonstrates the percentage of students per assessment category for all four-year-old students throughout the project period with valid scores. As shown, the results corroborate the larger trend of students moving to higher pre-literacy levels from the pretest result to the posttest results.



Tutors were solicited from early childhood education providers. All tutors received the following supports to assist them in faithfully implementing the instructional approach:

- pedagogy training at the onset of each semester, as well as an as-needed mid-semester follow-up training,
- a manual, training videos, and other support documentation with suggested effective instructional strategies for each reading component,
- monthly review with feedback on instructional practices as reported, and
- books and other materials to use during the tutoring sessions.

Worthy of note is that over each semester and the project period, the instructional documentation shows a steady improvement in the use of effective teaching strategies and alignment with the instructional approach.

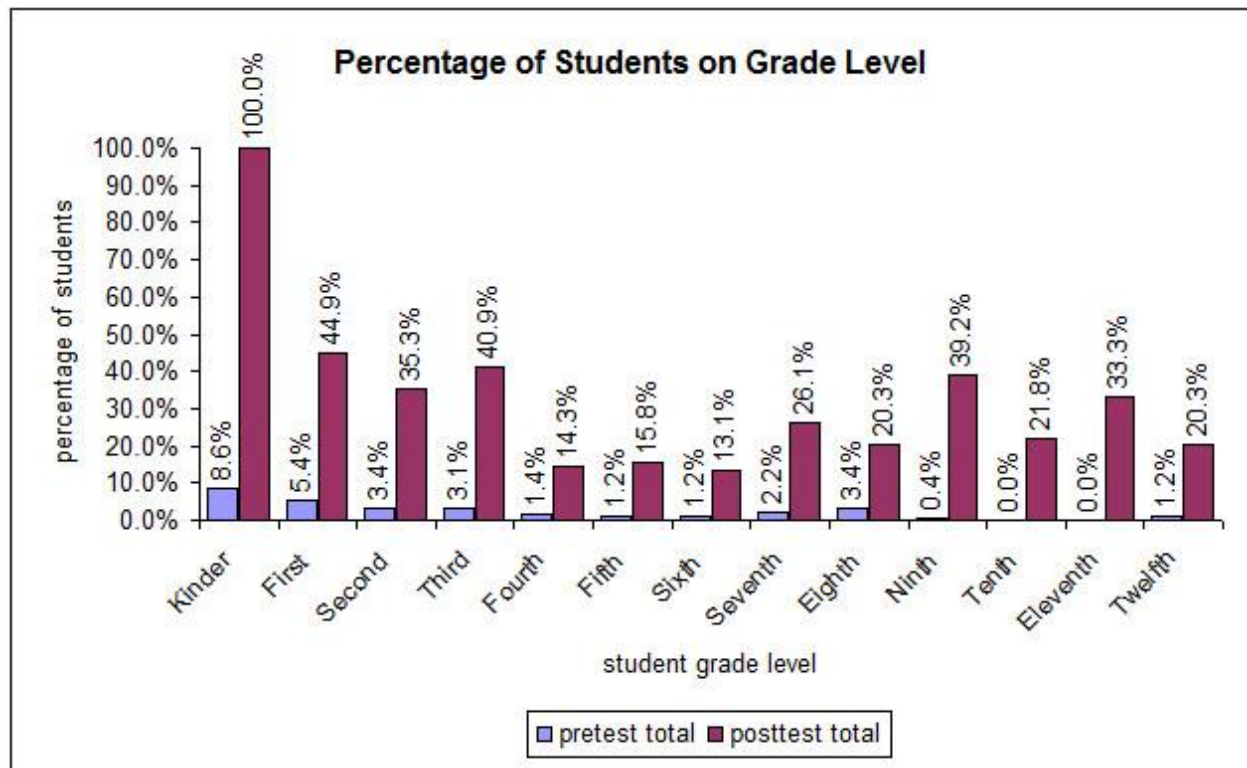
B.2. Objective Two Findings

Objective: The percentage of participating 3rd grade students who meet or exceed proficiency on State reading or language arts assessments (GPRA 2).

Of the 2,113 3rd-grade students, 3.1% (65 students) entered the tutoring services already on grade level, and 40.9% (865 students) were on grade level after one semester of tutoring. On average, students began services reading at the 1.6 grade level and made 1.05 grade-level improvement in their reading ability.

Scores used for analysis: This analysis includes all results for students with valid pretest and posttest results, as defined by receiving a minimum of 24 to a maximum of 32 hours of instruction, and a completed posttest with no rush flags on that assessment. Average pretest and posttest results were then calculated and compared.

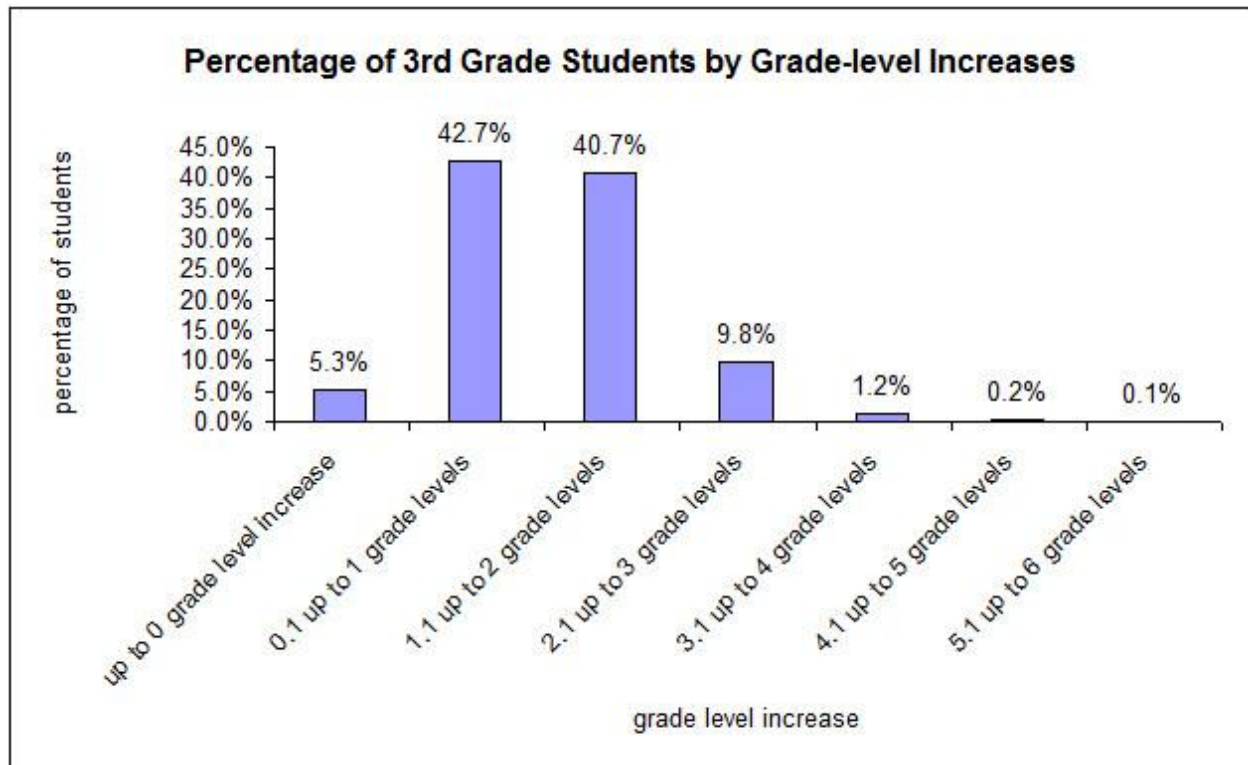
The following graph demonstrates the percentage of students who meet or exceed proficiency at both the pretest and posttest.



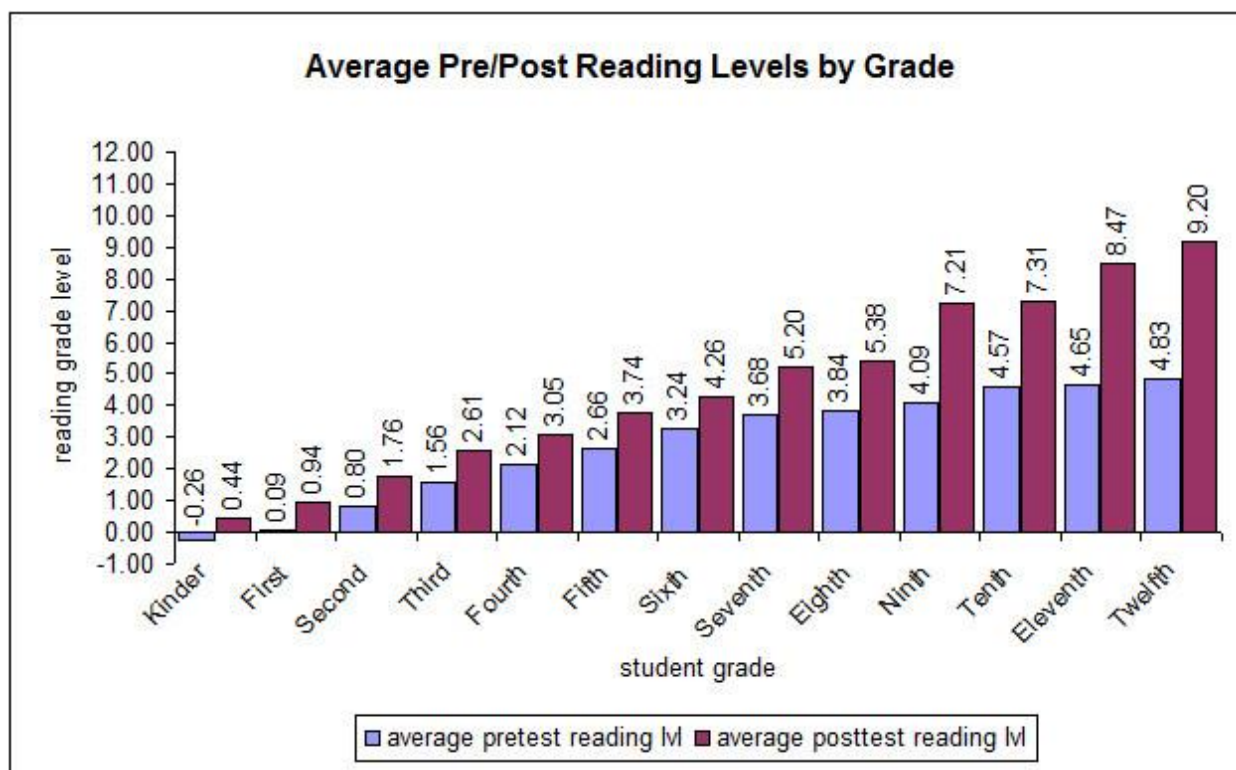
All students who participated in this tutoring component received up to 32 hours of instruction in literacy skills, namely oral language skills, phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Tutoring occurred outside the tutors' contracted duty hours.

The data source for this finding is the students' pretest and posttest results on the i-Ready Diagnostic Assessment of Reading by Curriculum Associates. Each student was administered the assessment at the onset and completion of the tutoring period, and growth represents the change from initial data to the exit data.

The following graph demonstrates the percentage of students per growth level for all third grade students with valid scores throughout the project period.



The following graph demonstrates the pretest and posttest grade-level equivalencies across all grades for all students throughout the project period with valid scores.

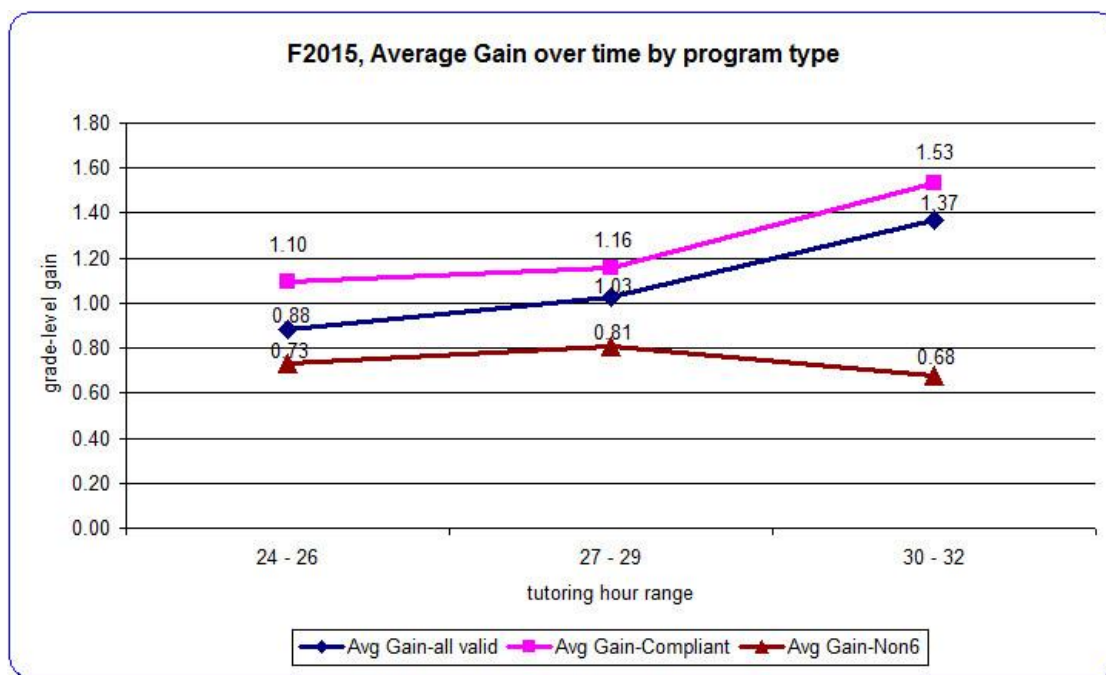


Tutors were solicited primarily from teaching staff members at participating schools. Teachers did not provide tutoring to students whom they instructed during the regular school day in their self-contained classrooms. All tutors received the following supports to assist them in faithfully implementing the instructional approach:

- pedagogy training at the onset of each semester, as well as an as-needed mid-semester follow-up training,
- a manual, training videos, and other support documentation with suggested effective instructional strategies for each reading component,
- monthly review with feedback on instructional practices as reported, and
- books and other materials to use during the tutoring sessions.

Worthy of note is that over each semester and the project period, the instructional documentation shows a steady improvement in the use of effective teaching strategies and alignment with the instructional approach. This is further documented by an analysis of results based on alignment: tutors who most closely conformed to the instructional approach uniformly showed the best results from their students.

An analysis of student growth rates relative to the instructional reports and session logs at the end of the fall 2015 semester revealed that strict compliance with the instructional model yielded the greatest achievement results. The following graph clearly demonstrates the relative gains of strict compliance, thereby the efficacy of the instructional model. The greatest results (i.e., 1.53 grade-level increase) were achieved by students whose tutors provided weekly instruction in each of the six reading components, regardless of the grade level, compared to the results for students who tutors did not comply with this approach (0.68 grade level improvement).



B.3. Objective Three Findings

Objective: The percentage of participating 8th grade students who meet or exceed proficiency on State reading or language arts assessments under section 1111(b)(3) of the ESEA (GPRA 3). Of the 266 8th-grade students, 3.4% (9 students) entered the tutoring services already on grade level, and 20.3% (54 students) were on grade level after one semester of tutoring. On average, students began services reading at the 3.84 grade level and made 1.54 grade-level improvements in their reading ability.

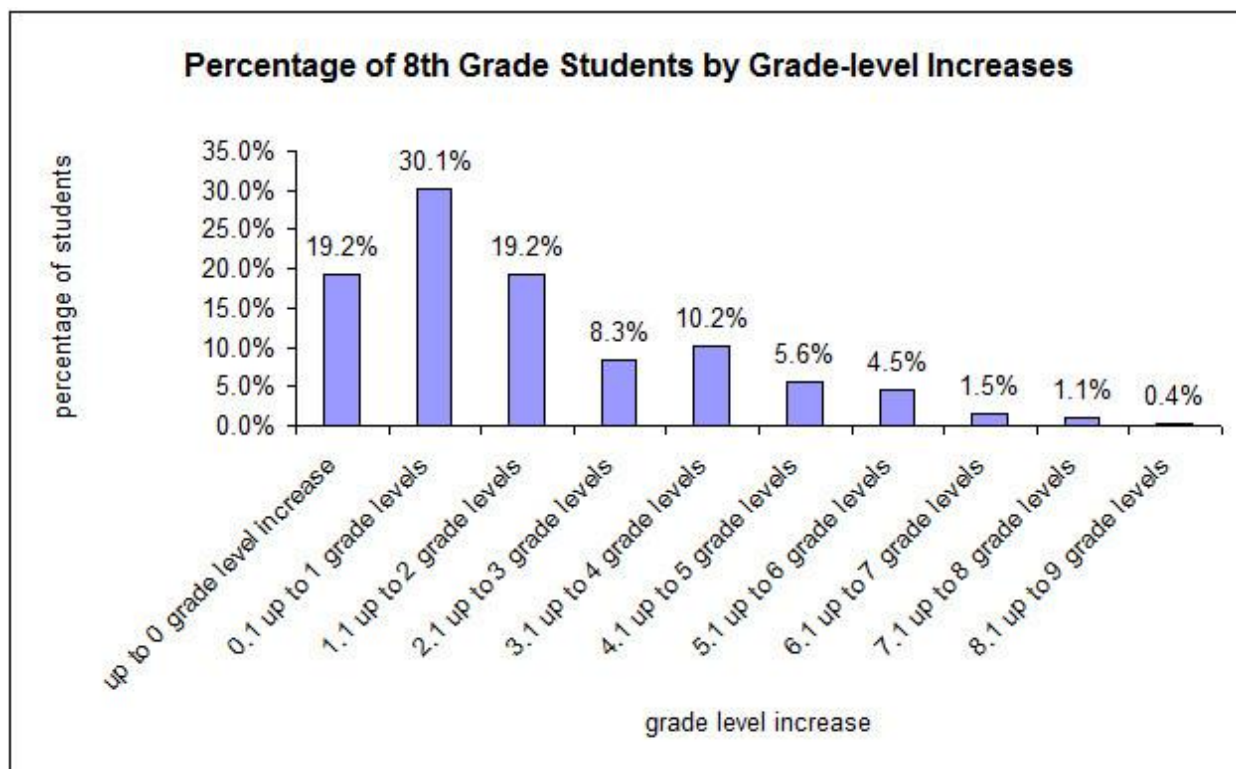
Scores used for analysis: This analysis includes all results for students with valid pretest and posttest results, as defined by receiving a minimum of 24 to a maximum of 32 hours of instruction, and a completed posttest with no rush flags on the assessment. Average pretest and posttest results were then calculated and compared.

See the initial graph in section B.2, which demonstrates the percentage of students who meet or exceed proficiency at both the pretest and posttest.

All students who participated in this tutoring component received up to 32 hours of instruction in literacy skills, namely oral language skills, phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Tutoring occurred outside the tutors' contracted duty hours.

The data source for this finding is the students' pretest and posttest results on the i-Ready Diagnostic Assessment of Reading by Curriculum Associates. Each student was administered the assessment at the onset and completion of the tutoring period, and growth represents the change from initial data to the exit data.

The following graph demonstrates the percentage of students per growth level for all eighth grade students with valid scores throughout the project period.



See the third graph in section B.2, which demonstrates the pretest and posttest grade-level equivalencies across all grades for all students throughout the project period with valid scores.

Tutors were solicited primarily from teaching staff members at participating schools. All tutors received the following supports to assist them in faithfully implementing the instructional approach:

- pedagogy training at the onset of each semester, as well as an as-needed mid-semester follow-up training,
- a manual, training videos, and other support documentation with suggested effective instructional strategies for each reading component,
- monthly review with feedback on instructional practices as reported, and
- books and other materials to use during the tutoring sessions.

Worthy of note is that over each semester and the project period, the instructional documentation shows a steady improvement in the use of effective teaching strategies and alignment with the instructional approach. This is further documented by an analysis of results based on alignment: tutors who most closely conformed to the instructional approach uniformly showed the best results from their students.

An analysis of student growth rates relative to the instructional reports and session logs at the end of the fall 2015 semester revealed that strict compliance with the instructional model yielded the greatest achievement results. The fourth graph in section B.2 clearly demonstrates the

relative gains of strict compliance, thereby the efficacy of the instructional model. The greatest results (i.e., 1.53 grade-level increase) were achieved by students whose tutors provided weekly instruction in each of the six reading components, regardless of the grade level, compared to the results for students whose tutors did not comply with this approach (0.68 grade level improvement).

B.4. Objective Four Findings

Objective: The percentage of participating high school students who meet or exceed proficiency on State reading or language arts assessments under section 1111(b)(3) of the ESEA (GPRA 4). Of the 360 high school students, 0.4% (2 students) entered the tutoring services already on grade level, and 30.8% (111 students) were on grade level after one semester of tutoring. On average, students began tutoring services far behind their grade level expectations and made large gains, seen here.

Grade level	Initial reading level	Final reading level	Gain in grade levels
9th	4.09	7.21	3.12
10th	4.57	7.30	2.73
11th	4.65	8.47	3.82
12th	4.83	9.18	4.35

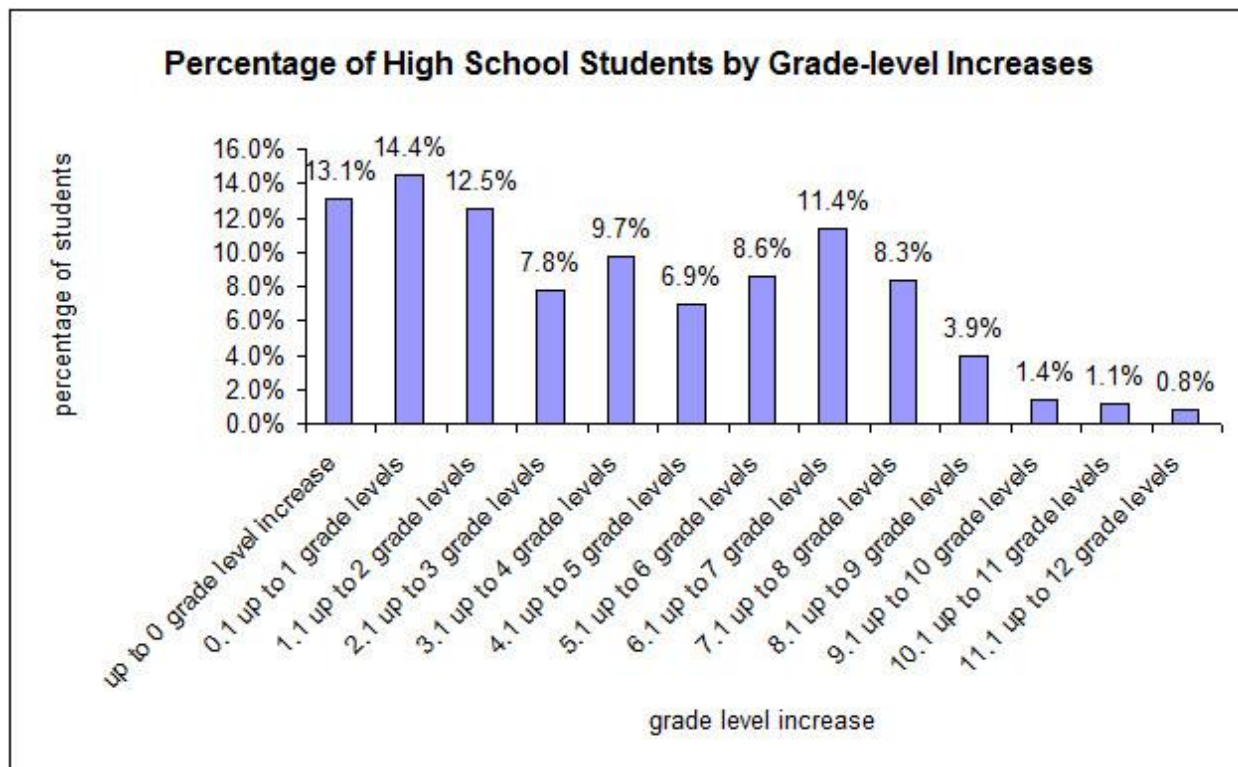
Scores used for analysis: This analysis includes all results for students with valid pretest and posttest results, as defined by receiving a minimum of 24 to a maximum of 32 hours of instruction, and a completed posttest with no rush flags on the assessment. Average pretest and posttest results were then calculated and compared.

See the initial graph in section B.2, which demonstrates the percentage of students who meet or exceed proficiency at both the pretest and posttest.

All students who participated in this tutoring component received up to 32 hours of instruction in literacy skills, namely oral language skills, phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Tutoring occurred outside the tutors' contracted duty hours.

The data source for this finding is the students' pretest and posttest results on the i-Ready Diagnostic Assessment of Reading by Curriculum Associates. Each student was administered the assessment at the onset and completion of the tutoring period, and growth represents the change from initial data to the exit data.

The following graph demonstrates the percentage of students per growth level for all high school students with valid scores throughout the project period.



See the third graph in section B.2, which demonstrates the pretest and posttest grade-level equivalencies across all grades for all students throughout the project period with valid scores.

Tutors were solicited primarily from teaching staff members at participating schools. All tutors received the following supports to assist them in faithfully implementing the instructional approach:

- pedagogy training at the onset of each semester, as well as an as-needed mid-semester follow-up training,
- a manual, training videos, and other support documentation with suggested effective instructional strategies for each reading component,
- monthly review with feedback on instructional practices as reported, and
- books and other materials to use during the tutoring sessions.

Worthy of note is that over each semester and the project period, the instructional documentation shows a steady improvement in the use of effective teaching strategies and alignment with the instructional approach. This is further documented by an analysis of results based on alignment: tutors who most closely conformed to the instructional approach uniformly showed the best results from their students.

An analysis of student growth rates relative to the instructional reports and session logs at the end of the fall 2015 semester revealed that strict compliance with the instructional model yielded the greatest achievement results. The fourth graph in section B.2 clearly demonstrates the

relative gains of strict compliance, thereby the efficacy of the instructional model. The greatest results (i.e., 1.53 grade-level increase) were achieved by students whose tutors provided weekly instruction in each of the six reading components, regardless of the grade level, compared to the results for students who tutors did not comply with this approach (0.68 grade level improvement).

B.5. Objective Five Findings

Objective: Annually a parent survey to determine the frequency with which they read to their children will be conducted. Comparisons will be made on an annual basis to determine change over time (Project Objective 5).

Data collection rates are as follows:

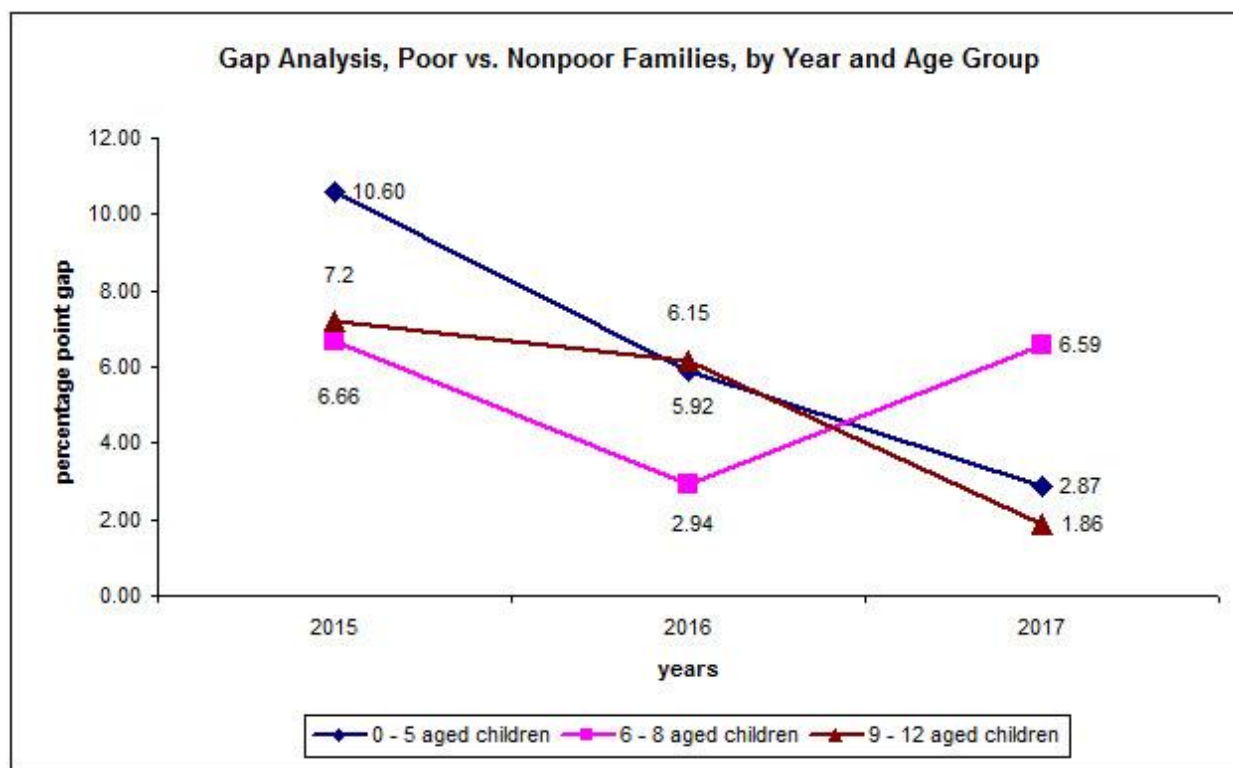
2015: 1,668 household responses (representing 4,269 children)

2016: 2,209 household responses (representing 5,585 children)

2017: 2,932 household responses (representing 7,604 children)

(These response rates provide a 99% confidence level, within 2 percentage point margin of error, that the findings represent the service population of 79,000 children as a whole.)

The percentage of parents who read to/with their children frequently has been reported as increasing since project inception by approximately 4 percentage points. Furthermore, data from the 2015, 2016, and 2017 parent surveys indicate that the gap between non-poor and poor household reading rates has generally decreased. (The one exception is the 2016 finding for children aged 6–8, which may be an outlier finding. Surveys in subsequent years should validate these values and provide a better description of reading rates for this sub-population.)



B.6. Objective Six Findings

Objective: By the end of the funding period, 65% of teachers will indicate improvements in their reading instruction as a result of professional development as evidenced by school- and classroom-based assessments.

The project analyzed data from multiple sources to respond to this objective and determine the efficacy of professional development opportunities. Data were collected from three discrete groups: teachers, via surveys; administrators, via surveys; and students, via their state assessment performance data.

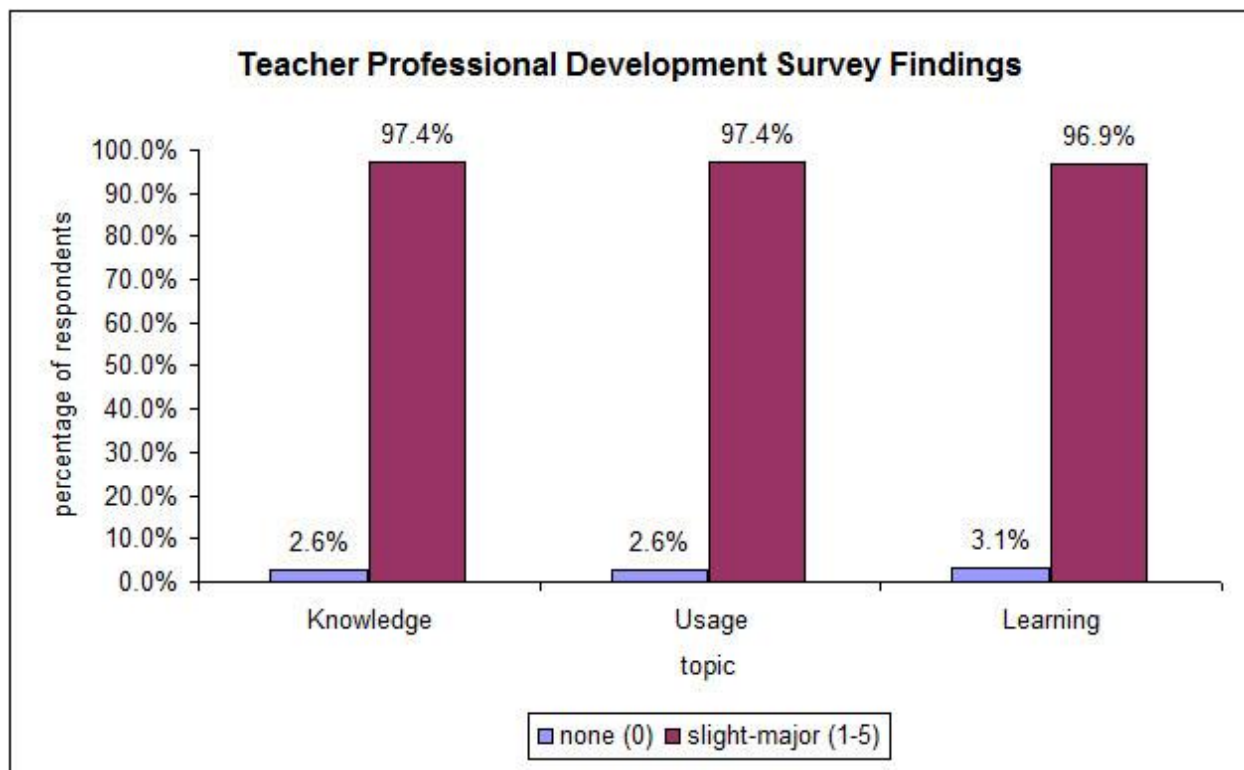
Teacher Survey Results

The project provided 232 professional development opportunities (non-tutor training) serving 52 districts across 4 states in the project service area. 3,844 participants participated in these opportunities. Participants report implementing the strategies introduced during the professional development events. Results of professional development evaluation forms indicate that **80% (3,075) of participating teachers reported that they believed that their instruction would improve as a result of the professional development provided.**

A follow-up survey of professional development attendees, conducted in fall 2017, yielded the following results:

- 97.4% indicated improved knowledge of the professional development content;
- 97.4% indicated that they had used the content and/or resources from the professional development session in their classroom; and
- 96.9% indicated that the student learning was positively impacted as a result of attending the professional development session.

These findings are illustrated in the graph below.

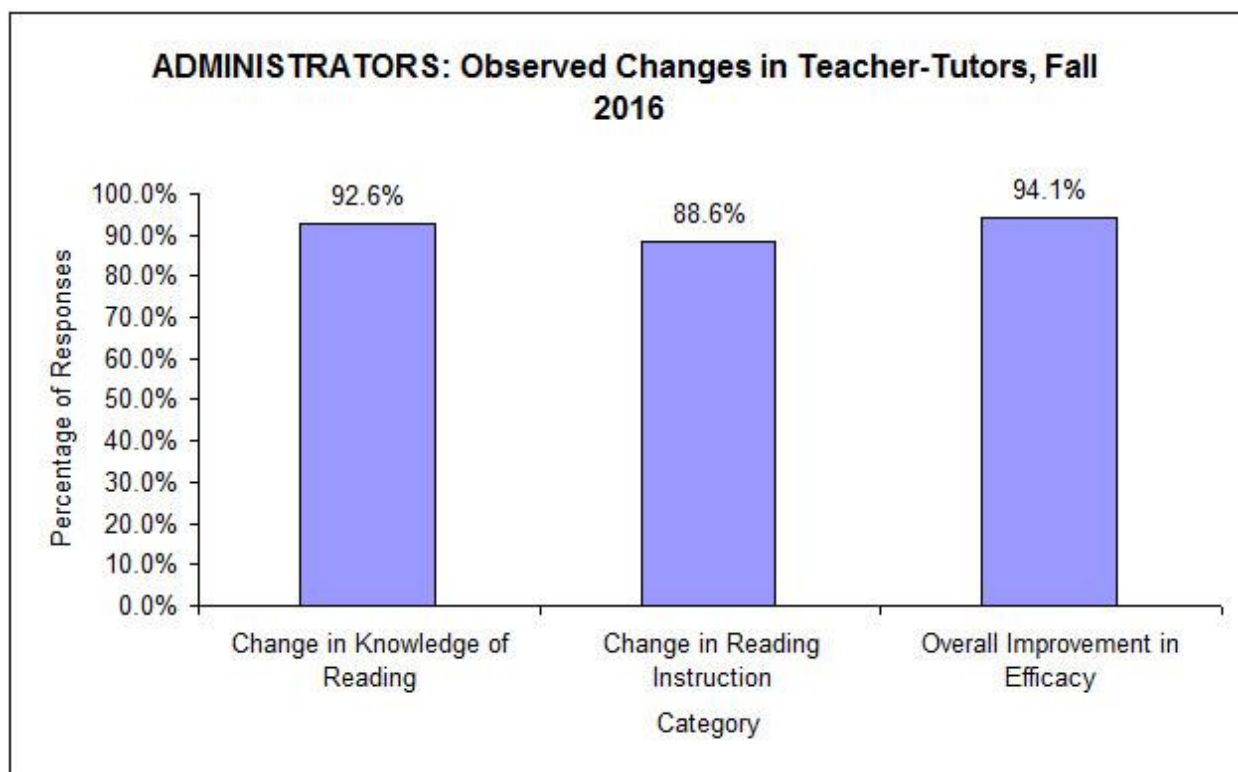


Furthermore, all tutors receive professional development in reading pedagogy to assist them with providing effective instruction to the students they tutor. Since the first semester of tutoring in spring 2015 inception, 2,320 tutors have received this training. Based on a survey of tutors conducted in August and September of 2016, **93.4% indicate that they have improved their classroom reading instruction as a result of serving as a tutor**; participating in required pedagogy and instruction training; and receiving monitoring, support, and resources.

Based on the two data sources, 85% of teachers (5,242 / 6,164) who participated in professional development indicate that their reading instruction improved as a result of the professional development. Thus, the analysis of these data indicates that the project **exceeded the target outcome by 20 percentage points**.

Administrator Survey Results

To corroborate results from the tutor survey, school administrators were surveyed regarding their observations of teachers who served as reading tutors through the project. 73 school administrators responded to the survey. As shown in the following graph, administrators **indicated improvement in teachers' knowledge of reading, reading instructional practices, and overall efficacy**.



Student State Assessment Achievement Analysis

Project staff analyzed state assessment data from four participating school districts (1 large district, 2 medium-sized districts, and 1 small rural district). Data were collected from the PARCC assessment for English Language Arts, which the state uses as the annual state assessment. The PARCC assessment provides a student's overall performance level on a scale of 1–5. Students were administered the assessment in the spring semester of the 2016–2017 school year.

The analysis focused on 3rd grade reading achievement for students in schools that participated in the tutoring component. Data were segmented into two comparison populations:

1. intervention population: students whose teachers served as a full-year tutor during the 2016–2017 school year, and
2. control population: students whose teachers did not serve as a tutor in the 2016 – 2017 school year.

The analysis included assessment results for 5,415 third-grade students. Assessment scores for students who received tutoring were not analyzed so that results would not be influenced by student participation in tutoring but rather by the teachers' experiences serving as a tutor.

Results indicate that students whose teachers served as full-year tutors outperformed their peers in non-tutor teacher classrooms by an average of 0.4 PARCC levels. The actual results varied by district, as follows:

- district 1: 0.65 level difference
- district 2: 0.67 level difference

- district 3: 0.34 level difference
- district 4: 0.51 level difference

The overall difference was disproportionately reduced by results from district 3, which was by far the largest district and comprised 76% of students under study.

This identified difference in results for the two populations of students suggests that a **teacher's experiences serving as a tutor through this project** (with associated training, support, monitoring, and resources, and opportunity to implement recommended strategies) **has a positive, significant affect on student achievement rates.**

Summary of Professional Development

Further, it is clear from the findings described above that professional development improvement **far exceeded the stated 65% target objective established for this project objective.**

C. EVALUATION OF COMPETITIVE PRIORITIES

The competitive priorities offer additional opportunities and insight into project success.

C.1. Priority One

Priority: Serve the needs of the lowest-performing schools

BCSCR has dramatically increased the number and selection of books available in low-income communities. Project staff has provided approximately 460,000 free books to community members through a wide-variety of channels, including community and school events and distribution centers in 289 high-traffic areas. All students in tutoring services received at least one additional book each semester. Furthermore, classroom teachers had access to classroom sets of books (with accompanying instructional unit guides aligned to state content standards) to increase students' access to, and study of, books in the school setting. Staff created 30 book sets comprising 68 different titles, totaling 19,680 books, for grades K–12.

Funding for and implementation of the BCSCR project contributed to the body of knowledge, practice, and research regarding improving children's reading abilities in rural, diverse, and low-socioeconomic communities.

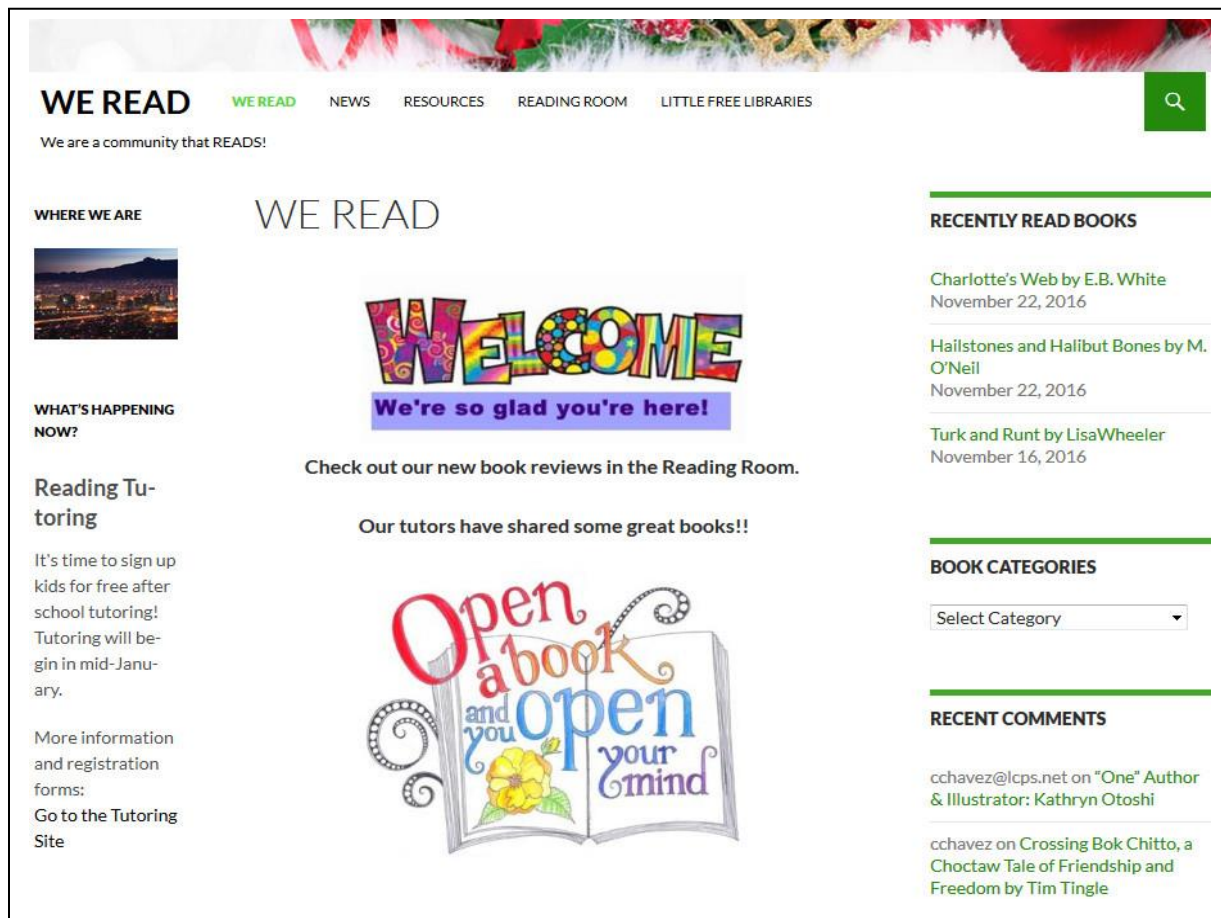
C.2. Priority Two

Priority: Innovative use of technology

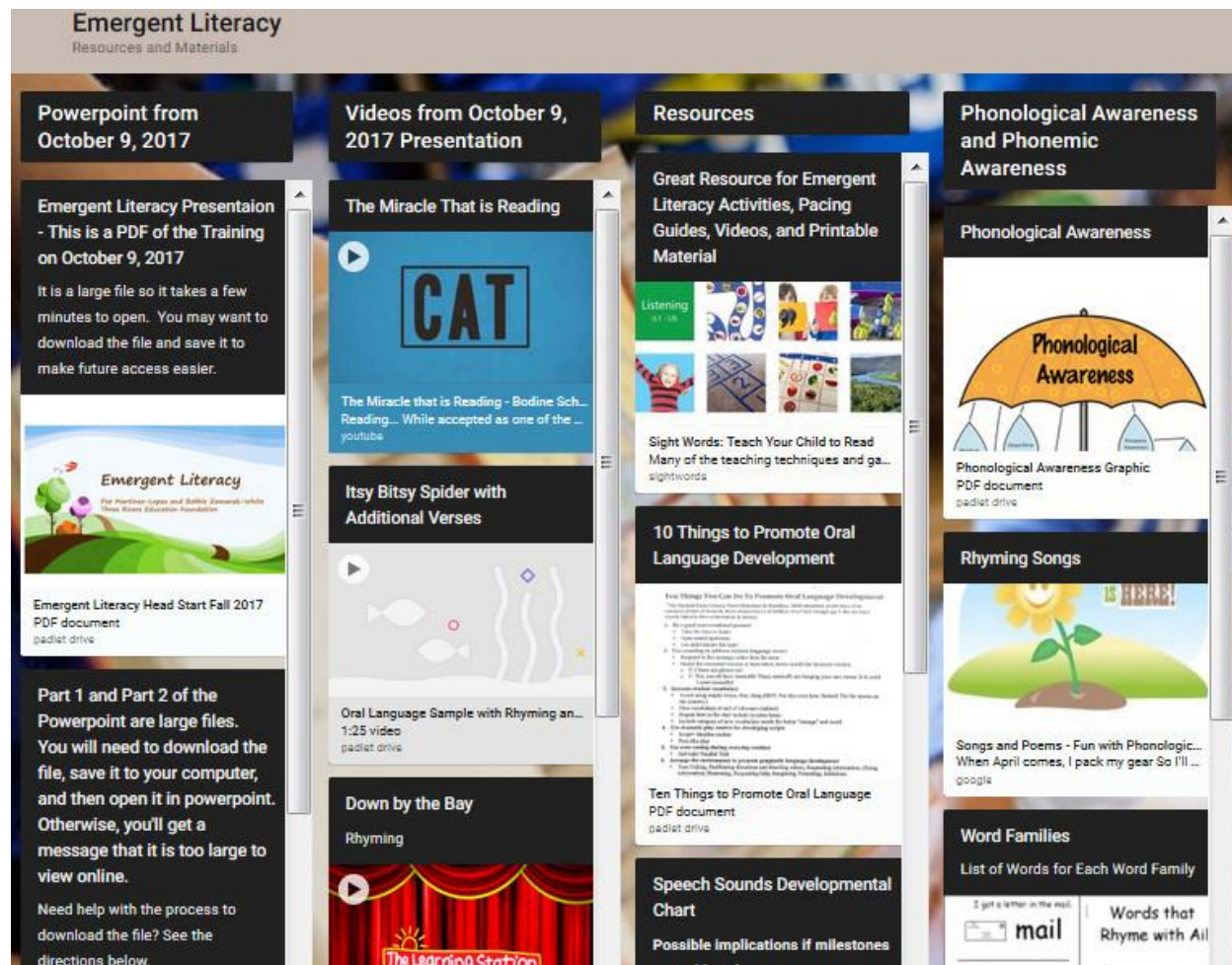
The project design includes a number of unique uses of technology, including the following.

- Project materials were disseminated in multiple forms including on-line and video formats. The multiple formats allow access from a wide variety of individuals and at a wide variety of times and locations. These same materials are also available to and have also been accessed by individuals not otherwise directly involved in the grant activities.

- Reading blogs were established for participation by virtually all impacted groups (students, tutors, coordinators, etc.). Each of the 15 regions has its own blog. These blogs allow in depth communication between participants on topics of mutual interest and concern and allow community members and students to share information about the books they are reading. This support group approach has proven to be highly successful and a great benefit to the project overall success. The following screenshot is one example of a regional blog, available at <http://suncity.3riversed.org>.



- Padlets have been created to share appropriate materials. (Padlets are online, cloud-based accessible tools for presenting information and resources to anyone with an Internet connection.) Padlets have been created to provide resources for the various book sets, as well as resources on instructional topics (e.g., early learning instruction). The articles, website, documents, videos, links, and other resources on the Padlets can be used by individuals, in group settings (training, etc.), and to address public bodies (families events, school boards meetings, etc.). This has proven to be an extremely efficient way to maintain a multitude of information in a quick and efficient format to share with great ease. The image below shows a portion of one example Padlet.



C.3. Priority Three

Priority: Improve early learning outcomes

The project included a specific tutoring / learning structure for 4-year-old children in PreK programs. See Section B.1 for more detail.

In addition, it became clear early in the project that birth–PreK literacy was an important aspect for preparing students for Kindergarten and beyond. In response, project staff built partnerships with supporting private and public agencies to address those needs. To that end, BCSCR has included specific components to address this population, including the following.

- More than 40,000 books for early learners distributed to parents, early learner educators, pediatric health providers, and other supporting groups
- 116 workshops for parents of children aged 0–5
- 15 professional development events for early childhood providers and teachers, with 350 educators attending

To increase the impact on early learners, BCSCR efforts were intentionally extended to birth through 5 issues and applications. To support successful literacy development in the service area, these efforts need to be continued and expanded.

C.4. Priority Four

Priority: Serve the needs of rural LEAs

Within the BCSCR service area, 96% of participating school districts and associated communities are considered rural. As such, all prior findings and listed project components are serving rural areas.

Anecdotal reports from school administrators indicate that in multiple cases, school administrators attribute improvements in school ratings to their school's participation in the BCSCR project. As evidence, one superintendent in a remote, rural district provided the following letter.

McNary School District

P.O. Box 598
McNary, Arizona 85930
(928) 334-2293

June 3, 2017

Dear Dr. Coy,

I wanted to take this opportunity to share some good news with you, regarding our McNary Elementary students who just completed 3rd grade!

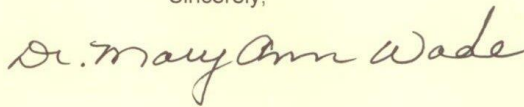
I know you are familiar with the Move on Reading legislation for the State of Arizona, in which 3rd graders **MUST** pass the Reading portion of the AzMerit standardized test, in order to move on to 4th grade. While we only had one class of (18) third grade students at McNary during the 2016/17 school year, there were several boys in the class who had varying degrees of behavior problems, and whose reading skills were below grade level. There was concern among several of our teaching staff, that it would be a challenge to prepare all of the 3rd graders for the standardized test to be administered in April 2017.

As a strategy, we targeted several of our 3rd graders for participation in the BCSCR after school reading tutoring program for McNary School, during both the first and second semesters. I am very happy to report that ALL of the students tested at a level of proficiency enabling them to be promoted at the end of the school year!

While the students received some support outside of the classroom through bi-weekly library classes, and small group reading instruction during the school day, I can't help but think that the additional tutoring through the BCSCR after school program may have made the difference for this group of at-risk children.

Thank you again for all of the work you have done with the Three Rivers Foundation to increase student literacy. Your efforts are much appreciated by the students, parents and staff of the McNary Elementary School community!

Sincerely,



Dr. Mary Ann Wade
Superintendent
McNary Elementary School/District

Fax (928) 334-2336

Finally, the impacts in rural districts are especially profound as many remote districts do not have equal access to professional development and additional resources to the same degree as the non-rural districts. Being high-need, high-poverty districts, the needs are even greater than would be evidenced in less needy districts.

D. STAKEHOLDER RESPONSE

Project staff conducted a survey of stakeholders for their impressions of BCSCR. Each regional coordinator interviewed parents, administrators, tutors, other teachers, and representatives of community organizations. Coordinators also provided their perspectives on the project implementation and impact on the communities they serve. Project staff collected and transcribed 362 interviews for analysis. Results were collected and analyzed to identify themes per stakeholder group.

Identified themes include the following, by stakeholder group.

Stakeholder	Observed benefits	Anticipated benefits
Tutor	increased student confidence and willingness for a tutored-student to put her- or himself in a position to learn and take associated risks	providing the opportunity for increased willingness to explore and consider alternatives as a means to greater learning potential in the years ahead
Non-tutoring teacher	increased willingness by the tutored-students to participate and stay on task with their classmates during classroom activities	increased learning potential and thus associated life opportunities
Administrator	improvement in test scores	overall school improvement
Parent	increased interest in school	fewer school related behavioral issues

Coordinators, ranked impacts: The impacts can be grouped as follows: direct project impacts: tutoring, professional development, book distribution longer range impacts: community awareness and participation (Little Free Libraries, community support for reading, etc.)

E. BROAD IMPLICATIONS

There is no question that this has been a very ambitious project, but even so it has been a highly successful project. It is striking, the differences between these 81 individual school districts. Even though they are all in the same southwest region, but district size ranges from less than 50 students to nearly 25,000 students. Individual communities served range in population from less than 500 to more than 100,000 people. Many of these communities have a strong single cultural/ethnic base, a single faith base, a sole employment (industrial) base, and/or are little more than a truck stop along an interstate highway or major route surrounded by housing units with a school. A few have great diversity of faith, culture, and economic opportunity and have a variety of unique community assets and amenities. Some of the communities have suffered greatly from the economic downturn of the last decade, while others were minimally affected by these larger national economic trends. It is against this background that the following impacts

were seen:

- BCSCR has positively impacted the community ethos of every community it has served. There is a plethora of evidence to that effect as can be examined in the files at the Three Rivers Education Foundation offices and from the Three Rivers websites. Letters and photos are compelling evidence of the increased awareness and importance of literacy in these communities. This change in community ethos was accomplished in large part by the introduction of Little Free Libraries, community events, and the involvement of so many different community members in the varying aspects of this grant. In some communities local service clubs have taken on the responsibility for stocking and maintaining the Little Free Libraries. This is an especially positive development as it indicates that the Little Free Libraries are now regarded as an important community resource. Another example of the improved community ethos is the anecdote that the changeable message sign outside a small community café in Heber, Arizona, was used to not just promote menu specials, but also to promote the upcoming Astronomy Night event at the local high school. That event included a community book give-away where well over 200 astronomy-related books were distributed to those attending. Another interesting point is that book distribution has also become a valued part of Trunk-or-Treat activities and Clothe-a-Child events, two additional events where books are clearly not the primary purpose. A final point is the increasing impact seen by parents of participating students. Through creative programming (Camp Read S'more, Reading Under the Stars, etc.) students and their families have participated in group events where the entire family is engaged in literacy learning (games, etc.) and reading. This increased awareness has impacted the parents' views on literacy and the role that the parent can play in assisting the student's literacy learning. The net result of all these impacts is an improved community ethos with regard to literacy and learning.
- There has been a clear change in teacher perspectives as a result of the various grant activities. Evidence cited above is compelling that the teachers and their administrators both feel that instruction has improved both as a result of the direct involvement of teachers as tutors, and professional development provided by the grant. There is an indirect result from non-participating teachers, as they have noted improved classroom behavior and classroom participation by tutored-students in their classes. Ultimately these improvements should translate themselves into improved achievement for all the students, classes, schools, districts, and communities.
- Through this grant, the Three Rivers Education Foundation has established itself as a regional leader and resource for K-12 reading improvement and literacy. The documents and videos on-line are available to everyone, well beyond the population of those actually participating directly in the grant-funded activities. The instructional (tutoring) program is grounded in the 1999 National Reading Panel's findings, but was then expanded through analysis of other initiatives to yield an even more appropriate and highly effective instructional design. One point to illustrate the viability of this design is the question of including phonemic awareness and phonics above the primary grade levels. Coursework in many teacher education preparation programs and state and district curriculum have limited these two components of reading instruction to the earliest grades and then have directed that teachers concentrate on fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension at the higher grade levels. The grant's instructional design requires

including phonemic awareness and phonics (and the other four components) at all grade levels every two hours of instruction. This is a unique approach but the results speak for themselves. Because Three Rivers Education Foundation was willing to rethink the accepted norms of literacy instruction, and because there has been a wealth of information made available to any practitioner, Three Rivers has now become the go-to source for proven methodology and application in literacy learning in our region.

- The above referenced resources have proven to be great assets both for direct application but also for renewal for teachers and administrators who years into their careers need to reexamine their educational assumptions and efforts. All too often people in education get stuck in a rut of repeating the same methods and using the same materials they have used in the past. However, there is a constant need for renewal and reassessment of our assumptions about learning and learners. The student population is not a static group, but is constantly changing. Teacher renewal was addressed in part in the paragraph above, but there are other aspects. One is preparation of new materials and approaches. The classroom sets are directly aimed at that issue. Each classroom set includes a curriculum guide with a wide range of activities designed to comply with applicable state standards. These resources give the teacher the opportunity to see what else can be done to reach the students. The classroom sets have proven as effective models for the teachers to improve their own materials and enrich their own methods. There is also the question of group size. Normal classroom activities clearly work for some students, but the smaller group size (3 to 4 students per group) offers another approach and clearly works well for both teachers and their students. This is evidenced from the informal data collected when tutors were asked why the Three Rivers approach actually works. Routinely tutors cited smaller group size as a aspect of the instructional design leading to the success of the project. It is clear that some students' needs are met within the larger self-contained classroom environment, but small group tutoring, where a struggling student cannot remain anonymous but rather is an active group participant, coupled with high-interest materials, allows for more students to be reached and thereby succeed.
- Finally there is the issue of forging a stronger home to school connection. Education is not something that occurs only between the school bells, but is rather a 24/7 opportunity for all individuals who come in contact with the student. A portion of the Parent Reporting Form, as a part of the monthly reporting of the tutoring effort, is the notation "What you can do to help your child read better." The intent is to engage the home in assisting the child's literacy development. Many parents do not have a solid literacy background, do not feel comfortable aiding in literacy development, and thus do not recognize the opportunities available to them to engage their child in on-going literacy development. By tutors overtly recommending actions to assist with this process the BCSCR design is exponentially increasing the opportunity for the success of each student. In addition by engaging the parents, the message to the child reaffirms the importance of learning and literacy in the home. Finally there are a multitude of parent and community activities that were included in the grant to further engage the families in the child's literacy achievement. Many of these activities are highly creative interactive efforts where the parent(s) and child engage together in a process that can be replicated anytime.

E.1. Project Continuation

There is no question that BCSCR has been highly successful and thus is worthy of project continuation. To put it simply, there are no other opportunities for these types of services available to high-need, high-poverty districts served through the *IAL* grant. As a result of their poverty and rural location, the resources available to the districts have yielded unmet needs far beyond those encountered by more affluent districts.

The results of the BCSCR grant are far greater than ever envisioned while the project was being designed and clearly they far exceed the reasonable amount of benefits one could expect from typical (traditional) school programming. This grant clearly offers learning alternatives for students who have not been well served or who have not been successfully reached through the traditional classroom context. The literature equating successful literacy learning with positive life outcomes overwhelmingly supports the need for continuation of this project.

Finally there is no other coordinating organization available for a project of this scope and scale in this region. The scope and scale were very real assets as the Coordinators met on a semi-annual basis to interact, discuss, and share their experience of best practices. This sharing led to an enrichment of the offerings and opportunities throughout the grant regions. And, most remarkably, the success of this effort was realized with a minimum expenditure of overhead and indirect costs. The resources of the grant were directed to the students, classrooms, districts and communities, and not consumed by a bloated administrative structure. Clearly this has been a very lean administratively-directed effort which has achieved truly remarkable results.

E.2. Contribution to the Field

The responses of the Tutors and Administrators leave no doubt that on a local level this grant has contributed greatly to the field of literacy and its practices in those same districts. It is clear from the evidence that strict adherence to the 6 reading components yields profound results. There is clear evidence that this grant has incorporated the very best practices available and the benefits of implementing the recommendations from 1999 National Reading Panel are in fact profound.

This grant has numerous examples of evidence of the transference of tutoring experience to the classroom. This transference and the professional development potential have profound importance especially during the current crisis of a national teacher shortage. Clearly, at this time, there is a need for an effective model for developing less-prepared incoming teachers in order that their students can succeed in our increasingly complex world. To offer a very clear, comprehensible instructional design, which can and has been adopted and practiced with great success by any number of instructors, is exactly the kind of instructional design as more of our teachers lack the benefit of a well-designed comprehensive teacher education program.

The home reading surveys assist in understanding family reading behaviors. All too often programs are designed based on the assumptions of the traditional nuclear family where there is usually an adult in the home. Regrettably that model no longer exists as the primary or even predominant model. Increasingly there is great variability in the home environments and often a corresponding lack of time dedicated to support learning needs for the children. Helping those in the home recognize the constant opportunities for engaging children in literacy learning activities, far beyond actually sitting down and reading, can help satisfy the needs that are otherwise unmet.

In the introductory section above, the unique nature of each district was described. Some

districts may be as small as a single K-8 school with only a few teachers and combined grade-level classes. Others may have as few as 3 grades (for example K-2) and multiple classes at each grade. Providing services when the market is this diverse, not even considering other sociological factors requires individual project modifications and tailoring. There clearly is no one size fits all solution for these 81 districts or even for each school in a given multi-school district. The BCSCR grant design allows for a flexible district-by-district approach tailored to the individual needs of all participating districts, schools, and students.

For the students to do better than current and historic achievement data show, the need to invest in a substantial, multi-pronged, and flexible effort is critical.

E.3. National Relevancy

This model is highly transferable and is also very much in need in countless regions around the country. Further it appears that the approach is equally relevant for literacy learning well beyond K-12. The 6 reading components work equally well at the Pre-K level as they do at the 12th grade level. There is little doubt that they would be equally viable for literacy and reading learning for adults beyond the 12th grade and outside the structured school context.

To implement this program requires a robust organizational structure with distributed leadership. This structure allows for flexibility to provide targeted, tailored services that are applicable in a wide variety of settings. Such an organizational structure could be problematic, but the BCSCR leadership has succeeded in creating and implementing a lean leadership structure that places flexibility and direct responsiveness in the hands of the 16 Regional Coordinators. The Regional Coordinators know their regions and the sociological forces at evident in their service areas. Only then can they insure that the solutions put in place are appropriately tailored to the individual districts and schools (communities) being served.

Reading instruction remains a problem nationally. A portion of the problem is teacher knowledge of successful reading instruction. Teaching reading as a scheduled activity inside a self-contained classroom during the school day is not working for all students. The project has demonstrated that through the appropriate resourcing (including professional development and materials) for the teachers, with enhanced parent and community involvement and support, and allowing for a variety of instructional approaches (from whole class to small group instruction with high-interest materials), the problem can be successfully addressed.

E.4. Implications and Potential for Replications or Expansion

These practices are clearly replicable and thus could be expandable to other regions of the country. But implementation cannot be piecemeal. All the components represent the influences that affect student literacy and reading behavior. To achieve fidelity of the results, this literacy approach must be implemented in a consistent manner and all the components need to be incorporated. Data collected by the project staff indicate that strict conformance to the instructional model has achieved profound results. It is critical to the success of this approach that all aspects of the model are imbedded in the design and implementation of instruction and literacy initiatives.

F. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is truly gratifying to see a collaborative data based literacy project that truly works in such diverse and unique environments. The breadth of the successes, as cited in the sections above, is truly remarkable. This project succeeds because it engages the community, parents, the school, teachers, and students to address the very pressing and serious needs of the students. The results cannot be duplicated without a commitment to and involvement by all of these parties (community, home, and school).

There is no question that this effort needs to be maintained and expanded into other regions and to additional age groups. Based on the remarkable results from the Pre-K through 12th grade programs, it should be transferable to GED and adult education programs utilizing the same instructional approach.

F.1. Overall Conclusions Regarding Evaluation Findings

As has been repeated above, this was a highly ambitious but notably highly successful grant. It is clear that it works as an approach and also in practice in a wide variety of settings and locations as evidenced by the success in the 81 widely different districts involved. The approach is collaborative, distributed, and relies on the involvement of multiple groups in the student's life. Through this distributed collaborative approach the results are actually greater than the sum of the individual parts. The BCSCR grant design is clearly a model for literacy education initiatives in wider context. The "evidence" page of the BCSCR website, as prepared by the staff, includes the quotation: *"This has to be one of the most successful investments of educational federal funds ever."* —Dr. Ruth Beeker, Professor Emeritus, University of Arizona, College of Education. (Both quantitative and qualitative evidence of project success appears to support this statement.)

F.2. Importance to Communities Served

The short term importance is clearly documented. All students involved have seen a significant increase in their achievement rates. Far beyond what they have experienced in the past through more traditional learning approaches. There is data and anecdotal evidence there has been school improvement as a result of this grant's many and varied activities in support of the schools and communities in the service area.

The longer term importance can only be assumed, but would seem to indicate a much higher achievement rate for the students going forward, thus; a much greater ultimate life potential. This potential will ultimately translate itself into better lives, improved schools and districts, and stronger communities.

F.3. Recommendations and Commendations

From my formative and summative analysis and observation of the implementation of the BCSCR *IAL* literacy initiative, serving in the capacity of the external evaluator, it is my recommendation that this grant be extended, replicated into other regions, and be used as a state-of-the-art model for literacy learning throughout the country.

It is evident that to implement this approach requires an efficient administrative structure, distributed delivery of services and fidelity to the project design and services should yield similar

results in regions where the initiative is implemented.

I believe the leadership of the Three Rivers Education Foundation staff should be commended for the original grant design. The unique and highly successful literacy model (design) used as its foundation the recommendations and results from the 1999 National Reading Panel and then augmented those findings, to include 1) oral language development, 2) an instructional model based on small group size, 3) repetitive use of the 6 reading components during tutoring, 5) professional development in support of the literacy approach for teachers, administrators and parents, 4) providing high-interest and appropriate reading materials for classrooms, and 5) book distribution to schools and communities. The implementation of this unique, comprehensive and thoughtful design has proven to be highly successful.

To achieve success the leadership also recognized the need to develop an implementation plan that included a wide variety of support structures (community, home, school); thereby increasing the success of the grant far beyond the efforts of the traditional classroom. Additionally, these results were achieved by the leadership of a lean administrative structure, concentrating the resources in the regions to be served from where they were directed to the districts and individual schools within those regional service areas. The flexibility of the project design allowed for regional tailoring of the approach based on school and community needs. Adapting and adjusting the design at the regional level increased the success of the grant, far beyond what any one-size fits all model could have been able to achieve while still continuing with fidelity to the project components and *IAL* (GPRA) measures.

It is clear that the leadership of the Three Rivers Education Foundation has developed a highly effective instructional model and supporting resources for addressing this very important regional and national need for school and community literacy improvement. They should be commended for the design and implementation of this very important project. The design should be seen as a model for future projects to address literacy learning.

Respectfully Submitted, December 15, 2017

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