



Iowa's Reading First Program

Overview and Impact

Every
Child
Reads



K-12

EXCELLENCE
IN TEACHING
AND LEARNING



Introduction

“The most important measures of ‘grade level’ proficiency in reading are those that assess a student’s ability to comprehend the meaning of text.”

Dr. Joseph Torgesen

Reading First is a national effort to support states in helping all children become proficient readers. It is designed to accelerate the reading achievement of students in kindergarten through third grade, and in particular, students in low performing/high poverty schools. The goal of Reading First is to have all students reading at grade level by the end of third grade. Within this goal, Reading First strives to increase the percentage of students reading “at grade level” each year, at each grade level, from kindergarten through third grade as well as to decrease the percentage of students with serious reading difficulties each year at each grade level.

Reading First is designed to:

- establish research-based reading programs;
- provide professional development and other support;
- select or administer screening, diagnostic, and classroom based instructional reading assessments;
- select or develop effective instructional materials;
- strengthen coordination among schools, early literacy programs and family literacy programs.

Reading First funds are used by schools throughout Iowa to obtain additional personnel, instructional materials, books, assessment materials, as well as time and materials for professional development. To receive funding, schools qualifying for Reading First funds must implement professional development, focus on the five core components of reading, and implement research-based reading instruction. They must also assess student performance to determine where additional focus is needed and ensure performance benchmarks are being met. All schools are accountable for their use of the funding, and must file reports to the Iowa Department of Education showing their improvement in order to continue to receive funds.



Background

Reading First is much larger than previous efforts—spending \$900 million nationally. It is also much more focused and concentrates on just one main venue, reading, instead of several. Further, Reading First provides unprecedented funding and support for State Education Agency (SEA) level activities, with twenty percent of the total funding going to fund SEA-level activities. While not all Iowa schools receive Reading First funding, Reading First is responsible for helping all schools in Iowa take steps towards improving students' reading abilities.

Iowa received notification of approval from the U.S. Department of Education on October 11, 2002 of its initial Reading First grant. The federal government allocated 5.7 million dollars for the first year, with approximately 37.7 million dollars to be spent over the six-year grant period.

Iowa has had two rounds of applications for Reading First funds. In the first round (2002), districts and schools needed to have more than 40% of fourth graders performing below the 40th percentile on the reading comprehension sub-test of the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS) to qualify for Reading First funds.

In the second round (2005), districts and schools needed to have more than 25% of fourth graders performing below the 40th percentile on the reading comprehension sub-test of the ITBS to qualify. In addition, the following requirements had to be met:

- Designation as an empowerment zone
- Identification as a Title I school in need of improvement and/or
- Have 25% or more of their students identified for free and reduced lunch



Early success in reading prevents the need for later remediation.

- Reading First Support Web site

Participation

In 2002, 31 Iowa districts were determined to be eligible for Reading First Funds and 30 districts submitted a sub-grant for Reading First funds. On June 30, 2003, 30 districts received approval for Reading First funds for a three-year period.

In 2006, additional districts were approved to receive Reading First funds, bringing the total number of districts receiving funds to 49, providing support to 100 school buildings to improve reading achievement.

Of the 22,127 Iowa students the Reading First program is serving,

- 61% of the students are economically disadvantaged;
- 14% of the students are English Language Learners;
- 36% of the students are from minorities;
- 12% of the students are receiving special education services.

Professional Development

In Iowa, Reading First utilizes the professional development materials created as part of the statewide K–12 literacy effort: Every Child Reads (ECR). ECR provides the resources for districts to develop and refine a professional development strategy for large-scale, building-based structured school improvement. It also provides research-based content and the facilitation needed to improve instruction in order to accelerate the achievement of all

students. Two major goals of ECR are to

- build a learning community that is engaged in studying literacy and promotes growth in literacy;
- improve student achievement in literacy.

The content of the Every Child Reads: Excellence in Teaching and Learning professional development materials includes:

- the study and use of organizational action research;
- the study and implementation of school improvement directed at student achievement;
- the study of literacy and literacy acquisition.

The materials are designed to provide research-based content and facilitation needed for improving instruction in order to accelerate the achievement of all students in reading. In addition, the materials are designed to foster successful implementation of research-based reading initiatives, strategies, and models.

Teachers attend professional development sessions during which



a facilitator guides the group in tasks designed to help them learn and implement new strategies and teaching models. Support materials include video demonstrations, planning guides, implementation logs, data collection forms, scientifically based reading research articles, and other support materials.

Much of the support and professional development for Reading First is provided by the Statewide Reading Team (SWRT), which consists of Iowa Department of Education consultants, consultants from the Iowa Area Education Agencies (AEAs), elementary school principals, as well as central office staff such as curriculum directors and literacy strategists. The primary purpose of the Elementary Statewide Reading Team, a part of the SWRT, is to support schools in accelerating reading achievement at the elementary level, including supporting effective implementation of Iowa's Reading First plan. To provide this assistance, SWRT studies the implementation of Reading First at individual buildings, as well as at the district, regional, and state level; the impact on student performance; and the research base related to instructional practices that support growth in reading achievement.

In Iowa's effort to improve reading achievement, ten support components are considered essential. These components are based on a body of research that describes successful school improvement theory and practices. The following support components provide a structure to guide the work of schools and districts with a focus on student and staff learning in an academic curriculum:

- Focus on accelerating student achievement
- Focus on instruction
- Continuous assessment of student performance and implementation
- Continuous professional development
- Sustained effort
- Technical assistance
- All instructional staff involved
- Willingness to lead
- Policy support
- Time

A Focus on the Five Core Components of Reading

Scientifically based reading research has identified five essential components of reading. Iowa uses Reading First funds to provide instruction for these five components:

- Phonemic awareness
- Explicit and systematic phonics
- Fluency
- Vocabulary
- Comprehension

Phonemic awareness is the ability to hear, identify, and manipulate individual sounds—phonemes—in spoken words. Scientifically based research on phonemic awareness has found that phonemic awareness *can* be taught and learned. Phonemic awareness is important because learning it improves children's word reading, comprehension, and spelling.

Scientifically based reading research is research that applies rigorous, systematic and objective procedures to obtain valid knowledge relevant to reading development, reading instruction, and reading difficulties.

- Guidance for the Reading First Program

Phonemic awareness improves children's word reading and reading comprehension, in addition to helping them learn to spell.

Phonics instruction improves children's word recognition, spelling, and reading comprehension.

Fluency instruction improves students' ability to recognize words automatically as they read and to read aloud effortlessly and with expression.

Vocabulary instruction improves students' ability to understand what they are reading.

Comprehension is the reason for reading. Comprehension can be taught by teaching comprehension strategies.

Students at the kindergarten and first grade level engage in **phonics instruction** based on assessment that can help individual students to learn the relationships between the letters of written language and the sounds of spoken language. This leads to an understanding of the alphabetic principle: the systematic and predictable relationships between written letters and spoken sounds. Critics argue that English spellings are too irregular for phonics instruction to really help students learn to read words, but scientifically based research has found that systematic and explicit phonics instruction is more effective than non-systematic or no phonics instruction in contributing to childrens' growth in reading.

Fluency is the ability to read a text accurately and quickly. Fluency is important because it provides a bridge between word recognition and comprehension. Fluency develops over time and through substantial practice. Researchers have found that two approaches to fluency instruction positively affect reading fluency and overall reading achievement. These two approaches are modeling fluent reading and repeated and monitored oral reading.

Vocabulary refers to the words that are needed to communicate effectively. Readers must know what most of the words mean before they can understand what they are reading. Children learn the meanings of most words indirectly through everyday experiences with oral and written language. Scientifically based research on vocabulary instruction shows that most vocabulary is learned indirectly through everyday experiences with oral and written language, but some vocabulary can and must be taught directly.

Comprehension is the reason for reading. Good readers are purposeful and actively engaged. Comprehension can be improved by instruction that helps readers use specific comprehension strategies. Comprehension strategies are conscious plans that good readers use to make sense of text. Students are explicitly taught the use of effective strategies in Reading First classrooms. Scientifically based research on text comprehension has found that it can be improved by instruction that helps readers use specific comprehension strategies.

Impact on Student Performance

Reading First continues to impact requirements and expectations of Iowa's statewide effort to improve reading instruction and raise student achievement. In 2007, the state's fourth grade reading achievement scores improved for the fifth consecutive year. In addition, progress continues to be made in closing the achievement gap among all student groups at the fourth grade level.

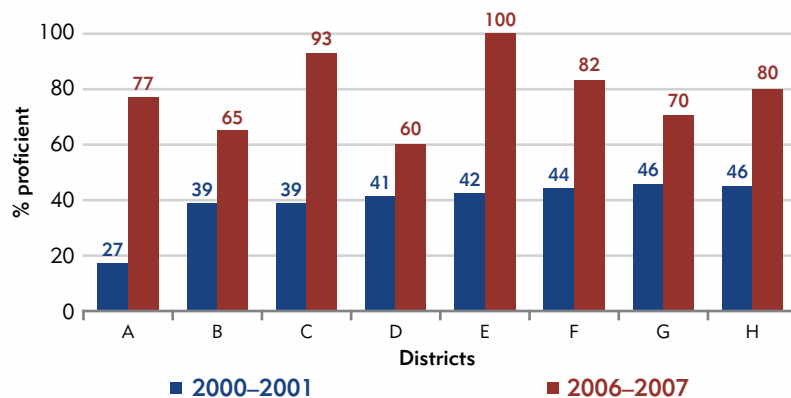
In respect to the goals set for Reading First, the percentage of students proficient in every reading component at every grade level has increased. The percent of students identified as needing substantial intervention in reading is decreasing across all reading components at every grade level as well. Reading First schools have made progress in closing the achievement gap on the majority of reading assessments.

The following graphs compare the percent of Iowa's fourth graders proficient in reading comprehension from the 2000-2001 to the 2006-2007 school year, as measured by the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS).

Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS)

Reading Comprehension

4th Grade: Districts A-H

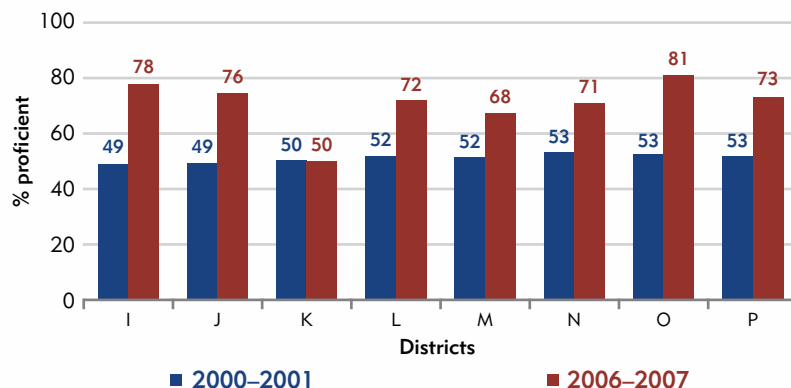


Research shows that children who read well in the early grades are far more successful in later years. Young, capable readers can take greater advantage of school opportunities, and develop invaluable confidence in their own abilities. Plus, reading success leads directly to success in other subjects such as social studies, math, and science. Reading is undeniably the foundation for success in society.

- U.S. Department of Education Web site

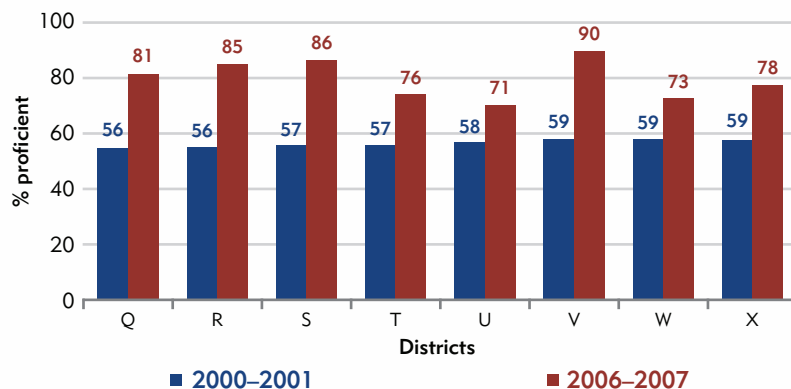
Reading Comprehension

4th Grade: Districts I-P



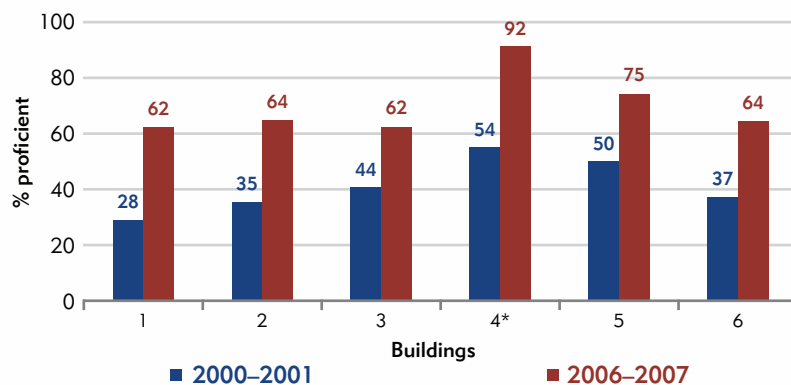
Reading Comprehension

4th Grade: Districts U-X



Reading Comprehension

4th Grade: Districts AA



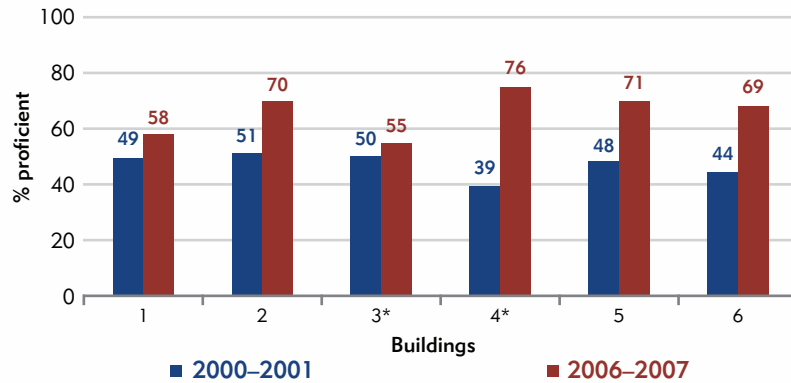
*05-06 data. School completed after 05-06

As a direct result of Reading First grants, more than 100,000 teachers across the country from kindergarten through grade 3 have been trained to implement high-quality, scientifically based reading programs.

- U.S. Department of Education Web site

Reading Comprehension

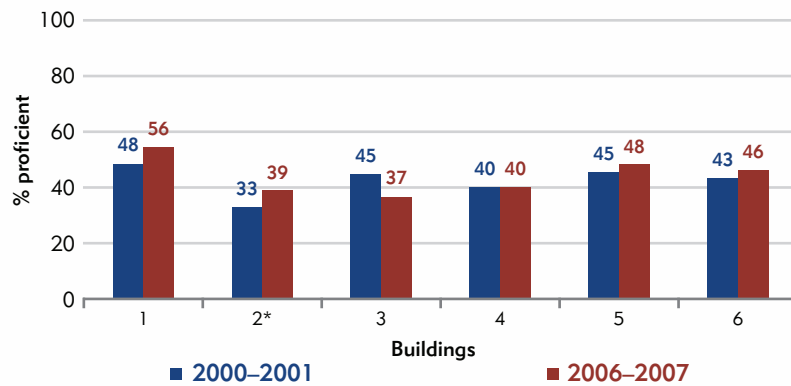
4th Grade: Districts BB



*05-06 data. School completed after 05-06

Reading Comprehension

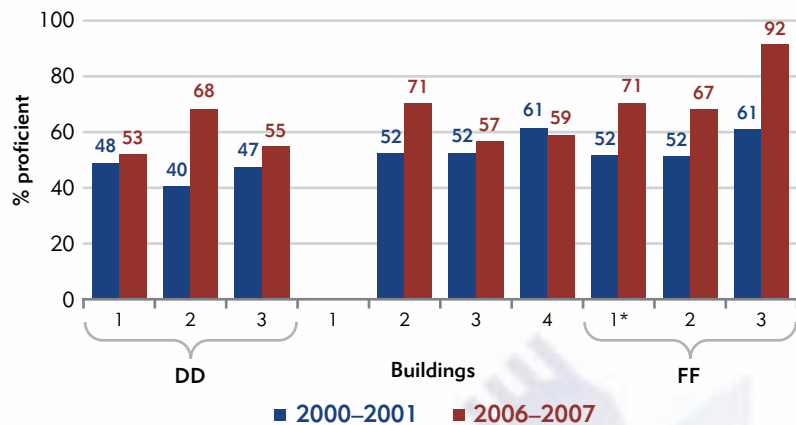
4th Grade: Districts CC



*05-06 data. School completed after 05-06

Reading Comprehension

4th Grade: Districts DD-FF



*05-06 data. School completed after 05-06

"We have developed a comprehensive reading program in grades K-4 where teachers speak a common language about instruction and meeting the needs of all learners."

Michelle Huntress
Reading Strategist, SLCS

Of the schools that have participated in Reading First since 2003, 87% of the buildings have increased the percent of fourth graders proficient in reading comprehension on the Iowa Tests of Basic



Skills. Fifty-four percent of those Reading First buildings have increased the percent of fourth graders proficient in reading comprehension on the ITBS by 20 percentage points or more. In addition, none of the currently existing school buildings that have participated in Reading First for the last four years were on Iowa's 2007-08 Title I Schools in Need of Assistance List.

Iowa's Reading First Program helps schools and teachers produce successful readers by focusing on high quality, comprehensive K-3 classroom reading instruction, basing instructional decisions on what works, and by putting the research base about reading instruction into the hands of teachers.

Reading First has been a powerful vehicle of reform for our elementary schools. We now work as a community of learners who live in an active research world every day. Our teachers know how to assess and analyze data to determine the instructional needs of students. They also know how to select powerful research-based strategies to use explicitly with struggling readers to move them toward proficiency. We have developed a comprehensive reading program in grades K-3 where teachers speak a common language about instruction and meeting the needs of all learners.

Michelle Huntress, Reading Strategist,
Storm Lake Community School District

Reading must come first, and focused, federal initiatives will provide effective and meaningful support to states and districts in their crucial efforts to make all children successful, fluent readers by the end of third grade.

- U.S. Department of Education Web site

Assessment

Reading First strives for early intervention for children who are struggling in learning to read by including screening and diagnostic assessment for identifying and diagnosing individual student instructional needs. Results of assessment and diagnosis help the teacher determine which instructional objectives to teach (or re-teach), what methods and strategies to use, and what

materials are appropriate. To monitor students' progress, teachers perform frequent, ongoing classroom-based assessments. The systematic and on-going assessment plan consists of the following:

- Screening reading assessments
- Diagnostic reading assessments
- Classroom-based instructional reading assessments.

Additionally, while receiving Reading First funding, schools *must* record performance benchmarks, which are determined at a building level, to establish if there is a statistically significant increase in the proportion of students attaining proficiency. This information is used to determine funding status, and to be studied in conjunction with implementation data.

State Evaluation Assessment Instruments include the following:

- Phonological Awareness Test (PAT)
- Basic Reading Inventory (BRI)
- Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS)

Results

The goal of Reading First is to have all students reading at grade level by the end of third grade. Broken down, this goal has two components: increasing student comprehension, and decreasing the number of students needing substantial intervention.

The following graphs show the increases in proficiency in Reading First schools using the Phonological Awareness Test (PAT), Basic Reading Inventory (BRI), and the ITBS. The PAT measures blending, segmentation, and decoding. The BRI measures comprehension and fluency. The ITBS measures vocabulary and comprehension. Additional graphs show the percentage of students needing substantial intervention (NSI) for each assessment after Reading First was implemented.

Approximately 40% of students across the nation cannot read at a basic level and almost 70% of low-income fourth grade students cannot read at a basic level.

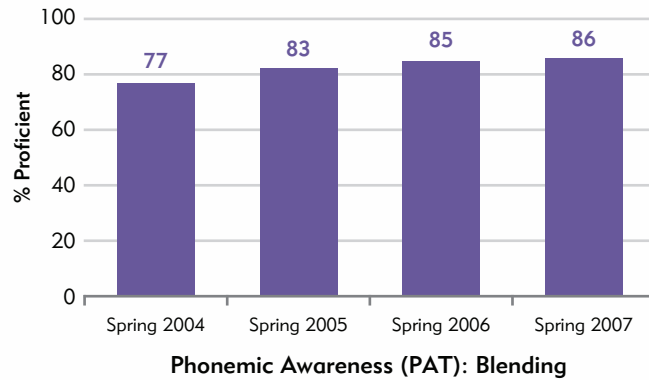
- U.S. Department of Education Web site

First Goal

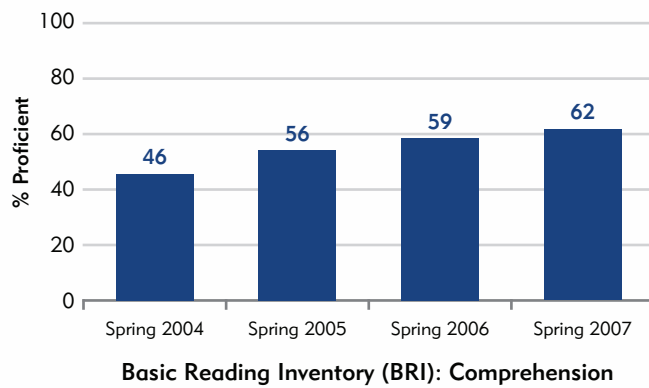
The first goal of Reading First is to increase the percentage of students reading "at grade level" each year, at each grade level, from kindergarten through third grade.

Blending is combining individual phonemes to form words, onsets, and rimes to make syllables, and syllables to make words. (National Institute for Literacy, 2001)

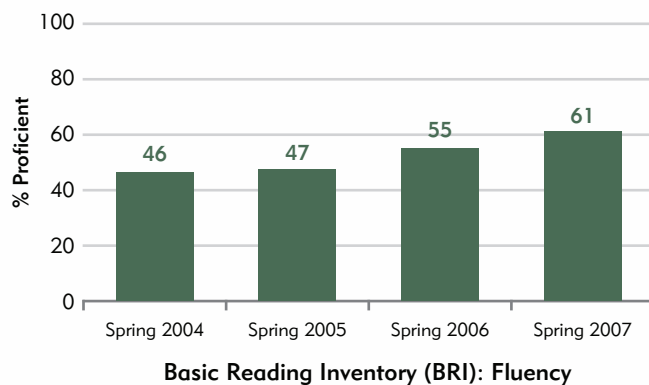
Kindergarten Proficiency 2004-2007



1st Grade Proficiency 2004-2007

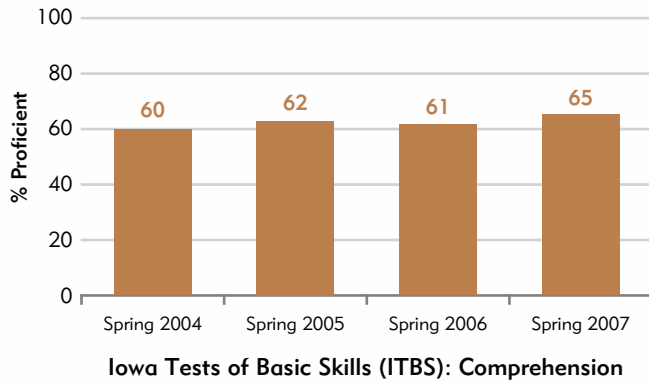


2nd Grade Proficiency 2004-2007



Segmentation is breaking words into their individual phonemes, words into syllables, and syllables into onsets and rimes. (National Institute for Literacy, 2001)

3rd Grade Proficiency 2004-2007



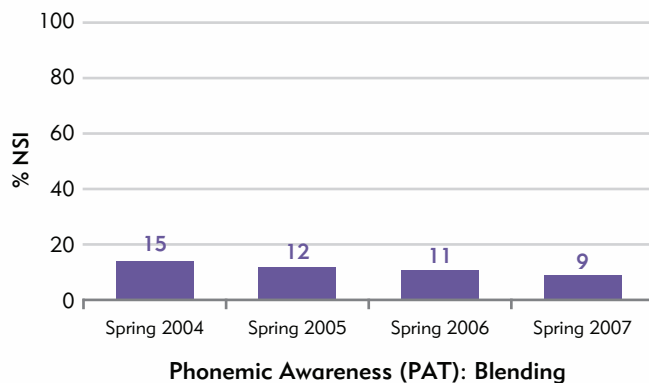
Decoding is using letter-sound relationships in a predetermined sequence to make sense of words that contain them.

(National Institute for Literacy, 2001)

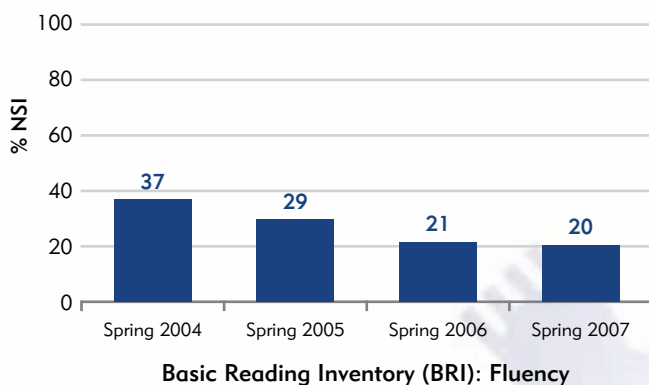
Second Goal

The second goal of Reading First is to decrease the percentage of students with serious reading difficulties each year at each grade level.

Kindergarten Students Needing Substantial Intervention (NSI) 2004-2007



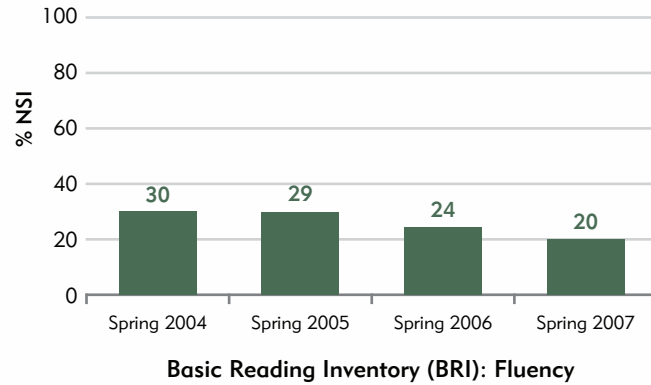
1st Grade Students Needing Substantial Intervention (NSI) 2004-2007



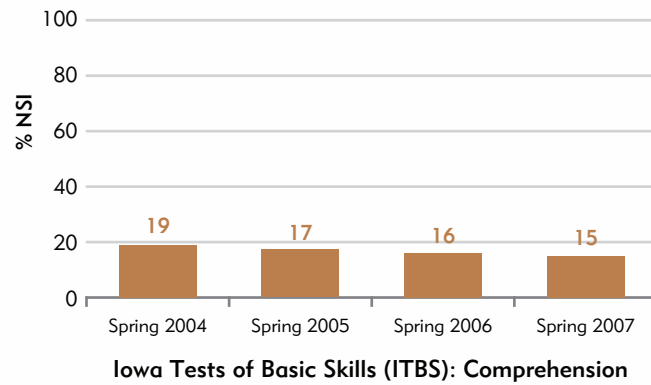
"I think my student's determination to improve, having the same tutor, the frequency of the interventions, and a strong focus helped to make hers a success story."

**Mrs. Sue Mobley,
Third Grade Teacher**

2nd Grade Students Needing Substantial Intervention (NSI) 2004-2007



3rd Grade Students Needing Substantial Intervention (NSI) 2004-2007



Summary

Reading First combines structured school improvement, using research-based reading strategies, teaching core components of reading, access to print, and using data to guide actions into a successful reading program which is student-centered.

With this combination of elements, and the support of the Statewide Reading Team, teachers, and other school staff, Iowa's schools are striving to make sure all children become proficient readers. Through careful implementation, thorough assessment, and focused support, Iowa schools are working towards 100% proficiency in student reading. With each success story, with each new skill learned and improved test score, Iowa is making progress towards helping **all** students succeed at reading.



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