



District Level Self Assessment Tool

September 2007

Self Assessment Tools for Teachers, Schools and Districts

The District Self Assessment Tool is part of a set of three instruments intended to be used together to begin a process for planning to sustain evidence-based reading initiatives at the local level. Used as a needs assessment, the material will (1) promote reflection on current areas of strength in implementing and sustaining scientifically based reading instruction, (2) spark conversations among staff, and (3) facilitate identification of areas that are important for sustainability.

Background

Throughout the self assessment many references are made to “scientifically based research” and “research-based” reading practices. The Reading First Program is based on the findings of research, in particular the five elements of effective reading instruction identified in 2000 by the National Reading Panel—phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. If the users of this self assessment feel the need for a brief refresher on the research findings on effective reading instruction, the Guidance for the Reading First Program (<http://www.ed.gov/programs/readingfirst/guidance.pdf>) document, especially the “Components of an Effective Reading Program” section found on Page 3, will help put all of the indicator statements describing effective Reading First implementation in proper context and perspective. A complete description of the elements of effective reading instruction can be found in the Reading First legislation (<http://www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg4.html>).

Understanding and Using the Self Assessment

The quality indicator statements in the self assessment were drawn from the findings of research and literature on effective sustainability practices, where sustainability is defined as the ability of a program to operate on its core beliefs and values (its reading culture) and use them to guide essential and inevitable program adaptations over time while maintaining improved outcomes (adapted from Century and Levy, 2002).

The statements are organized around three functions that district staff with a stake in reading achievement perform as they develop and implement research-based reading instruction. Those functions are:

- Establish an organizational culture that supports continuous improvement in student outcomes in reading;
- Set expectations for practice and monitor implementation and outcomes ; and
- Use data to support schools as they implement results based reading programs.

The District Self Assessment, and its companion pieces, the School and Classroom Self Assessments, may be used in a variety of ways, depending on local context. However there are two common factors that you will want to incorporate into your use of the local self

assessment tool set.

First, the ratings in the instrument should be based on evidence and not perceptions alone. Each item in the instrument has suggested sources of evidence and reflection questions to guide you on this path.

Second, the use of the instruments should include a combination of individual thought and group discussion and consensus. For example, you may want to ask individuals to complete the rating form and synthesize their conclusions on what's working that will support sustainability and what needs to be developed to support sustainability on the first "Begin to Plan" Worksheet at the end of the self assessment tool. Appropriate individuals to engage in this exercise might include:

- Teachers complete the classroom self assessment;
- School level reading teams complete the school Assessment; and
- District staff with a stake in reading achievement complete the district self assessment.

Then, you may want to convene group meetings to combine conclusions from all three of the local instruments: classroom self assessment, school self assessment and district self assessment. The second Begin to Plan Worksheet is suggested as a place to capture consensus from group discussions.

Next Steps

With your needs assessment completed, you will be ready to move into developing and implementing a sustainability plan. The Sustaining Reading First website contains additional resources to assist you, including practical guidance on sustaining evidence based reading programs, how to cover recurring resource needs, and training opportunities or workshop materials.

District leaders...

A. Establish an organizational culture that supports continuous improvement in student outcomes in reading, by:

1. Ensuring that the district’s mission, vision, and philosophy statements contain clear support for a scientifically based reading instruction program as a means to continuously improve reading outcomes.

Implementation Progress			
4	3	2	1

Possible Sources of Evidence

- Mission, vision, and philosophy statements.

Guiding Questions

- What specific statements in the sources of evidence documents set high expectations, focus on student outcomes and embody some of the underlying principles of scientifically based reading research? Cite examples of when these were used to make a decision or pursue a course of action.

2. Supporting the implementation of scientifically based reading instruction, even in the face of competing priorities.

Implementation Progress			
4	3	2	1

Possible Sources of Evidence

- Strategic plan; agendas and minutes from school board meetings. (District leaders self-rate on these as individuals and then compare answers.)

Guiding Questions

- Identify instances when district leaders articulated how scientifically based reading research fits in the district plan for teaching.
- Are these leadership behaviors occurring frequently enough?
- Have district leaders demonstrated behaviors related to the leadership functions described above within the past 6 months?

3. Communicating the district’s expectations and requirements for staff collaboration on issues related to scientifically based reading instruction programs.

Implementation Progress			
4	3	2	1

Possible Sources of Evidence

- Meeting agendas and attendance records;
- district organizational chart; and
- staff interviews.

Guiding Questions

- What do staff report in interviews that reflect that the district’s culture and “way of doing business” support collaboration among staff?
- What messages about reading instruction does the district communicate?
- Does evidence of district communication address Reading First elements and occur frequently?

To rate your program, circle the rating that best describes your program’s implementation progress for each item.

- 4 = Already in Place**
- 3 = Partially in Place, Under Development**
- 2 = Area to Develop**
- 1 = Important, But Not Feasible Now**

District leaders...

B. Set expectations for practice and monitor implementation and outcomes, by:

4. Ensuring that the district reading related policies and procedures are reflective of evidence based reading research and aligned with state standards.

Implementation Progress

4	3	2	1
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Possible Sources of Evidence

- Documentation of alignment, pacing guides, and review of curricula; and
- review of policies and procedures.

Guiding Questions

- In what ways are principal supervision ensuring that the most important reading instruction elements are being implemented? What examples can staff cite of actions taken when principal evaluation showed need for improvement in implementing district policies or guidance on reading instruction?
- What curricula, assessments, and materials that are based on scientifically based reading research has the district selected and purchased?
- How did the district align the curriculum to state English Language Arts standards? When did it vertically align the curriculum across grade levels?

5. Supporting implementation of an assessment system that supports the reading program with formative and summative results and yields the data necessary to guide decisions.

Implementation Progress

4	3	2	1
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Possible Sources of Evidence

- Lists of reading assessments;
- list of databases of assessment results; and
- school plans.

Guiding Questions

- What data do district and school leaders have readily available to use in program evaluation and in summarizing patterns in student needs?
- Have district leaders eliminated any reading assessments that don't directly contribute to the implementation of a K-3 reading system?
- How do district leaders hold schools accountable for using data on an on-going basis?
- Does the assessment system include assessments that are appropriate for screening, diagnosing, benchmarking, monitoring progress, and measuring outcomes?
- What system does the district have for storing and using data?

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<p>6. Coordinating federal, state, and local funds to support scientifically based reading instruction programs.</p> <p><u>Possible Sources of Evidence</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local consolidated application; and district budget documents. <p><u>Guiding Questions</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Who is responsible for ensuring that school and district plans coordinate funding to appropriately support scientifically based reading instruction programs and that funds don't support competing approaches? What instances can district leaders cite in which the decision was made to shift use of resources from one use to another that was more supportive of implementation of a scientifically-based reading instructional program? 	<table border="1" style="margin: auto;"> <tr> <th colspan="4">Implementation Progress</th> </tr> <tr> <td style="width: 25px;">4</td> <td style="width: 25px;">3</td> <td style="width: 25px;">2</td> <td style="width: 25px;">1</td> </tr> </table>	Implementation Progress				4	3	2	1
Implementation Progress									
4	3	2	1						
<p>7. Ensuring that job descriptions for district administrators, principals, reading coaches, and teachers include the knowledge and skills needed to implement a scientifically based reading instruction program.</p> <p><u>Possible Sources of Evidence</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Job descriptions; advertisements for key positions; qualifications of current staff; and interviews with district and school administrators. <p><u>Guiding Questions</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Name instances when hiring in the district supported getting the qualified people to implement outcomes based reading programs. When have district administrators reviewed the qualifications of staff who are not recent hires and provided in-service professional development if needed? 	<table border="1" style="margin: auto;"> <tr> <th colspan="4">Implementation Progress</th> </tr> <tr> <td style="width: 25px;">4</td> <td style="width: 25px;">3</td> <td style="width: 25px;">2</td> <td style="width: 25px;">1</td> </tr> </table>	Implementation Progress				4	3	2	1
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District leaders...

C. Use data to support schools as they implement results based reading programs, by:

8. Leading the use of data-driven planning processes.

Implementation Progress			
4	3	2	1

Possible Sources of Evidence

- School and district plans;
- agendas from local board meetings and school parent meetings; and
- staff interviews.

Guiding Questions

- Identify district and school plans that contain improvement strategies that directly address student needs in reading.
- Does staff demonstrate an understanding of student needs informed by data?
- Have support plans been developed for schools not making adequate progress? Identify plans that contain specific supports that teachers need to implement the improvement strategies. Specify how the data analysis processes include identifying patterns of student reading needs.
- How do they address selecting improvement strategies that would directly address needs and support teachers' efforts to implement the improvement strategies well?

9. Making district organization clear so that school staff know who to go to for technical assistance related to improving their reading outcomes.

Implementation Progress			
4	3	2	1

Possible Sources of Evidence

- List of district staff assignments for serving schools;
- list of district technical assistance providers; and
- staff interviews.

Guiding Questions

- Can interviewed staff cite examples when school staff seeking help received a strong message about scientifically based reading instruction?
- Who in the district, or under contract to the district, provides technical assistance to staff seeking support in scientifically-based reading instruction?
- What evidence is there that the district ensures that all providers of technical assistance, whether district staff or others under contract to the district, understand the basics of scientifically based reading research?

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<p>10. Ensuring that professional development provided to teachers is focused on research-based practices, job-embedded, and based on student data.</p> <p><u>Possible Sources of Evidence</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> District professional development plan; list of district professional development activities; and interviews with administrators and staff. <p><u>Guiding Questions</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What evidence is there that professional development in reading is focused and of high quality? What support is provided to teachers to facilitate transfer of knowledge and skills from the training setting to the application setting? Do interviewed staff cite examples of the elimination or revision of professional development activities that did not reflect scientifically based reading research content? How is professional development based on student and teacher needs? Is professional development of sufficient duration and intensity to change practice? 	<table border="1" style="margin: auto;"> <tr> <th colspan="4">Implementation Progress</th> </tr> <tr> <td style="width: 25px;">4</td> <td style="width: 25px;">3</td> <td style="width: 25px;">2</td> <td style="width: 25px;">1</td> </tr> </table>	Implementation Progress				4	3	2	1
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<p>11. Scheduling district meetings for principals, reading coaches and teachers outside of main reading times to protect instructional time.</p> <p><u>Possible Sources of Evidence</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> List district meetings concerning reading; attendance records for district meetings; and interviews of district and school administrators. <p><u>Guiding Questions</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent have district leaders been successful in keeping principals, coaches and teachers in the school during instructional time? How has the district scheduled meetings to avoid frequent use of substitute teachers for release time during reading instruction? 	<table border="1" style="margin: auto;"> <tr> <th colspan="4">Implementation Progress</th> </tr> <tr> <td style="width: 25px;">4</td> <td style="width: 25px;">3</td> <td style="width: 25px;">2</td> <td style="width: 25px;">1</td> </tr> </table>	Implementation Progress				4	3	2	1
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<p>12. Recognizing and celebrating school success in teaching students to read.</p> <p><u>Possible Sources of Evidence</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> List of district celebration and recognition mechanisms. <p><u>Guiding Questions</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What specific feedback and reinforcement of what is being done right has been provided to staff within the school and to others outside the school (parents, community, board of education, and other schools) during celebrations and recognition events? Identify instances where the recognition included highlighting why and how the school succeeded. 	<table border="1" style="margin: auto;"> <tr> <th colspan="4">Implementation Progress</th> </tr> <tr> <td style="width: 25px;">4</td> <td style="width: 25px;">3</td> <td style="width: 25px;">2</td> <td style="width: 25px;">1</td> </tr> </table>	Implementation Progress				4	3	2	1
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Begin to Plan at the District Level: Synthesize Your Own Thoughts		
Leadership Function	What's in Place and Working?	Areas to Develop
<p>A. Establish an organizational culture that supports continuous improvement in student outcomes in reading.</p>		
<p>B. Set expectations for practice and monitor implementation and outcomes.</p>		
<p>C. Use data to support schools as they implement results based reading programs.</p>		

**Begin to Plan at the District Level:
Meet with Others and Reach Consensus**

Based on group discussion, identify the top priority Areas to Develop.

Based on group discussion, what general strategies are needed to address the listed priorities?

Based on group discussion, what general challenges do you anticipate?



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