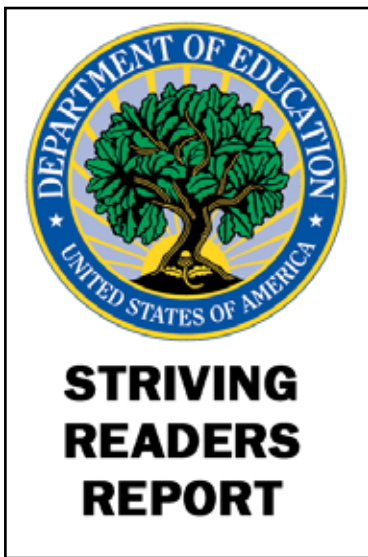


RESEARCH UPDATE

Milwaukee Public Schools, WI

U.S. Department of Education's Striving Readers Program

Urban Students in Milwaukee Public Schools Demonstrate Improved Reading Achievement after *READ 180*[®] Instruction

PROFILE

Districts: Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS)**Evaluation Period:** 2010–2011 School Year**Evaluator:** American Institutes for Research**Grades:** 6–9**Model:** Daily 90-minute model**Assessments:** Northwest Evaluation Association Measures of Academic Progress (MAP)

DISTRICT CHARACTERISTICS

Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) consist of 175 schools enrolling approximately 80,000 students in Grades K through 12. The schools include 116 elementary schools, 7 middle schools, 29 high schools, and 19 schools with combined grades or partial grade spans. In addition, the

district has Early Childhood programs and Head Start. The majority of students in MPS were African American (56%), 14% were Caucasian, 24% were Hispanic, and 5% were Asian. Eighty-three percent of students were considered low income, 20% were students with disabilities, and 10% were English language learners. In 2010, 63% of eighth grade students were proficient/advanced on the state test, the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Examination (WKCE), and 39% of tenth grade students were proficient/advanced on the WKCE.

IMPLEMENTATION OVERVIEW

During the 2010–2011 school year, a third party firm, American Institutes for Research (AIR), conducted an evaluation of the Wisconsin Striving Readers Program.¹ Eligible 6th–9th grade struggling readers were identified to participate in the study, with approximately half of those eligible students randomly assigned to the treatment group and half to the control group. For students in the treatment group, *READ 180* was implemented as a supplement to regular English Language Arts (ELA) classes, taking the place of an elective for a 90-minute block each day. Students who were placed into the control group attended regular ELA classes along with their classmates in the treatment group; however, this group attended a study hall or elective class instead of the *READ 180* program. Students were assigned to the treatment group to receive the intervention for two years, but because Congress eliminated the Striving Readers program midway through the grant, the study only followed students through one year of the intervention.

¹The Striving Readers program was funded by the United States Department of Education with two aims: 1) to raise middle and high school students' literacy levels in Title I-eligible schools with significant numbers of students reading below grade levels; and 2) to build a strong, scientific research base for identifying and replicating strategies that improve adolescent literacy skills. The full reports for each district are available at www2.ed.gov/programs/strivingreaders/.

Students were eligible to participate in the program if they received a score of “Minimal” or “Basic” on the WKCE. Students who did not have a WKCE score were also eligible based on having a score of “Minimal” or “Basic” on the district benchmark assessment, ThinkLink. If a student did not have a recorded score for either of these assessments, eligibility for the intervention could also be established based on teacher assessments and observations that indicated that the student was performing at least two grade levels below expectations.

Implementation Model

All of the cohorts of students who were placed into the *READ 180* treatment group attended classes in which they were to receive 90 minutes of *READ 180* instruction daily. The *READ 180* implementation guidelines included specified time for whole-group instruction (20 minutes), small-group work with rotations among three stations (60 minutes), and whole-group wrap-up (10 minutes). The three rotations consisted of: small-group direct instruction; independent work using *READ 180*'s computer-assisted instructional (CAI) software; and modeled or independent reading.

The primary text used for instruction was the student *rBook*®, an interactive text divided into nine instructional workshops. Each workshop contained six sections: (1) Preview/Teach Vocabulary; (2) Reading; (3) Vocabulary/Word Study; (4) Writing and Grammar; (5) Functional Literacy; and (6) Workshop Wrap-Up. Throughout each workshop there were “checkpoints” that would allow teachers to assess student knowledge and provide opportunities for more in-depth skill instruction and practice. Teachers were also able to make frequent use of assessment data created by the *READ 180* software system to identify the individual strengths and weaknesses of students, thus allowing them to tailor instruction to the individual needs of their students.

Participants

Approximately 900 struggling readers in Grades 6–9 from five schools in MPS were eligible to participate in the study. Of the eligible students, 462 were randomly assigned to the *READ 180* treatment group, and 419 were randomly assigned to the business-as-usual control group. The remaining students were placed on a waiting list. Of the randomly assigned students, only 619 students were included in the impact analysis—335 students in the *READ 180* treatment group and 284 in the no treatment control group. Students who did not attend school in the district, left the district, or otherwise had no outcome data were excluded from the analysis.

The majority of the students in the study were African American (70%), followed by 19% Hispanic, 7% Caucasian, and 4% Other. Thirty-six percent of the students were special education students, 8% were English language learners, and 88% received free or reduced-priced meals. Of the *READ 180* students, 69% were African American, 2% were Hispanic, 20% were Caucasian, and 1% was Other. Thirty-four percent of the *READ 180* students were special education students, 8% were English language learners, and 90% received free or reduced-priced meals.

MEASURES

Northwest Evaluation Association Measures of Academic Progress

The Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) consists of computerized adaptive assessments, aligned to national and state curricula and standards, which provide immediate feedback on student progress. The scores represent a developmental scale and are comparable across grade levels. The MAP is the primary assessment measure of student progress in MPS. The MAP is administered to all students in mathematics and reading three times a year: October, February, and June. For the purposes of this study, the reading portion of the June MAP assessment was used as the primary outcome measure for student reading proficiency.

Reading Engagement and Self-Efficacy Survey

AIR developed a student survey to determine whether participation in the *READ 180* program had an impact on student engagement and self-efficacy related to reading. The survey asked students to respond to items related to self-efficacy, as well as the constructs of behavioral engagement, emotional engagement, and cognitive engagement with reading. Surveys were administered to all Grade 6–9 English Language Arts classes in April 2011; however, only surveys of students participating in the study were used for the analysis.

Implementation Ratings

The fidelity of implementation of the *READ 180* intervention was studied in the five schools. The study assessed the fidelity of implementation of two components of the *READ 180* intervention: 1) the professional development model; and 2) the classroom instruction model. For the fidelity of implementation of the professional development model, scores were obtained from professional development logs, teacher interviews, and principal interviews. The scores were used to rate the professional development model as adequate or not, based on the following items: the extent to which professional development opportunities were provided

and attended as planned; the level of effectiveness of the professional development opportunities in preparing teachers to implement *READ 180* and appropriate literacy instructional content and strategies; and the extent to which the identified curricular materials and resources were made available to intervention teachers as planned. The total number of points that could be awarded was 51, with a low level of implementation rating corresponding to 28 points or less, a medium rating corresponding to 29–40 points, and a high level of implementation rating corresponding to 41 points or higher.

For the fidelity of implementation of the classroom model, the study used multiple data sources—classroom observations, interviews, and extant program data—to examine the extent to which the program provided instruction to students in accordance with intervention specifications. The AIR evaluators developed a rubric to rate components of *READ 180* instruction, which included class size, student attendance, and classroom model components (whole-group instruction and skills lesson for 20 minutes, rotations between small-group instruction (computer, small group, and modeled and independent reading rotations) each lasting 20 minutes, and a 10-minute wrap-up session during which the teacher facilitates discussion about the day’s lesson). Each classroom was rated as low, medium, or high implementation, with a low

level of implementation rating corresponding to 35–58 points, a medium rating corresponding to 59–82 points, and a high level of implementation rating corresponding to 83–105 points.

RESULTS¹

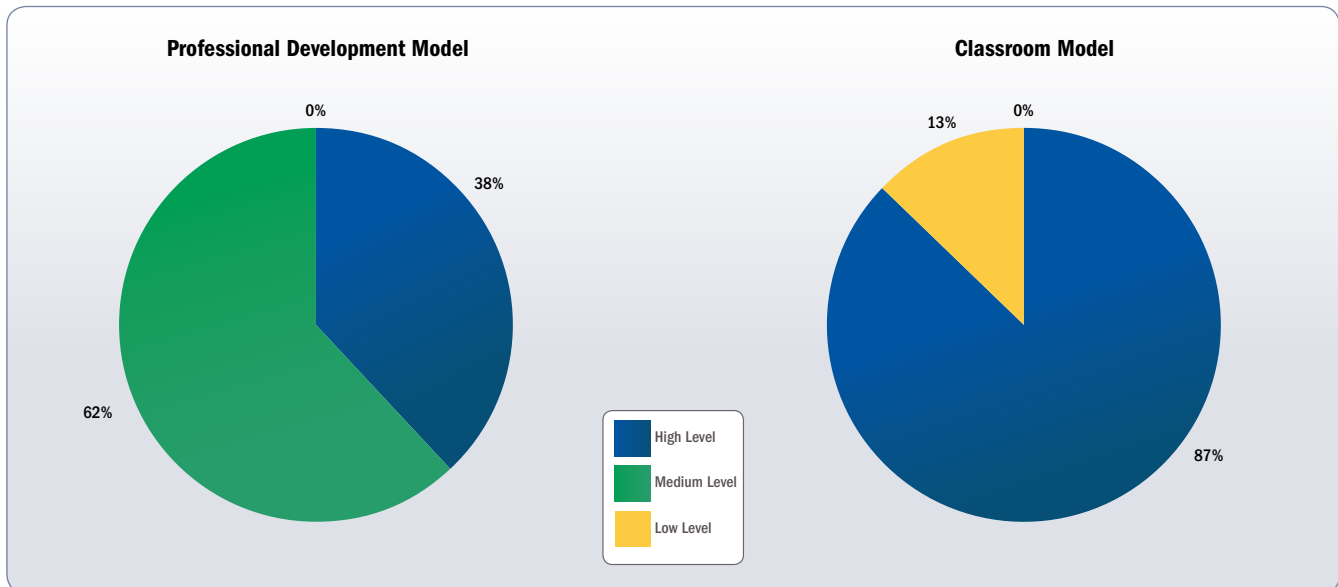
Implementation Findings

In terms of fidelity of implementation of the professional development model, five of eight classrooms (62.5%) received a rating of medium (29–40), and three of eight classrooms (37.5%) received a rating of high (41–51). The average score across all classrooms was 39, which indicated that there was a medium level of fidelity. Some components of the model were implemented and attended as planned, including the *READ 180* orientation trainings; however, other components were not. For example, some teachers did not complete the Scholastic online professional development course trainings (RED), and three of the nine *READ 180* round-table sessions were cancelled. In addition, teachers did not receive individual mentoring sessions as planned.

Overall, the *READ 180* classroom model was implemented with high fidelity; however, due to low student attendance, seven of eight classrooms (87.5%) received a rating of medium, and one of eight classrooms (12.5%) received a rating of low. Teachers reported that prior experience

Chart 1.

Milwaukee Public School *READ 180* Classrooms, Grades 6–9 (N = 8)
Fidelity of Implementation, 2010–2011



Note. Across the classrooms, professional development was implemented with medium to high fidelity. The majority of the classrooms implemented *READ 180* instruction with medium fidelity, with a small percentage implementing the program with low fidelity.

¹ See final report: Swanland, Dahlke, K., Tucker, N., Kleidon, B., Kregor, J., Davidson-Gibbs, D., & Halberg, K. (2012). *Striving Readers: Impact student and project evaluation report*. Naperville, IL: American Institute for Research.

teaching *READ 180* and the support of the district *READ 180* coordinator were important facilitators for successfully implementing the model.

Impact Findings

There was a statistically significant impact on the reading achievement of struggling readers in Grades 6–9 after one year of exposure to *READ 180* instruction (effect size of .14). (See Chart 1.) On the MAP, students in the *READ 180* treatment group scored approximately 1.8 points higher than their peers who received another elective at their respective school or a study hall when controlling for pretest scores and other student-level covariates.

Overall, results of the student survey were inconclusive. *READ 180* students and students in the control group responded similarly to the majority of survey items; however, *READ 180* students did indicate slightly higher self-efficacy in reading, as well as higher levels of behavioral engagement. *READ 180* students had more positive perceptions of their reading ability, and they seemed to indicate an increased desire to read. *READ 180* students' responses to the survey also indicated that they are better able to apply strategies to understand what they are reading. However, due to the small sample size of study students participating in the survey, these differences were not statistically significant.

When interviewed, teachers and principals indicated that *READ 180* had a positive impact on students' self-efficacy, motivation, and level of achievement. All teachers stated that among the *READ 180* students, they observed increased student confidence and motivation to read. Principals also stated that they observed increased motivation to read, as well as increased student achievement, among the *READ 180* students.

CONCLUSION

After one year of *READ 180* instruction, struggling readers in Milwaukee Public Schools showed improved reading achievement on the MAP, over a control group who did not receive instruction. *READ 180* students reported slightly higher self-efficacy and behavioral engagement in reading than control group students, and teachers and principals observed increased confidence, motivation, and achievement among these students. These findings show that struggling readers can experience success with *READ 180*, even after receiving only one year of intervention. It is important to note that medium to high levels of program implementation were observed across the five schools utilizing the *READ 180* program in terms of fidelity to the professional development model and fidelity to the instruction model. This suggests that higher levels of program implementation play an important role in increasing positive program impact.

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