

# A Scale-Up Evaluation of Reading Apprenticeship



Michaela Gulemetova, Raquel Sanchez, Robyn Elkins, Ilana Barach, Vincent Chan, and Megha Joshi

## Introduction

WestEd designed the Reading Apprenticeship professional development framework to improve secondary literacy instruction across academic disciplines. The framework helps teachers understand their role in teaching literacy skills. This project examined how multiple state, regional and LEA leadership supported teacher practice, broadened school uptake, and built local capacity to sustain Reading Apprenticeship in three states. WestEd extended existing relationships with state and LEA partners to connect Reading Apprenticeship with other local reform initiatives, encourage participation in professional development, and facilitate the professional development sessions. Each partnership involved a different type of lead agency: the state education agency (SEA) in Arizona, two regional agencies in Michigan, and a single school district in Texas.

## Key Findings and Implications



- No partnership model had strong implementation of Reading Apprenticeship across every domain.
- Most participants surveyed thought it was likely that their school would continue implementing Reading Apprenticeship if funding were available.
- While there was evidence of short-term funding commitments to sustain Reading Apprenticeship on the coming school year, no long-term funding streams were put in place.
- Sustaining Reading Apprenticeship requires champions at all levels of education administration to promote buy-in and influence school funding decisions.
- Longitudinal studies are required to examine the conditions for sustainability, such as long-term financial coherence.
- Multi-level partnerships show promise for sustainability, and merit further research.

# Overview of Reading Apprenticeship

The Reading Apprenticeship framework is designed to improve student literacy across four dimensions of learning: social, personal, cognitive, and knowledge building (Exhibit 1). When teachers use Reading Apprenticeship literacy routines with their students, they transform their classrooms into engaging, collaborative learning spaces. These routines place academic texts at the center of learning activities. Students work together to make meaning of texts through metacognitive conversations. These conversations help students understand their own thinking and learning processes. Reading Apprenticeship provides teachers with specific instructional routines that engage students in the four dimensions of learning.

**Exhibit 1. The Reading Apprenticeship Framework**



*Note.* Image from WestEd’s Reading Apprenticeship website (<https://readingapprenticeship.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Dimensions-2023.pdf>).

Students engage in metacognitive conversation to understand how they read and overcome roadblocks when reading. They discuss their processes, strengths, and weaknesses as readers and learn from one another. Teachers create the space for these discussions by offering more in-class opportunities for reading. Teacher Leaders, a crucial role in the Reading Apprenticeship model, are practitioner leaders within each school who support their fellow teachers through mentoring and collaboration.

The word “Apprenticeship” in the program’s name reflects its emphasis on helping teachers apprentice students into the ways of reading, writing, thinking, talking, and reasoning in their fields of study. Reading Apprenticeship teachers participate in carefully designed cycles of inquiry. These cycles mirror the routines they will use in the classroom with their students. Through these cycles, teachers discuss their own literacy skills with their peers and identify new approaches for teaching those skills.

For this study, Reading Apprenticeship was planned for implementation during one academic year. Exhibit 2 describes the key Reading Apprenticeship components and the general timing of professional learning activities as intended.

**Exhibit 2. Reading Apprenticeship Components**

Component	Description
<b>Professional development</b>	Five days (32.5 hours) of in-person training for teachers (3-day Summer Institute and 2-day Winter Institute) facilitated by WestEd trainers
<b>Implementation support</b>	Monthly on-site school team meetings facilitated by a Teacher Leader throughout the year (approximately 8 hours)
<b>Teacher Leader</b>	One orientation and three Teacher Leader regional in-person all-day meetings (October, January, and April) facilitated by WestEd consultants
<b>Administrator training</b>	Online Administrator Essentials (four virtual sessions) conducted by WestEd in August–October (approximately 8 hours)

**Research Design**

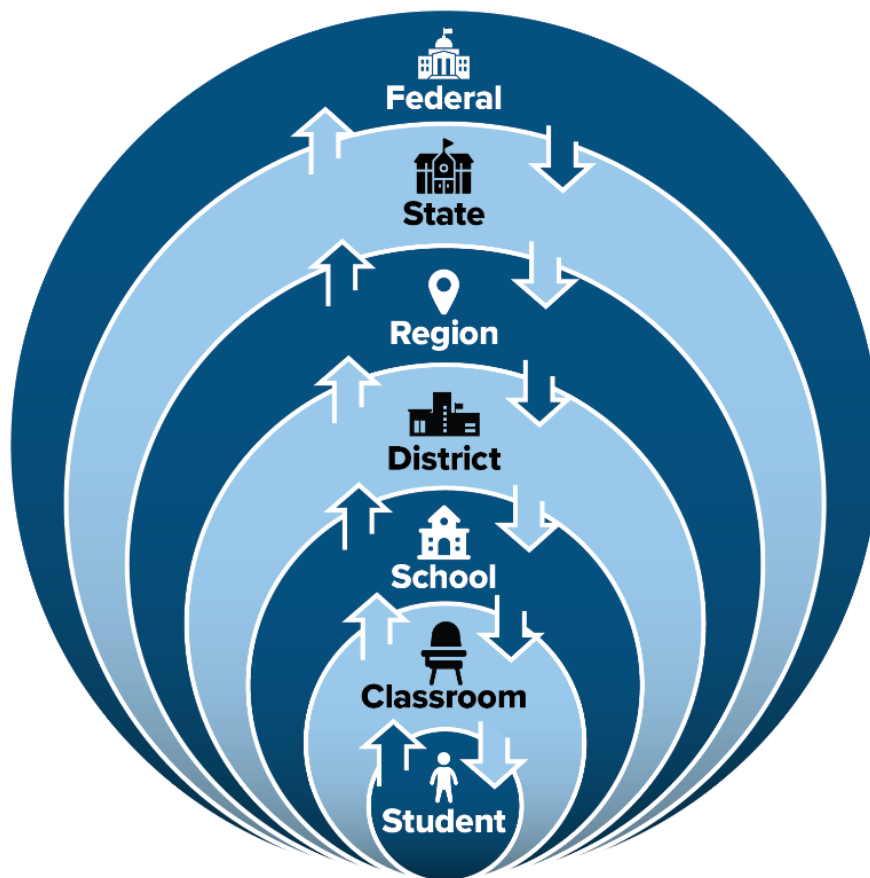
AIR conducted a mixed-methods formative evaluation to study the three partnership models and how they support implementation and sustainability of the Reading Apprenticeship framework.<sup>1</sup> We compared data from surveys, participation data, focus groups, and key informant interviews. We used these data to answer four key research questions related to (a) outcomes of the scale-up process, (b) buy-in and support for implementation, (c) sustainability and capacity building, and (d) contextual factors influencing scale-up and sustainability across the three partnership models. The study included

<sup>1</sup> The full report can be found at <https://www.air.org/project/reading-apprenticeship-evaluation>.

669 participants, including teachers, Teacher Leaders, administrators, coaches, and instructional support staff.

We used the lens of sustainability adapted from Koff et al. (2020)<sup>2</sup> to examine vertical coherence of the implementation of Reading Apprenticeship within the three partnership models. Vertical coherence is alignment in terms of goals, policies, and practices at different organizational levels. In education contexts, vertical coherence refers to alignment between state, regional, district, and school improvement goals; instructional practices at the school and classroom levels; and monitoring systems used to evaluate educational progress. Exhibit 3 illustrates the nested aspect of educational organizations. The arrows moving downward represent the goals, policies, and collective resources flowing from the federal level down to the student. The upward arrows represent the flow of feedback data, information, and advocacy to inform ongoing changes to policy and practice. Creating sustainable organizational environments that support evidence-based practice depends on two-way vertical coherence.

### Exhibit 3. Vertical Coherence



---

<sup>2</sup> Koff, H., Challenger, A., & Portillo, I. (2020). Guidelines for operationalizing policy coherence for development (PCD) as a methodology for design and implementation of sustainable development strategies. *Sustainability, 12*, Article 4055. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12104055>

## Key Findings

### Arizona Department of Education: State Partnership

**Participation:** Forty-three schools serving 34,097 students across seven districts

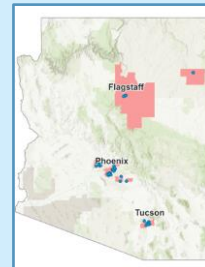
**History:** Reading Apprenticeship had not been previously implemented in Arizona.

**Context:** WestEd facilitators made connections with administrators at the Arizona Department of Education to form a state-level partnership. Arizona is a local control state, and decisions about curriculum and instruction, including professional learning, are made at the LEA level and cannot be mandated by the state. To seed interest, SEA administrators used existing relationships and invited district leaders to participate in Reading Apprenticeship–related activities prior to the grant period.

**Implementation:** Teachers opted in or were chosen by school administrators. They tended to have less ongoing support in implementing Reading Apprenticeship compared with the other partnerships. They were less likely to have campus-level Teacher Leader support and sometimes implemented Reading Apprenticeship alone or with only one or two others at their school. Many teachers did not have contractual hours to engage in Reading Apprenticeship activities. Yet, interest was strong enough that teachers still participated, but this likely had an impact on their attendance at trainings and meetings and time for lesson planning and collaboration.

**Buy-In:** Buy-in was strong from the SEA partner, and they helped seed interest across the state. Once a handful of teachers and local administrators in different LEAs across the state bought into Reading Apprenticeship, that buy-in spread organically to principals and local district administrators. This buy-in also spread to teachers and instructional support staff; participants in Arizona scored higher on the survey construct measuring buy-in compared with the other partnership models. Strong buy-in is likely related to the opt-in approach to teacher participation.

**Sustainability:** The self-selected sample had relatively high scores on the survey constructs for individual capacity to sustain and willingness to continue implementing. Although Arizona administrators at multiple levels expressed a desire to continue implementing Reading Apprenticeship, reliable funding continued to be an unknown factor. Administrators have put forth efforts to secure grants or carve out room in their school budgets for the program, but no dedicated funding streams currently are available for Reading Apprenticeship. Therefore, administrators and school staff must continually champion the program to secure the required funding at the local level.



*We will continue to use it. We like it so much that even if we don't get funding from the grant, we are going to use our funding to ensure that my teachers are receiving appropriate training. Absolutely.—Site Administrator*

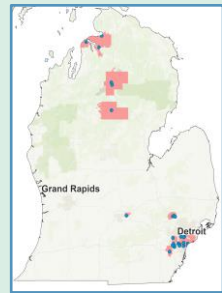


## Wayne RESA and Charlevoix-Emmet ISD, Michigan: Regional Partnership

**Participation:** Twenty-four schools serving 22,648 students across 16 districts

**History:** More than 10 years of Reading Apprenticeship implementation

**Context:** The regional partnership approach in Michigan involved two distinct agencies: the Wayne Regional Educational Service Agency (RESA) in the Detroit area and Charlevoix-Emmet Intermediate School District (ISD). The two regions implemented Reading Apprenticeship simultaneously but attended separate trainings and did not collaborate with each other. Both regions are veterans of Reading Apprenticeship (for more than 10 years), with many teachers and administrators who have participated in the training multiple times. Although this cohort of participants was completely new to Reading Apprenticeship, they benefited from the support of a well-developed network of experienced teachers, Teacher Leaders, instructional coaches, and administrators.



**Implementation:** Teachers were recruited to participate in Reading Apprenticeship professional learning through opting in or being chosen by an administrator. Although a few of the Michigan schools had no Teacher Leader, teachers in Michigan benefited from regular attendance at school team meetings. In addition, teachers benefited from the existing network of teachers and other staff who were trained in the Reading Apprenticeship framework. The benefits of participating in the last two face-to-face training days are unknown because they occurred outside the data collection timeline.

**Buy-In:** The Michigan regional partnership had strong buy-in with certain regional and district-level administrators and teachers, largely a result of the long-term presence of Reading Apprenticeship implementation for about a decade. Buy-in has grown organically, with a handful of Reading Apprenticeship “cheerleaders” spreading their enthusiasm for the program to their colleagues across the years. However, not all districts and schools had strong support from their administration because of competing priorities. This sentiment left some teachers and Teacher Leaders feeling as if they were waiting for the rug to be pulled out from under them when their district would decide to focus on another program.

**Sustainability:** The regional partners in Michigan were somewhat more involved in funding decisions and could leverage available resources for the program. The regional education agencies also play an important role in organizing coalitions of interested districts that can pool their resources for future trainings. Although the regional partners play an integral role in convening Reading Apprenticeship training activities, formal decisions related to sustainability need to be made at the district level.

“ Generally, what we would do in a case like this would be, if that’s something that more than half of our districts would like to pursue, then we could look at it as a consortium and see what districts would all be interested in joining . . . So, in terms of if that was something that our local districts wanted and [it was] something that we wanted to continue to pursue, then [as] the ISD, I would definitely fully support both financially and organizationally our resources to support that. —Regional Partner

”

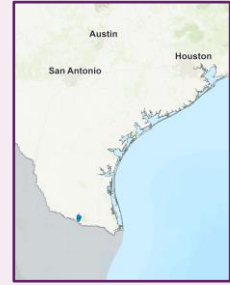


## Mission CISD, Texas: District Partnership

**Participation:** Seven schools serving 7,484 students in one district

**History:** Participated in a 2019–21 randomized controlled trial, scaled to additional schools

**Context:** WestEd facilitators formed partnerships with one district, Mission Consolidated Independent School District (CISD) in southern Texas near the border with Mexico. Texas is a local control state in which sustainability relies on local champions who continually advocate for funding. The district has strong central leadership, which employed a “top-down” approach, mandating that all middle and high schools participate in the study and implement Reading Apprenticeship schoolwide. Once WestEd gained buy-in at the district level, recruitment of teachers and Teacher Leaders at the school level was ensured.



**Implementation:** Teachers benefitted from the high number of Teacher Leaders in each school and by implementing simultaneously with all their peers. Even though attendance at school team meetings was not high, there were many other opportunities for collaboration regarding Reading Apprenticeship throughout the school day. Because participation in the program was required, teachers could attend trainings and meetings during contractual hours and were provided substitute teachers.

**Buy-In:** The district partnership in Texas demonstrated strong buy-in at the top, but enthusiasm did not necessarily trickle down to all teachers. There was some pushback, particularly from veteran teachers who felt that they had seen many programs and frameworks come and go, thus creating uncertainty about investing their time and energy into yet another one. Securing ongoing funding and a plan for long-term implementation would help convince those teachers that Reading Apprenticeship is a worthwhile investment of their time. Protecting teacher time for collaborative planning for Reading Apprenticeship will also be crucial for buy-in.

**Sustainability:** The district demonstrated a commitment to sustainability by writing Reading Apprenticeship into their grade-level frameworks, and entering into a 2023–24 coaching contract for Teacher Leaders, coordinators, and school leaders. These are important steps toward sustaining implementation by integrating it into the curriculum and building capacity to support future implementation which had not been clearly communicated to teachers and site leaders at the time of data collection.

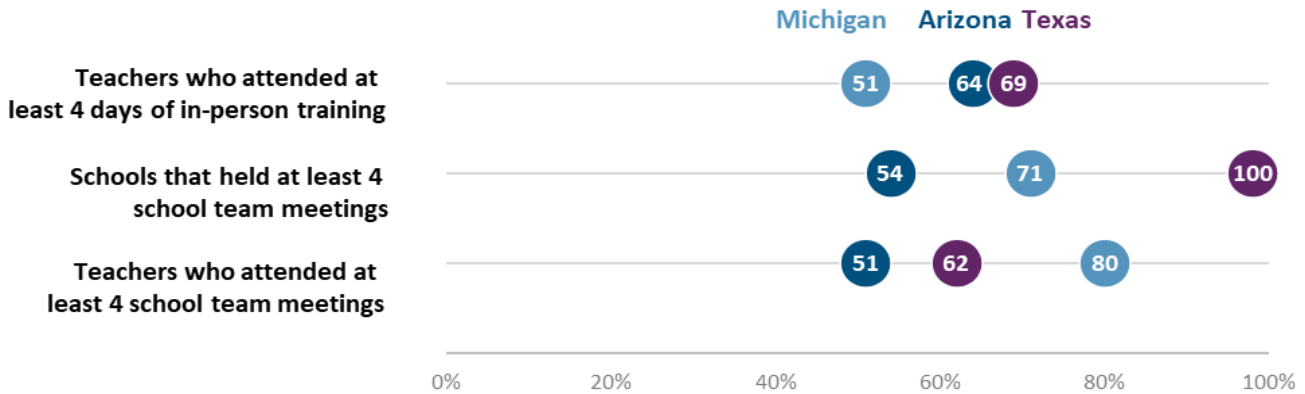
“ We learn everything and we have the buy-in and then it changes, and they bring in something else. And, so, we don’t get to see the whole thing through. And that’s another challenge that ends up happening. We start to get comfortable, we start to get everybody to buy in, and then it changes. And I think that’s where some of the hesitancy comes from, too. It’s, like, “Well, this may only be here for 3 years. We’re going to do something different. Something different is bound to come.—Teacher Leader

”

## Fidelity of Implementation

Higher percentages of teachers and schools met two of the fidelity targets in Texas and Michigan. By contrast, fidelity of implementation was lower in Arizona (Exhibit 4).

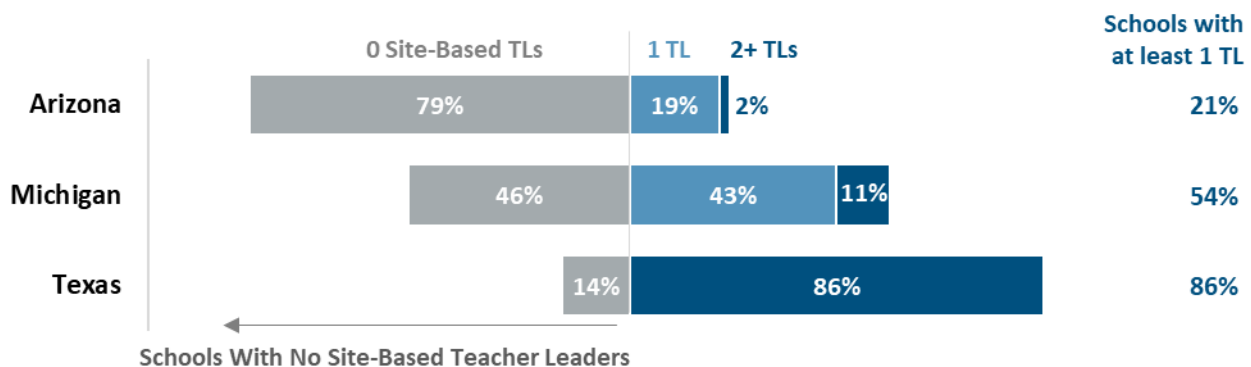
**Exhibit 4. Percentage of Teachers and Schools Meeting Fidelity Thresholds**



The dosage of the in-person teacher professional development training was delivered as intended; however, the timing varied across the three states due to staffing and contract hours. In Arizona, the teacher training days took place during the school year, as intended. In Michigan and Texas, however, Days 4 and 5 took place in summer 2023. Therefore, teachers in Michigan and Texas completed the last days of professional learning after the school year.

The selection of Teacher Leaders varied by district because of contractual issues related to additional work and compensation. Ideally, within each school, teacher teams select a Teacher Leader to support team members. However, a few schools in Michigan and most schools in Arizona did not have their own Teacher Leader on campus (Exhibit 5). Teacher Leaders in these states often served at the district level and/or worked with teachers across multiple schools. Although these Teacher Leaders often had more opportunity to visit classrooms, demonstrate the Reading Apprenticeship routines, and observe teachers, they were not always in the same school as the teachers they supported, possibly making them less accessible.

**Exhibit 5. Percentage of Schools With Teacher Leaders**





## Classroom Teaching Practices

On average, teachers reported using Reading Apprenticeship teaching practices between one and three times per week. Teachers were most likely to model metacognitive inquiry and least likely to report students engaging in collaborative activities (Exhibit 6). Perhaps because of the whole-school approach to implementation adopted in Texas, teachers in that state reported more student collaborative activities compared with the other partnership models.

### Exhibit 6. Teacher Outcomes, by Partnership Model

Outcomes	Arizona	Michigan	Texas
Content knowledge building	3.73	3.60	3.71
Metacognitive inquiry (teacher modeling)	3.96	3.85	3.88
Metacognitive inquiry (student practice)	3.47	3.34	3.54
Collaborative activities (teacher modeling)	3.48	3.40	3.51
Collaborative activities (student practice)	3.23	3.01	<b>3.49**</b>

Note. Constructs are measured on a scale from 1 to 5. \*\*F-test significance at the 0.01 level.

## Buy-in, Commitment, Sustainability, and Capacity Building

Most teachers found the Reading Apprenticeship training helpful for implementing the Reading Apprenticeship framework in their classroom. Participants in Arizona tended to have more buy-in for Reading Apprenticeship implementation than participants in Michigan and Texas, possibly because they self-selected into the program. The lower buy-in in Texas possibly reflects some teacher resistance to the “top-down” approach that required teachers to participate. Texas teachers also reported the lowest willingness to continue Reading Apprenticeship.

On the other hand, Reading Apprenticeship participants in Texas reported the highest levels of school commitment. In fact, attendance at the online course for administrators was highest in Texas, and Texas teachers consistently reported receiving more support from school leadership (Exhibit 7).

### Exhibit 7. Scale-Up Outcomes, by Partnership Model

Outcomes	Arizona	Michigan	Texas
Teacher buy-in to Reading Apprenticeship	<b>4.39***</b>	4.11	3.99
School commitment to implement	3.29	3.13	<b>3.79***</b>
Individual capacity to sustain implementation	3.90	3.72	3.80
Willingness to continue Reading Apprenticeship	3.48	3.48	<b>3.16***</b>

Note. Constructs are measured on a scale from 1 to 5. \*\*\*F-test significance at 0.001 level.

## Contextual Factors in Implementation

**Individual characteristics influenced teacher outcomes related to Reading Apprenticeship implementation.** Increased teaching experience tended to be associated with traditional teaching practices in the classroom and higher resistance to implementing Reading Apprenticeship. On the other hand, being a certified reading/literacy specialist was associated with higher implementation of certain Reading Apprenticeship teaching practices. Certification as a reading/literacy specialist also was associated with attendance at trainings and individual capacity to sustain the program and perceived school commitment. Having adequately prepared Teacher Leaders on campus was associated with higher teacher participation at that school (more in-person training days and school team meetings attended). Among school factors, larger schools were negatively associated with teacher modeling of collaborative activities, less buy-in for the program, and less willingness to continue implementing Reading Apprenticeship. Student demographic composition or the location of the schools did not appear to affect outcomes.

Findings on sustainability depended on several factors, including the local context and how much control the partner had over funding decisions. For example, in local control contexts like Arizona, Texas and Michigan (i.e., decisions regarding funding, curriculum, instruction, and professional development are made at the local level), a state-level partner would be unable to influence funding decisions. For this reason, our findings suggest that **building partnerships with multiple levels of education administration may be a more effective approach to ensure the sustainability of Reading Apprenticeship.** Having administrators at multiple levels who can connect Reading Apprenticeship to the shared goals and objectives and have authority over funding decisions would create the kind of vertical coherence that teachers need to believe that Reading Apprenticeship is worth their time and effort.



## Implications for Future Research

---

This study has several implications for future research to inform education policy coherence for Reading Apprenticeship. Three key implications relate to the duration of the study, partner selection, and multiple organizational levels.

Sustainability takes time. To better understand the mechanisms that support the sustainability of Reading Apprenticeship, we need to follow a given partnership model for 3–5 years. Longitudinal analyses are necessary to examine the conditions for a successful scale-up process and make practical recommendations for scale-up efforts in new contexts and states.

Sustainability requires vertical policy coherence, especially related to goal setting and funding. To support such coherence, WestEd must intentionally choose its partners according to how funding for professional learning is allocated in the specific policy context. For local control settings, it will be important to incorporate those local decision makers into the partnership to ensure that financial coherence is possible.

To identify the mechanisms that either reinforce or undermine sustainable education policy, we should study a multilevel partnership within a single state. For example, the provider could forge a partnership in a single state that includes the SEA, a county/regional office of education, and a medium-sized school district. Such an implementation would minimize the confounding factors we encountered in this study across multiple states and regions of the country.

