LESSONS & RECOMMENDATIONS
from the Alabama Reading Initiative

Sustaining Focus on Secondary Reading

AMERICAN INSTITUTES FOR RESEARCH®

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Prepared for

Carnegie Corporation of New York

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

About Carnegie Corporation of New York

Carnegie Corporation of New York was created by Andrew Carnegie in 1911 to promote "the advancement and diffusion of knowledge and understanding." As a grant-making foundation, the Corporation seeks to carry out Carnegie's vision of philanthropy, which he said should aim "to do real and permanent good in the world."

The advancement of literacy is one of the major emphases of the Corporation's work in education. More specifically, the Corporation has sought to increase the knowledge base on how to support the literacy learning of students in grades 4 to 12; that is, students who have moved beyond the initial "learning to read" phase but who still struggle with the skills and strategies that are necessary for reading, comprehending, and writing about the subject matter they encounter in the middle and high school grades.

About the American Institutes for Research (AIR)

Established in 1946, with headquarters in Washington, D.C., the American Institutes for Research (AIR) is an independent, nonpartisan not-for-profit organization that conducts behavioral and social science research on important social issues and delivers technical assistance both domestically and internationally in the areas of health, education, and workforce productivity.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

What's changed with me since being involved in ARI is it's made me realize reading is not a separate subject. When I went to school, it was an isolated subject. It's got me bringing reading into my math class, making me realize reading is an integral part of any subject.—(Alabama high school teacher)

Since 1998, the Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI) has captured the attention of many who are interested in reading and educational reform. ARI has become known for its clear, committed, and widespread focus on a deep-rooted problem for many students—namely, poor reading achievement. ARI epitomizes the concept of systemic reform by the involvement of and support from many diverse stakeholder groups. The Initiative spans the K–12 landscape and has created partnerships among schools, colleges, private organizations, and others. ARI continues to have the potential to change teacher practice, student motivation and attitudes toward literacy, and, ultimately, student achievement.

From its inception, ARI has given comprehensive attention to reading difficulties across the K–12 span—difficulties that have historically been very real in Alabama. ARI is unique among state efforts to address reading difficulties in its attention to the needs of secondary students who struggle with reading, a group that is often overlooked. Key elements of ARI include:

- decisions by schools to apply to become literacy demonstration sites committed to a 100% literacy rate among students.

- commitment of at least 85% of the faculty and administration to attend a two-week intensive summer institute about reading improvement and ongoing professional development throughout the school year.

- appointment of full-time reading coaches, who work with teachers and with struggling readers.

- collaboration between schools and higher education faculty partners, who serve as mentors, provide access to research, and help solve instructional problems related to literacy learning.

- partnerships with local businesses.

The Descriptive Study of the Alabama Reading Initiative

As a leader in the adolescent literacy movement, Carnegie Corporation of New York asked the American Institutes for Research (AIR) to conduct a descriptive study of ARI in secondary schools, essentially to "tell the story" of how the secondary component of the Initiative has fared, especially amid decreased state funding for education in Alabama and the large-scale national and local attention to the needs of beginning

readers. The report reflects the results of numerous interviews with students, teachers, school and state administrators, higher education faculty, and members of nonprofit organizations in Alabama—essentially those individuals who can best trace the emergence of a distinct secondary model for ARI and who can report on what still needs to be done to make the Initiative a permanent part of Alabama middle and high school education. Additional information about ARI was gained from a survey administered to teachers in ARI secondary schools across the state.

Findings of the ARI Study

The interviews with teachers, administrators, and others related many challenges in gaining recognition of the difficulties adolescent struggling readers encounter and in maintaining support for a reading initiative at the secondary level. The ARI model, as initially presented to participating schools, advocated a one-size-fits-all approach to supporting students' reading. In elementary schools, the model would focus on intense, systematic instruction in basic skills; in secondary schools, the approach would include reading-across-the-curriculum strategies. But the secondary approach was never articulated fully enough in the ARI professional development for teachers to understand how to implement it in content area classes. Rather than rejecting the model, Alabama secondary teachers and their reading coaches have systematically adapted materials and approaches to meet their particular needs. Indeed, it is safe to say that their efforts to make ARI work in secondary schools with adolescent students have resulted in separate secondary and elementary reading initiatives under the same ARI umbrella. This finding is encouraging because it speaks to the determination of secondary content area teachers to help their students learn the skills and strategies they need to make sense of the textbooks and other reading materials that so often baffle them.

An important goal of the study was to derive *lessons* about secondary reading initiatives from the experiences of Alabama's secondary educators and to develop *recommendations* for other districts or states that might want to start a secondary reading initiative such as ARI—that is, one grounded in strong professional development for all content area teachers and seeking to strengthen the reading and writing skills of all students, regardless of their previous accomplishments. Four primary lessons were learned from the study of ARI.

LESSON 1: Be responsive to the different needs of secondary and elementary students and schools—a one-size-fits-all approach won't work.

Within any local or state educational system, elementary and secondary students and schools have distinct characteristics that require special attention. At the outset, the developers of the original ARI plan reasoned that the elementary model would seamlessly transfer to a secondary application under the umbrella of "reading in the content areas."

As could be expected, opinions initially differed on where the Initiative should focus. According to some, an elementary orientation of ARI was appropriate; others recognized from the beginning that middle and high school reading poses specialized challenges for both students and teachers. Gradually, state staff responded by revising some aspects of ARI, such as the focus of the professional development sessions they sponsored. But more important than the changes at the top level were the changes that occurred locally, as teachers themselves sought to understand and adapt the ARI strategies for use with adolescents who were learning English literature, science, social studies, or even mathematics. The ARI model, initially conceptualized as one-size-fits-all, proved to be responsive and flexible enough to accommodate content area teachers' needs. Teachers worked to make it their own so that they could meet their students' needs. Separate professional development sessions were held for secondary teachers, and strategies and materials were tailored to accommodate a secondary-specific perspective.

LESSON 2: Develop partnerships among teachers, administrators, and schools to create a coherent and well-defined K–12 continuum of reading instruction.

Although elementary and secondary ARI have emerged as having unique characteristics and needs, a successful K–12 initiative must rest on a coherent continuum of reading instruction across the grades. This continuum would clearly articulate reading goals for students, "best practices" for teachers, and the ways these elements could be aligned and modified across the K–12 span.

Such a continuum can guide reading instruction only when teachers and administrators across a state or district communicate to each other in a common language and share understanding about how reading develops over time. The resource material provided to teachers seeks to codify not just the research-based "best practices" teachers should use but also a clear developmental continuum of literacy development teachers should be seeing as their students gain skills and strategies for addressing their reading and writing tasks. Additionally, ARI's large summer professional development sessions, the monthly regional and local meetings for teachers and reading coaches, and professional development efforts for principals have all sought to establish partnerships among educators that share a common framework for reading development and a common conviction that students can improve their skills.

LESSON 3: Provide secondary teachers and schools with consistent support from specialized staff.

Repeatedly, the data collected in interviews with teachers and administrators confirmed that adequate and consistent human resources matter more than material resources for an initiative like ARI. And these human resources—school and regional coaches, professional development providers, and administrators at the state level—are most effective when they understand the particular needs of adolescent learners and the teachers who teach them specialized, content area subject matter.

Interviewees explained that many staff assigned to work in middle and high schools lacked adequate experience in and knowledge of the secondary schools. Still, teachers who understood the local need for ARI worked valiantly and creatively to provide services for their students. Although they have felt the strain of a lack of secondary-specific expertise and leadership from the state, teachers and administrators have devised local means to support the continuation of ARI.

LESSON 4: Be attentive to the local, state, and national policy environment related to reading.

National attention to reading—and the resulting policy environment—has had great influence on secondary ARI. The focus on K–3 reading education has presented major challenges to maintaining the emphasis on secondary literacy issues, as funds have been devoted to developing and expanding the Initiative as part of Alabama Reading First.[1] Although ARI administrators maintain some support for secondary schools, they face an ongoing struggle to allocate funds and continue professional development related to Initiative approaches for teachers in grades 4 to 12. The current attention to adolescent literacy at the national level and through organizations like Carnegie and the Alliance for Excellent Education suggests that funding sources will be available to mount initiatives like ARI, and states and districts desiring to do so are advised to be attentive to possible ways to support their efforts.

ARI Outcomes for Teachers and Students

Interview data showed that there were positive outcomes for teachers who participated in ARI training and implemented its strategies in their classrooms. Many interviewees reported positive outcomes for students as well, and student participants in focus

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[1] Alabama was one of the first three states to receive funding under the Reading First component of the No Child Left Behind legislation. Its award was $102 million for six years. All 46 eligible districts have received awards, and the money is distributed among 93 schools.

groups were themselves enthusiastic in discussing how their schools' implementation of ARI had benefited them directly.

Teachers were asked specifically about changes in the ways they think about and teach students who struggle with reading, and they often stated that their teaching philosophies had come to include awareness of the importance of reading in all content areas and their own personal responsibility to address students' reading difficulties. They were increasingly aware of and articulate about instructional practices that could help their students read better and achieve more academically. Teachers also reported that there was more collaboration across content areas, as a professional community developed among teachers around their shared intent to help their students read and learn more effectively.

Perhaps the most important and, in many ways, most exciting outcomes of ARI are the positive changes reported about students. Although this study did not specifically examine test scores or other quantitative indicators, the data reveal a great deal about students' reading habits and engagement and the changes observed by teachers and others in their classroom activities and performance.

Teachers and administrators reported—and student focus group participants confirmed—that students were more engaged in reading and had increased confidence in themselves as readers because of ARI. Students reported that they knew about, used, and found helpful the ARI strategies that their teachers were implementing in their content area classes. Many interviewees reported that referrals to special education and discipline problems declined after ARI was introduced into their schools. More students used the existing libraries, and in many schools, newspapers and magazines were purchased to augment the reading materials available to students.

Teachers and administrators stated that students in ARI schools were doing better on standardized tests and on the Alabama Graduation Examination and

seemed to be achieving more academically. However, the contrasts between ARI and non-ARI schools have been most dramatic in the better resourced schools— those where students have less far to climb as they reach for academic success—and results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading test administered in 2005 find Alabama students performing poorly.[2] Some in the state attribute the slow progress toward academic accomplishment at least partly to changes in the student population; specifically, in the number of students coming from low-income and minority families. Indeed, shifting demographics in Alabama schools seem to mitigate the ARI impact. An evaluation of ARI prepared for the State Department of Education[3] in 2004 reported: "[T]here are examples where [ARI] schools raise the scores of both their Black students and their White students, but nonetheless see a drop in overall scores as racial composition changes."

To look at student outcomes from a different perspective, interviewees described other, more qualitative measures of improved achievement, such as student concern about academic success, increased aspiration for postsecondary education, and awareness of how they can monitor and control their own learning. Students reported personal accomplishments such as better comprehension skills, increased vocabularies, and strengthened abilities to present ideas orally.

It can be conjectured that the advances reported by teachers and students are important *initial outcomes* that will lead toward steady progress in academics among the students in these secondary schools. Teachers are more aware of how to meet the needs of all their students; students are seeing the importance of academics and recognizing their ability to participate in academic life—these speak to the kind of positive, reciprocal relationship that denotes successful schools

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[2] The 2005 NAEP test results released on October 20, 2005, reported that grade 4 reading scores were almost flat and that the percentage of students at grade 8 scoring at the proficient level had dropped to 31%, down from 32% in 2003.

[3] Moscovitch, E. (2004). *Evaluation of the Alabama Reading Initiative*. Gloucester, MA: Cape Ann Economics, p. 14.

where teachers expect students to achieve and students meet that expectation. The sad reality is that less that 20% of students in middle schools, junior high schools, and high schools in Alabama attend schools that participate in the Initiative.

Recommendations from the Alabama Reading Initiative Experience

The report that follows "tells the story" of how secondary educators crafted their own version of a statewide reading initiative and how they have implemented it in schools around the state. Our interview data yielded specific lessons about their experiences, and from those we were able to develop recommendations for others interested in mounting a similar reading improvement effort.

The first is to use a flexible model that is grounded in solid research on reading acquisition and growth but that can also be responsive to different secondary content areas and to conditions in local schools. An inflexible model does not allow teachers and administrators to achieve the kind of ownership that motivates them to refine the model to fit their students' needs. Even though flexible, the model must emphasize to teachers the importance of using explicit comprehension strategies and provide teachers with clear direction on how to use them within their different content areas. Otherwise, teachers can easily claim that strategies are fine but "won't work in my area."

It is important that there be centralized leadership at the beginning—educators who know the challenges of secondary education and respect the ways in which middle and high school teachers, students, and teaching practices differ from those in elementary schools. But that leadership must cede authority to district- and school-based leaders who have been nurtured and mentored in the tasks needed to localize the initiative. These local leaders should be encouraged to be creative in their use of local monies but also be constantly vigilant for opportunities for external funding to pay for supplies, professional development, and even just opportunities for teachers from one school to visit and observe their colleagues in other schools. Building community across schools is a productive use of even small amounts of money.

Finally, several years of implementation of secondary ARI have shown that even a well-developed initiative cannot erase deep-seated reading difficulties. Across the state, teachers and administrators said that they needed an intensive reading program for students in the middle and high schools. Content area teachers can certainly become better skilled at helping students improve their ability to understand and learn from textbooks, but they cannot provide in-depth intervention. Nor should they be expected to do so. These students may have some basic reading skills, but they need help learning how to orchestrate existing skills and obtain new ones. Without such help, they will remain behind academically, still struggling to make sense out of school.

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Since 1998, the Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI) has captured the attention of many who are interested in reading and educational reform. ARI has become known for its clear, committed, and widespread focus on a deep-rooted problem for many students—namely, poor reading achievement.[4] ARI epitomizes the concept of systemic reform by the involvement of and support from many diverse stakeholder groups. The Initiative spans the K–12 landscape and has created partnerships among schools, colleges, private organizations, and others. ARI continues to have the potential to change teacher practice, student motivation and attitudes toward literacy, and, ultimately, student achievement.

ARI is unique in many capacities. It is a collaborative effort with roots at the state rather than local level. Leaders of the A+ Foundation,[5] a Montgomery-based nonprofit organization dedicated to improving K–12 education in Alabama, and Dr. Katherine Mitchell,[6] of the Alabama State Department of Education, worked to bring many people together to take action about the poor reading achievement of the state's students. A panel of teachers, higher education faculty, State Department of Education staff, business leaders, and representatives of educational organizations as diverse as the Alabama chapter of the National Education Association, the Alabama Reading Association, and the Alabama Eagle Forum met for a two-week working session during which they envisioned a statewide effort to achieve the common goal of 100% literacy for students at ARI sites.

Key Elements of ARI

- Decisions by schools to apply to become literacy demonstration sites committed to a 100% literacy rate among students

- Commitment of at least 85% of the faculty and administration to attend a two-week intensive summer institute about reading improvement and ongoing professional development throughout the school year

- Appointment of full-time reading coaches, who work with teachers and with struggling readers

- Collaboration between schools and higher education faculty partners, who serve as mentors, provide access to research, and help solve instructional problems related to literacy learning

- Partnerships with local businesses

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[4] The 2005 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) test results released on October 20, 2005, reported that grade 4 reading scores were almost flat and that the percentage of students at grade 8 scoring at the proficient level had dropped to 31%, down from 32% in 2003.

[5] See www.aplusala.org for more information about the A+ Foundation.

[6] Dr. Mitchell has recently been named Assistant Superintendent of Education for Reading.

The Initiative emphasizes extensive professional development to improve teachers' skills and the use of research-based instructional practices to improve students' literacy skills. The approaches recommended by the panel members emerged from their study of the extensive literature on beginning reading,[7] their discussions of what would work in Alabama, and their belief that research-based professional development could increase teachers' abilities to help their students read better.

From its inception, ARI has given comprehensive attention to reading difficulties across the K–12 span—difficulties that have historically been very real in Alabama. To illustrate, in 1998, the first year of ARI, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores for Alabama fourth graders indicated that just 24% were reading at or above the Proficient level on the reading test, and 21% of eighth graders scored at or above Proficient. A respondent to a 2002 report on reading policy in Alabama[8] described the problem as "cumulative, and it catches up with people as they get to high school. Every year the deficit gets bigger and bigger." ARI's attention to the needs of secondary students who struggle with reading, a group that is often overlooked, is unique among statewide efforts to address reading. This report focuses on the implementation and impact of ARI in secondary schools and with secondary students.

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[7] The panel's *Report on the Review of Research* (1998) outlines themes for effective literacy instruction that emerged from a review of over 70 articles and books. For Beginning Reading, the report emphasizes taking a balanced approach to instruction; providing a language-rich, literature-rich environment; addressing oral language development, phonemic awareness, print awareness and letter recognition, phonics, temporary/developmental spelling, and reading comprehension; and facilitating the reading/writing connection. For Expansion of Reading Power, the report emphasizes providing an ample and broad amount of reading; using effective direct reading comprehension instructional practices; supporting vocabulary development; addressing motivation; and facilitating the reading/writing connection. Finally, for Effective Intervention, the report emphasizes recognizing need and persistent deficit; making early diagnoses; taking a balanced approach to instruction; using effective teacher-directed instructional practices; accelerating instruction; and being attentive to effective program features.

[8] Coggshall, J. G. (2003). *Alabama reading policy: Problems, processes, and participants*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan School of Education, p. 3.

As a leader in the adolescent literacy movement, Carnegie Corporation of New York asked the American Institutes for Research (AIR) to conduct a study of ARI in secondary schools. The resulting study focused primarily on ARI in middle and high schools. Its goals were to discover how secondary ARI was being successfully implemented and to identify obstacles to success. A further goal was to suggest how initiatives like ARI can be mounted in other states. To meet these goals, AIR undertook a qualitative study, using surveys, interviews, focus groups, and, most specifically, site visits to see ARI in action. From the descriptive data, AIR was able to uncover the theory of action that captures successful implementation of ARI and to suggest factors that have contributed or can contribute to its sustainability at the secondary level. Specifically, this report describes how ARI as originally conceptualized emerged into a reading initiative to meet the needs of middle and high school teachers and students. Data revealed the successes teachers and administrators experienced as the Initiative took shape for secondary schools, the challenges encountered along the way, and the outcomes experienced by both teachers and students. Many of the Alabama educators were willing to share their opinions about the likelihood of continued and improved reform through secondary ARI and also to make recommendations to others contemplating beginning such an initiative in their districts or states.

ARI as a Secondary Initiative: Continuing Emergence

Alabama was clearly ahead of many states and of federal efforts in recognizing the needs of older, struggling readers when the formative reading panel members proposed an initiative that would span kindergarten through grade 12. One of the Initiative's first tasks, however, was gaining recognition of the literacy issues that existed among middle and high school students—essentially, ARI advocates needed to gain buy-in for secondary ARI from many stakeholders. Although attention to literacy among educators and concerned citizens has grown and

continues to grow—and receive significant federal attention through the No Child Left Behind Act and Reading First—struggling readers at the secondary level have often been neglected. The challenge of creating widespread advocacy for and understanding of adolescent readers' needs remains to this day, in Alabama and across the United States.

At the time of ARI's inception, many secondary students were receiving borderline scores on reading tests.[9] These students were not necessarily failing, but their scores were low enough to suggest that their reading skills were not well developed; these students could not read at grade level, think deeply about what they were reading, and use their skills in content area learning. These barely passing test scores were being achieved through what Caroline Novak of the A+ Foundation termed "coping and masking skills," essentially, compensatory abilities that allowed them to pass tests but that would not serve them well in content area coursework. Students' comprehension was a huge issue at the secondary level, although it wasn't an issue that many middle and high schools were interested in addressing head on.

Gaining recognition of these issues and support for a reading initiative at the secondary level—and maintaining it—was the first challenge for those committed to a K–12 effort. As Novak explained, *"Initially, when we were having public forums, people continued to puzzle about why there was such a big to-do. Reading was assumed to be something that teachers knew how to address. I would say that's changed somewhat [since ARI], although there's still legislators and some constituents [for whom] this remains an issue."*[10] As ARI has been implemented in middle and high schools, teachers and reading coaches have systematically adapted materials and approaches to meet their needs.

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[9] One strong motivation for ARI was the realization that students in the state were scoring in the bottom quartile in reading on the Stanford Achievement tests.

[10] Direct quotations from individuals who were interviewed for the study are presented in italics and are accompanied by the individuals' job title or role in ARI. Interviewees signed an informed consent form, and in all but a few cases, quotations are anonymous. Those to whom quotations are attributed had agreed that their names could be used.

Indeed, it is safe to say that their efforts to make ARI work in secondary schools with adolescent students have resulted in separate secondary and elementary reading initiatives under the same ARI umbrella.

This section of the report, using data from interviews with teachers, administrators, state personnel, and other key ARI actors, describes how federal, state, and school factors affected the development of the Initiative. The comments illustrate differences between elementary and secondary ARI in terms of perceived need, attention, and available supports and resources. They provide at least four valuable lessons for other states and organizations that undertake similar initiatives:

Lessons Learned

1. Be responsive to the different needs of secondary and elementary students and schools—a one-size-fits-all approach won't work.

2. Develop partnerships among teachers, administrators, and schools to create a coherent and well-defined K–12 continuum of reading instruction.

3. Provide secondary teachers and schools with consistent support from specialized staff.

4. Be attentive to the local, state, and national policy environment related to reading.

These lessons are explained in more detail in the following sections.

LESSON 1: Be responsive to the different needs of secondary and elementary students and schools—a one-size-fits-all approach won't work.

Within any local or state educational system, elementary and secondary students and schools have distinct characteristics that require special attention. At the outset, ARI was formulated as a single, seamless initiative to address reading across the K–12 span. The formative reading panel that had advised the State Department of Education did not make a clear distinction between early and later grades in planning ARI. Although there was some mention of secondary

reading, the professional development and resource materials provided to teachers took something of a "one-size-fits-all" approach to teaching reading with only minor modifications for subject areas. Consciously or unconsciously, the developers of the initial plan reasoned that the elementary model would seamlessly transfer to a secondary application under the umbrella of "reading in the content areas." (See "Trends in Secondary Reading Research" on page 4 of this report for more on reading in the content areas.) One reason for this initial across-the-board approach to ARI is the orientation of many ARI advocates and staff toward early reading and their backgrounds in elementary schools. A state administrator explained that there has been *"not really…anyone on the reading panel or staff with real expertise in secondary; that doesn't mean [certain state staff] don't have a lot of secondary expertise but the focus has been people with so predominately an elementary background."* Their "elementary backgrounds" were evident in the research they considered, the materials and strategies they promoted, and the design they proposed for professional development.[11]

As could be expected, opinions differed on where the Initiative should focus. The elementary orientation of ARI was appropriate, according to some. One state administrator explained that the *"focus should be on the K–3 program…K–3 is the critical range for making a life-long difference in kids to read…You'll always have a group of kids in middle school and high school that don't receive support, even when they need it."* (See "Why Do We Need Secondary ARI at All?" on page 6 for more on different perceptions of the need for ARI.) Still, this approach had both positive and negative aspects, as one in-service director noted:

> *The bad thing in the beginning is that it was one size fits all. The presentation styles were the same for both groups. Elementary school teachers accept materials*

and will play [along] with you, whereas secondary teachers won't. It turned out to be positive in that the secondary teachers learned a lot about pedagogy from the elementary presenters and teachers that they participated with. They were exposed to things they might not have ever tried before, exposed to quality children's literature, and that was not by design. It happened by accident.

Trends in Secondary Reading Research: Reading in the Content Areas

The study of secondary reading is not a new phenomenon. The notion of "reading in the content areas," perhaps the first lasting agenda related to adolescents and literacy, has been emphasized for over a century.[i] During the first half of the 20th century, reading researchers and advocates promoted content area reading by using such slogans as "every teacher a teacher of reading."[ii] These pioneers, recognizing that different content areas placed different demands on readers, sought to identify these differences and enable teachers and students to deal with them effectively. Interest in content area reading waned mid-century and reemerged in 1970 with the publication of Herber's *Teaching Reading in Content Areas*.[iii] Since that time, the literature has grown exponentially and has also become more specialized. Researchers and advocates continue to address adolescents' literacy issues, including their motivation and engagement,[iv] their struggles,[v] and the contexts that influence their reading choices and activities.[vi]

[i] For a detailed history of reading in the content areas through the early 1980s, see Moore, D., Readence, J., & Rickman, R. (1983). An historical explanation of content area reading instruction. *Reading Research Quarterly, 18*(4), 419–438.

[ii] Betts, E. A. (1939). Elements in a remedial reading program. *American School Board Journal, 99,* 29–45; Gray, W. S. (1940). *Reading in general education: An exploratory study.* Washington, DC: American Council on Education.

[iii] Herber, H. (1970). *Teaching reading in content areas.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

[iv] See, for example, Wigfield, A. (2004). Motivation for reading during the early adolescent and adolescent years. In D. Strickland & D. Alvermann (Eds.), *Bridging the literacy achievement gap: Grades 4–12* (pp. 56–69). New York: Teachers College Press.

[v] See, for example, Underwood, T., & Pearson, P. D. (2004). Teaching struggling adolescent readers to comprehend what they read. In T. Jetton & J. Dole (Eds.), *Adolescent literacy research and practice* (pp. 135–161). New York: Guilford.

[vi] See, for example, O'Brien, D., Moje, E., & Stewart, R. (2001). Exploring the context of secondary literacy: Literacy in people's everyday school lives. In E. Moje & D. O'Brien (Eds.), *Constructions of literacy: Studies of teaching and learning in and out of secondary schools* (pp. 27–48). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

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[11] It should be noted that as ARI was being developed, national attention—and federal funding—was focused on beginning reading. As discussed later in this report, Alabama had considerable funding from the Reading Excellence Act, the forerunner of the *No Child Left Behind* program, Reading First.

Secondary teachers began to complain that the strategies and materials they were given as well as the approach to professional development were not appropriate for their work with middle and high school students; a school reading coach explained, *"The perception [was] that some reading strategies are too elementary for the high school level."* Some students shared this perception; a high school teacher observed that *"some of the students think that ARI is elementary, and they don't want to take it seriously."*

> *It's a challenge at the state level to learn the subtle differences about what we need to be doing at the elementary versus the secondary levels.*—(State administrator)

Gradually, state staff responded by revising some aspects of ARI. They held separate professional development sessions for secondary teachers and tailored strategies and materials to accommodate a secondary-specific perspective. A regional reading coach explained, *"We've had to really put a secondary spin on some of the strategies, the basis for which was from primary."* The process was ongoing at the time of the study. A state administrator noted that it is *"gradually becoming clear to them why secondary is so different even with the same strategies, [which is] not to say we've provided the very best infrastructure or leadership to our secondary folks; but ARI should be commended for including secondary at least in theory, on paper, and with budget."*

LESSON 2: Develop partnerships among teachers, administrators, and schools to create a coherent and well-defined K–12 continuum of reading instruction.

Although elementary and secondary ARI have unique characteristics and needs, a successful K–12 initiative should rest on a coherent continuum of reading instruction across the grades. This continuum would clearly articulate reading goals for students, "best practices" for teachers, and the ways these elements could be aligned and modified across the K–12 span. One regional reading coach described the challenge of creating such a continuum in terms of the distinct needs of students at different grade levels:

> *I think between K–3 and 4–12 we're seeing that the emphasis is totally different. We're really taking a look at what reading means. It should be decoding [in] K–3 and then comprehension [in] 4–12…How do you define secondary? I'm beginning to think that more and more it's a K–3 versus 4–12 thing because the skills they need at grade 4 are the same ones they need at grade 12.*

Many interviewees explained that increased communication across ARI sites—especially between elementary and secondary schools—was a key component for developing a continuum. Elementary-secondary school partnerships were often suggested as a way to create a continuum of knowledge about reading and aligned reading instructional practices. One high school principal noted that administrator partnerships were a place to begin:

> *I'd tell the secondary administrators to partner with the elementary administrators. [Secondary administrators] have to get out of the frame of mind that it's the elementary school's job to teach reading and that if [elementary schools] don't do it, it won't get done. It's all of our jobs. We have to make sure that students cannot only read and recognize words, but can also comprehend what they read. Students have to be able to read and comprehend at the 11th-grade level.*

ARI has moved toward establishing administrator partnerships through the use of principal coaches. These coaches provide professional development specifically for principals of ARI schools. One principal coach described the early principals' meetings, saying, *"All responded well to the meetings, [but] elementary and secondary principals are two different animals…We need to focus on reading instruction. There may have been advantages for secondary staff being in principal coach meetings with elementary principals, just to hear how they think and talk."*

Why Do We Need Secondary ARI At All?

A number of teachers and administrators voiced a complaint: If reading was taught correctly from the outset—that is, in elementary school—then secondary ARI would not be necessary. Many teachers and administrators urged the broader application of ARI principles at the lower grades, believing that this would ensure students' acquisition of strong reading and writing skills before their arrival in middle and high schools. A middle school principal said, *"I think something really needs to take place prior to [students'] getting here…A sixth-grade teacher should… not have to go back and teach elementary skills that they should have learned."* Expressing her frustration, another teacher stated:

> *I don't know why [ARI] is not mandatory for elementary school, so when that a child gets to high school, [reading] won't be a problem. I don't know why the State Department doesn't put this in the budget for elementary schools… this <u>should</u> be the elementary reading program. It's just not fair for a child to get to high school and not be able to read. Someone should have seen that problem earlier. It was someone's responsibility to see that earlier, not in seventh and eighth grade. It is not the child's problem; it is the State Department['s]. Poor counties don't have the money to do programs; children shouldn't be penalized for living in poorer counties.*

Still, many people emphasize that ARI fills an important role in addressing the needs of struggling readers in the middle and high schools. Several interviewees noted that ARI, by addressing reading difficulties, enables secondary teachers to better teach their content. In other words, secondary teachers must be able to effectively deal with the reading issues that seriously limit their students' academic success in a particular subject area. One teacher explained her new understanding of the reading-content connection, saying, *"ARI…made me realize reading is not a separate subject…It's got me bringing reading into my math class, making me realize reading is an integral part of any subject."* Because students with better reading skills and strategies can generally take on subject matter more successfully, one state administrator commented that ARI *"is the salvation of teachers."*

Some interviewees described their hopes that as generations of elementary ARI and Reading First students enter secondary schools, the gradual phasing-out of secondary ARI might begin. One high school teacher noted, *"I want to [reach] a point where ARI won't be necessary in high school."* According to one regional reading coach, *"If the elementary is effective, it can only help us. Theoretically, the burden on the secondary level should ease as the implementation is effective on the elementary level."* Still, secondary ARI fills—and should continue to fill—an important educational space because secondary readers have unique needs. An in-service director explained, *"[I]f we get [students] in the early grades, we don't need a secondary focus, but until we see if NCLB works, we need to have secondary funding. Even if it does work, you still need to have some emphasis on secondary education, just because it is so different at that level."*

Advocates for partnerships also suggested that school administrators work to create teacher partnerships across the elementary and secondary levels. For example, elementary teachers might provide useful modeling for secondary teachers as they become more acquainted with reading instructional strategies. By observing and discussing practice in this way, teachers can learn how reading issues are addressed differently across the grades; at the same time, they can establish shared understandings of and responsibility for reading instruction. A secondary principal described the benefits of teacher partnerships, saying, *"Most high school teachers will admit that they are content teachers and don't have the strategies and skills to teach reading.*

The high school teachers can partner with elementary school teachers, and they can learn from them to be sure that they are being successful. In our school, we need to teach the fundamentals, the basic skills of reading, phonics, just basic good practices for reading."

> *We depend on each other to bounce ideas around. Being in touch with people that deal with different grade levels and different questions is really good for us [and allows us] to know what's out there.*
>
> —(Regional reading coach)

LESSON 3: **Provide secondary teachers and schools with consistent support from specialized staff.**

Repeatedly, the data confirmed that adequate and consistent human resources matter more than material resources for an initiative like ARI. Almost all interviewees described the statewide "budget crisis" that affected schools in many ways. One interviewee admitted, *"Secondary is on the back burner…they have talked about cutting it at some point."* At the time of the study, secondary schools wishing to become new ARI sites had to raise their own funding for professional development and materials. Still, schools that understand the local need for ARI have worked valiantly and creatively within budget constraints to provide services for their students. The strain they feel results from a lack of secondary-specific expertise and leadership from the state, but they have devised local means to support the continuation of ARI.

Interviewees explained that many staff assigned to work in middle and high schools lacked adequate experience in and knowledge of the secondary schools.[12] One state administrator acknowledged that the original ARI reading panel had no one with real expertise in secondary reading and that *"the focus has been [on] people with predominately an elementary background."*[13] This lack of expertise has raised questions among secondary school-based educators about the Initiative's credibility. A high school principal explained, *"This has been a real weak link from the beginning. The [school reading coaches] will tell the secondary principals, 'I don't know about secondary.' Well, you can't expect a principal to take their time away from school and go to a meeting where they preface the conversation with, 'Well, I'm not sure about secondary.' So I think that has got to be dealt with."*

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[12] This finding is consistent with other research. See, for example, Juvonen, J., Li, V-N, Kaganoff, T., Augustine, C. H., & Constant, C. (2004). *Focus on the wonder years: Challenges facing the American middle school*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation.

[13] Several faculty members from Alabama teacher education programs who served as consultants to ARI throughout its development phase do have secondary expertise, but although they may have provided insight and ideas to state administrators, their role remained consultative.

The state has provided a handful of staff to support the implementation of ARI in secondary schools, primarily through professional development sessions and monitoring visits from regional reading coaches. However, with four or five secondary staff members and 134 secondary school sites, these coaches have clearly been overextended. One district administrator said, *"Even though there is a secondary person at the State Department, many times that secondary person is in dual roles, supporting the elementary as well as trying to keep the secondary going…As you know, we have 134 schools right now in the secondary…[state-funded support staff] are spread very thinly."* The same is true for school-based reading coaches. Many people described the position of school reading coach as an essential component of the ARI model. However, many secondary ARI schools simply cannot afford to fund this position. Some schools have no school reading coach, others have a coach who is responsible for ARI at two or more schools, and still others have a coach who divides his or her time among several tasks. Later in this report, profiles of ARI school sites illustrate how schools have coped with the fiscal and logistical burdens of maintaining ARI services.

LESSON 4: **Be attentive to the local, state, and national policy environment related to reading.**

National attention to reading—and the resulting policy environment—has had a great influence on secondary ARI. The focus on K–3 reading education, emerging first in the Reading Excellence Act and now in Reading First, has presented major challenges to maintaining the emphasis on secondary literacy issues. As one in-service director observed, *"I think secondary education is embraced at the state level and seen as important, but I think there are things on the national level that bring that focus to the elementary level."*

Although ARI administrators maintain some support for secondary schools, they face an ongoing struggle to allocate funds and continue professional development related to Initiative approaches for teachers in grades

> *Our focus has shifted so much to K–3, and the needs of middle and high school teachers [have] fallen by the wayside.*
>
> —*(In-service director)*

funding is available from outside sources for secondary ARI. A district administrator explained this persistent problem for secondary schools:

> *There are many big differences [between elementary and secondary ARI], and funding is one. I don't think that there's a category within the budget to support secondary. I think that secondary just sort of falls into the overall budget, and whatever can be taken out is used…We wish that we had a budget to work from and that we could make*

[14] Alabama was one of the first three states to receive Reading First funding; its award was $102 million for six years. All 46 eligible districts have received awards, and the money is distributed among 93 schools.

long-term plans, but it's…very short term. This is what's available now.

The next section elaborates on many of the components of ARI mentioned here—the specialized strategies, the personnel, and the supports and resources that seem to be central to its successful implementation.

Necessary Conditions for ARI Implementation

Certain conditions within the state, the school districts, and the schools themselves have enabled ARI to take root and survive at the local level. Alabama is certainly unique in terms of policy and school contexts; nonetheless, these conditions may provide important lessons about the structures and resources necessary for the development and implementation of reading programs in other states. The graphic below presents these conditions and illustrates the ways that they work in tandem to support teachers' and students' work with ARI.
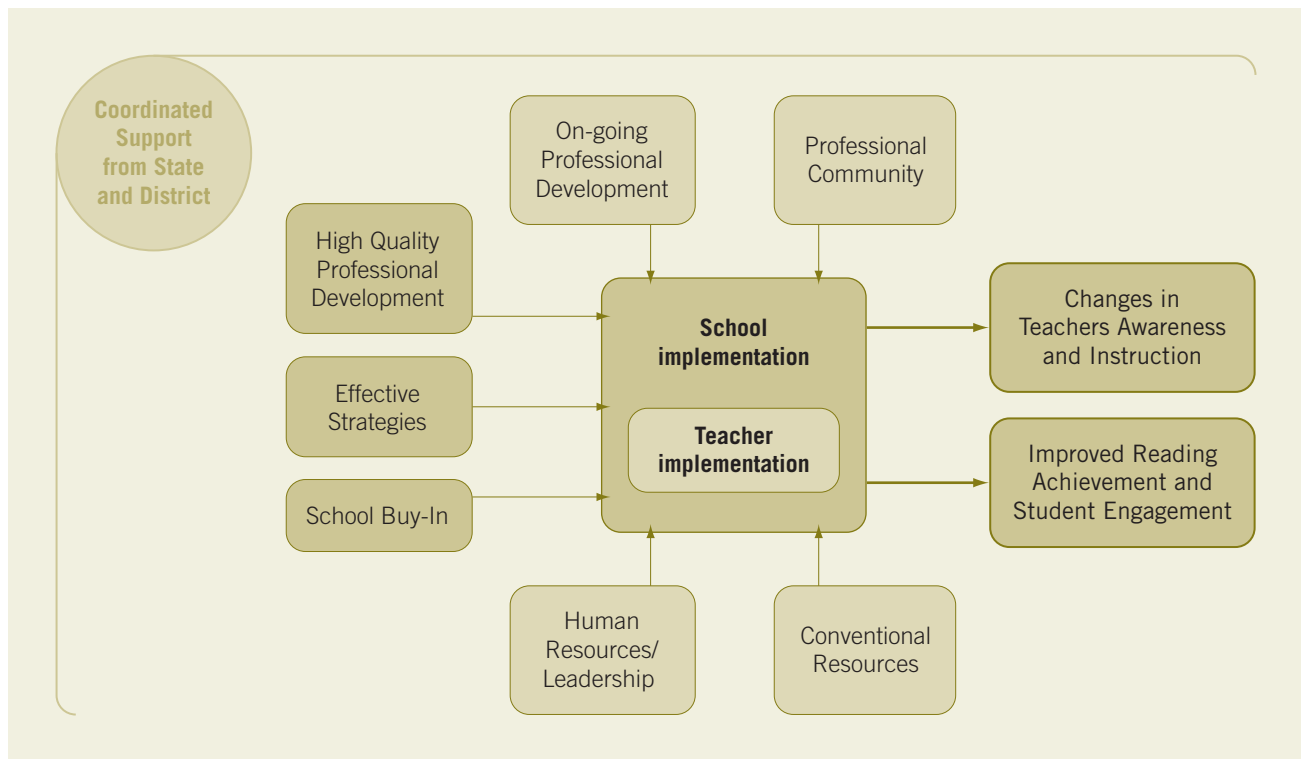
An overarching variable in implementation of ARI is **Coordinated Support from District and State Administrators**, as shown in the hexagon at the upper left of the graphic. Such support might take more conventional forms, in terms of funds or personnel, or a less defined form, such as a policy climate for change. As is depicted in the graphic, this support is envisioned to create an environment conducive to implementation of the Initiative without placing demands or burdens on the school. Interviewees suggested that coordination and support are imperative to sustain an initiative such as ARI. Many focused on the need for robust and long-term funding for the secondary Initiative, while in other cases, principals and teachers suggested that with support at the district or state levels, elementary, middle, and high schools coordinate their view of reading. By developing a shared continuum of reading growth, ARI could be more effective in secondary schools for the simple reason that instruction had been more effective in elementary grades.

The three components on the far left of the graphic—**High Quality Professional Development, Effective Strategies,** and **School Buy-In**—are essential starting points for ARI implementation. High-quality professional development provides teachers with the knowledge base and tools to meet the needs of students who are reading at many different levels.[15] ARI's first professional development sessions were grounded in a research base derived primarily from investigations of beginning reading; content and participant activities were generic, regardless of teachers' levels. However, middle and high school teachers of content area subjects found neither the professional development as a whole nor the particular instructional strategies applicable to their teaching situations or their students' needs. It was

not until the content of the professional development was differentiated for them that secondary teachers really began to appreciate the training and see how the strategies could be effective in *their* classrooms. School buy-in is stronger when teachers and administrators recognize the value and relevance of ARI to their situation and can see that the strategies underlying the Initiative can make a difference in students' achievement and engagement.

The four components shown in the ovals—**Ongoing Professional Development, Professional Community, Human Resources/Leadership,** and **Conventional Resources**—all influence how ARI is implemented at the school and classroom levels. Interview and survey data suggested that ongoing professional development is needed if the content of the lengthy summer sessions were to become part of teachers' instructional repertoire. Ongoing professional development takes many forms and may be formal or informal, including interactions with the school and regional reading coaches and the recertification process. It is often through the professional development that teachers begin to forge the sense of professional community that was reported in many of the ARI schools.

In ARI schools, human resources (including higher education partners, regional reading coaches, school reading coaches, and school administrators) seemed far more important than conventional resources such as materials and funds. These individuals were described as leaders who have influenced teachers' thinking about students' literacy development and their ability to improve reading and writing skills. They prioritize ARI and devote time to promoting and refining its implementation, and were often referred to as "instructional leaders."

Still, conventional resources are important: many schools in Alabama are poorly resourced, and respondents frequently mentioned lack of time and appropriate supplies for implementing ARI. Notably, the lack of these conventional resources was mentioned

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[15] Garet, M., Birman, B., Porter, A., Yoon, K., & Desimone, L. (2001). What makes professional development effective? Analysis of a national sample of teachers. *American Educational Research Journal, 38* (4), 915–945; Garet, M., Birman, B., Porter, A., Desimone, L., & Herman, R. (1999). *Designing effective professional development: Lessons learned from the Eisenhower Program.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of the Undersecretary.

as a deterrent to successful implementation in schools with less sense of common vision, coherence around common goals, and collegiality—in short, in schools with less sense of professional community. In schools that evidenced a strong professional community, teachers, coaches, and administrators worked together to overcome the lack of resources in order to make ARI successful.

Finally, the boxes at the far right—**Changes in Teachers' Awareness and Instruction** and **Improved Reading Achievement and Student Engagement**—are the ultimate goals of ARI. Teachers are central to the implementation of the Initiative, which is built on professional development that not only teaches strategies for teachers to integrate into their instruction but increases teachers' awareness of and sense of responsibility for reading instruction for all students. As discussed later in this report, many teachers did view ARI as a positive agent for change in their professional lives.

Students' improved reading achievement and engagement with reading activities are other key goals for ARI. This study has looked tangentially at reading improvement as measured by standardized tests or the Alabama high school exit exam,[16] but has focused more closely on student attitudes toward and engagement with reading. The literature highlights adolescent students' motivation to read and engagement with reading as serious concerns.[17] In ARI secondary schools, especially those in which widespread use of ARI strategies and participation in a professional community were the norm, these issues were clearly taken seriously. Teachers realized their responsibility in helping struggling readers,

administrators saw the provision of "extra" reading materials such as magazines as part of their role, and students talked enthusiastically about their in-school and out-of-school reading.

As the national spotlight turns more toward the crisis in adolescents' reading, we may see changes in the ways that secondary ARI is acknowledged, funded, and supported. At the time of this study, however, responsibility for the maintenance of ARI—including funding—had fallen largely to the secondary schools themselves, and schools varied in the extent to which they were able to achieve and manipulate the conditions deemed essential for success. The next sections elaborate on the successes and challenges related to ARI at the school level; in addition, the report presents the ways that specific ARI sites have taken ownership of the Initiative to make it work within specific settings.

Successes and Challenges: ARI at Work in Secondary Schools

Our study confirms the role of ARI in Alabama secondary schools as both an agent for positive change and a challenge to implement. On the one hand, teachers experienced changes in philosophy and practice and saw results in terms of students' achievement and engagement in reading and across subject areas. On the other hand, teachers and schools faced obstacles that represent significant barriers to using the Initiative. This section of the report describes several successes that can be attributed to ARI as well as challenges that have made implementation difficult.

Outcomes for Teachers

In many ways, ARI simply does not work unless teachers accept its tenets and invest in its practice. Interviews with numerous teachers and comments on the teacher survey indicate the extent to which teachers changed both philosophy and practice. The ARI-related outcomes for teachers listed below were particularly evident.

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[16] Moscovitch, E. (2002). *Evaluation of the Alabama Reading Initiative: Third year evaluation*. Gloucester, MA: Cape Ann Economics; Moscovitch (2004).

[17] For a review of the complex processes involved in reading motivation and engagement, see Guthrie, J., & Anderson, E. (1999). Engagement in reading: Processes of motivated, strategic, knowledgeable, social readers. In J. Guthrie & D. Alvermann (Eds), *Engaged reading: Processes, practices, and policy implications* (pp. 17–45). New York: Teachers College Press. See also Reed, J. H., Schallert, D. L., Beth, A. D., & Woodruff, A. L. (2004). Motivated reader, engaged writer: The role of motivation in the literate acts of adolescents. In T. L. Jetton & J. A. Dole (Eds.), *Adolescent literacy: Research and practice* (pp. 251–282). New York: Guilford.

Teacher Outcomes

- Teachers' philosophies reflected more awareness of the importance of reading and a personal responsibility to address students' reading difficulties.
- Teachers were increasingly aware of instructional practices that could help students read and achieve academically.
- Teachers were collaborating more than before ARI.

Teachers' philosophies reflected more awareness of the importance of reading and a personal responsibility to address students' reading difficulties.

Perhaps more significant than any outward indication of ARI's impact are the more subtle changes that occurred in teachers' philosophies of teaching and expectations for students. Many comments from teachers suggested changes deeper than surface-level behaviors, particularly in terms of a greater sense of responsibility for teaching reading. *Awareness* is a term used frequently by teachers and others involved with ARI, particularly heightened awareness of reading as a central component of learning across the content areas. One teacher noted, *"Because of ARI, reading is a foundation to everything, so I think ARI is giving teachers a way to get their point across in their subject matter."* Another teacher explained that ARI

> *has changed the way we approach material with our classes. It has made us aware of the need to read and monitor reading. It has been good for everyone. It changed [teachers'] approach because we are so aware of it. We are encouraged to make [students] dig more, spoon-feed less, make students aware of the importance of reading. Since before ARI the focus has definitely changed; that goes without saying.*

A regional reading coach observed, *"Reading is the basis for everything that happens in the school building; it's a life skill you're teaching….It's a need; we've got to do something about it…[O]ne thing [a certain principal] always said [was], 'We can't focus on what they didn't get in elementary. They're here now.'"*

This "they're here now" attitude was reflected in teachers' comments; one teacher noted that in her school, *"The vast majority of teachers are looking to improve their abilities"* to address students' reading difficulties. Another teacher explained, *"I've had a realization within myself that if a student cannot read, that he/she is very limited in what they can absorb from my class since so much is printed text."* Still another teacher who attributed changes in philosophy to ARI explained:

> *I've learned that ARI is the most important thing in the class and in teaching. I've learned to understand that there are multiple learning strategies and methods, and have been able to think about the whole classroom environment and focus on making it kid friendly so they aren't afraid to open their minds up.*

Teachers evidently had higher expectations for students in terms of reading as well: 83% of surveyed middle school teachers and 80% of high school teachers agreed with the statement "ARI raised my expectations for the level and amount of reading students can handle." A middle school assistant principal observed, *"Even our below-grade-level students realize that our teachers care, that they can be successful too."*

Teachers were increasingly aware of instructional practices that could help students read and achieve academically.

ARI also evidently raised awareness of instructional practices that could help students with reading and, by extension, their academic achievement within a content area (see "Frequently Used ARI Strategies and Activities" on page 12 for some of the preferred practices). One teacher noted, *"For the majority…I would say every [teacher] has taken the strategies and employed them at least to a degree with the students…It's changed the way we teach."*

These changes took various forms, both overt and subtle. For some teachers, ARI seemed to have become part of their everyday teaching. One teacher said that ARI *"is a big part of how I teach. I now reexamine how I teach; not solely that, but it helped to motivate change."*

Another teacher explained, *"I changed the whole format of my class."* A school reading coach commented that at her school, *"You can practically walk down the hall and hear them doing things that are ARI related. You can walk in their classroom, and it's evident."*

Some teachers attributed other changes in practice to ARI, as the Initiative provides alternatives to the old, lecture-style approaches to teaching. According to one school reading coach, *"I think what ARI did for*

our teachers was break the traditional style of lecturing." A state administrator agreed, saying, *"[Fewer] teachers are just lecturing…One of the biggest changes was watching the teachers move from lectures to teaching strategies where students were helping each other."* A teacher at another school elaborated on this type of change, explaining:

> *The big difference is…coming right out of college and starting to teach, I was still set on the aspect of lecturing. I can sit there and lecture for 45 minutes or 50 minutes and ask the kids to answer questions out of the book. I assumed since I was an auditory learner, everyone was like that. Going to ARI this summer, it was like a slap in the face. Some people need hands-on. Some kids need to see it. I've cut down my lectures from 45 to 15 minutes.*

The results from the teacher survey support this notion of changes in teaching style and practice: 84% of surveyed middle school teachers and 70% of high school teachers agreed with the statement "because of the ARI, I regularly tried new instructional approaches"; and 92% of middle school teachers and 87% of high school teachers agreed with the statement "because of the ARI, I used more instructional strategies to address the individual needs of students."

> *That summer session provided me with a flood of new ideas and activities that I really applied and that I could use in my classroom.—(Teacher)*

Through ARI, teachers also became more aware of their students who were struggling readers. As one regional reading coach explained, *"[A] lot of it was about frame of reference. A lot of teachers weren't identifying students as struggling readers because they were comparing them to other classmates, and they were all poor readers. And we had to raise awareness and let them compare them to national levels and stuff like that."* In this way, ARI was more strategic than

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Frequently Used ARI Strategies and Activities

Teachers mentioned numerous ARI strategies and activities that they found particularly interesting and engaging or that they used successfully with students. The most commonly mentioned strategies and activities follow:

- Graphic organizers (e.g., Venn diagrams, story maps, comparison/contrast charts) to organize, summarize, and display information that students have read

- KWL, a graphic organizer that asks students to list before reading what they know (K) about the subject and what they want to learn (W) from reading and to list after reading what they have learned (L)

- Think-alouds, used by teachers or students to increase metacognition

- Diamond and bean poems (a kind of shape poem)

- Cooperative learning or working in teams to encourage discussion and shared construction of meaning

- ABC books made by older students and shared with youngsters in elementary school

- Drop Everything and Read (DEAR) or Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) time, in which everyone in a classroom or school reads independently for a set period of time

- Fluency checks (usually as a one-minute oral read) on the contention that fluency, or the words read correctly in a given time period, is correlated with comprehension

- Journaling, as students record their thoughts, which teachers read and respond to directly on paper

simply incorporating new activities into instruction; many teachers learned how to recognize the reading difficulties that might be impeding their students' learning and what interventions were appropriate to address those difficulties. One teacher explained:

First of all, I think that every teacher here has become a diagnostic teacher, which before, we were not. They know how to tackle and intervene in those interferences that are causing them not to comprehend text. They are using so much more data as a result. We as a faculty at this school are a much more humane faculty. We don't have to hide, any of us that have reading deficiencies.

One key to being such a "diagnostic teacher" is using data to inform instructional decisions, a hallmark of ARI. A principal commented on the increased use of data in one school:

The biggest thing…that ARI has done for us is to make us look at the research and the data that is available to us and structure our teaching around the data that is available to us and [note] our strengths and weaknesses. As long as we continue to do that, we'll be successful. This year, the ARI people, actually the regional [reading coach], she was able to get me a printout of our student scores, a breakdown…Those are the kinds of things that ARI has made us do. It's made us analyze the data to cover where our weaknesses are.

Using data regularly to inform instruction—or progress monitoring[18]—was a new concept for some. One teacher explained that using data in this way enables her to differentiate instruction as she teaches instead of being tied to more permanent "tracking" decisions. She explained that the faculty at her school uses data for *"monitoring [students'] progress. The teachers*

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[18] Progress monitoring is a component of the assessment approach advocated by Reading First; it has become an integral part of what teachers in the early grades do to ensure that students are mastering skills in a timely manner. The Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) is used across the state for this purpose. No similar instrumentation is used in secondary schools, but the concept of checking in on students' progress seems to have taken hold with many ARI teachers.

who work with them are aware of their progress, their strengths, their weaknesses. We monitor those students a lot more closely; I think that's one good thing. We use our [standardized] assessment. We look at data. We look a lot more comprehensively."

Of course, not all teachers experienced such heightened awareness and commitment to ARI's principles and practices, and many had to work at it. A teacher explained, *"Teachers have responded [to ARI]; 90 to 95% are on the bandwagon. There are some people who don't do it—we know who they are and we work around them."*

When [ARI] initially started, the challenge to me was, I can't do this. How do I get my kids in the mind-set that I'm going to bring reading into math? When they've not been accustomed to it? The biggest challenge was making myself believe I could actually do this.—(Teacher)

Teachers noted that the change process required by ARI isn't always easy. One teacher in a strongly implementing school said, *"I think when I graduated from college, when I thought about going into high school, I didn't think about teaching reading. I assumed they all knew how to read. Comprehension problems, that kind of thing—I stereotyped that as a special education thing. It took me a while to buy into it. I'll be honest with you."* Another teacher explained the gradual implementation process she encountered:

Before coming [to an ARI school] I'd never done ARI at all. At first I was floundering and didn't understand what the Initiative meant. The first semester I think I did more handouts and more things that were not really useful. I went to the two-week seminar, and ended up getting this huge book, and not knowing exactly how to use it. But the end of the sections [of the ARI teacher resources] really helped me take my textbook and bring more

projects to it and to incorporate vocabulary and more reading. That summer session provided me with a flood of new ideas and activities that really applied and that I could use in my classroom.

Principals often commented on the varied responses to ARI from teachers with different content areas and years of experience. One commented, *"Teachers that are more veteran know how to have smoothly flowing classrooms by implementing the strategies. Younger teachers are still working through classroom management and are still learning how to incorporate the strategies in their classes."* Another principal was pleasantly surprised by the openness of teachers to ARI:

Some of the teachers that have come on board; it's been wonderful to see. Some of the ones we were concerned would not be as flexible—I'll just say math—to see some of them come on board and see that math and reading are connected, a lot of it was that they never had the training before. The teachers have done an excellent job of becoming a part of that. You have to bring them along with whatever they bring.

Teachers were collaborating more than before ARI.

The awareness of reading difficulties and the use of the strategies just described are not only individual changes by individual teachers; in many schools, ARI has raised a shared consciousness as

You find changes in morale [when] you actually implement something and see changes in students. It serves to bring faculties together across all their different kinds of differences in terms of backgrounds; it results in teachers who are much greater advocates for specific kinds of strategies that are usable in their unique schools.

—*(A+ Foundation administrator)*

well, demonstrated by increased collaboration and communication among teachers. A teacher said about ARI, *"One strength is the realization that there is a problem and you can do something about it. Everybody, not just the reading teacher, is in on it."* In other words, many teachers in ARI schools had developed a shared awareness of students' reading problems and were collectively committed to helping their struggling students achieve. Further, in some schools, according to Caroline Novak of the A+ Foundation, *"You have faculties working together who are no longer tolerant of two or three folks who are not willing to carry their load; there is peer pressure to become part of the problem-solving team."*

Teachers collaborated to figure out ARI more broadly, to find the most effective and efficient ways to incorporate ARI strategies into instruction. A junior high school teacher elaborated on the ways that collaboration and communication among her colleagues have eased the ARI implementation process:

Teachers have responded well. If they aren't sure in one [ARI] area, they talk to coworkers—have they tried it? How does it work? Teachers [are] talking a lot about what they've tried and what works, suggesting, at first it took some getting used to. It was a little difficult choosing what would work for you. But now everyone is used to implementing the strategies, and they've seen how they help in a lot of different areas.

A principal noted that collaboration has also helped teachers discover ways to use data to inform instructional choices:

An unintended benefit is the bringing together of faculty in ways that never happened before. You have whole faculties that are now looking at assessments rather than bunches of useless data, but are looking at it and reflecting on it, and realizing where groups of students and individual students have shortcomings and how that reflects on their instruction. That may have been born of the reading initiative—and where ARI initiated these

kinds of conversations, the best practices center also works with the ARI schools, teaching them how to do self-assessments and reflections and how to facilitate powerful conversations in schools. It's allowed teachers to learn how to have conversations about practices, and kids, and growth, without being judgmental.

The development of professional community around ARI seemed an especially rewarding outcome for teachers, according to some observers. A regional reading coach noted, *"Yes, I'm seeing collaboration. They are seeing that they can help students make the connections across the content levels and then they can't stop; they keep working together."* Another regional reading coach agreed:

It didn't occur with all [teachers], but the teachers that were receptive to change couldn't get enough… Their doors were more open, and they made the children more proud of what they produced. Everything became more community oriented. Teachers started covering each other's classes so that they could do guided reading while the teachers got to meet with the reading coach.

An assistant principal agreed, indicating that teachers in her school now *"talk about a particular student and how they can work toward eradicating those interferences that the student is having. Those powerful conversations are taking place all over the building all day. The collaboration is so much more."*

Outcomes for Students

Perhaps the most important and, in many ways, most exciting outcomes are the positive ARI-related changes reported about students. Although this study did not specifically examine test scores or other quantitative indicators, the data reveal a great deal about students' reading habits and engagement and the changes observed by teachers and others in their classroom activities and performance. Four outcomes emerged as most prevalent:

Student Outcomes

- Students demonstrated considerable engagement with reading and increased confidence in themselves as readers.

- Students seemed to be using ARI reading strategies independently.

- Students in ARI schools did better on standardized tests and on the Alabama Graduation Examination and seemed to be achieving more academically.

- ARI seemed to result in fewer referrals to special education and fewer discipline problems and in increased student use of school libraries.

Students demonstrated considerable engagement with reading and increased confidence in themselves as readers.

Many teachers and administrators described the benefits of ARI in terms of behaviors and activities that showed increased interest in and confidence about reading. One teacher explained, *"Before [ARI] they would forget their books, or not bring them, and now they're ready on Monday mornings with the books and ready to go to the library. It's important to them now."* Another teacher noted that students seemed *"more open to reading; [they] don't mind reading [and] may bring books to class to read when they finish; now they pull out books, tote books around school with them."* A third teacher explained that when she provides daily newspapers for her students, they *"are excited and want to look at the headlines—they search out reading."* A high school reading coach stated:

Students have become <u>much</u> more excited about reading and read so much more…voluntarily! Children can read without being nerds. Everyone reads, not just smart kids. Children's excitement has been a measure of effectiveness [of ARI].

Many of the changes that occurred with ARI, in other words, related to students' positive attitudes about reading and being readers. One state administrator noted that ARI schools generally seemed to have *"fewer [students] with belligerent attitudes toward reading.*

Many students have truly developed a love for reading." In many cases, more students had begun to think of themselves as competent readers, capable of gaining something from reading in and out of school (see "Addressing the Home-School Reading Divide" on page 17 for more on students' reading outside school). A middle school teacher said:

> *The students are simply reading more. Just to see students who are sitting and reading, that's unusual. They come to me all the time, [asking] how can I be reader of the week? They're seeking the recognition that comes with reading. I kind of feel like we got away from that for a while. The big push was technology. Then with all the standardized tests that they have to take, the most important thing is, what are your test scores? But a truly educated person is a well-read person. Our students are becoming aware of this.*

In focus groups, students were asked about characteristics of good readers. Their responses indicate the value placed on expression and comprehension in reading. One middle school student explained that good readers put *"[e]xpression into their voice. We have plays sometimes in social studies, and people just read it off and expect us to be interested. I could tell the good readers by the expression they put into the play."* Another student noted that *"[t]here's a difference between knowing words and understanding it."* A high school student said, *"The best type of reading comes from sitting down and trying to understand what you read."* In addition, students described the connection of reading to their learning in all content areas. A middle school student, whose sentiments were echoed by students across schools, explained that it is *"all of the teachers' job to teach you how to read. We do it in all our classes."*

Further, ARI may have enabled some students to ask for help. One teacher told of students who *"will come after school and ask for help with reading. When you get popular basketball players doing that, or other students who are struggling, you keep that information confidential. You are really surprised that they can't*

read, but you are more surprised that they came and asked for help."

Participation in extracurricular activities was mentioned as evidence of such increased engagement with reading. One high school teacher commented that more students had become interested in literacy-based activities, meeting with book clubs and publishing books of their own poems. Other teachers and administrators described well-attended after-school tutorial programs and Saturday academies that had been implemented with ARI. Teachers in one middle school reported on an extensive array of extracurricular activities that encourage reading, including a schoolwide Dr. Seuss celebration. A teacher explained, *"Every class was involved, which had never been heard of here before. Thursday we're going to kick off our Spring Fling Reading Thing. All kids can win. If you get a certain number of points, you get a prize. This year the kids are [saying], 'When can we start?'"*

> [Reading is] not outside the norm anymore. Kids have discovered reading for pleasure again. ARI is helping students become better self-learners.—*(Teacher)*

Of course, not all students reacted positively to all aspects of ARI. Teachers and administrators explained that some students expressed dislike for certain reading activities, such as the daily reading time in homeroom, the sustained silent reading time in their content classes, or teachers' choices of books to read aloud. A high school teacher acknowledged that ARI had not completely won over all students: *"We have reading time throughout the week. Some students love it; struggling readers do not."* Others explained that students of different grade levels and interests respond differently to ARI activities and strategies; one middle school teacher noted:

> *Not all students react the same way. Sixth graders are more elementary and more willing to try new things and more cooperative. Seventh graders tend*

to have problems just being seventh graders. Some eighth graders don't like to do work. Our boys are weaker than our girls, but that's typical everywhere. You just have to find materials that the boys like to read or study.

Asked whether ARI seemed more effective with some students than with others, most interviewees initially responded that it was effective with all students; many then qualified their comments, noting that struggling readers need more time and support to respond to the changes in instruction and school culture encouraged by ARI. A teacher explained that although some students are quick to pick up new reading strategies and habits, *"Then you have other students who may not realize there's a movement going on."* Describing this seeming delay in positive results, a middle school instructional leader commented, *"I've seen a difference in our eighth grade. They want to be role models for sixth grade, and their attitudes toward learning have changed. They have more care and concern for their work, [but] we're still working on the sixth grade."* Still, an assistant principal noted, *"Those who weren't achieving before*

[ARI] have more hope because they are progressing, and although they are taking small steps, there is some noticeable improvement."

Students seemed to be using ARI reading strategies independently.

Part of engagement with reading can surely be attributed to students' awareness of and facility with ARI strategies. According to many interviewees, as students gained familiarity with ARI-endorsed strategies in their classes, they became more adept and consistent about using them independently. A middle school teacher noted that her students *"have really gotten comfortable and used to the strategies. They like doing graphs and sequencing. They love sharing the text or being read to every day. These were all things that we were doing before but not to the extent that we're doing it now."*

A first step may be gaining students' acceptance of ARI as a lasting component of the classroom and school; with such acceptance, students can focus on reading in all academic areas and commit to strategies that

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Addressing the Home-School Reading Divide

Many interviewees attributed the positive changes they saw to ARI's common focus on reading and its emphasis on reading as central to learning. This clear focus has been good for schools themselves and has also enabled schools to address more effectively the home-school divide that teachers and administrators perceive as a key issue affecting student achievement. Many described a lack of parental involvement, communication, and support for academic goals; with ARI, these teachers and administrators noted, they saw positive changes in students' reading habits even without support from home. One teacher explained, *"I've seen kids that would not have picked up a book two years ago are carrying a book. It's a start. When you don't have family involvement, when they come to me and say, 'Can I check this book out to take home?' It's a big step."* A regional reading coach concurred, saying:

> *Kids that come from more affluent families, reading is part of the culture anyway. It's these kids where [reading] is not an influence at home where we've seen the biggest increase. A lot of times just providing reading material for these kids has done a lot and having a culture that encourages reading—so when you have SSR [Sustained Silent Reading] and the halls are decorated with book reviews and things like that, kids get the mind-set that reading is very important.*

Students talked about the importance of support from home for reading. A middle school student noted the importance of *"an early start"* in reading. At a high school, one student reflected, *"Learning truly starts at home. You come to school to learn, [but] if you don't take that information home then it is being wasted on you."* The Initiative may provide a bridge of sorts between home and school, as reading has received greater emphasis and value from some parents since ARI was introduced. A teacher noted, *"I think that if you actually went into the homes now you would see that there is more literature in the homes; there's more appreciation of newspapers and print of all sorts."*

help them become better readers. In her classroom, one high school teacher explained, students *"have accepted it, although begrudgingly because it requires new skills and brainwork and has no busywork. I find throughout their work, even in other classes,…that they are using [reading strategies]."*

To gain this acceptance, some schools avidly promoted their connection to ARI, identifying themselves with an ARI wall banner or an ARI logo on the school Web site and promoting schoolwide activities that celebrate ARI and reading. Other schools took a quieter approach, implementing the Initiative in more subtle ways; these schools introduced schoolwide reading times or new reading strategies without referring explicitly to ARI. One teacher said that when she presented new reading strategies, she simply didn't tell students they were part of ARI. A reading coach explained that at her school:

> *I don't think that [students] always know that they are ARI strategies. They just say, 'Hey, Ms. X is doing this neat thing.' They don't know the difference because the teachers don't say this is ARI. We just do that. It is supposed to be a natural part of your [teaching].*

At some ARI sites—whether explicitly or subtly—ARI was promoted on a schoolwide, rather than classroom-specific, basis. In other words, students heard most of their teachers talking similarly about reading goals, and they encountered the same kinds of activities and strategies in many different classes. This schoolwide approach may have led to students' greater familiarity and facility with ARI because the strategies and approaches were reinforced in several settings; in focus groups, some students described *"consistency"* across classes in terms of the teachers' approaches to teaching reading. One middle school teacher explained that her students were *"more familiar with the variety of activities, and they know how to do them because other teachers are using them in other classes."*

Regardless of the ways teachers and schools presented the Initiative, students themselves described their familiarity with numerous reading strategies and activities, most often citing the emphasis on context clues; the use of mnemonic devices, KWL charts, and word walls; and participation in schoolwide DEAR/SSR time. Several interviewees explained that they had observed students using ARI-promoted reading strategies comfortably and confidently. One regional reading coach observed, *"I went to one of my schools, and all of them were doing reciprocal teaching. It was obvious that these kids had done this before; they were comfortable with their roles, and they were talking to each other and not at each other."* A school reading coach said:

> *One change [was noted] when the children were taking their graduate exams and when they were doing their work in class. There are certain strategies affiliated with note-taking, and you can see them using that note-taking when you walk around. You see them taking notes, [making] circles. So that is positive to me. The kids may or may not care about ARI. They are not making the [entire] connection; they are making the connection to the strategy. They don't care that our school is an ARI school. They are children, [and] that is not what they are thinking about, [but] I can see the children using the strategies.*

Students in ARI schools did better on standardized tests and on the Alabama Graduation Examination and seemed to be achieving more academically.

When asked about students' academic achievement, many interviewees spoke first about test scores. As one high school student explained, *"Reading has been proven to help with all areas, and it helps on your graduation exam."* In Alabama, particularly in high schools, great emphasis is placed on the Alabama Graduation Examination, which students must pass to receive a high school diploma. Standardized tests such as the SAT-10 also receive some attention. Since ARI, several teachers and administrators explained, scores had improved on both of these tests. One high school principal said that since ARI was introduced,

his school *"got a higher percent of [students] passing the graduation exam. That's the most notable thing."* A teacher said, *"Kids are now passing reading portions of the high school exam when they never could before."* A regional reading coach commented on several of the schools she serves:

> *Now our scores went up at [a high school], and they have continued to. Last year 100% of the seniors passed. [Another high school] got an A on high school graduation scores. Writing scores have gone up. When you look at statistics across the state, ARI schools outperform non-ARI schools as far as testing is concerned.*

However, not all ARI schools have seen such dramatic or consistent increases in test scores. One school reading coach explained, *"Students are now trained to deal with unfamiliar vocabulary and reading problems on their own with ARI reading strategies, [but] there has not been improvement consistently on assessments."* This slow progress may be partly attributable to changes in the student population; as one teacher explained, *"I wish I could see lots more success. At the same time, our SES level has been continually dropping, too. We're very transitory, so we have a lot of students that we have for two years and don't see in eighth grade, or come in eighth grade only."* Indeed, shifting demographics in Alabama schools seem to mitigate the ARI impact. An evaluation of ARI prepared for the State Department of Education[19] in 2004 reported: "[T]here are examples where [ARI] schools raise the scores of both their Black students and their White students but nonetheless see a drop in overall scores as racial composition changes."

An official from the A+ Foundation commented on the complexity of school improvement:

> *We're seeing chronically underperforming schools have amazing results. This just has such a huge impact that they double their efforts and keep wanting to achieve more and more. We're not seeing rapid gains in the SAT-10 scores, but we are seeing*

huge gains in the writing assessments. And it will be interesting to see future writing assessment scores at the high school level. With high schools, you look to the high school graduation exam, but are changes in these and the writing assessment scores due to other things [than ARI]?

The impact of ARI on student performance on standardized tests was evident to many of the interviewees; but, in reality, the increases in test scores are not as strong as they could be among certain segments of the school population. The 2004 evaluation of ARI[20] concluded, "While ARI schools outperformed non-ARI schools in 2003 for all students [on the SAT-10], the ARI makes more of a difference for non-poor White or Asian students than for minorities and/or students living in poverty…In middle school grades, the ARI advantage is 6 percentiles for majority students and 1 percentile for minorities or students in poverty." This is a significant, if sad, finding, as approximately 25% of the close to 750,000 students in Alabama live at or below the poverty line.

Interviewees described other, more qualitative measures of improved achievement. These, in fact, may be truer indicators of student achievement and, coupled with teachers' increased understanding of how to make reading tasks accessible to students, may suggest that improvements in academics will continue. The principal of a rural school said that he had *"noticed more concern about academics"* among students since implementing ARI. He reported that students share their work with him and ask his opinion about how they are doing; students showed *"desire to get where they are expected to reach and take pride in learning."* He also noted that more students are expressing an interest in a nearby community college, and many took advantage of a half-day off from school to take the college's entrance examination.

A teacher said that students *"grasp concepts a lot quicker, and they apply them a lot better. That's more than I would have expected four years ago, before I was in the*

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[19] Moscovitch (2004), p. 14.

[20] Moscovitch (2004), p. 3.

Initiative." A junior high school teacher commented that *"even the strugglers have improved tremendously. They are in competition with each other and their grades have improved across the board. I see improvement, and I constantly remind them that improvement is the key to success."* A high school senior reflected, *"I can read and comprehend so much faster since my freshman year."* Another student concurred: *"I think I've improved on reading since my freshman year—[my] vocabulary,[and] the way I speak."*

> *Student performance has improved drastically. We have removed hundreds, and I mean hundreds, from the intervention list.*
> —(Administrator)

ARI seemed to result in fewer referrals to special education and fewer discipline problems and in increased student use of school libraries.

Teachers, administrators, and other interviewees reported that since implementing ARI, they had observed decreases in discipline problems and fewer referrals for special services. At the same time, library circulation had increased. They attributed the changes in these indicators to the less measurable transformation of students' attitudes about and behaviors related to reading, as inspired by ARI.

A junior high school principal referred to the ARI-related changes as a "rebirth"; he added that the school seemed to be meeting its goal of decreased discipline referrals because *"the more engaged they are, the less time [students have] to get into trouble."* A regional

> *Our library circulation, the first year [of ARI] it almost doubled, and it's almost doubled every year since then. You see more students reading more. There's more reading in the classrooms and everything.*
> —(Administrator)

reading coach has observed *"a decrease in referrals in most of these schools. Even in the inner cities, even in schools where [implementation] is just scraping the surface, you see the difference in those classes."*

A reading coach noted that although she had observed only small changes in referrals, *"One thing that jumped dramatically was library circulation."* This comment was often repeated in interviews. School libraries and media centers often had poor resources, although some principals had tried to provide high-interest books and magazines with ARI funds, and the reading coaches in some schools had set up their own lending libraries. Nonetheless, students seemed ready to use whatever facilities were available to them. As one teacher said, *"Before [ARI], students never wanted to read. They were always tired of reading. Now they have been given time in the library; they enjoy reading, and they are upset when they don't have a chance to go to the library."*

A regional reading coach indicated that even public libraries had been influenced by ARI, saying, *"I think outside reading is increasing…Public libraries are branching out and supplementing materials from the schools. Lots of efforts like that —I see [this] in the communities."*

What can be concluded then is that students and their teachers have all benefited from ARI implementation. Test scores per se may not indicate huge advancements; but other signs, including teachers' increased skills in teaching reading in the content areas and students' increased receptivity to reading and academics, suggest a positive direction for secondary schools.

The achievement of positive outcomes for teachers and students, as described in this section, is in many ways a function of the way the Initiative is implemented within a given school setting; in this sense, implementation refers to the ways individuals are organized and resources are used to respond to particular needs. The next section outlines several features schools have had success in implementing, illustrating these with data from case studies developed about ARI sites.

ARI in Context:
Features of Successful ARI Schools

Two ARI sites—a high school and a middle school—are profiled in this section. These sites may be considered "successful" ARI schools because the Initiative has changed teachers' instruction and affected students' reading habits; yet the form that ARI takes in each school is quite different. The profiles of these schools demonstrate differences in several areas, including the ways teachers have approached and implemented the Initiative, the coherence of ARI with other programs and curricula in the school, and the resources available to support the Initiative. As would be expected, the schools have unique stories to tell about their use of ARI; however, these schools also illustrate four key features of successful ARI schools, listed here.

Features of Successful ARI Schools

1. A group of key teacher implementers
2. Responsiveness to students
3. Strong within-school leadership
4. Innovation with funding and resources

Howard High School[21]

Howard High School has a student population of fewer than 1,000, with approximately 60% White and 40% African American students. The students represent a wide socioeconomic range, although the number of Howard students who receive free or reduced-price lunch is rising at a faster rate than in most other areas of Alabama. The principal described the population as a *"cooperative student body, considering the differences."* The community is small, and one teacher explained, *"We know a lot of the kids and their families."*

One teacher described the school as *"very safe and clean"*; students noted that the *"teachers really care a lot about each student…they are willing to help you out."* The school is focused on students' success in

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[21] Howard High School and Barry Middle School are pseudonyms.

academic, social, and personal areas, as evidenced by the mission statement that all the interviewed faculty emphasized; in the words of one teacher, the school strives to *"produce students who are lifelong learners, teach them to figure things out for themselves…have them ready for the world and what the world will throw at them."* Their major challenge, again voiced by numerous teachers as well as the principal, is apathy among students. The faculty attributed several school issues to the problem of apathy; for instance, the principal noted the school's dropout rate, and one teacher described classes where students tend to *"coast through"* with a *"not going to participate if you challenge me"* attitude. This apathy may be one reason for the school's decision to adopt ARI. Since Howard became an ARI site, the Initiative has become an integrated part of the school's curriculum and culture.

Feature 1: A group of key teacher implementers

At ARI sites, implementation tended to be spearheaded by pockets of enthusiastic teachers within a faculty. Although their number in each school varied, in no school did the entire faculty fully support the Initiative. These key teacher implementers described how their beliefs and their development of skills aligned to support the Initiative. Many described additional responsibilities—such as delivering professional development or organizing the school's achievement data—taken on to further support the school's use of the Initiative.

One teacher described the faculty at Howard as *"strong, well prepared…[and] fairly demanding,"* and students agreed that teachers have high expectations for them. However, the teachers vary in their enthusiasm for ARI, according to the principal, and she has *"relied on a core group that has kept the Initiative going."* One of this core group explained that ARI *"has made me more aware of the fact that I have been spoon-feeding the students and to require them to dig…it has made me use less lecture and more reading. I talk about [students] as consumers of literature and print."* Still, one teacher

noted that although *"some have probably not responded [as much as other teachers], I think it has affected the outlook of every teacher. It has changed the way we approach material with our classes. It has made us aware of the need to read and monitor reading."* Other teachers also indicated that most faculty have been touched by the Initiative in some way; one teacher explained that some of her colleagues are *"not very fond of ARI, but obviously it's working or they wouldn't be doing it anymore."*

For a time, Howard shared a school reading coach with an area middle school, but the position no longer exists in the district. The principal has since attempted to fill the leadership role; in fact, the administration is *"solely responsible for motivating what's going on,"* explained one teacher. Others described the principal and other administrators as *"consistent and supportive"* and *"very visible."* The principal, who oversees instruction as her main responsibility, led the ARI recertification process; she explained that she is the only secondary principal involved in this capacity, and as a result, *"the state is looking at Howard as a model."*

The interviewed faculty seemed to perceive ARI as a means of changing instruction while maintaining the subject matter. The Initiative is, explained a teacher, *"more of a thinking initiative than a reading initiative."* In this way, the Initiative has not changed what but how teachers teach. ARI strategies and activities are somewhat embedded at Howard, rather than the overt embracing of the Initiative that occurred at other sites. This may be related to the initial resistance from students that teachers encountered early in the implementation process; as one teacher explained, there was *"a lot of eye-rolling because of overlapping strategies and repetition between classes."* Another teacher indicated that the students resented the Initiative because they perceived it as *"an experiment"* in which they were *"guinea pigs."* However, since teachers have adapted the strategies to fit their subjects and methods of instruction and use the ARI label infrequently, the Initiative is now perceived as *"just part of what they do."*

Additionally, faculty at Howard indicated that K–12 coherence has not been fully realized among the elementary, middle, and high schools in the district. The principal explained that Howard needs *"help for high school preparedness from K–8"* schools and teachers. To an extent, she noted, ARI has provided some coherence through the schools, but the lack of accountability remains an issue at the lower grades, as many students continue to arrive at Howard unprepared for high school-level work.

Feature 2: Responsiveness to students

Teachers and administrators at ARI schools were sensitive to students' responses to the Initiative. These responses ranged from subtle changes in reading habits and abilities to overt reactions to schoolwide activities planned around the Initiative. Teachers and administrators who reported positive responses from students indicated enthusiasm for the Initiative and seemed prepared to continue with implementation; those who reported negative responses from students seemed somewhat more reluctant and haphazard in their implementation of ARI.

According to the principal, the school has little funding to work with and no relief in sight. Having lost the financial support provided by a now-closed nearby mill, the school has found itself more reliant on state and district funding; at this point, the principal explained, they are *"squeezing blood from a turnip,"* and she anticipates more cuts in the future. Still, teachers seem to be dealing with funding issues as matter-of-factly as possible. Teachers tended not to focus on the resources they lacked that might be addressed by additional funding; a teacher noted that with regard to funding cuts, one has to *"suck it up and go on."*

Barry Middle School

Barry Middle School, located in a large city, has seen vast change in its 50-year history. It opened as an elementary school and became a middle school in the late 1980s. The principal explained that the school is *"not as diverse as it once was,"* with a current student

population that is primarily African American. The school offers a range of programs and activities for students, which, a teacher noted, is important for middle school students' development: *"We're trying to use the middle school concept as much as possible, considering the developmental age of the students we have. They really have to be engaged in a lot of other activities to accentuate their learning process."*

The school faces the challenge of overcrowding, with close to 40 students in some classrooms. Teachers indicated that low parental involvement is another issue facing the school, describing a difference between the values and priorities many students encounter at Barry versus in their homes. One teacher explained, *"We have different children who have different values in their home, not the values that we are espousing—it's an uphill battle."* Still, the school enjoys support in the community, notably from a local business that provides both resources and volunteers. Barry adopted ARI at the invitation of the school district, which provides funds for the school reading coach and support from a central office administrator for ARI. Otherwise, the school has been essentially self-sufficient in implementing the Initiative.

Some teachers at Barry indicated that ARI strategies were not new to them; still, most teachers described the Initiative as a positive influence on their teaching, bringing to the forefront the centrality of reading to students' learning. Several teachers commented on their new awareness of the need to stress reading and address reading difficulties, no matter what the subject matter. As one teacher said, *"What's changed with me since being involved in ARI is it's made me realize reading is not a separate subject. It's got me bringing reading into my math class, making my children realize reading is an integral part of any subject."* In addition to these changes in philosophy and approach to the subject area, teachers also changed their practice. According to the school reading coach, the Initiative *"has broken the traditional styles of teaching, the lecture styles…[Teachers are] using different strategies to get students involved."* However, not all teachers at Barry

have embraced ARI. A reading teacher noted that teachers' use of ARI seems to vary by content areas: *"I feel like some teachers thought that since I was the reading teacher it was my job to teach reading, not theirs. I don't teach math, so why should they teach reading? For the most part, [some teachers] still leave it up to the reading teachers to teach reading."*

Teachers and administrators described largely similar goals for students' learning; as one teacher explained, *"We're all on the same page, trying to get to the same goal."* Another teacher attributed this sense to ARI, which has served to increase faculty "cohesiveness" by virtue of the common goal of 100% literacy. Although Barry seems to have a positive professional climate, this has not translated into increased communication and collaboration among teachers. Teachers meet regularly by grade level to *"discuss the issues that come up over the course of the day"* or to *"discuss the students or where we are in a particular area"*; however, those interviewed made little mention of informal meetings or conversations about practice related to the Initiative or other areas of curriculum and instruction. The principal explained that the school reading coach *"goes into classrooms and provides them with what they need,"* but team meetings or professional conversations are infrequent.

The principal and the school reading coach share leadership for ARI at Barry. Teachers see the principal, in her third year, as supportive of instructional innovation generally and ARI specifically. One teacher noted, *"Our*

Feature 3: Strong within-school leadership

Sites with evidently higher levels of implementation also tended to have strong leadership within the school, whether from the principal, the assistant principal, or the reading coach. These leaders spoke fluently about the fit of the Initiative into the school's culture as well as the responses of faculty and students to its implementation. These leaders also had a vision for ARI's future in the school and described plans to maintain the Initiative within the school.

administration backs us in whatever changes we need to make in trying to get our children where they need to be." The principal characterized her position as *"supervisory . . . I am responsible for everything from teaching to custodial staff, and am accountable to the district."* The principal described her high expectations for the school (*"We are going to be a school of promise; we'll be nationally recognized"*) and noted the role of ARI in meeting these expectations, as *"being an ARI school helps us in becoming a school of promise."* She explained that a previous administrator had initiated the school's participation in the Initiative, and while she was not very familiar with the form or content of the ARI professional development, she fluently described her observations of the teachers' successes and struggles with implementation.

The school reading coach described her main responsibility for ARI as *"to ensure that the teachers are utilizing ARI strategies in their classrooms,"* a role that includes providing materials, modeling strategies, and monitoring teachers' use. Her role as reading coach also has a more abstract component, as she simply represents *"the idea of someone supporting them and pushing them, [which] keeps them engaged in the program."* She described her increasing administrative duties, including textbook distribution as well as spending and monitoring expenditures related to Title I funds. Because of these administrative demands, she works only infrequently with small groups of students who need reading intervention, but she would like to do so more often. Teachers seemed generally supportive of the school reading coach and appreciative of her work for the Initiative, but several wished for more extensive leadership and coaching; one teacher indicated, *"She's helped a lot; she's always offering materials and activities, [but] we need another person. She does all she can, but we have such an overwhelming need that she can't do it all."*

The school reading coach described ARI as a central component of Barry's curriculum and instruction, noting that the school's recently adopted reading series aligns with the Initiative. She implied that the

Initiative has become a permanent part of Barry's culture: *"We will continue to implement the strategies even if we don't have…ARI, if the program left [the school]."* Still, teachers tended to describe ARI in terms of individual classroom-level implementation, rather than schoolwide efforts or changes. The students also described mainly class-specific strategies related to the Initiative, although they also mentioned the schoolwide DEAR time.

Teachers and administrators spoke at length about Barry's needs in terms of funding and resources to support ARI. While they described to some extent their wishes for books and technology, most of the comments focused on personnel. Teachers expressed a desire for more classroom-level support in terms of coaching. The school reading coach is also the school's Title I teacher; in this way, she has a full-time position, and the school can maintain the reading coach position. As a result, however, she juggles multiple administrative responsibilities and is often pressed for time to meet with and model for teachers. According to one teacher, *"The lack of an ability to read is epidemic. You can't put one person over ARI and train the teachers and expect it to work; you need people coming in to help."* The principal agreed, saying, *"We need more personnel to help teachers teach reading. We need a reading coach for each grade level."* In addition, interviewees wished for further professional development. A reading teacher indicated that

> **Feature 4:** Innovation with funding and resources
>
> ARI schools revealed creativity in marshaling conventional resources to support ARI. For example, they might redirect funds initially earmarked for other purposes or purchase materials to support ARI as well as other instructional programs or goals. Schools' innovation also extended to human resources, as schools recognized the importance of the reading coach and sought to fill this role despite a lack of funding for the position. Some schools combined the role of reading coach with other responsibilities, while others added coaching responsibilities to an administrator's role.

content-specific professional development might draw in teachers who have not bought into the Initiative. This teacher explained, *"I think we've been provided the necessary information, but I think we need follow-up workshops done by discipline—all the math teachers, science, et cetera. Sometimes we as reading teachers feel like we're doing it all by ourselves."*

In terms of books and other conventional resources to support literacy, Barry has been able to draw on Title I funds and make requests for donations from a local business that has partnered with the school. This represents a change from previous years; one student noted, *"We got plenty of books. I was surprised this year, because the system doesn't have enough money."* Still, the teachers described their wish lists for materials related to ARI. One teacher explained, *"I'd like for it to be, as soon as you walk in the door, you see materials everywhere, not only that are general [to the school], but also that belong to the children so that it shows they have an interest and are succeeding in reading."*

RECOMMENDATIONS
Sustaining a Focus on Improvement of Secondary Reading

RECOMMENDATIONS
Sustaining a Focus on Improvement of Secondary Reading

The Alabama Reading Initiative has received widespread attention because of its ability to marshal the efforts of diverse groups to improve students' literacy, its innovative approaches, its persistence in the face of budget and personnel challenges, and its ongoing self-evaluation and change. No one in the state would deny that the availability of funding through the Reading Excellence Act and then Reading First was a motivator for the self-evaluation that has resulted in an even more vital ARI, one that is better funded and more focused. As a result, the majority of state attention has been—and continues to be—directed toward early reading. But interestingly, even with this laser-sharp focus on early reading, secondary ARI has not faded away, perhaps beating the budgetary and resource odds against its survival.

Recommendations

1. Begin with a flexible model that reflects a broad and solid research base and that can be responsive to different content areas and local conditions.

2. Emphasize the importance of using explicit strategies for increasing comprehension and show how they can be applied in all content areas.

3. Identify students who are most at risk for continued reading difficulties and provide intervention as early as possible.

4. Ensure that there is centralized leadership at the beginning but also encourage and support the emergence of local leaders.

5. Be creative in the use of local monies, while also being vigilant about sources of external funding.

Four specific lessons from ARI have already been presented and discussed. The study has also suggested certain recommendations for other entities—such as states and districts—that want to undertake a reading initiative that can provide high-quality service to secondary schools. These recommendations are:

These five recommendations are explained in more detail in the following sections.

RECOMMENDATION 1: Begin with a flexible model that reflects a broad and solid research base and that can be responsive to different content areas and local conditions.

As this report has noted, the reading panel that had advised the State Department of Education on ARI had not make a clear distinction between early and later grades in planning ARI; however, the panel did reach some consensus on a "balanced" approach to reading instruction, one that was based on solid research and did not privilege a "whole language" or a phonics-only orientation.[22] The professional development and resource materials provided to teachers reflected something of a "one-size-fits-all" approach to teaching reading, with only minor nods toward the subject-matter specialization of

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[22] It is important to note that the reading panel began its work prior to the publication of two seminal works on early reading: *Preventing Reading Difficulties* and *Report of the National Reading Panel,* both of which are recognized as the major compendia of scientifically based research on reading or "SBRR". (National Research Council. [1998]. *Preventing reading difficulties in young children.* Washington, DC: National Academy Press; National Reading Panel. [2001]. *Report of the National Reading Panel: Teaching Children to Read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction.* Washington, DC: National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.

secondary teachers. Consciously or unconsciously, those who developed the initial plan reasoned that the elementary model would seamlessly transfer to a secondary application under the umbrella of "reading in the content areas."

This report suggests that rather than rejecting ARI as irrelevant to their teaching, secondary educators welcomed and embraced the Initiative, largely through localized, concentrated efforts by individuals and schools to make it work for them. Determination to incorporate AIR-endorsed approaches, strategies, and activities into their daily practice drew teachers together to discuss assessment results, student needs, and pedagogy. These localized efforts produced the very different manifestations of the Initiative across sites that are illustrated in the profiles of two schools presented in the last chapter. In effect, secondary ARI seems to have taken on multiple models, as the Initiative's principles interacted with elements within the local school context.

Although the determination of local educators to address the needs of struggling adolescent readers has been a valuable contributor to secondary ARI's persistence, the general model presented for the Initiative provided a necessary framework in which these schools could work. Even while complaining about the one-size-fits-all ARI perspective, many teachers and local administrators saw the model as flexible and responsive enough to be shaped to fit their needs. The resulting secondary version of ARI may not be as focused as its elementary counterpart, but its ability to accommodate the differences in content area pedagogy and student needs has resulted in professional communities in many schools where teachers concentrate efforts toward a long-neglected academic problem. Many middle and high school teachers now think differently about struggling readers, alter their content area teaching, and acknowledge their responsibility for helping all students read.

After many years of implementation, staff at the State Department of Education are finally, although perhaps reluctantly, acknowledging the ongoing growth and adaptation of ARI at the local level. For example, a regional reading coach, who was often named as an ARI leader, responded to a question about recommendations for others contemplating a statewide reading initiative by writing: *"We have found that, indeed, listening is the key. We now formally or informally survey our reading coaches after each meeting to see if our session was beneficial and let that data drive our instruction for the next session. We always plan ahead, but we 'tweak' according to what we hear from them and what we observe. We want them to know that whatever we do is a direct result of the need we see."*

RECOMMENDATION 2: Emphasize the importance of using explicit strategies for increasing comprehension and show how they can be applied in all content areas.

Although the initial ARI model was flexible enough to allow secondary educators to shape it to their needs, it did present very specific guidelines on research-based instructional practice. The research underpinning the model emphasized the importance of systematic instruction in the skills and strategies for acquiring reading,[23] and it also affirmed the need for explicit instruction in vocabulary acquisition and comprehension. ARI professional development sessions presented specific comprehension-enhancing strategies that, with minimal tweaking, work as well in a secondary history class as in a second-grade class where students are reading a story in a core reading program. Additionally, the sessions included opportunities for participants to try out the strategies with each other and with students.

Because of their ARI training and the availability of ARI resource material, content area teachers began to develop a repertoire of teaching and assessment strategies. Teaching practice started to change in ways that were obvious in our interviews with

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[23] These skills—phonemic awareness, phonics, and oral fluency—are the bedrock of Reading First. While some students in middle and high schools need work with these basic skills and can definitely benefit from fluency practice, their needs are different from those of younger struggling readers.

teachers and administrators, in displays of student work in schools, and in focus groups with students. Students sometimes rolled their eyes when asked about ARI strategies, but they admitted that they used them and they were helpful. A former principal at an ARI cohort 1 middle school, who now consults for the State Department of Education, offered this recommendation to others thinking about a reading initiative: *"I…think it is important to include the value of all content teachers using explicit comprehension strategy instruction in their daily instructional plans. An intervention class or SPED students usually do not show growth [in reading] without the regular content teacher's involvement. I am not sure if these elements came out in your study, but as I visit the schools and talk with the staff, it appears over and over."*

The emphasis on "ARI strategies" can be somewhat misleading, giving the impression that secondary teachers were given only a "bag of tricks." As the Initiative matured, the professional development content extended to other areas of teachers' work, most specifically, their understanding and use of student assessment data. In keeping with the interactive, hands-on approach to learning teaching strategies, professional development sessions allowed teachers to actually work with student data. A former regional reading coach now working at the State Department of Education reported that school and regional reading coaches are trained to work with real data on students in the schools they serve. The coaches make instructional decisions based on the data and then pass on their ideas to the students' teachers. At the next coaches' training session, *"We have a progress report and evaluate the intervention efforts. We don't want extraneous material at these sessions that will not apply to [the coaches'] school situations…Those difficult conversations occur in our meetings, just as they do in the schools, and we have to think very carefully about our decisions."*

RECOMMENDATION 3: Identify students who are most at risk for continued reading difficulties and provide intervention as early as possible.

The reading scores of students in ARI schools, especially those serving poor and minority populations, are not dramatically different from those of students in other schools. Students still struggle, even though teachers attend professional development, change their instructional practice, and work collaboratively toward a solution to students' reading problems. The Reading First model, as implemented nationwide, can provide one possible answer to the less-than-significant improvements in students' reading performance: not only are schools supposed to use a core reading program, they are also mandated to provide an intense, focused intervention designed to meet students' specific reading needs. Secondary ARI relies primarily on the integration of instructional strategies into content area teaching, not the targeted interventions of the Reading First model.

Many students in Alabama's middle and secondary schools are seriously below grade-level expectations in reading and need more than their teachers can offer them, no matter how well teachers integrate ARI strategies into their teaching. These students are the ones who could potentially benefit from a systematic, focused, research-based reading intervention to supplement their other instruction. Some school-based interviewees mentioned the need for such programs, and staff at the state ARI office report that some districts do in fact use commercial programs for intensive intervention. However, anecdotal accounts maintain that intervention teachers are often not well trained, instruction is not monitored, and procedures are insufficient for identifying students who should receive services. Further, the interventions are often not targeted at what students really need: many do not need more drill on letter-sound correspondences, but could benefit from a more integrated program acknowledging their adolescent needs and building skills that will transfer to the requirements in their regular coursework. Not surprisingly, students' reading

does not improve; they continue to encounter difficulty and academic failure and, in many cases, drop out of school as soon as possible.

RECOMMENDATION 4: Ensure that there is centralized leadership at the beginning but also encourage and support the emergence of local leaders.

Over and over, leadership was cited as an important feature of successful ARI implementation. ARI began with strong leadership, most notably that of Katherine Mitchell. A report on reading policy in Alabama stated: "In the reading policy arena…the State Department of Education is almost synonymous with the name of Katherine Mitchell, the director of the Alabama Reading Initiative and an active entrepreneur for reading policy."[24] Mitchell brought together representatives of many groups in Alabama, won the support of the superintendent of schools, and convinced the governor and members of the state board of education of the need for a direct approach to the literacy problems of the state's students. But for a major effort like ARI to be successful, local leaders need to emerge as well.

Leadership can take many forms, and leaders can have many job titles. The former principal of an ARI middle school said: *"I think the importance of leadership should be included [in any recommendations], not only [regarding] the principal but also teacher leaders. This phenomenon continues to appear in conversations with teachers and principals."* In interviews, many respondents did cite principals and key teachers as leaders, but the secondary regional reading coaches were often described as the real leaders, people whom the teachers and principals respected and wanted in their schools more often. This is quite understandable, as it was the regional reading coaches who helped teachers make sense of the strategies that were presented at the professional development sessions and included in the huge resource notebooks. School reading coaches less often took on the mantle of leader; some schools had no reading coach, and

[24] Coggshall (2003), p. 4.

in others, the coaches' background in elementary education cost them the credibility they needed to provide leadership.

ARI made some efforts to encourage local leaders, particularly through principal workshops and principal coaches. But, as in so much of the initial ARI organization, individuals running workshops and providing coaching came from an elementary orientation. This issue, compounded by the high rates of reported mobility among administrators, meant that efforts were less than successful in cultivating local ARI leadership. Putting the effort into identifying and cultivating local leadership among teachers and knowledgeable reading coaches might have a larger payback. Local teacher and coach leaders can encourage buy-in, provide support to others, and, in general, help to build the cohesive, collaborative professional community that was evident in strong ARI schools.

RECOMMENDATION 5: Be creative in the use of local monies, while also being vigilant about sources of external funding.

Many respondents to our interviews mentioned as a problem continual budget shortfalls and lack of monetary streams for secondary ARI. But they also related how they had compensated for poor funding with the kind of grit that marks educators dedicated to making do with poor resources. Title I money was reallocated toward the Initiative, other sources of funds were found for books and magazine subscriptions, and teachers worked together to share and build knowledge about and share resources toward helping students improve their reading. Still, no one doubted that more money would have helped—whether to increase state-level staff with knowledge of secondary issues, to hire more regional or school reading coaches, or simply to offer more frequent professional development.

Reading First offered the State Department of Education a remarkable opportunity to build ARI into an efficient, comprehensive, coherent reform initiative—for K–3 students. Although federal attention is still largely focused on early reading,

the Striving Readers discretionary grant program[25] has reinforced the message of organizations like the Alliance for Excellent Education,[26] the Carnegie Corporation, and others advocating for attention to secondary education. The grants will in no way equal Reading First grants in magnitude, but they do represent the first major federal recognition of adolescent reading difficulties. But the grants program comes with the stipulation that evaluations of programs financed with Striving Readers funding must include a randomized field trial, the current "gold standards" of research. Simply put, a randomized field trial means that states or districts that receive funding must designate a cohort of eligible schools and then randomly assign schools to either treatment or control status. The control schools will receive no help for its striving readers or will receive the "treatment" on a delayed schedule.

Alabama intended to apply for a Striving Readers grant, and Katherine Mitchell turned her keen planning skills toward a proposal for funding to

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[25] The Striving Readers program, announced in August 2005, falls under the Title I demonstration authority (Part E, Section 1502 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, Pub. L. 107-110).

[26] See www.all4ed.org for more information. The Alliance published *Reading Next*, among other documents that have been at the forefront of the issues of adolescent struggling readers and recommended means to address these issues.

implement the Alabama Program for Adolescent Literacy, or A-PAL, in several needy districts. A-PAL would build on ARI but offer more targeted strategies for supporting reading in the content areas. It would also include testing to identify students who would benefit from supplemental reading intervention programs. Ultimately, Alabama decided not to apply for the grant because it meant that those schools in the treatment group would not immediately receive A-PAL benefits. Assigning students to the control group violated deeply held values that mandated providing services to as many students as possible.

Alabama's decision reflects the controversy in the education field about the "ethics" of randomized field trials as a means to evaluate program impact, and this report is not the venue to debate the issue. Rather than building on the state's proven track record of securing federal funding, Mitchell has secured a considerably smaller amount of money from the state to try out A-PAL as a pilot in a small number of schools; it will hardly be the $3 to 5 million a year that Striving Readers would have brought into the state, but perhaps it will be enough to refine the model for scale-up to other schools.

Thus, another phase for secondary ARI will begin in the 2006–07 school year as A-PAL is introduced into selected schools.

RESEARCH METHODS

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Questions

A main purpose of the research was to discover causes and rationales for the changes in the basic ARI model as it was implemented in the middle and high schools in Alabama. The model, which is presented in the first chapter, in the section "Necessary Conditions for ARI Implementation," would present the various factors that seemed to contribute to the vitality and sustainability of a secondary form of the Initiative. Specifically, we wanted to discover salient features of the secondary ARI model that might be generalized to other states. For example, we wanted to discover aspects of the K–12 ARI model that appeared to have been effective at the secondary level and also to discover what appeared not to be working well. By visiting different kinds of schools and interviewing many stakeholders, we wanted to identify the conditions that seemed to lead to success and to frustration as ARI was implemented. We also wanted to gather recommendations about what could be done to address less successful aspects of the Initiative.

The following research questions guided the development of survey items and interview protocols:

1. In what ways does participation in ARI professional development influence teachers and principals? Specifically, in what ways are there changes in:

   • the skills and abilities of teachers in academic content classes, such as social studies, science, or mathematics, to use appropriate strategies to help students strengthen their reading skills, read strategically in the content areas, and enhance their metacognitive and self-regulatory processes as they relate to reading?

   • the skills and abilities of teachers in reading, language arts, and English classrooms to provide appropriate reading instruction to middle and high school students?

2. In what ways do students in ARI schools experience changes in self-efficacy, motivation to read, value placed on reading, and other potential correlates of reading achievement?

3. What components of the ARI effort are perceived to be the most successful facilitators of student self-efficacy, teacher self-efficacy, and teacher skill enhancement?

4. What are the real and perceived obstacles to the successful implementation of ARI?

The Sample

Staff at the State Department of Education were helpful in identifying schools across the state to visit. The optimal sample would be representative of the state, be divided between middle and high schools, and also represent the different cohorts of ARI implementation (that is, the year in which the Initiative was introduced into the school). The original

sampling plan was modified somewhat to reflect the realities of ARI implementation, demographics, and school structure. For example, there were no ARI low-SES urban high schools. We also found that many schools had to be classified as "urban/suburban" because of the populations they served. We conducted interviews with one or more faculty members and/or reading coaches in schools spread across the state, as depicted in Exhibit 1.

The schools differed in the percentage of students who were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, with more than 95% of the students eligible in Middle Schools 1 and 4 and in High School 4.

Data were gathered from site-based respondents, stakeholders within the broader educational community, and state- and community-based stakeholders. Interviews were conducted during site visits to Alabama or by phone. Respondents all completed informed consent forms prior to the interviews. Distinct protocols were developed for each category of respondent. Exhibit 2 profiles the

individuals who were interviewed and the nature of the data gathered from them.

Survey

A survey was distributed to middle and high school teachers in ARI schools by the school reading coaches during staff meetings. Approximately 1,200 were returned to AIR, and data from approximately 500 were coded and used to confirm responses from interview respondents.

Data Analysis

All data were collected electronically. The research team created and defined codes related to the research questions. Two researchers independently read each transcript, and identified and marked information related to the codes using the Atlas.t1 software program. The project director read behind the researchers to verify application of the codes. When disagreements occurred, the research team discussed the data and resolved the differences.

Exhibit 1: Sampling plan for the Alabama Reading Initiative Study

School	Grades	Location	Community	Cohort
Middle School 1	K–8	Southwest	Rural	4
Middle School 2	K–8	South	Small town	2
Middle School 3	6–8	Central	Small town	5
Middle School 4	6–8	Central	Inner city	3
High School 1	6–8	North	Small city	2
High School 2	9–12	North	Rural	2
High School 3	9–12	Central	Large town	3
High School 4	7–12	Southwest	Rural	4
High School 5	9–12	Central	Rural	5

Exhibit 2: Interviewees and the Foci of the Data they Provided

Respondent Categories (Number of interviews)	Foci of Interviews
Principals (8)	• Impact of program on schools, students, teachers • Observations on procedural issues; suggestions for changes
Principal coaches (3)	• Perceptions of principals as school and instructional leaders • Perceptions of ARI • Suggestions for improvement
Teachers (41)	• Value of professional development opportunities • Sense of enhanced level of skills • Changed expectations for students • Observations on procedural issues
School-based literacy (reading) coaches (11)	• Effectiveness of professional development opportunities • Observations about changes in teacher skill level • Integration of ARI into routine curriculum • Areas of success and weakness in ARI • Suggestions for program improvement
Students (9 groups/90 students total)	• Details of experiences in ARI programs • Sense of improved competence as readers • Perceptions of amount of reading they are doing and usefulness of reading in their academic and out-of-school lives
Regional reading coaches (4)	• Similar questions as those asked of school-based coaches but from the broader, regional perspective • Observations on factors that contribute to success and the recertification process • Suggestions for sustainability
State Department of Education staff (7) (administrators for ARI, special education, math/science/technology, school improvement)	• Impact on curriculum, student achievement, teacher professionalism • Areas of success and weakness in ARI • Suggestions for program improvement
In-service reading center specialists (3)	• Observations on Summer Academy and on Literacy Demonstration Sites administration • Areas of success and weakness in ARI • Suggestions for program improvement
Higher education partners/Teacher educators (3)	• Observations on Summer Academy and on Literacy Demonstration Sites administration • Areas of success and weakness in ARI • Suggestions for program improvement
Representatives of private-sector funding agencies (2)	• Observations on program effectiveness and impact • Motivation for funding

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