



TOUCHING BASE

DECEMBER 19, 2007

PUTTING PROVEN METHODS OF READING RESEARCH IN THE CLASSROOM
TO INCREASE STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT ACROSS THE NATION

BUILDING A STRONG READING CULTURE

This issue of Touching Base is the first in a series addressing the key aspects of sustainability for Reading First. The focus of this issue will be Building a Strong Reading Culture.

What is Culture?

Reading Culture is an important aspect of the scientifically based school-wide reading models established with Reading First funds.

Culture, in the anthropological sense, can be thought of as “how a group of people do things,” how they greet one another and communicate, how they dress, eat, work and play. Therefore *school reading culture* can be defined as how a group of people teach reading: how we select and use instructional materials, how we address individual students’ instructional needs, how and when we assess students’ skills and use assessment information, how we use avail-

able instructional time, and how we learn and collaborate with one another.

Culture is how we act collectively, as a school community, to address the needs of all of our students. What it takes to act collectively for a purpose, of course, is strong leadership. Therefore the responsibility for building and sustaining a strong reading culture in a school falls to the one person in most schools who has the authority to make it happen: the principal.

In the battle for literacy, where the goal is ambitious—to have all children reading on grade level by the end of third grade—we cannot afford to leave any potential resource untapped. We must explore all the variables that schools use to bring large numbers of their students into the fold of successful readers.

One of the most powerful, and most affordable, of these variables is the school reading culture. It is not only possible, but vital, to

define a school’s reading culture, and to develop and sustain a culture that supports reading success over time.

As Figure 1 illustrates (see the end of this issue) common ground around reading creates a strong reading culture. Members of the school community must have a shared mission (sense of purpose), a shared vision of what they want to achieve, and shared beliefs that the desired outcome is attainable. They must also have a common understanding about what it takes on their part to achieve this vision and have a common commitment to it. Finally, they must have a common set of reading-related practices so that they can collaborate on student programs, agree on what needs to be done, and communicate effectively about what they are doing.

As part of what needs to

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SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST

- *Building a Strong Reading Culture-First in a Series on Sustainability*
- *Important Dates*



INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

IMPORTANT DATES 2



"ACHIEVING COMMON OUTCOMES (MANY STUDENTS AT BENCHMARK LEVELS, FOR EXAMPLE) REQUIRES COMMON GROUND. DEVELOP THE COMMON GROUND IN YOUR SCHOOL TO HELP THE MOST STUDENTS REACH HIGHER OUTCOMES."

~STAN PAINE



IMPORTANT DATES FOR 2007-08

DIBELS

Winter Benchmark

January 7-18, 2008: DIBELS window

January 25, 2008: Data due

Spring Benchmark

April 7-18, 2008: DIBELS window

April 25: Data due

BEAR

April 28-May 9, 2008:

BEAR window

May 16, 2008: BEAR Data due

Action Planning Due

Dates:

February 22, 2008

Regional Coach Training

March 2008

Principals, Coaches and Regional Consultants:

February 5, 2007:
Colorado Springs

Spring CRF

Conferences:

April 16: Denver

April 17: Colorado Springs

April 18: Colorado Springs

Note: Due to the number of CRF participants in the southern regions of the state, both April 17 and 18 conferences will be held in Colorado Springs.

BUILDING A STRONG READING CULTURE

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be done in leading instructional staff toward a strong reading culture, principals must articulate high expectations of all staff and hold them accountable for working toward these expectations. They must also engage staff and other stakeholders working toward this outcome; cultivate stakeholder participation in supporting the process; and communicate the reading mission and vision, how the school is progressing toward this outcome and how the support of the stakeholders is needed to continue moving toward the vision. This process is the essence of leadership when the goal is improved performance of the organization.

Everyone Plays a Part

All components of a school system influence a school's academic culture and its ability to produce strong outcomes. The very nature of systems makes this so; a system is composed of multiple parts and functions, all working together for a common purpose. At the district and school levels, instructional, operational, fiscal, and personnel functions must all work together to enable schools and teachers to deliver effective instruction. At the school and classroom levels, structural and organizational elements must coordinate with classroom, Title 1, English language learners and special education functions to serve the

instructional needs of all students.

While the principal has the key responsibility in establishing and maintaining a strong reading culture, other staff members and stakeholders also have roles to play in this process. Figure 2 (see the end of this issue) illustrates some of these roles.

Reading Culture: Implementation and Sustainability

Of all the elements of a school-wide reading model, such as Reading First, leadership and a strong reading culture have the greatest potential for sustaining the model over

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BUILDING A CULTURE OF READING

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time as initial funding streams disappear. Other elements, such as (cont.) curriculum, instruction, assessment, professional development, coaching, and use of time and other resources, are primarily procedural. There are criteria and procedures for how best to implement them. If these procedures are followed, implementation is likely to be positive, and outcomes are likely to improve. Yet none of these things are likely to happen without effective leadership and the cultural foundation upon which to implement these procedures—the “common ground” upon which the procedural and structural elements stand.

With respect to sustainability, or “the ability of the staff to keep procedures in place and the improved outcomes occurring, even after initial funding disappears” (adapted from Century and Levy, 2002), a strong reading culture is the one element with the potential to sustain an im-

proved reading program over time. Leadership comes and goes, and new leaders may have differing priorities or may not have the focus or charisma needed to provide the driving force for sustainability. For this reason, the school reading culture is uniquely essential in continuing the good work and improved outcomes that have stemmed from the original Reading First funding.

The good news is that a strong reading culture costs nothing to implement and continue. It requires only a few good character traits—will, persistence, and determination—to ensure that effective practices are carried on over time, even as contexts change (e.g., funding, personnel, and competing priorities). If ownership of the culture is not concentrated just in the principal or a small group of interested staff—rather, if it is distributed across all staff with roots extending into the district leadership, parent community and other community stakeholders, then the reading

culture can continue to determine “how we do things here in reading” well into the future, and students can continue to benefit from improved reading instruction for many years to come.

Sustainability of an initiative like Reading First is not about money. It is about having the will and the determination to carry on. What matters most is not the funding; other funding sources can always be identified by resourceful stakeholders. What matters is the school’s commitment to fulfill the mission and the vision of its staff to empower tomorrow’s students to become successful readers, an outcome they have already shown to be possible today. The school’s reading culture is the heart of what makes that as possible for tomorrow as it has shown to be today.

Thank you to Stan Paine, Director, Western Regional Reading First Technical Assistance Center for the generous use of these articles for reprint.



“TO
UNDERSTAND
THE HEART AND
MIND OF A
PERSON, LOOK
NOT AT WHAT
HE HAS ALREADY
ACHIEVED, BUT
AT WHAT HE
ASPIRES TO DO.”

~KAHLIL GIBRAN



Happy Holidays from all of us at
Colorado Reading First!



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COLORADO READING FIRST

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PUT **READING** FIRST!



**MERRY CHRISTMAS &
HAPPY HOLIDAYS TO ALL**



At this festive time of year, we pause to give thanks to each of you involved in Colorado Reading First. We recognize that the commitment to the development and enrichment of the children in your stead is not to be taken lightly, and we congratulate you for your diligence in the pursuit of ensuring that all children become successful readers.



May your holidays be filled with love, family and good cheer.

Happy New Year and we look forward to our continued work together in 2008!

Debora L. Scheffel
and the
Reading First Staff

CRF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT CALENDAR

December 07-January 2008



MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	S/SU
24 ★	25 ★	26	27	28	29/30
31	1 ★	2	3	4	5/6
7	8	9	10	11	12/13
Winter Benchmark DIBELS testing window January 7-18					
14	15	16	17	18	19/20
Winter Benchmark DIBELS testing window January 7-18					
21 ★	22	23	24	25	26/27
28	29	30			
DIBELS Data Due					

Holiday Office Closures ★

December 24-25, 2007

January 1, 2008

January 21, 2008

Martin Luther King

February 18, 2008

President's Day

May 26, 2008

Memorial Day

Components of a Strong Reading Culture

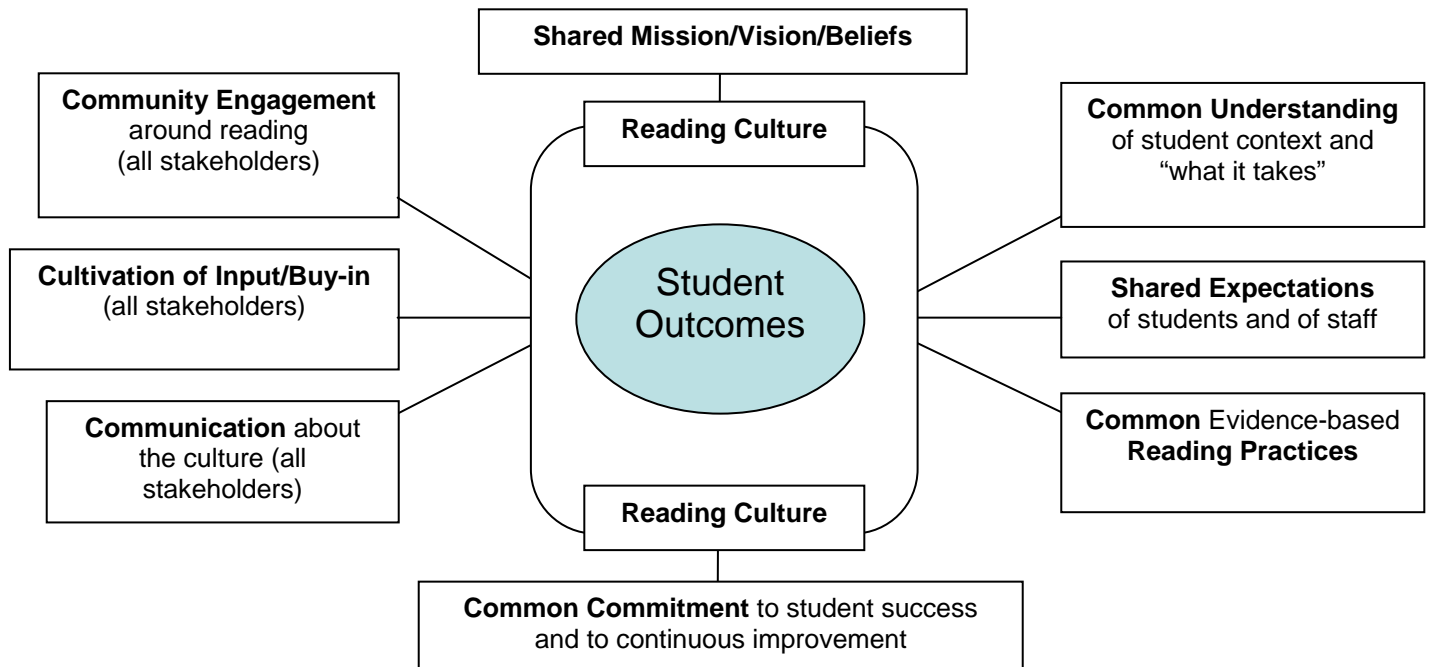


Figure 1: Components of a Strong Reading Culture

Figure 1 illustrates the components of a school reading culture and how they contribute to a school's reading outcomes. Notice that the essential functions are engaging and communicating with stakeholders to establish common ground for teaching and learning.

Everyone Plays a Role in Supporting School Reading Culture



Figure 2: Everyone Plays a Part