

A Profile of the Striving Readers Program: The Springfield/Chicopee School, Massachusetts, Districts Project

The Federal Striving Readers Program

The Striving Readers program aims to support literacy interventions for adolescent readers in middle and high school. Funded at roughly \$30 million per year, the pilot program currently operates in eight sites—six large school districts, one consortium of multiple rural districts, and one statewide education system for students in the juvenile justice system. Focusing on Title I-eligible schools with significant numbers of students reading below grade level, Striving Readers projects must include three key components: 1) schoolwide cross-disciplinary strategies for improving student literacy, which may include professional development for subject-matter teachers and use of research-based reading and comprehension strategies in classrooms across subject areas; 2) targeted intervention for students who are reading significantly below grade level; and 3) a strong experimental evaluation component.¹

The Springfield/Chicopee Striving Readers Project

In 2006, Springfield Public Schools and Chicopee Public Schools were awarded \$16,655,483 over five years for the Springfield/Chicopee Striving Readers Project. Both districts are located in southwestern Massachusetts and have a history of partnering on initiatives to improve student achievement, especially among three of the Springfield high schools and the two Chicopee high schools. Striving Readers gave the grouping of five schools another opportunity to join in an effort, this time to focus on literacy.² The project originally targeted seven thousand students in grades 9–11, and has since expanded to serve twelfth graders, as capacity has allowed.³

The Strategic Instruction Model Content Enhancement Routines for Teachers (SIM-CERT), developed by the Center for Research on Learning at the University of Kansas, was used as a whole-school intervention strategy in the five participating high schools. For targeted interventions, Scholastic's *READ 180* and the University of Kansas's Xtreme Reading were both implemented. Ninth graders reading at least two but no more than five grades below grade level were eligible for random assignment into

A Profile of Springfield and Chicopee Public Schools

- Nearly seven thousand students attend high school in Springfield, and more than 2,600 attend high school in Chicopee.
- Low-income students account for 78 percent of students in Springfield and 52 percent of students in Chicopee.
- The student body at Springfield Public Schools is more than 50 percent Hispanic, 24 percent African American, and 17 percent white.
- The student body at Chicopee Public Schools is 70 percent white and 24 percent Hispanic, while African American and Asian students together make up less than 5 percent of the student population.

S. Robinson, A. Southworth, and A. Ferriter, "Literacy Leadership: District Level and Building Level Support of CLC," presentation delivered at Council for Exceptional Children Convention, 2008, Boston, Mass.

one of the two targeted intervention groups or a nonintervention group. A nonintervention group allowed for the impact of each program to be measured by the evaluators in order to provide a more accurate picture of the program's effects. Teachers were also randomly assigned to one of the three groups—either *READ 180*, Xtreme Reading, or no targeted intervention—to facilitate an equal distribution of teachers in the evaluation.

Evaluations were conducted for both the schoolwide and targeted interventions after the first year of implementation. Year two evaluations are currently under way.

Schoolwide cross-disciplinary strategy

Professional development for the whole-school intervention, SIM-CERT, entailed training sessions, onsite literacy coaches, workshops, and administrative support. Teacher training, to impart mastery of the intervention strategies, occurred in two-day sessions: once during the summer, and subsequently throughout the implementation of the program. Literacy coaches came to observe classes and provide feedback monthly, and were available for consultation as necessary. There were monthly workshops to support the practical implementation of the intervention schoolwide. Administrators received a half day of training to better enable them to support their teachers.⁴

Targeted intervention

While Xtreme Reading appealed to the team leading the Striving Readers effort, the districts had already begun work with *READ 180* as an intervention strategy. As a result, the Striving Readers Project incorporated both programs into its targeted intervention approach.⁵ The targeted intervention programs were offered as supplements to the standard English language arts instruction. *READ 180*'s instruction occurred for ninety minutes each day, beginning and ending with whole-group instruction, including independent and small-group activities. Xtreme Reading was implemented for forty-five minutes each day, and featured explicit instruction and motivation building as its primary strategies. Professional development for *READ 180* featured two and a half days of training, monthly in-class mentoring, eight three-hour seminars throughout the year, one six-hour course during the year, and administrative and developer support. Professional development for Xtreme Reading included three days of teacher training, monthly in-class mentoring, quarterly workshops, and administrative support.

Evaluation

The Education Alliance at Brown University conducted the initial evaluation for the Springfield/Chicopee Striving Readers Project and determined that while there was variation among teachers in the degree to which implementation adhered to the theoretical design of the program, overall, implementation was adequate.⁶ The Education Alliance expects to publish the results of its impact study along with its year two evaluation by the end of 2009.

Endnotes

¹ Department of Education, <http://www.ed.gov/programs/strivingreaders/index.html> (accessed May 8, 2009).

² Matt Rigney, personal communication, May 15, 2009, and July 1, 2009.

³ Kimberley Sprague, personal communication, May 18, 2009.

⁴ K. Sprague et al., "Striving Readers Implementation of the Targeted and the Whole School Interventions: Summary of Year 1 (2006–2007) Springfield/Chicopee School Districts, Massachusetts, July 2008," <http://www.ed.gov/programs/strivingreaders/performance.html> (accessed May 8, 2009).

⁵ Matt Rigney, personal communication, June 24, 2009.

⁶ Sprague et al., "Striving Readers Implementation."

