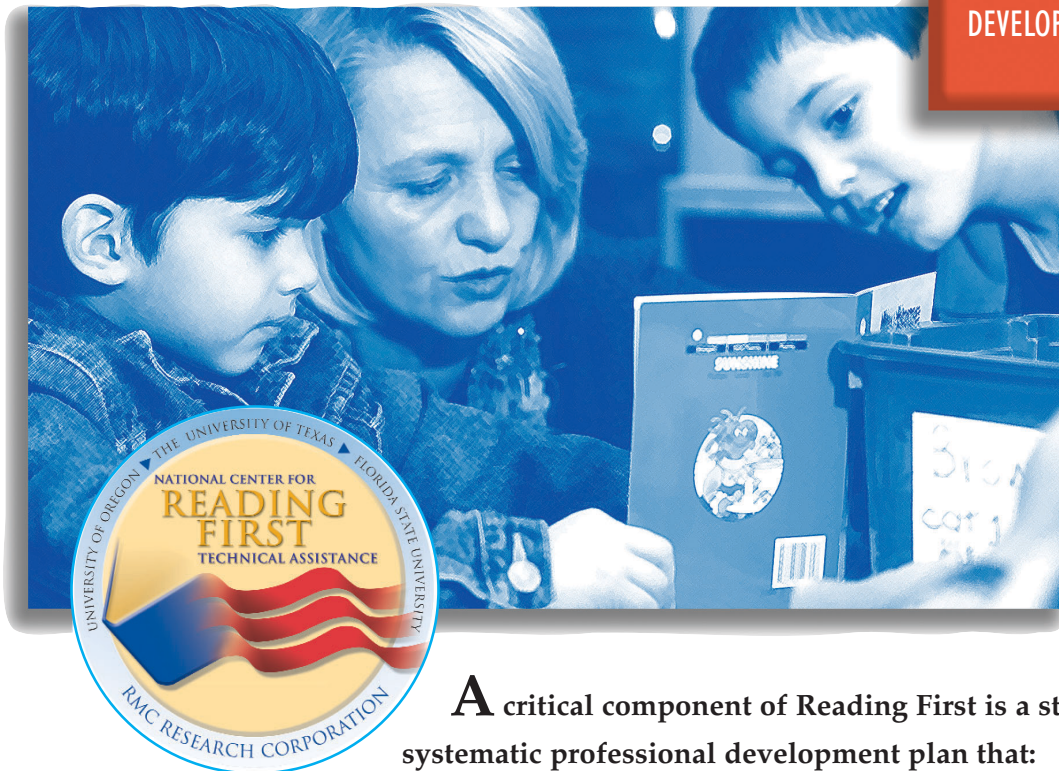# Tips for Designing a High Quality Professional Development Program

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT.

A critical component of Reading First is a strategic, systematic professional development plan that:

➤ prepares teachers in all of the essential components of reading instruction;

➤ provides information on instructional materials, programs, and strategies that are based on scientific reading research;

➤ enhances teachers' ability to implement early intervention and remediation programs; and

➤ facilitates the use of assessment data to inform instruction and meet the needs of all students, especially struggling readers.

The purpose of this brief is to provide guidelines for building a high-quality professional development program in Reading First schools.

GETTING STARTED...WHAT TO CONSIDER

Professional development sessions are not just a series of events. Rather, they are parts of a coherent, focused program designed to elicit a specific outcome. Whether at the district or school level, a coherent professional development program:

➤ prepares teachers at the beginning of the year to teach core reading and intervention programs and use all supplemental materials

➤ provides training on the administration of assessments and use of assessment data to inform instruction;

➤ includes follow-up sessions and ongoing support for classroom implementation throughout the year;

➤ is coordinated among the state, district, and local levels; and

➤ provides training for administrators, instructional leaders, reading coaches and teachers.

While the specifics of each plan will vary across schools, districts, or states, every plan should address these key elements:

➤ **Scientifically-based reading research (SBRR):** sessions that provide participants with a general knowledge and understanding of the research base on which Reading First was built.

➤ **Scientifically-based reading instruction (SBRI):** sessions that translate the research into practice and describe what SBRR looks like in the classroom.

➤ **Assessment for instructional decision-making:** sessions that prepare educators to administer early reading assessments and use those data for differentiating instruction, planning professional development, and problem solving.

➤ **Intervention strategies:** sessions that help teachers provide additional, targeted instruction to accelerate the learning of struggling readers.

➤ **Program specifics:** sessions that enable teachers to implement all parts of the school's selected reading programs—core, supplemental, and intervention—effectively.

➤ **Ongoing support:** coaching, grade-level meetings, and other learning opportunities that provide follow-up to initial training sessions and enhance implementation.

Reading First professional development priorities and opportunities should be based on teacher needs and results from early reading assessments. In general, however, a professional development plan progresses in a logical sequence of training that begins with an understanding of the scientifically-based reading research and program-specific training and continues with on-going and more in-depth training and support. The table below provides a sample framework for a professional development timeline that can be used to help you develop a coherent plan that addresses each key element.

SAMPLE FRAMEWORK FOR A PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN	
Timeline and key elements	**Approximate time needed**
First Summer	
Scientifically based reading research and instruction	2 days
Initial assessment training	2 days
Program-specific training	4 days
Ongoing training during the school year (year 1)	
Continued program-specific training and support	Ongoing
General and program-specific assessment data utilization	Ongoing
Problem solving (e.g., intervention strategies)	Ongoing
Second Summer	
Continued SBRI strategies and interventions	2-4 days
Problem solving using data and year one implementation experiences	2-4 days
Additional, more in-depth program-specific training	2 days
Ongoing training during the school year (year 2)	
Continued support in all areas; continued development of the knowledge and skills introduced in year one	Ongoing

Prepare teachers at the beginning of the year to teach core reading and intervention programs and use all supplemental materials effectively

Program-specific training prepares teachers to implement the core, supplemental, and/or intervention programs used in the classroom during the school year. The initial training, usually conducted during the summer or spring before implementation, prepares teachers to teach the lessons and complete the required organizational steps related to implementing the program(s). This initial professional development session can also include information on classroom management and organization and the administration of program-specific assessments.

➤ Ensure that program-specific training fully prepares teachers to use their classroom materials at the beginning of the year. Ideally, provide a minimum of three to four days for program-specific training on the use of the core reading program, followed by additional training on any supplemental or intervention programs. When this is not possible, provide at least one day of training that highlights the program's most critical elements. Ensure that teachers have access to an experienced reading coach or district trainer in case they encounter problems within the first few weeks of school. Arrange for additional professional development as soon as possible.

➤ Attending Reading First professional development sessions is critical for teachers in participating schools. Encourage attendance by providing adequate release time or stipends. In addition, arrange make-up sessions for the teachers who may miss all or portions of the initial training.

➤ If possible, allow substitute teachers and teaching assistants to attend professional development sessions. When a school can call on well-trained substitutes, reading instruction is not interrupted during a teacher's absence. In addition, these individuals can help teach during assessment windows or while the teacher attends Reading First training.

➤ District-wide or regional training sessions may be offered on multiple occasions or simultaneously in several locations.

➤ Encourage teachers from the same grade level to participate in training together to foster collegial networks and a shared understanding of program goals.

➤ Limit the size of sessions (approximately 20 participants) so that feedback can be given to teachers as they practice.

➤ Although the greatest commitment of time and resources will be in the first year, program-specific training should continue in subsequent years to train new teachers and guide experienced teachers in their efforts to improve implementation. After the initial year, training should focus on helping teachers refine their instruction to more effectively meet students' needs.

➤ Provide opportunities for teachers to visit and observe classrooms where the program is being implemented with fidelity and children are succeeding in reading. Ask your Reading First technical assistance provider to help identify nearby schools that can serve as models.

Prepare teachers to administer assessments, record the data, and use results to inform instruction

➤ Before the first administration of the early reading assessments outlined in the district or school plan, train the faculty and staff to use the assessment protocol (e.g., how to mark student errors) and understand how to record data.

➤ After initial data are collected, provide teachers with inservice sessions on interpreting results and using that information to inform instructional decisions. Work sessions facilitated by the reading coach can help teachers analyze the data, identify struggling readers, and plan instruction that targets students' learning needs. These sessions will need to address both program-specific assessments and other early reading assessments outlined in the Reading First plan.

➤ Teachers need both structured and less structured training on data-driven decision-making. For example, after an initial presentation on general guidelines for using assessment data to inform instruction, teachers will need time to work collaboratively with their peers and school leaders using real data to solve real problems.

➤ When planning opportunities to learn more about data-driven decision-making, consider the different levels and uses of assessment data, which include (among others): using student- or classroom-level data to inform instructional decisions; examining classroom, school, or district data to answer implementation questions; and analyzing school- or district-level data to inform programmatic and systemic decisions.

➤ Program-specific training for selected intervention programs also should address the issue of using assessment data to group students and differentiate instruction.

<div style="text-align:center">**Include follow-up sessions and ongoing support for classroom implementation throughout the year**</div>

The change process takes time and requires ongoing support. Administering assessments and implementing core, supplemental, and intervention programs consistently and with fidelity requires that teachers participate in a well-designed, high-quality professional development plan. Researchers estimate that 25 teaching episodes of using a new strategy are needed before teachers transfer the new strategy into their teaching repertoire.

Teachers are more likely to implement new practices well if they receive support while trying them in the classroom. Ongoing support includes:

➤ Sessions during which additional lessons and techniques are demonstrated;

➤ Opportunities to practice techniques in role-play situations; and

➤ Time for teachers to work together and with reading experts, such as coaches, consultants or other reading leaders. Effective coaches and expert consultants not only observe teachers' practices and offer guidance and feedback, but also demonstrate lessons, help create solutions to instructional problems, help teachers group students and plan for interventions, and assist teachers in using assessment results to inform instruction.

Intensity and duration are important factors to consider when designing a professional development program. For example, a three-day session will provide many contact hours, but the span of time (three consecutive days) is insufficient to foster change.

Consider the needs of individual teachers when designing follow-up sessions. Some teachers may need more individualized support, while others may assume a leadership role and serve as a mentor or coach. There will likely be some teachers who need additional intensive training as well as classroom support.

Coordinate state, district, and local professional development

As part of Reading First, teachers will likely attend training provided by the district, region, or state department of education. SEA and LEA professional development should be thoughtfully coordinated so that efforts are not duplicated and training at the different levels does not compete for time or offer contradictory messages. Determine the topics and schedule of the district and state level professional development offerings before finalizing a school plan. If, for example, the state offers sessions that provide teachers with a general knowledge of effective reading instruction, expand on that knowledge-base by providing a more in-depth session on select topics you have identified as specific areas of need. Leaders at all levels will need to work together to develop a coordinated plan that provides teachers with a deep general knowledge of effective reading instruction and prepares them to teach selected programs adequately.

Provide professional development for local leadership

Administrators in Reading First schools should attend professional development that will enhance their ability to lead for reading success. The training should include all elements of how to plan, implement, and manage a comprehensive reading initiative.

Principals are strongly encouraged to attend program-specific professional development so that they know what teachers are expected to do in the classroom. If large numbers of schools in a region or district are using particular programs, program-specific training can be coordinated to more efficiently train school leaders and ensure that they are able to provide program-specific guidance and assistance.

Other resources

The National Center for Reading First Technical Assistance is developing professional development modules on several topics addressed in this brief. Specifically, there will be modules that provide in-depth information on assessment-driven decision-making, program-specific training, leadership, and coaching. These modules are designed to enhance educators' knowledge and skills in the key areas of Reading First and will be available through the three regional technical assistance centers.

Planning the logistics of professional development

➤ After examining your student and teacher data (e.g., screening and diagnostic data and your needs assessment), identifying goals and determining the amount of time available, prioritize training needs and select the top priorities as your focus. It is better to focus on a few well-defined needs, rather than trying to superficially address multiple topics.

➤ Explore existing professional development materials and packages. Using existing materials can minimize the time and effort spent creating professional development sessions and is an effective method of addressing a training need at a minimal cost.

➤ Ask professional development vendors if online training is available. Online training can be cost effective and makes training more accessible to rural areas.

➤ When budgeting for professional development, consider all related expenses including meeting location, presenters' fees and travel, training materials, and teacher stipends.

➤ Consider videotaping the most important professional development sessions (e.g., the initial program-specific training) and national experts who may not be available in the future. This will allow you to train new or absent teachers more easily.

➤ Using a "train the trainers" model can be cost effective. To do so, identify a cadre of outstanding teachers who can serve as trainers or coaches. Invest in additional training for this group and then have them train teachers.

Key questions to ask when planning professional development

▼ What are our goals?

▼ What do our student data and needs assessment reveal about our training needs?

▼ Are the selected topics for training aligned with the district's Reading First plan and scientifically-based reading research?

▼ Who is our target audience?

▼ How much has been allocated in the budget for training? Are there sufficient funds to cover all related expenses (e.g., location, presenters, materials etc.)?

▼ How does this training align with existing professional development opportunities?

▼ How can other stakeholders (e.g., higher education faculty or business partners) be involved in the implementation of the plan?

▼ How many presenters are needed and who will be responsible for communicating with them about training needs and logistics?

▼ Are the presenters qualified to conduct the sessions? Do they have knowledge of Reading First goals and SBRR? Have they conducted professional development for similar audiences?

▼ Where and when will the session(s) be held?

▼ What materials are needed? How much is needed?

▼ How will new or reassigned teachers have access to the information after the initial training?

▼ Who will be responsible for securing the location and presenters and for notifying participants?

▼ How often and by whom will follow-up be provided?

Effective Professional Development Checklist

COMPONENTS

❏ Professional development goals and objectives stem from program goals and a systematic needs assessment.

❏ Theory and skills and a rationale for each are presented during training sessions.

❏ Modeling, demonstration, and practice are included in initial and ongoing training opportunities.

❏ Follow-up includes on-site coaching and access to additional resources or experts.

❏ Training on all materials and programs, including intervention programs, is provided.

❏ Training on the use of screening, diagnostic, and classroom-based reading assessments is provided.

❏ Training on using data from screening, diagnostic, and classroom-based reading assessments to inform instructional practices is provided.

❏ The timing, content, and duration of program-specific training enables teachers to use reading programs effectively at the beginning of the school year.

❏ High-quality, knowledgeable trainers have been secured.

❏ Program leaders have developed a mechanism for determining the extent to which teachers are implementing the core and intervention programs appropriately; follow-up and onsite support to improve fidelity of implementation are based on this information.

❏ A systematic, ongoing needs assessment informs short and long term professional development planning.

For more information, contact your regional Reading First Technical Assistance Center.
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