

Running head: ACCELERATED READING INSTRUCTION

An Evaluation of the
Accelerated Reading Instruction Program
A Component of CISD READS-
A Texas Student Success Initiative

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Executive Summary

Program Overview

School districts in Texas are required by Texas Education Code (TEC) § 28.006 to provide accelerated reading instruction for children in kindergarten and first grade who are identified as “at risk for a reading difficulty, including dyslexia” based on diagnostic reading assessments. The statute further states that each district will determine the form, content, and timing of the accelerated reading instruction program. The Texas Education Agency (TEA) has mandated the continuation of this intervention program for the 2001-2002 school year. The Director of Early Childhood Programs in Conroe ISD (CISD) is responsible for designing and implementing the Accelerated Reading Instruction (ARI) program and for providing the descriptive evaluation components required by TEA.

Rationale

According to the Texas Center for Reading and Language Arts (TCRLA), the key areas of focus for accelerated instruction should be phonological awareness, word analysis and spelling, fluency, and instructional level reading. The Center for Academic and Reading Skills (CARS) suggested that the following components are essential: phonemic awareness, letter-sound recognition, word work (blending and sight word practice), spelling and dictation practice, fluency practice with instructional level texts, and comprehension strategies. Each of these areas of literacy development was addressed in the CISD READS Literacy Model.

Description

The CISD READS Literacy Model outlined a framework for addressing the reading instruction needs of proficient and at risk readers. In addition, CISD provided additional tutorial support to at risk students in kindergarten and first grade. For approximately six weeks, trained tutors conducted daily sessions to supplement the literacy instruction provided by classroom teachers. These tutors worked with the student individually or in small groups of two to four.

To support the work of the classroom teachers, the ARI tutors used the FOCUS program to assist students who needed intensive auditory processing training. The tutors also used phonemic awareness activities, letter/word work, and interactive writing to provide additional opportunities for students to further develop their skills in these areas.

Participants

Staff members whose campuses participated in the Accelerated Reading Instruction program were given the opportunity to participate in the program evaluation. Each of the thirty-five tutors who served 500 at risk first grade students at 20 elementary campuses throughout the district, 100 first grade teachers, and eleven elementary administrators participated in this study.

Evaluation Approach

The researchers used both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to analyze the impact of the ARI program.

The researchers used quantitative analyses to examine the impact of the ARI program on students' reading levels, as measured by changes in reading benchmark levels. The term "benchmark scores" refers to the student's reading level, as determined by the classroom teacher through authentic assessment using graded reading materials. These levels are also posted on the students' report cards. An additional quantitative analysis was conducted using participant responses to forced choice survey questions concerning various components of the program.

A qualitative analysis of participants' perceptions of program was carried out using the focus group methodology and participant responses to open-ended survey questions. Results of both analyses are summarized below.

Evaluation Results

Impact on student reading levels. Preliminary quantitative analyses revealed that participation in the ARI program increased most students' reading levels at a rate comparable to the increase expected of non-participants. The average expected increase for non- participants was three reading levels. An analysis of the pre and post benchmark scores of 39 students from one campus indicated that students from typical first grade classes gain an average of 3.3 levels in their reading, as compared to students from a developmentally young class, who averaged a 1.4 level increase.

A qualitative analysis of responses on the participant surveys indicated that, according to participants, students who benefited from the program were those who appeared to have an innate desire to learn and were able to effectively focus on instruction. In contrast, a significant number participants

reported that students who failed to benefit from the program had suspected or diagnosed learning disabilities or short attention spans.

Program strengths. Quantitative and qualitative analyses of participant responses appears to indicate that the ARI program has been successful in meeting the needs of at risk students. The dominant view of stakeholders and others is that ARI the program is very effective, well designed, and targeted to those students most in need. Participant responses appear to indicate that the program's success is due to:

1. Stakeholder involvement
2. Programmatic focus on the literacy needs of the students
3. Well designed program components, including accurate assessment procedures
4. Standardization of the program across sites.
5. Strong commitment from program designers, tutors, and teachers.

Areas of concern. Although stakeholders in general rated the program as successful, they identified some potential areas of concern. The areas identified included:

1. Type of content covered during tutor training.
2. Assessment process used for identifying at risk students.
3. Number of tutorial sessions allocated.
4. Students who failed to benefit from the program.
5. Impact of the FOCUS component.

Additional Considerations

In light of this input and the previously conducted data analyses, district personnel may wish to consider:

1. Analyzing data from all campuses regarding the reading gains across all groups in the district.
2. Providing additional training for tutors on specific teaching strategies and time management techniques.
3. Reducing the numbers of assessment tools required for identifying at risk students.
4. Increasing the number of ARI sessions.
5. Conducting additional research regarding the program's effectiveness in meeting the needs of students with disabilities or limited attention spans.

6. Assessing the impact of the FOCUS program on the reading achievement of at risk students.

Introduction

Program Rationale

In an attempt to meet the needs of its student population, the 76th Texas Legislature amended the Texas Education Code (TEC) § 28.006 and approved the implementation of the Student Success Initiative. This initiative supported professional development of teachers and the implementation of scientific, research-based reading programs to assist in the early reading development of students. This initiative consisted of three programs: (a) Teacher Reading Academies, (b) K-2 Reading Instruments, and (c) Accelerated Reading Instruction.

The goal of Accelerated Reading Instruction (ARI) is to provide more intensive, more targeted, and more supportive instruction for struggling kindergarten, first, and second grade students. Program requirements include (a) use of state-approved assessment instruments to determine placement, (b) use of a scientific, research-based model of reading instruction, and (c) professional development for those implementing the program.

According to the Texas Center for Reading and Language Arts (TCRLA), the key areas of focus for accelerated instruction should be phonological awareness, word analysis and spelling, fluency, and instructional level reading. The Center for Academic and Reading Skills (CARS) suggested that the following components are essential: phonemic awareness, letter-sound recognition, word work (blending and sight word practice), spelling and dictation practice, fluency practice with instructional level texts, and comprehension strategies. The CISD READS Literacy Model addressed each of these areas of literacy development.

Program Description

The CISD READS Literacy Model outlined a framework for accommodating the reading instruction needs of proficient and at risk readers. The Accelerated Reading Instruction (ARI) program in CISD was aligned with the program requirements established by the Texas Education Agency. CISD used the Texas Primary Reading Inventory (TPRI) and other district-approved assessments to establish eligibility for the program. In addition to their regular reading classes, ARI students attended daily small group sessions conducted by trained tutors for a period of 6 weeks. Each session lasted for approximately 30 to 40 minutes. The program included a number of research-based strategies, including guided reading

and interactive writing. The ARI tutors also used the FOCUS program to assist students who needed intensive auditory processing training.

Purpose of the Evaluation

The purpose of the evaluation was to describe the impact of the Accelerated Reading Instruction (ARI) program on the reading achievement of at risk first grade students in CISD. In addition, the evaluation focused on the perceptions of ARI tutors, first grade teachers, and elementary campus administrators regarding (a) tutor training, (b) materials provided, (c) student identification and grouping, (d) students who did/did not benefit from the participation in the program, (e) interactions among teachers and tutors, (f) number and length of tutoring sessions, (g) record keeping, (h) impact of the FOCUS program on students' behavior and reading skills.

Audience

This evaluation is intended to provide the Director of Early Childhood Programs and others responsible for the implementation of the Accelerated Reading Instruction (ARI) program with information regarding the impact of the program, as measured by the changes in reading benchmark scores among students who participated and the perceptions of program stakeholders, including ARI tutors, first grade teachers, and elementary administrators.

Limitations

Due to the limited time frame allocated for this project, the results of this evaluation were, of necessity, narrow in scope. The feedback from individual tutors who participated in an audio taped focus group discussion was transcribed and combined with the written responses of the tutors, first grade teachers, and administrators who anonymously completed and returned surveys. Approximately 90% of the tutors and 80% of the first grade teachers completed and returned surveys.

In addition, student impact was measured for 39 students in one elementary school and was based on teacher evaluation of student benchmark levels, rather than on standardized instruments. These students represented only 8% of the total student population served by the program.

Contents of the Report

This report consists of a summary of the context for the study, the quantitative and qualitative strategies used to gather and analyze the data, the results of the data analysis, and suggestions for additional consideration.

Focus of the Evaluation

Setting

The Conroe Independent School District (CISD) is a suburban school district with a student population of approximately 33,000. Of this population, 5.3% of the students were African American, 15.9% were Hispanic, 77% were White, 1.6% were Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0.3% were Native American. Students who were economically disadvantaged comprised 26.1% of the population Limited English Proficient (LEP) students made up 8.3% of the total population.

Participants

Administrators, tutors, and first grade teachers whose campuses had implemented the Accelerated Reading Instruction program had the opportunity to participate in the program evaluation. Each of the thirty-five tutors who served 500 at risk first grade students at 20 elementary campuses throughout the district, 100 first grade teachers, and 11 elementary administrators participated in this study.

Research Questions

The following research questions provided the focus for this evaluation:

1. Did participation in the CISD ARI program impact the reading achievement (as measured by benchmark levels) of participating at risk first grade students?
2. What are the perceptions of CISD administrators, first grade teachers, and tutors regarding the ARI program?
3. Based on the data collected, what program practices appear to be effective in meeting the instructional needs of at risk first grade students?
4. Based on the data collected, what aspects of the program may warrant further consideration?

Data Sources

Data regarding the requirements for the ARI program were gathered using on-line resources available from the Texas Education Agency (TEA) (see Appendix A). The Director of Early Childhood Education Programs provided additional information specific to the implementation of ARI in Conroe ISD.

Quantitative data regarding student reading progress were collected using a matrix distributed to the teachers of first grade ARI students at one campus. In addition, researcher-developed surveys provided quantitative data regarding stakeholder perceptions of the ARI program

Qualitative data were gathered using an ARI tutor focus group and open-ended questions from the researcher-developed survey. Twenty-nine of the ARI tutors discussed the program during an afternoon focus group session facilitated by the Assistant to the Director of Early Childhood Education Programs and the researchers responsible for this program evaluation. Participant responses were tape-recorded and transcribed for analysis.

Evaluation Plan and Procedures

Researchers distributed surveys consisting of forced choice and open-ended responses to ARI tutors, first grade teachers, and elementary administrators in the district (see Appendix B). The participants completed and returned the surveys anonymously via the intra-district mail system. The researchers used a response matrix to record and analyze the quantitative data. Qualitative data were transcribed and analyzed for reoccurring themes.

In addition, ARI tutors participated in an afternoon focus group session in which issues related to program implementation were discussed using guiding questions (see Appendix C). The Assistant to the Director of Early Childhood Programs, assisted by the researchers, facilitated the focus group. Focus group responses were tape-recorded and transcribed for analysis. Participants were ensured anonymity in the reporting of responses.

First grade teachers from one campus reported student progress using a pre- and post- test benchmark matrix. Benchmark increases for each participating student were calculated. These scores were averaged and compared to the average gain for students who were not identified as ARI candidates.

Evaluation Results

Summary of Findings

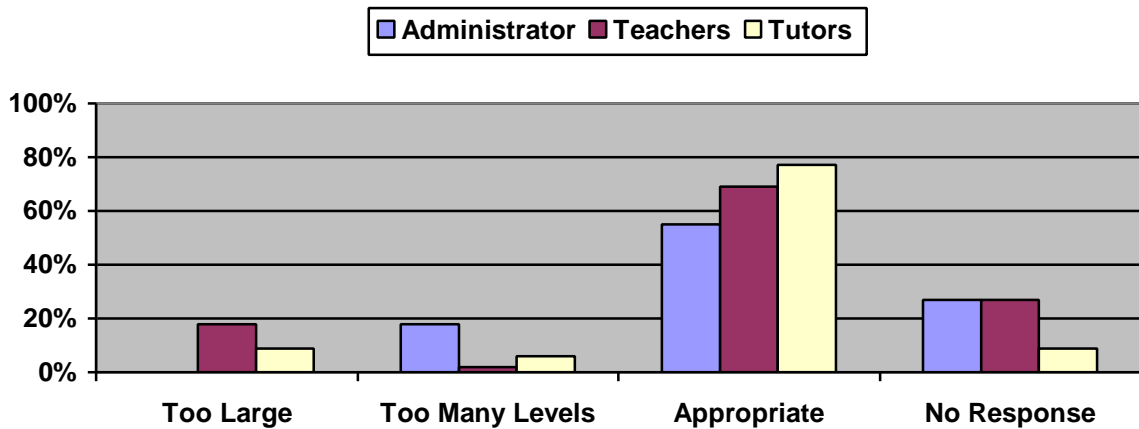
Intervention sessions. Intervention sessions were held daily for six weeks. Tutors worked with small groups of two to four students for approximately 30 minutes each day. Most participants in this study felt that the size of the groups was appropriate (see Table 1 and Figure 1).

Table 1

Perception of Size of Groups

<u>Stakeholder</u>	<u>Rating</u>			
	Too Large	Too Many Levels	Appropriate	No Response
Administrator	0	2	6	3
Teacher	18	2	69	11
Tutors	3	2	27	3

Figure 1. Comparison of stakeholders' perceptions of size of groups.



The tutors indicated that groups of three or less were best managed in a tutorial situation.

“A group of 3 was most ideal. With 4, you sometimes have management issues which wastes time.”

Most campuses held 29 sessions over the six-week period that began in January 2001. The responses on the adequacy of the number of sessions were mixed. The majority of the administrators returning surveys indicated that there were too few sessions, however, many of the tutors and about half the teachers reported that the number was about right. (see Table 2 and Figure 2).

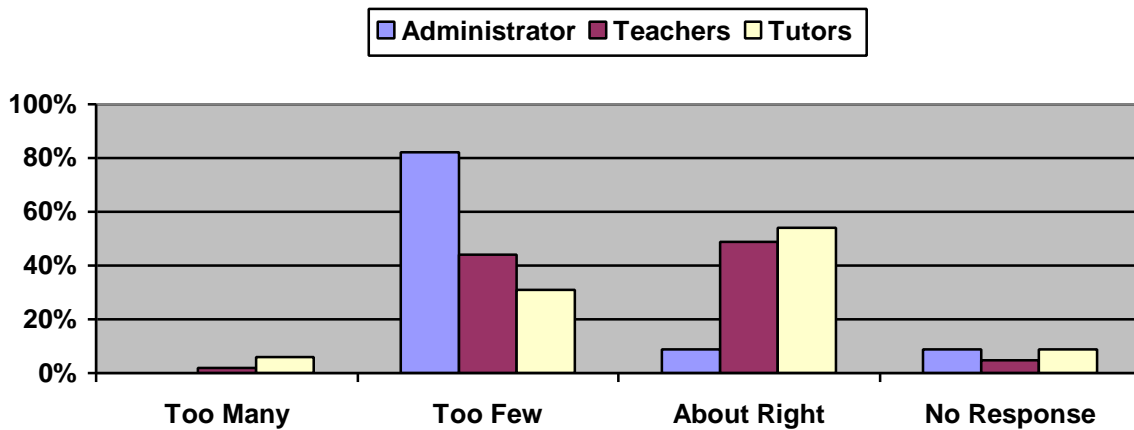
Table 2

Perception of Number of Sessions

<u>Stakeholder</u>	<u>Rating</u>			
	Too Many	Too Few	About Right	No Response
Administrator	0	9	1	1
Teacher	2	44	49	5
Tutors	2	11	19	3

Figure 2. Comparison of stakeholders' perceptions of number of training sessions.

The majority of the respondents who commented on this question stated that additional sessions



should be added and that the sessions should begin earlier in the year. All of the tutors and 53% of the first grade teachers expressed some concerns regarding the timing and duration of the program. Many tutors indicated that they were just making headway when the program ended.

“Too short of a time; six weeks will never catch these kids up to grade level.”

“It just decreases the gap temporarily, but without continuing instruction the gap will come back.”

“It really should be longer. They are just getting it. The lights are coming on.”

“Felt like program could be longer, as some of the children are just catching on. “ “When we talked to the teachers about the program, they feel like it needs to be at least two 6-week sessions.”

First grade teachers recognized the impact the tutors themselves had on the program regardless of the number of sessions.

“The effectiveness depended on the individual tutor and their qualifications.”

“My tutor would not take my students on a daily basis, but took other students more than once a day.”

“Not long enough, great certified teacher who understands reading, but not long enough to transfer knowledge effectively to classroom.”

“Need more time and teacher with experience and wish they were certified.”

“Start earlier in the year. It’s great for the children to have tutors.”

Administrators also commented on their perception that more sessions would have been appropriate.

“More time was needed. Should start earlier.”

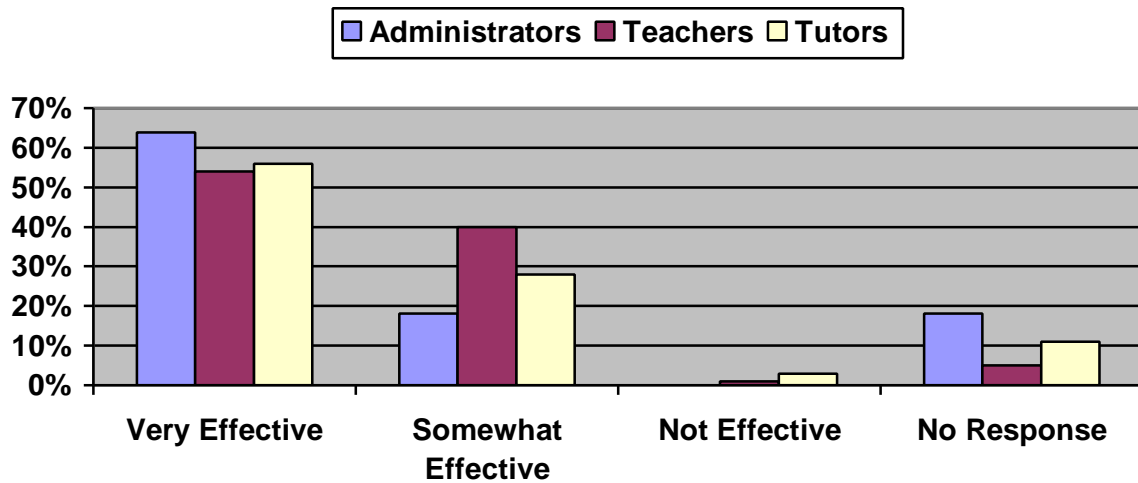
Effectiveness of intervention sessions. An overwhelming majority of the survey respondents gave the program very high marks and felt that it was very effective (see Table 3 and Figure 3).

Table 3

Stakeholders Perceptions of Overall Effectiveness of Program

<u>Stakeholder</u>	<u>Rating</u>			
	Very Effective	Somewhat Effective	Not Effective	No Response
Administrator	7	2	0	2
Teacher	54	40	1	5
Tutors	20	10	1	4

Figure 3. Comparison of stakeholders’ perceptions of overall effectiveness of program.



The respondents were also asked to describe the type of child who seemed to benefit most from the program. Tutors who responded described a child who was focused, alert, lacking in self-confidence, yet ready to learn.

“Alert, taking risks, does retain.”

“Those children who already knew their letters/sounds but needed help hearing and putting together those sounds.”

“The child that lacked self-confidence. They needed some one on one time.”

“The kids who already had a base, however small, seemed to benefit most.”

“Those children who wanted to learn.”

“Late bloomers, quiet children, insecure, unsure children.”

“All students benefit from this program.”

An equal number of first grade teachers who responded to this question indicated that, in general, students who (a) were reading slightly below grade level placement, (b) needed more individualized instruction (c) were risk-takers (d) needed a “boost” in self-confidence, and (e) were able to focus on the instruction appeared to benefit most from the program.

“Those who are ready to learn and take risks.”

“Who paid attention, had parental support,

“A child who needed extra attention and practice seemed to benefit most.”

“Children who needed to gain self-confidence.”

“Children that had low self-esteem regarding their reading ability were very thrilled when they were in a small group setting and their confidence begins to soar.”

Tutors and first grade teachers were also asked to describe the type of child who had difficulty with this program. Half of the first grade teachers who responded to this question indicated that the students who had short attention spans and “focusing “ difficulties failed to benefit from this program. Other frequently mentioned factors included students who qualified or had been referred for special education services and students who had behavior/discipline issues.

“A child with a learning disability had trouble but did benefit a little.”

“Children with identified behavioral issues.”

“Children with maturity problems.”

“Children delayed in speech, vocabulary development (oral language) recent arrivals from Mexico, children whose parent were illiterate in Spanish.”

“Child who previously showed extreme discipline problems.”

ARI tutors echoed the concerns of their first grade counterparts, with 29% noting that students with short attention spans failed to benefit from participation in the ARI program. In addition, approximately 38% of the tutors indicated that students who qualified or had been referred for special education services failed to benefit from the program.

“A child with focusing or a very hyper student.”

“The one who needed to be in special ed. Mom doesn’t want him tested.”

“Hyperactive child, concentration, speech problems, does not retain.”

“The child whose testing for Special Ed. is pending.”

“”The child that missed the “Special Ed.” cut-off.”

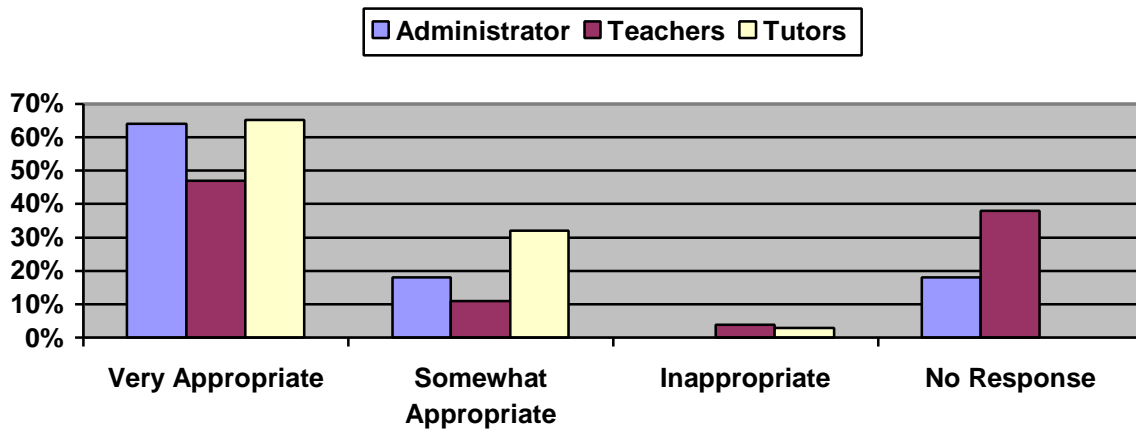
Training for tutors. Tutors attended two and a half days of training in the use of the ARI curriculum and the FOCUS Program before they began working with the children. Respondents in all three stakeholder groups were generally positive about the effectiveness of the training (see Table 4 and Figure 4).

Table 4

Perception of Training Content

<u>Stakeholder</u>	<u>Rating</u>			
	Very Appropriate	Somewhat Appropriate	Inappropriate	No Response
Administrator	7	2	0	2
Teacher	47	11	4	38
Tutors	23	11	1	0

Figure 4. Comparison of stakeholders' perceptions of training content.



Tutors' comments about their training seemed to focus on their need to learn specific reading strategies and their perceptions that too much time was spent on the FOCUS Program. In all 35 % of the tutors responding to the open-ended question about training content felt too much time was allocated for FOCUS.

“Have a demonstration of how guided reading should be taught to our groups.”

“Should have had one-half day of FOCUS and more training on the program.”

“Too much time was spent on the training for the FOCUS program. I would have preferred additional training in remedial reading intervention.”

FOCUS needs two hours training, top. The rest of the time could be spent with better instruction of guided reading procedures and techniques.”

“Explain guided reading further. “

“How to manage groups, guided reading, more specifics in helping a student who is stuck.”

First grader teachers also commented on the need for tutors to learn about specific reading strategies.

“They need more instruction in guided reading since they were supposed to do it”

“The tutor on our campus had a chance to modify the curriculum. There were areas in which they needed more training (fluency, list of sight words, permission to modify as needed for slow/absent learners.”

In addition to the comments regarding training reported on the surveys, feedback that surfaced during the focus group discussion with tutors suggested there might have been some confusion regarding the concept of guided reading.

“See, I think it is easier if they’re in different books because I find when they’re all in the same book, they listen to what the other person is reading...like if they don’t know a word, they’ll listen to who they know is the better reader and so I don’t think they’re really helping so I really prefer it when they’re in different books.”

“But when it came to reading with the students, that’s when I would read with each individual child.”

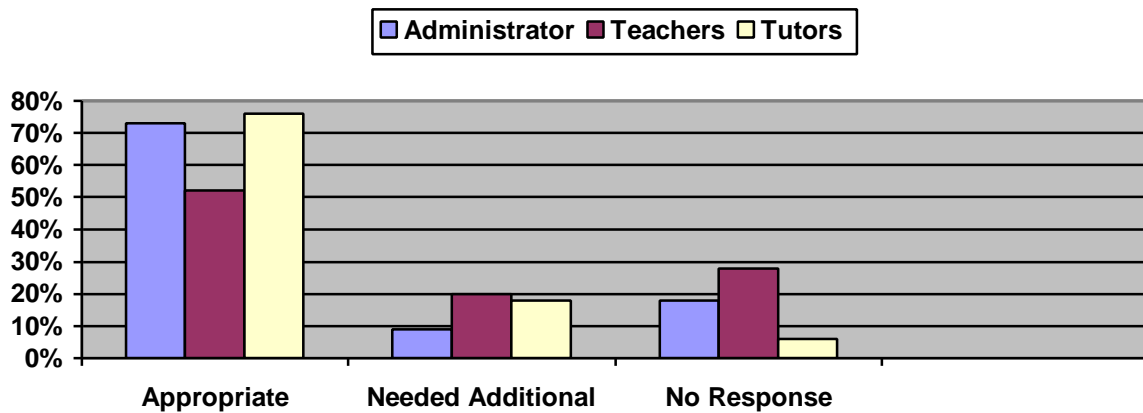
Materials provided. The district level program designers provided the tutors with a step-by-step curriculum with lesson plans. They also supplied the rubrics for the implementation of the FOCUS program. Tutors received materials such as flip charts, dry erase boards, magnetic letters, and flash cards. First grade teachers were less positive about the materials provided than the tutors and administrators (see Table 5 and Figure 5).

Table 5

Rating of Materials Provided by the District

<u>Stakeholder</u>	<u>Rating</u>		
	Appropriate	Needed Additional	No Response
Administrators	8	1	2
Teachers	52	20	28
Tutors	27	6	2

Figure 5. Comparison of stakeholders’ perceptions of materials provided.



Despite the fact that 52 % of the teachers felt that overall the materials were appropriate, more than half of the teachers who added comments noted that there were insufficient materials and/or materials had not arrived in a timely manner. Twenty-five percent of the tutors noted that more chart tablets were needed. A few tutors also mentioned additional equipment needs.

“Language master was helpful at our campus.”

“Materials for independent work would have been appreciated.”

“Need more chart tablets.”

“ The materials are great but some Wikki Stix would be a great manipulative to have. “

“The lesson plans were great.”

“Great materials, but [with] two of my groups I needed to extend their activities so I added some board games that went along with the lesson.”

“All materials to be given at beginning of sessions.”

“Would like to have it sooner.”

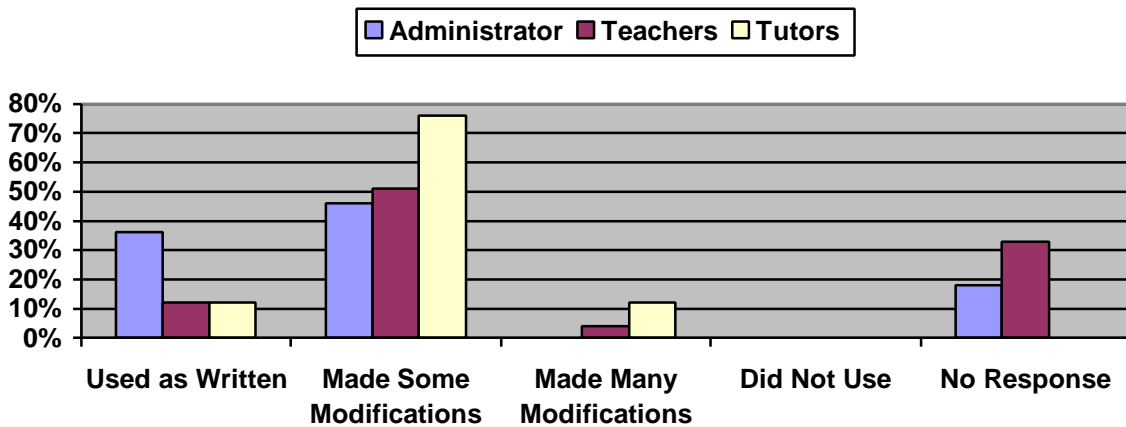
Use of materials. The program planners were particularly interested in how the curriculum and materials were used by the tutors. Most tutors reported that they had modified the lessons to meet the individual needs of their students (see Table 6 and Figure 6). Administrator appeared to believe that tutors used the materials more precisely than was the case.

Table 6

Stakeholders Perceptions of Use of Materials by Tutors

<u>Stakeholder</u>	<u>Rating</u>			
	Used as Written	Made Some Modifications	Made Many Modifications	No Response
Administrator	4	5	0	2
Teacher	12	51	4	32
Tutors	4	27	4	1

Figure 6. Comparison of stakeholders’ perceptions of the use of materials by tutors.



More than half of the teachers commenting on this question wrote that ARI tutors had modified the lessons to meet the needs of individual students. Sixty-three percent of the tutors indicated that they had modified the lessons to accommodate student or classroom teacher needs.

“Depending on the level of students, some modifications had to be made.”

“I had to do two different lesson plans. I have level 2’s and 9’s and had to design a lesson plan that would help each group.”

“Some materials were too low for almost all students’ needs.”

“Some lessons were too long. Some children did not need some of the points in the lesson so I would modify to either enrich or challenge.”

“I had two children who were on level one and a few times I felt their needs were better served with modifications. One had a language difficulty, (Spanish speaking). The other had behavioral problems.”

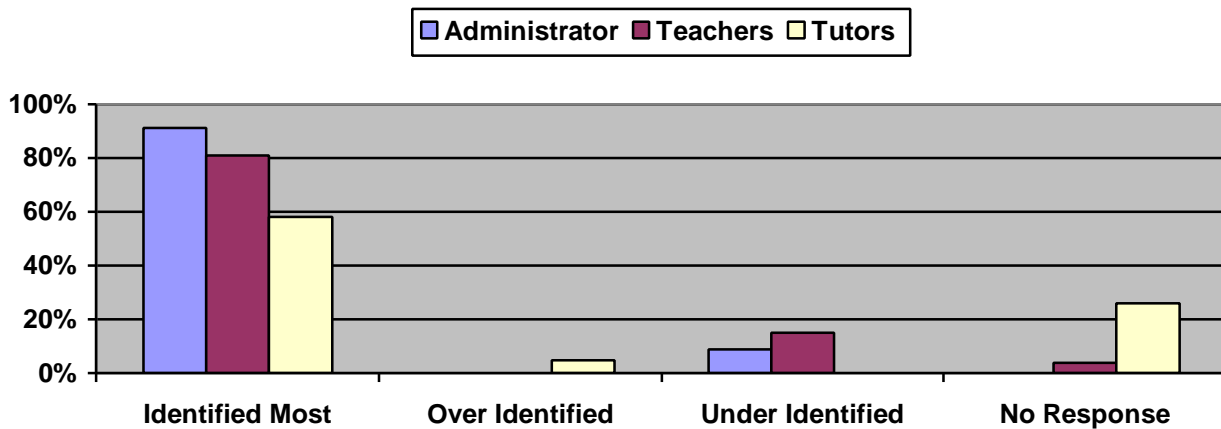
Student identification process. At risk students were identified for the program based on their benchmark reading scores, Texas Primary Reading Inventory results, and Observation Survey results. Teacher comments were also considered. Central office staff reviewed the scores and comments and made the final decision on placement in the program. The program developers were interested in the efficacy of this identification process. Stakeholders overwhelmingly agreed that the process was successful in identifying most of the students needing accelerated reading instruction (see Table 7 and Figure 7).

Table 7

Stakeholders' Perception of Student Identification Process

<u>Stakeholder</u>	<u>Rating</u>			
	Identified Most in Need	Over Identified	Under Identified	No Response
Administrator	10	0	1	0
Teacher	81	0	15	4
Tutors	20	2	4	9

Figure 7. Comparison of stakeholders' perceptions of the identification process.



When asked for comments on how the process could be improved, approximately one-third of the teachers responding to this question indicated that teacher judgment should be used more extensively in identifying students for participation in the ARI program.

“Ask the teacher. We know who needs help.”

“Do not use a standardized test! Use the teacher’s knowledge of students and leveled running record. Not the TPRI!”

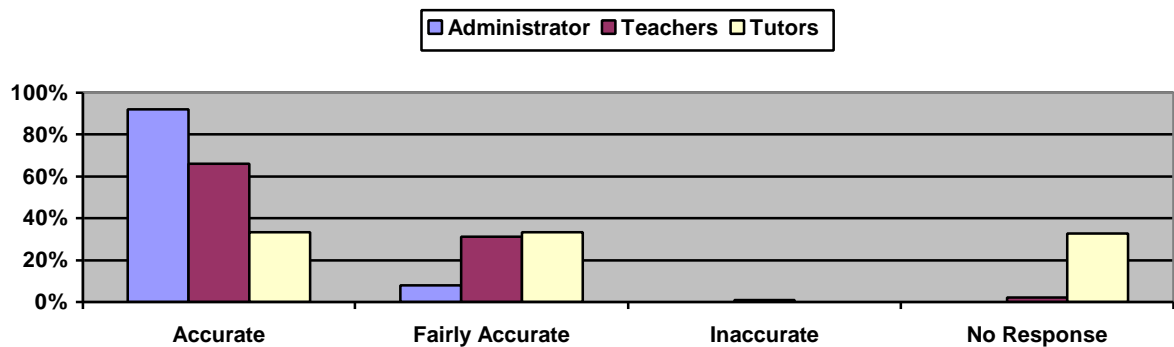
Although many teachers felt that the identification process could be improved, the overwhelming majority of administrators, teachers, and tutors felt the identification process was accurate (see Table 8 and Figure 8).

Table 8

Stakeholders' Perception of the Accuracy of the Identification Process

<u>Stakeholder</u>	<u>Rating</u>			
	Accurate	Fairly Accurate	Inaccurate	No Response
Administrator	10	1	0	0
Teacher	66	31	1	2
Tutors	12	12	0	11

Figure 8. Comparison of stakeholders' perceptions of the accuracy of the identification process.



Interactions with first grade teachers. The overall perception of all respondents was that the interaction between first grade teachers and the tutors was adequate to meet the students’ needs (see Table 9 and Figure 9).

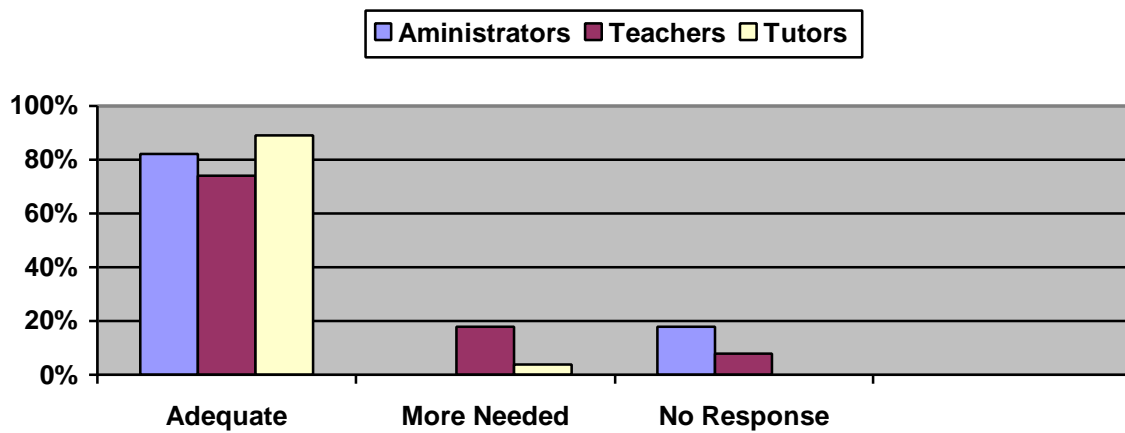
Table 9

Stakeholders’ Perception of Amount of Interaction between Tutors and First Grade

Teachers

<u>Stakeholder</u>	<u>Rating</u>		
	Adequate	More Needed	No Response
Administrator	9	0	2
Teacher	74	18	8
Tutors	31	4	0

Figure 9. Comparison of stakeholders’ perception of the interaction between tutors and teachers.



Approximately 80% of the first grade teachers completing this section of the survey made positive comments regarding the ARI tutors.

“The two I worked with were great. The one with a degree was outstanding. She helped in many areas. We need her on our team next year.”

“Our tutor was like a member of our team –very good.”

A majority of the ARI tutors completing this section noted that interactions with first grade teachers occurred regularly.

“I met almost daily with my first grade team.”

“We did a mid-session evaluation on each student for the teacher. They returned the evaluation with their observation of student and what they thought we should focus on.”

“The teachers were very helpful and supportive. They provided the materials and guidance to modify the tutorials to meet individual needs.”

“The teachers at my school have been great and very positive with their kids making the kids excited.”

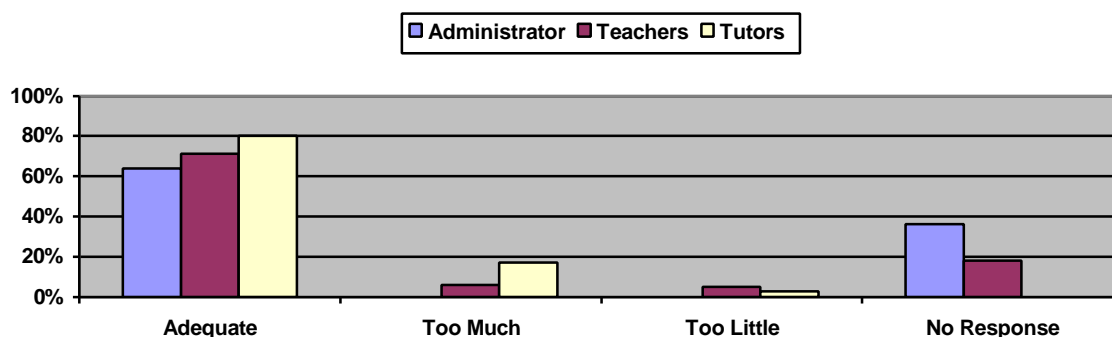
Record keeping. District officials were also interested in the value of the record keeping that was a component of the program. Most of those who responded felt that the record keeping was adequate to reflect progress (See Table 10 and Figure 10).

Table 10

Stakeholders' Perception of Amount of Record Keeping

<u>Stakeholder</u>	<u>Rating</u>			
	Adequate to Show Progress	Too Much	Too Little	No Response
Administrator	7	0	0	4
Teacher	71	6	5	18
Tutors	28	6	1	0

Figure 10. Comparison of stakeholders' perception of amount of record keeping.



Although most of the teachers felt that the record keeping was adequate to reflect progress, an analysis of the remarks section on the questionnaire revealed that nearly half of the first grade teachers commenting indicated that too much time was spent on record keeping while other teachers noted that they were not familiar with components of the record keeping process.

“I am not familiar with the record keeping that was done. The tutor feedback has been wonderful. It was personal and informative.”

The tutors themselves felt the record keeping helped in evaluating the students but felt not enough time was allowed in schedule for recording keeping.

“Helped us in evaluating the students.”

“Provided a checklist for tutors after midpoint and final session. Teachers like the written information.”

Use of FOCUS program. District program developers requested feedback regarding the FOCUS program that was used to supplement the ARI curriculum. Participants responded to four questions about the program.

1. Are the FOCUS lessons being tied into the reading process?
2. Are there increases in student vocabulary, verbalization in the tutorial session or classroom as a result of FOCUS?
3. Has there been any feedback from parents about the program?

4. Have there been any observable changes in student behavior since the students began the FOCUS program?

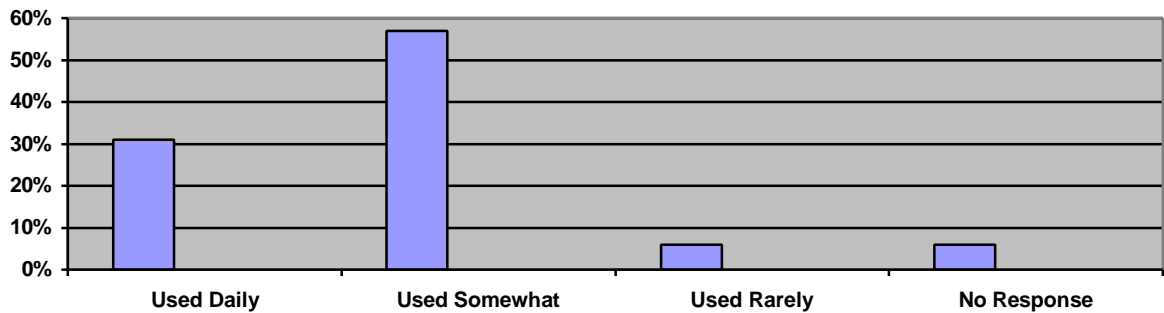
Thirty-four percent of the teachers and 36% of the administrators did not respond to the first question. The majority of the tutors who responded stated they were using the program “somewhat” (see Table 11 and Figure 11).

Table 11

Tutors’ Use of FOCUS Program

Used Daily	Used Somewhat	Used Rarely	No Response
11	20	2	2

Figure 11. Frequency of use by tutors of FOCUS program.



First grade respondents indicated that they had not received information on the FOCUS program.

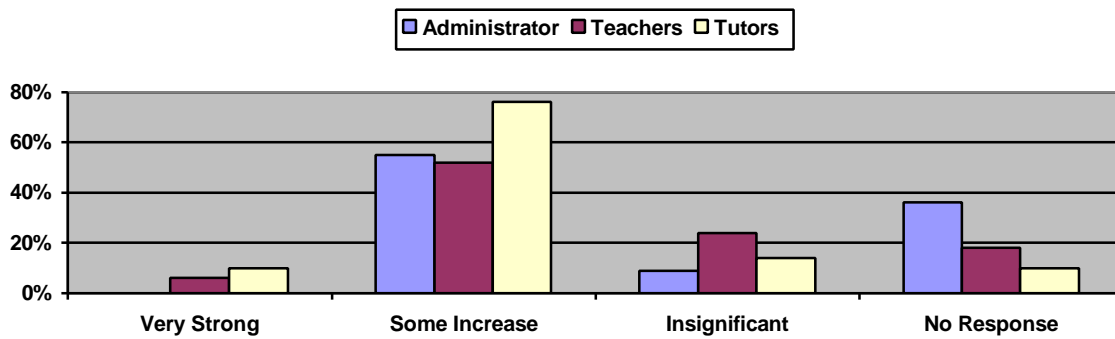
The survey results from question two are shown in Table 12 and Figure 12. Most tutors indicated that they felt there was some increase in vocabulary or verbalizations as a result of the FOCUS program. Only 10% felt there were significant increases. Almost 25% of the first grade teachers felt there were insignificant increases.

Table 12

Stakeholders' Perception of Increase in Student Vocabulary, Verbalizations as a Result of The FOCUS Program

<u>Stakeholder</u>	<u>Rating</u>			
	Very Strong Increase	Some Increase	Insignificant	No Response
Administrator	0	6	1	4
Teacher	6	52	24	18
Tutors	3	25	4	3

Figure 12. Comparison of stakeholders' perceptions of increase in student vocabulary, verbalizations as a result of the FOCUS program.



An analysis of the qualitative responses showed that 64% of first grade teachers who had observed increases noted progress only in the area of phonemic awareness. The bilingual teachers felt the program was not applicable to Spanish readers.

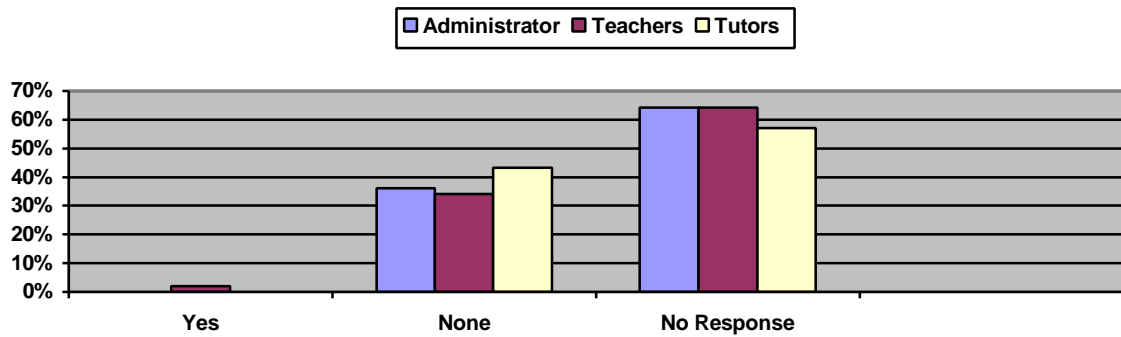
There appeared to little, if any, parent feedback regarding the FOCUS program (see Table 13 and Figure 13).

Table 13

Stakeholders' Statement Receipt of Feedback from Parents on FOCUS Program

<u>Stakeholder</u>	<u>Rating</u>		
	Yes	No	No Response
Administrator	0	4	7
Teacher	2	34	64
Tutors	0	15	20

Figure 13. Comparison of stakeholders' statements regarding receipt of feedback from parents on FOCUS program.



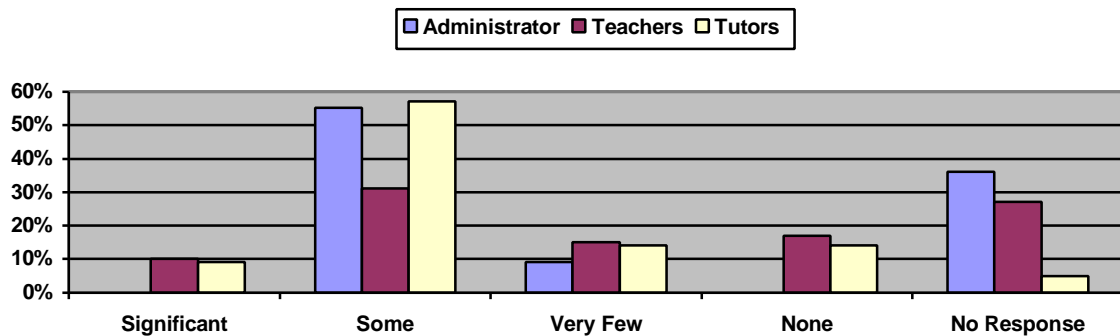
The most common response regarding parent feedback on the FOCUS Program was that parents were not aware of what the program entailed. The results of question 4 regarding the amount of observable changes from the FOCUS program are shown in Table 14 and Figure 14.

Table 14

Stakeholders' Perceptions of Observed Changes from the FOCUS Program

Stakeholder	Rating				
	Significant	Some	Very Few	None	No Response
Administrator	0	2	1	0	4
Teachers	10	31	15	17	27
Tutors	3	20	5	5	2

Figure 14. Comparison of stakeholders' perceptions of observed changes from the FOCUS program.



The majority of first grade teachers who responded to the comment section noted increases in self-confidence and reading skills.

Approximately 42% of the tutors who responded to the comments section of this question indicated that students were applying the skills learned in the FOCUS program to reading and spelling tasks.

“I think FOCUS is effective for some. However, I felt like it took too long to teach the process of FOCUS. FOCUS helped me to see what kids could separate phonemes and ones who needed work. During dictation, the kids would say words in slow motion, then write.”

“The FOCUS Program seems to be geared to the children who haven’t mastered how to make the letter sounds. The majority, in fact, all of mine already had mastered these tasks. I don’t see my students applying the FOCUS tasks to their reading.”

Benchmark level increases. Quantitative data were obtained from one convenience sample of 37 children. The results of the pre and post intervention benchmark scores for at risk students participating in the program from ten first grade classes at one campus are reported in Table 15. The scores of developmentally young children from one of the classes are indicated in the last row. The average increase in scores expected from first grade students in general was three levels. The results showed that all classes with the exception of the developmentally young class made gains comparable to those expected from children not receiving intervention.

Table 15

Pre-post Intervention Benchmark Scores

Class	Number of Students in Program	Net Change
Class 1	3	1.6
Class 2	6	4.8
Class 3	1	2.0
Class 4	5	3.6
Class 5	4	4.2
Class 6	2	2.5
Class 7	1	3.0
Class 8	4	5
Class 9	3	3.3
Average	3	3.3
Developmentally Young	10	1.4

Interpretation of Findings

This analysis of 146 surveys regarding the efficacy of the Accelerated Reading Intervention program revealed that the respondents viewed the program as successful in meeting its goals of improving the reading level of at risk first graders.

Tutors overall reported that the size of their tutorial groups was appropriate. The first grade teachers who responded seemed to be divided on the number of sessions with 49% stating the number of sessions was about right while 44% felt there were too few sessions. Administrators were overwhelmingly

of the opinion that there were too few sessions. About one-third of the tutors felt there were too few sessions.

Over half of the respondents in all categories gave the program a “very effective” rating. Only one percent of the respondents rated the program as “not effective.”

Both the qualitative and quantitative data showed that not all children benefited equally from the program. Children with maturity problems and children suspected of needing special education services did not fare as well as other children in the program.

The majority of respondents indicated that the training provided prior to the implementation of the program was very appropriate. The suggestions most frequently made for improving the training included (a) reducing the amount of time spent on the FOCUS program, (b) thoroughly explaining the use of guided reading, and (c) providing more information on specific reading strategies.

The majority of respondents in each category rated the district-provided materials including the curriculum as appropriate. The most frequently cited suggestions for improvement were earlier delivery of the materials and providing more chart tablets.

The effectiveness of the program may have been due to the fact that over 70% of the tutors modified the lessons to meet the individual needs of their students.

Most stakeholders perceived the identification process as effective in identifying most of the children in need. First grade teachers were the most critical of the process, indicating that authentic assessment from the classroom teachers was the most effective way to identify children in need of reading acceleration.

Most stakeholders were satisfied with the amount of interaction between the first grade teachers. In general, the first grade teachers were highly complimentary of the tutors.

Record keeping was deemed adequate by all categories of stakeholders.

The FOCUS program overall seemed to receive the least favorable ratings. Tutors reported that they used it somewhat and, although the majority of teachers and tutors stated they saw some increase in student performance associated with the FOCUS program, there was almost no response from parents. In addition, only 41 % of the teachers felt there were any observed changes in behavior, with 32% reporting few or no changes. Changes that were observed seemed to occur in the area of phonemic awareness.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Standards

The Texas Education Agency Program has listed specific requirements for the Student Success Initiative: Accelerated Reading Instruction Program (ARI) (Appendix A). The first states that decisions will be made at the local level of the individual child, the classroom, and school-wide, depending on the needs of the students to be served. CISD's program offered a uniform program guideline to assure equity among various schools. This guideline also allowed for program modifications based on the needs of the individual students.

The second stipulation was that the school district and charter school will determine the form, content, and timing of the program that will best meet the needs of the students being served. The Director of Early Childhood Services was responsible for developing the form, content, and timing of CISD's program, based on best practices of a successful reading program.

The third criteria was that Accelerated Reading Instruction (ARI) programs must be based on scientific research and must provide opportunities for students to engage in more intensive, more targeted, and more supportive reading instruction. The program developed in CISD provided for intensive daily small group reading instruction utilizing program components that were widely accepted as research based, i.e. phonemic awareness, guided reading, and multisensory teaching strategies.

The fourth and fifth components mandated that Accelerated Reading Instruction programs provide reading instruction that addresses the reading deficiencies of students identified through the early reading instrument and other data in kindergarten, first, and second grades. CISD's identification process included the Texas Primary Reading Inventory, the Observation Survey, and authentic assessment based on benchmark reading levels in first grade.

The final requirement was that programs should provide the professional development necessary for qualified staff to implement the specific objectives of the program. The CISD model provided for 2.5 days of staff development for the tutors. The majority of participants rated this training as "very appropriate".

Recommendations

Program strengths. Quantitative and qualitative analyses of participant responses appeared to indicate that the Accelerated Reading Intervention Program has been successful in meeting the needs of at

risk students. The dominant view of stakeholder and others is that the ARI program is very effective, well designed, and targeted to those students most in need. Participant responses appeared to indicate that the success of the program was due to:

1. Stakeholder involvement as demonstrated by the tutors' flexibility in making accommodations for the students and the very effective interaction between tutors and first grade teachers.
2. Programmatic focus on the literacy needs of the students which included best practices in interactive writing, phonemic awareness, letter-sound recognition, word work, spelling and dictation practice, fluency practice with instruction level texts and comprehension strategies.
3. Well-designed program components including participant training, appropriate materials, and accurate assessment procedures.
4. Standardization of the program across sites through the use of common assessment instruments, common delivery model, common curriculum, and common training procedures for the assessors, i.e., the first grade teachers, and the program implementers, i.e. the tutors.
5. The ratio of tutor to students, which permitted an average group size of three students.
6. Strong commitment from program designers, tutors, and teachers as evidenced by the program results and the depth of their commitment and understanding of the program as evidenced by the quality of their responses to the questionnaire.

Areas of concern. Although stakeholders in general rated the program as successful, they identified some potential areas of concern. The areas identified included:

1. The type of content covered during tutor training. Tutors indicated the need for more training on specific reading strategies included guided reading.
2. Number of sessions. Administrators and administrators felt the number of sessions was insufficient.
3. The assessment process. Stakeholders perceived the process as overly complex and time consuming.

4. Student who failed to benefit from the program. Tutors and Teachers were consistent in their descriptions of the poorly focused or motivated child who had difficulty with this model.
5. The impact of the FOCUS component. Most teacher and tutors felt the investment if time and training was not commensurate with the overall benefit of this program component.

Additional Considerations

In light of this input and previously conducted data analyses, district personnel may wish to consider:

1. Analyzing data from all campuses regarding the reading gains across all groups in the district.
2. Providing additional training for tutors on the specific teaching strategies and time management techniques.
3. Reducing the number of assessment tools required for identifying at risk students while maintaining the authentic assessment component.
4. Increasing the number of ARI sessions.
5. Beginning the program earlier for students that were identified in the kindergarten program.
6. Conducting additional research regarding the program's effectiveness in meeting the needs of students with disabilities for o limited attention spans.
7. Reassessing the benefit of the FOCUS program on the reading achievement of at risk students and modifying the role of this component in the program.
8. Assessing the need to better match the needs of bilingual students with the materials provided.