



Summer School Literacy and Professional Learning Project

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Summer School Literacy & Professional Learning

The Summer School Literacy and Professional Learning Grant (SSLPL) is an initiative designed by the Massachusetts Department of Education to simultaneously maximize achievement in extended school year programs and provide professional development in evidence-based literacy practices. The program is facilitated through a partnership between local educational agencies including Crafting Minds and HILL for Literacy and hosted by the Brockton Public Schools. The grant provides a half-day of literacy instruction within the Brockton extended school year program. The program is attended by rising first grade students who are reading below grade

SSLPL was developed by the MA Department of Education in conjunction with local agencies to address critical issues facing the field including stagnant student achievement in reading, the negative effect of summer slide on student achievement, minimal teacher preparation in the domain of structured literacy, and a lack of supported-practice during in-service training.

level. Participants receive small group instruction in foundational reading skills including phonics, fluency, spelling, vocabulary, and comprehension. Brockton educators serve as the program teachers, and participate in an initial series of workshops and ongoing professional development. Teachers also receive daily support from instructional coaches. A valid, reliable early literacy screening tool (DIBELS 8th) was used to group students and measure growth in skills. By the conclusion of the 4.5 week program, teachers participated in 45 hours of professional development and coaching and students received 60 hours of literacy instruction. As a group, the 75+ enrolled students demonstrated meaningful growth across all measures of reading ability.

Maximizing Summer Learning

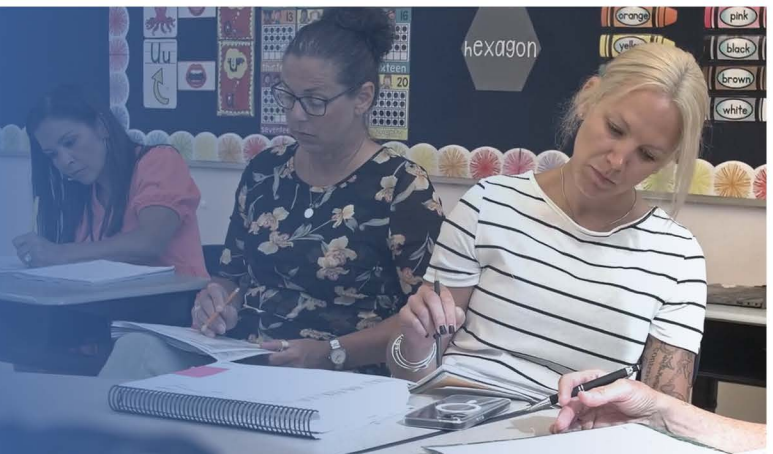
School-based programs that provide summer instruction vary widely in their purposes and outcomes. Many summer literacy programs that are offered by public schools focus on *maintaining* students' skills or preventing the "summer slide." These programs often fail to utilize a systematic or evidence-based approach to guide their instruction, and squander an optimal opportunity for intensive skill-building. Furthermore many school districts limit program enrollment to students who are either at-risk for retention or who carry diagnoses of learning disabilities, yet there is significant evidence to show that the proper summer instruction can help students reading below grade level make gains in a short period of time (Augustine, McCombs, Schwartz & Zakaras, 2013).

Expanding Previous Summer Initiatives

SSLPL expands upon previous summer literacy initiatives facilitated by DESE, namely the Summer Institute for Literacy Leadership. In 2019, the Summer Institute for Literacy Leadership served 35 students attending the Somerville Public Schools in Somerville, MA. Over the course of the four-week half-day program, students received approximately 30 hours of evidence-based literacy instruction and pre-post data indicated that students made significant gains across all measures. Teachers received 32 hours of professional development and coaching in assessment interpretation, planning, and delivering structured literacy routines. As a result of their participation, teachers reported increased knowledge and confidence in planning and delivering structured literacy routines. Student outcomes indicated that when instruction is sufficiently explicit, systematic, and robust and utilizes empirically-supported practices, meaningful growth can be made in a brief period of time.

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(Augustine, McCombs, Schwartz & Zakaras, 2013)



Improving Reading Proficiency in MA

SSLPL was developed to **address several challenges facing the field of education**. These challenges range from stagnant student achievement in literacy to weaknesses in teacher training and ongoing professional development programs, in particular:

- Recent data indicate that less than half of fourth-grade students in Massachusetts can read at a proficient level.
- Documented absence of pre-service training on the science of reading and structured literacy instruction.
- Minimal embedded practicum experiences within a professional development sequence.

According to data from the “Nation’s Report Card” (National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2023), 45% of all Massachusetts fourth-graders scored in the proficient range. This marks the eighth consecutive time that the state scored or tied for first place in the nation (U.S. Department of Education). There is much to celebrate, but also pedagogical weaknesses to address. Overall the number of proficient readers in the Commonwealth has plateaued (NAEP, 2023). Furthermore, rates of referral to special education have historically placed Massachusetts second in the country (Scull & Winkler, 2011). Nationally, a specific learning disability, including weakness in reading, accounts for the greatest percentage of special education referrals. However, prevalence rates for dyslexia are only estimated to range between 5 – 17% (D’Mello & Gabrieli, 2018).

Together these findings suggest that there is a significant percentage of children who are struggling to read and may not have a learning disability. Rather, they require systematic, explicit instruction in critical literacy skills, including *building fluent word recognition* which is widely regarded as the hallmark skill of proficient readers (Fletcher, Lyon, Fuchs, & Barnes, 2018). Although fluent reading and comprehension become a skill essential for all other academic achievements, in its earliest stages, it is an unnatural process (Wolf, 2007). Fluent word recognition is the outcome of proficiency in underlying foundational literacy skills. In order to become fluent it is necessary that students can automatically retrieve all five aspects of word knowledge including phonics patterns and accurate pronunciations of words, and word meanings.

The approaches that are **most effective at increasing fluent word recognition rely on direct, systematic routines that appropriately integrate phonemic awareness, single-word reading, spelling, and connected text reading** (Robinson, Lambert, Towner, & Caros, 2016). Recently branded as “Structured Literacy” (Spear-Swerling, 2018) systematic, direct instruction in the component processes of word knowledge results in the greatest outcomes for readers struggling with word recognition skills (Denton, Fletcher, Taylor, Barth, & Vaughn, 2014).

Use of Structured Literacy Instruction for Students Below Benchmark

In Structured Literacy, **teachers guide students through a systematic routine that incrementally builds in complexity from the smallest units of sounds to single words and connected text passages**. Students practice applying linguistic concepts to reading and spelling, and direct instruction highlights the difference between phonetically regular and irregular words. Activities regarding vocabulary, grammar, and comprehension are also woven into the routine.

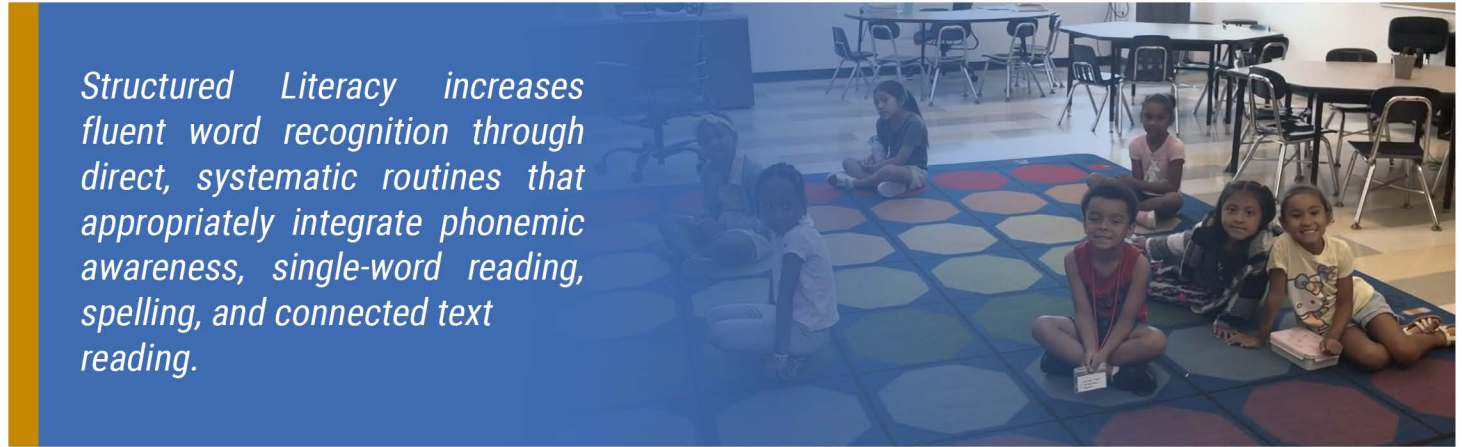
Hallmarks of structured literacy delivery include instruction that is *explicit* in nature, concepts are taught clearly and directly, as opposed to relying on inference, exposure, or incidental learning (Archer & Hughes, 2011). Skills are taught in a logical order moving from simple to complex (Torgesen, 2006), and instruction is diagnostic by nature and builds specific skill gaps as opposed to utilizing a universal approach (Spear-Swerling, 2018).



Enhanced Core Reading Instruction

One example of a structured literacy program is Enhanced Core Reading Instruction (ECRI). As the name implies, ECRI expands content from core, Tier 1 instruction into supplementary or Tier 2 instructional routines. The ECRI manuals provide interventionists with 150 ready-to-use daily foundational skills lessons that are directly aligned with the core reading program and are intended to be pre-taught to Tier 2 students to promote success in the core curriculum. Rigorous evaluations have demonstrated statistically significant and substantive impacts on the reading achievement of at-risk readers in first grade (Fien et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2016). Enhanced Core Reading Instruction has a positive effect on Tier 1 teachers' quality of explicit instruction and the accuracy of group practice opportunities (Nelson-Walker et al., 2013).

Structured Literacy increases fluent word recognition through direct, systematic routines that appropriately integrate phonemic awareness, single-word reading, spelling, and connected text reading.



Professional Development in the Planning and Delivery of Structured Literacy Instruction

In a Multi-Tiered System of Support Model (MTSS), those children who are not meeting benchmark standards receive additional or Tier 2 support which is intended to provide *explicit, small group intervention* based on *routines targeted* towards students' area of weakness (Baker, Fien, & Baker, 2010; Coyne, Kame'enui, & Carnine, 2011). The development of Tier 2 routines is often delegated to the classroom teacher or reading specialist. However, **there is a strong possibility that many educators are unfamiliar with planning and delivering structured literacy routines including the ECRI program.**

Embedding Practicum Experiences in Structured Literacy Instruction

Research on teacher training programs indicates that many classroom teachers and reading specialists **report receiving minimal pre-service preparation on teaching the foundations of word recognition skills.** A study examining the coursework of 210 graduate elementary education programs found that less than a quarter of them (23%) teach scientifically based methods of early reading instruction (National Council on Teacher Quality, 2018). This includes the developmental trajectory of reading skills and the implications for practice as outlined by the "essential components of reading instruction" (National Reading Panel, 2000). Approximately 80% of elementary teachers either provide only cursory instruction around phonemic awareness or do not teach it at all (Seidenberg, 2017). Furthermore, there is limited guidance on best practices regarding progress monitoring and referral for special education services. **Developing practitioners' ability to intervene with struggling readers through explicit instructional routines targeted towards weaknesses is the next essential step.**

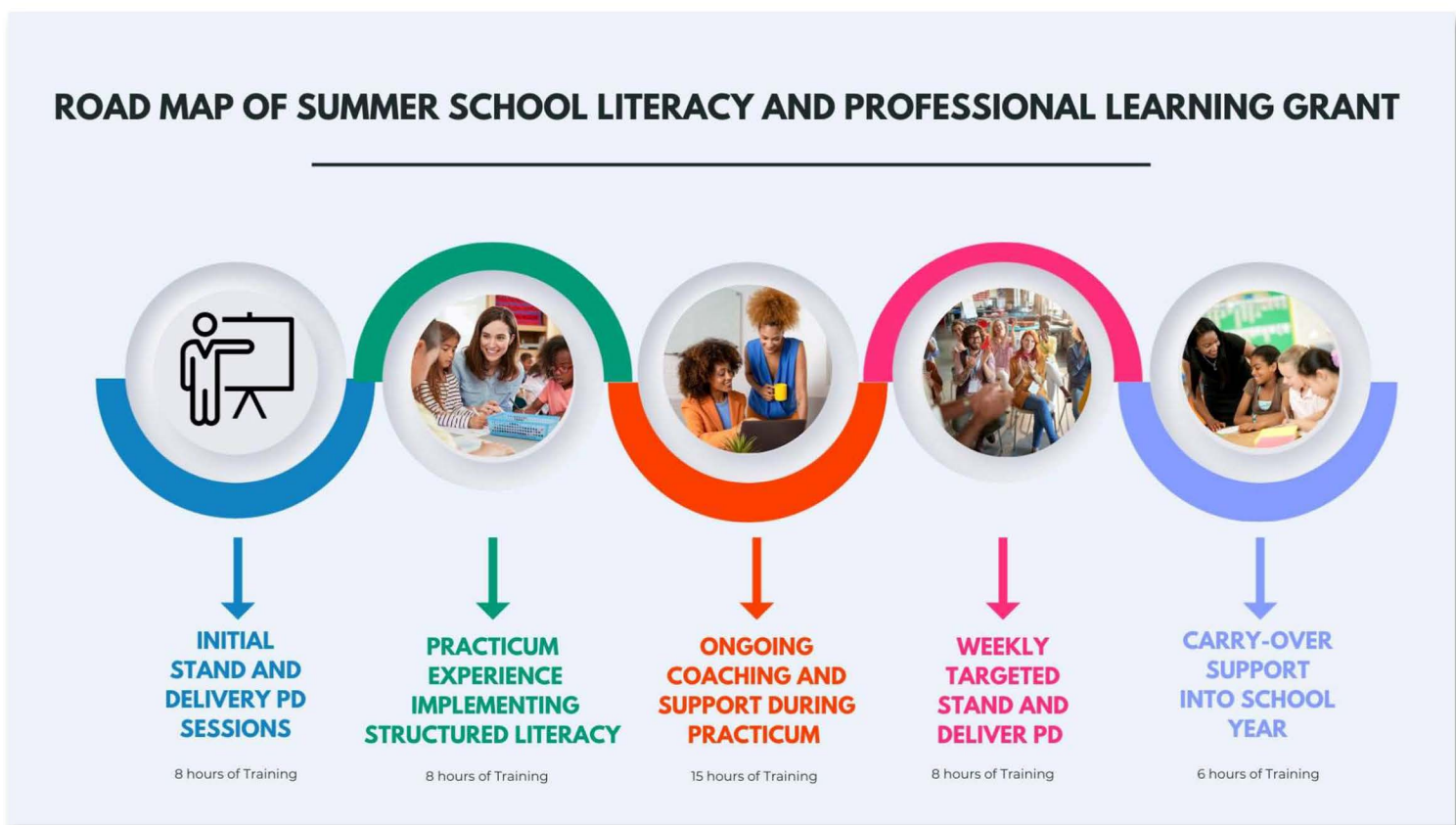
Effective professional development programs share several "critical features" including 1) job-embedded practice; 2) intense and sustained durations; 3) a focus on discrete skill sets, and 4) active-learning supported by coaching (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009; Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon & Birman, 2002). In other words, professional development which pairs "stand-and-deliver workshops" with ongoing coaching results in a greater change in teacher practice and improved student outcomes.

The Summer School Literacy and Professional Learning (SSLPL)

The SSLPL model focuses on two critical areas of professional development: 1) building teacher background knowledge in the science of reading and 2) coaching educators as they plan and deliver Tier 2 structured literacy routines. Participating educators received 45 hours of training through both content delivery and on-demand coaching.

Educator training kicks off with a series of initial stand-and-deliver workshops that focuses on a discrete set of skills (8 hours). Teachers then engaged in embedded practice within the district-supported extended school year program (at least 8 hours), and received ongoing support through coaching (15 hours) and weekly staff meetings (8 hours). Instructional coaches were also supported by HILL for Literacy facilitators who modeled routines, offered corrective feedback, and provided instructional planning. SSLPL participants represent a range of Brockton educators including classroom teachers, reading specialists, special educators, speech and language pathologists, and administrators. Finally, school year support is offered through ongoing course work designed to support participants' understanding of additional concepts like sight word recognition, vocabulary, and oral language development (6 hours).

Chart 1: Road Map of SSLPL Grant



Professional development objectives include:

- Train educators in **evidence-based, structured literacy routines** that build word recognition skills through an emphasis on **phonemic awareness, phonics, and fluency**.
- Support teachers in **planning and delivering literacy routines** that are managed to facilitate **full group participation** and **receive immediate corrective feedback**.
- Offer **ongoing coaching** to educators to **ensure successful independent implementation of routines during summer school**.
- Enable continued **use of routines during school year instruction** in a variety of settings (district, classroom, Tier 2 intervention, special education), including **data-driven decision-making** (using data to group students and make decisions about instruction).

Program Logistics

The summer program was staffed by Brockton educators who served as program directors, coaches, classroom educators, and interventionists. Staffing arrangements ensured that students learned in small skill-based groups that did not exceed 5 students. Program directors including district and building administrators, were on site on a daily basis to provide logistical support. Participating students were transported to and from the program by buses provided by the town of Brockton.

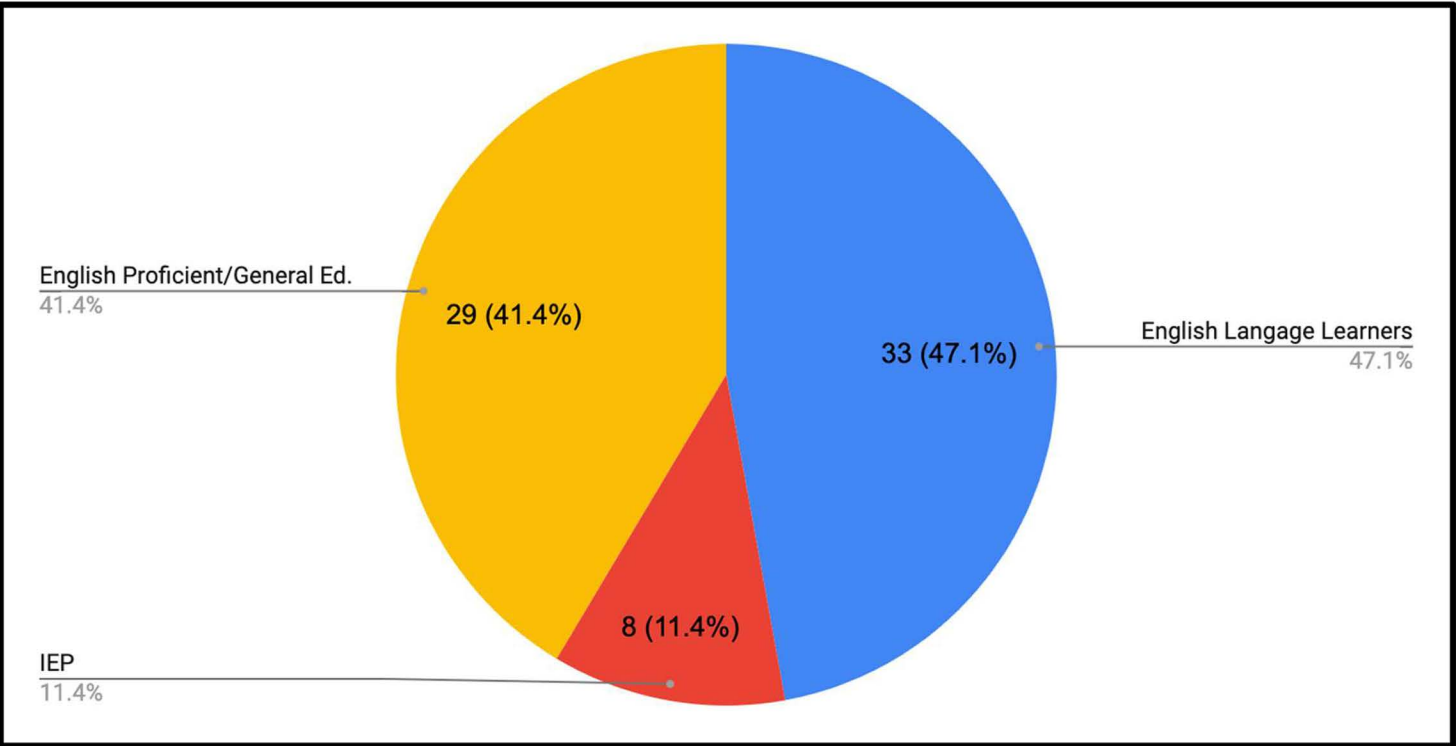


2023 SSLPL Results

Student Results

Approximately 75 rising first graders participated in the 2023 SSLPL Program. Students were identified by school personnel as requiring extended school year services to close sometimes significant gaps in their ability. Among participants, 58% of students were English Language Learners, or on an IEP, or both.

Chart 2: Student Demographic Results



Students were assessed during the first week of the program and grouped according to grade and skill level. Throughout the program, students receive 60 hours of instruction, of which 15 hours were dedicated to small group structured literacy instruction. A series of paired-sample t-tests were conducted on 76 students who completed pre and post testing using the DIBELS 8th Edition. Analysis indicates that students made significant growth over the course of the program on all criterion-based measures. The largest growth was observed on measures of decoding (Non Word Fluency).

Table 1: Differences in Pre and Post Scores on DIBELS Subtests

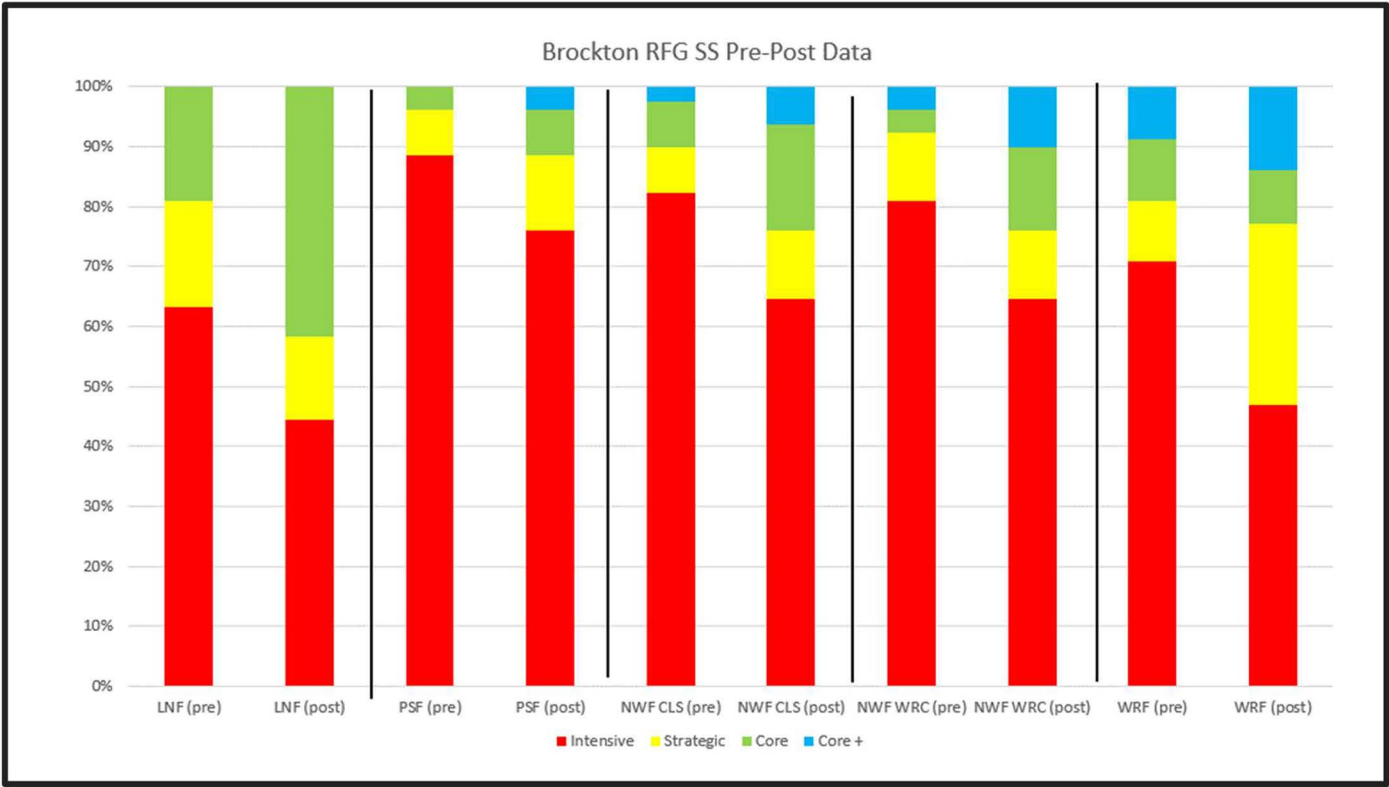
DIBELS 8th Subtests	Average Pre-Score	Average Post-Score	Growth	T Score	Significance
Composite Score	392.64	410.33	17.62	9.07	p < .001
Letter Naming Fluency (LNF)	31.45	39.66	8.20	7.13	p < .001
Phoneme Segmentation Fluency (PSF)	17.83	27.00	9.17	6.47	p < .001
Non Word Fluency - Correct Letter Sounds (NWF-CLS)	16.51	25.68	9.17	6.80	p < .001
Non Word Fluency Words Read Correctly (NWF-WRC)	2.21	5.09	2.88	5.33	p < .001
Word Reading Fluency (WRF)	6.88	10.60	3.71	6.80	p < .001

There are several factors that are related to students' outcomes in the program. Their pre-program skills were highly positively correlated with post-program scores; in other words, although all students entering the program were referred to receive extra support, those participants with stronger initial skills also had stronger concluding skills. In particular, students' letter sound knowledge (DIBELS NWF-CLS) before the program was most strongly related to their final composite score at the conclusion of instruction. A linear regression analysis indicated that together with their pre-program abilities, students' attendance was a factor in determining their achievement. For every 2 days of the program students attended, their final composite score improved by 8 points, $F(1, 75) = 3.82, p < .05$.

Increasing the Percentage of Students Achieving Literacy Benchmark

As noted earlier pre-post data indicates that students made gains across all measures of phonemic awareness, letter name, letter sound knowledge, decoding, and sight word fluency. On average, **the number of students at benchmark increased by 11%** and **the number of students significantly below benchmark decreased by 17%** in a four week period.

Chart 3: Students' DIBELS Scores Pre and Post Summer Program



DIBELS subtest scores are listed by the following acronyms: LNF (Letter Naming Fluency); PSF (Phoneme Segmentation Fluency); NWF-CLS (Non-Word Fluency - Correct Letter Sounds); NWF-WRC (Non-Word Fluency - Words Read Correctly); WRF (Word Reading Fluency).

Teacher Results

Approximately 26 educators from the Brockton Public School District participated in the 2023 summer school program. Educators served a variety of roles in the program. Coaches (3) offered ongoing support to the educators delivering direct service. Interventionists (8) taught structured literacy routines using ECRI to small groups of students. Classroom teachers (7) organized a full day of instruction and provided small group structured literacy instruction using the ECRI approach. Paraprofessionals (8) supported students in a variety of roles throughout the day. Each of the seven classrooms contained at least three educators which ensured that small group instruction did not exceed five students. All educators were provided with the option to receive graduate credits for their participation.

Throughout the institute, teachers received ongoing support in instructional planning from Brockton coaches who had received extensive training from HILL for Literacy. Brockton administrators managed all logistical aspects of the program including scheduling and supporting professional development opportunities.

Pre-post data indicates that students made gains across all measures of phonemic awareness, letter name and sound knowledge, decoding, and sight word fluency. On average the number of students at benchmark increased by 11% and the number of students significantly below benchmark decreased by 17% in a four week period.



At the conclusion of the institute, teachers' experiences were collected through two methods: surveys and anecdotal data. Unlike our prior summer program initiative, educators in SSLPL participated in a science of reading PD prior to their summer work, and developed a significant amount of background knowledge through the related coursework. Teachers' survey results reflect their existing knowledge in pre-program scores, and most indicated that they "felt capable of supporting struggling readers with structured literacy routines," and were able to correctly identify important components of the routine.

Additional anecdotal data was collected to capture the importance of job-embedded coaching as teachers implement new instructional strategies.

In my opinion, the PD for this program was great because there was always someone there to answer a question. The coaches were there. We had professional development trainings online every Tuesday. I think it's great because you can do something for a week and then if you have a question or a concern about whether or not you're doing something correctly, you can immediately ask somebody. And during the school year, you might not have the chance. There's one coach in a building and there's 800 kids, and everyone's busy. But it's great that you have contact with somebody that can specifically answer your questions, come in and model if you want. It's laid back. It's not an evaluation. It was positive feedback and it was relaxing, which was nice. I don't think teachers are used to that.

Lisa Talarico, Title 1 Teacher

There were so many connections in the summer program this year, all of the staff were connected because we were all learning the same instructional approach (ECRI). ECRI is connected to the science of reading, and the training for the curriculum was connected directly to the application. Oftentimes, during our professional development, it's like, all right, here's what you're gonna be doing and read this and then watch this video. And best of luck. But with our summer school model, it was actually super helpful to have coaching when you're doing it in real time. For example, if I don't feel comfortable with something or I have a question, I could get help or clarification right away.

Athena Deltano, Special Educator

Summary

SSLPL was developed by the Massachusetts Department of Education in conjunction With local agencies to address critical issues facing the field including stagnant student achievement in reading, the negative effect of summer slide on student achievement, minimal teacher preparation in the domain of structured literacy, and a lack of supported-practice during in-service training.

The institute pairs stand and deliver professional development in essential aspects of reading instruction with practicum experiences during an extended school year program. Teachers receive

coaching in assessment interpretation, structured literacy routines, and lesson-planning. Students receive 60 hours of instruction over four weeks. Ongoing professional development workshops following the conclusion of the summer program support teachers' ability to implement practices during school-year instruction.

Statistical analysis indicates that students made significant growth on all measures of foundational literacy skills including phonemic awareness, decoding, and word reading fluency. The number of students whose abilities fell in the benchmark range across measures of foundational reading skills increased an average of 11% and the number of students whose skills fell in the significant risk category decreased by 17%.

Findings from SSLPL expanded on similar literacy initiatives within extended school year programs. This format holds promising implications for future projects. Professional development opportunities that embed supported-practice benefit not only educators but also their students. Teachers reported an increase in their ability to deliver data-driven instruction, and students made meaningful growth over a short period of time. Furthermore, **institutes that focus on ensuring all educators have common knowledge about the science of reading, structured literacy routines, and targeting instruction towards students' weaknesses, provide an effective set of instructional practices for practitioners.**

There were several additional logistical elements that contributed to the success of SSLPL including:

- Staffing the program to ensure a 1:5 ratio of students to teachers during literacy instruction.
- Providing student transportation.
- District and building administrators act as program directors which ensures support, relationship-building, and continuity in staffing supervision and feedback.
- Program staff consisted of an interdisciplinary group of educators (classroom teachers, special educators, interventionists, ML teachers) who worked in a collaborative and unified fashion, attending the same training and employing the same curriculum.

Last year I jumped from fourth grade to second grade, and I loved it. And now here I am this summer doing the interventionist position and again, learning curve. I just finished the Science of Reading course this past school year as well. So it's been a lot of learning. For me, it's a mind shift from heavy duty vocabulary instruction, and comprehension, response to writing and response to reading, to now teaching the little ones how to read, sound letter naming, phoneme segmentation, blending. I never knew how to do that as an upper elementary teacher, you know? So it's been a great experience so far.

Shannon Whitehead, 2nd Grade Classroom Teacher



Next Steps

In the future, similar initiatives may expand the current model by including feedback from parents, collecting student achievement data during the school-year to determine the impact of summer instruction on long-term growth, and collecting ongoing data from educators to examine the ways in which initiatives can support the implementation of practices in light of school-year constraints.

Over the last decade, parents, researchers, educators, and policy-makers have raised concerns about the nature of literacy instruction. Yet at the same time, extraordinary scientific progress has revealed insights into learning processes that are critical for supporting struggling readers and those with dyslexia. As Yale University Professor, Dr. Sally Shaywitz has stated, "We now know what to do to ensure that each child becomes a good reader and how to help readers of all ages and at all levels...alas much of the time this new information appears to be a well-kept secret" (p. 6, 2003). **Initiatives like SSLPL decode the mystery of effective literacy instruction for educators by simultaneously building teachers' capacity, instructional strategies, and supporting the needs of young readers.** Increasing literacy skills to a level where all students have the tools for achievement is not a simple or easy task, but it is perhaps one of the most critical issues facing our society and it is certainly worth our investment.



WATCH THE VIDEO: <https://wi.st/3tULRff>

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