



Summer Institute for Literacy Leadership

Melissa Orkin, PhD, melissa@craftingmindsgroup.com

Cara Dellaterra, BA, cara@hillforliteracy.org

Shira Cohen-Goldberg, EdM, shira@hillforliteracy.org

Eleni Steadman, MS, CCC-SLP, eleni@hillforliteracy.org

Sally Grimes, EdM, sallygrimes@comcast.net

Darci Burns, PhD, darci@hillforliteracy.org

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Summer Institute for Literacy Leadership

The Summer Institute for Literacy Leadership (SILL) is a collaborative effort between the Massachusetts Department of Education, and local educational agencies including Crafting Minds, Hill for Literacy, and the Grimes Institute. The institute was hosted by the Somerville Public School District and designed to support teachers' instructional practices with elementary-aged struggling readers.

The institute focused on three critical areas: 1) building teacher background knowledge in the science of reading; 2) coaching educators as they plan and deliver Tier 2 Structured Literacy routines, and 3) supporting teachers' ability to create learning environments that foster intrinsic motivation. The institute took place within the Somerville Public School District's extended school year program, thereby providing both critical support to struggling students and professional development to practitioners. Teachers participating in the program hailed from the Somerville Public School District and neighboring communities including, Arlington, Cambridge, and Medford.

Improving Reading Proficiency in MA

SILL 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), 2019), 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, 2019). 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 skills essential for all other academic achievements, in its earliest stages, reading is an unnatural process (Wolf, 2007). As Dr. Mark Seidenberg, Professor of Psychology at the University of Wisconsin states "Because most of what goes on in reading are subconscious: we are aware of the result of having read something - that we understood it - not the mental and neural



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operations that produce that outcome. **That is why there is a science of reading: to understand this complex skill at levels that intuition cannot easily penetrate.**" (p.304, 2017).

The Simple View of Reading, which serves as one foundation of the science of reading, asserts that reading comprehension is the product of both decoding (word-level reading) and linguistic (language) comprehension (Gough & Tunmer, 1986; Joshi & Aaron, 2000; Tunmer & Chapman, 2012). If one side of this equation is equal to zero (word-level recognition and/or language comprehension), then the product is equal to zero. Therefore, in determining why students are struggling in reading achievement it is important to assess and appropriately target intervention.

"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."

Professor Sally Shaywitz
Yale University

Importance of Fluent Word Recognition

Students' abilities to automatically recognize single words is one of the two critical contributors to their overall reading comprehension. Poor readers frequently have to rely on compensatory strategies to account for weaknesses in word recognition and often resort to guessing. In fact, a lack of fluent word recognition is widely-recognized as the hallmark of poor readers (for reviews see Brady, 2011; NICHD, 2000).

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, 2019) 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).

Structured Literacy Routines

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. Explicit instruction regarding vocabulary, grammar and comprehension are also woven into the routine.



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 may be unfamiliar with planning or carrying out Structured Literacy routines.**

Embedding Practicum Experiences in Delivering Structured Literacy Routines

Recent research has revealed 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.**

A recent meta-analysis found that 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.



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The Summer Institute for Literacy Leadership Model

The SILL model employs a cycle of initial stand-and-deliver training (12 hours) focused on a discrete set of skills, embedded practice within a district-supported extended school year program (at least 12 hours), and ongoing coaching (6 hours). SILL participants represent a range of educators including classroom teachers, reading specialists, special educators, speech and language pathologists, and administrators.

The institute pursues several objectives including:

- 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**.
 - Increase student engagement by **enhancing structured literacy with strategies that foster intrinsic motivation** for learning.
 - 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 the support **data-driven decision-making** (using data to group students and make decisions about instruction).

Summer Institute for Literacy Leadership Professional Development Cycle

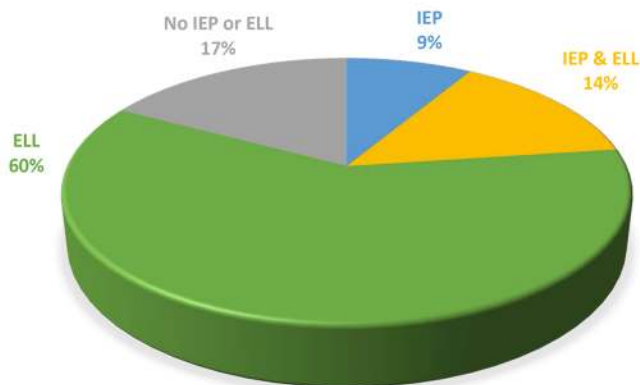


2019 Results

Student Results

Approximately 35 rising second to sixth-graders participated in the 2019 institute. Students were identified by school personnel as requiring extended school year services to close sometimes significant gaps in their ability. Eighty-three percent of students were English Language Learners, on an IEP or both.

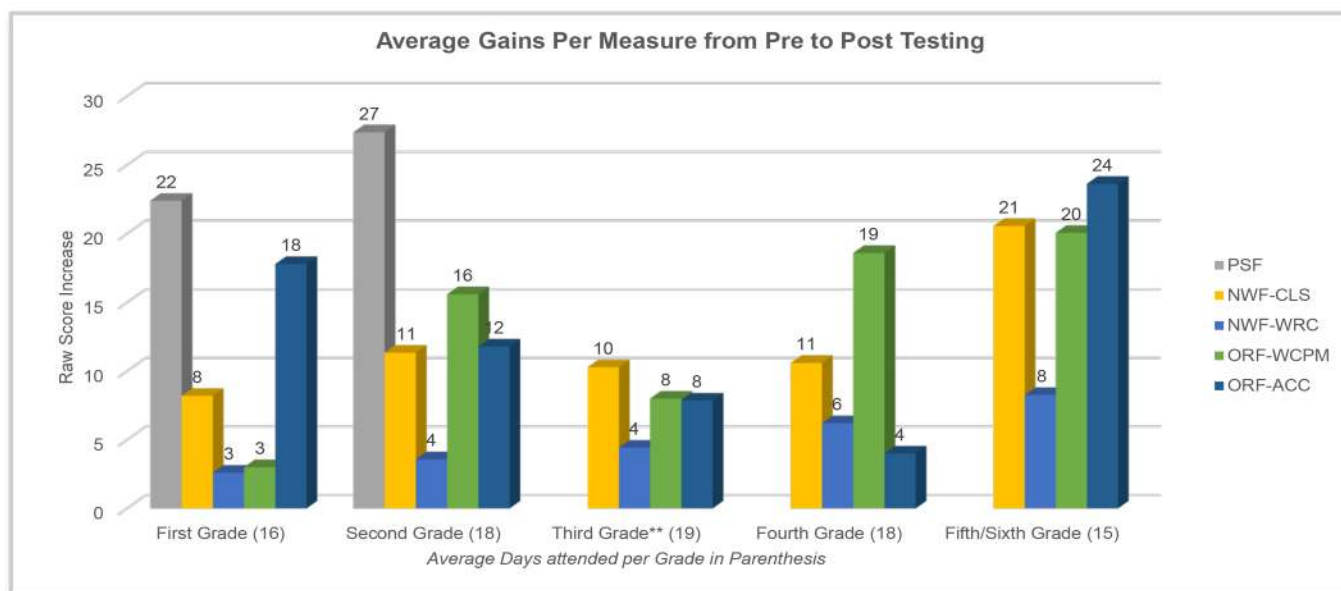
STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS



Students were assessed during the first week of the program and grouped according to grade and skill level. Throughout the four-week half-day program, students receive 40 hours of instruction, during which approximately 26-30 hours was dedicated to Structured Literacy Instruction. **Pre-post data indicates that students made significant gains across all measures of phonemic awareness, decoding, and oral reading fluency.**

"We've been teaching reading for so long, but it doesn't work for all kids. This institute showed me how to differentiate my instruction and increase my repertoire of reading strategies for all types of students."

Dara Gibbons
Learning Specialist



MEASUREMENT KEY:

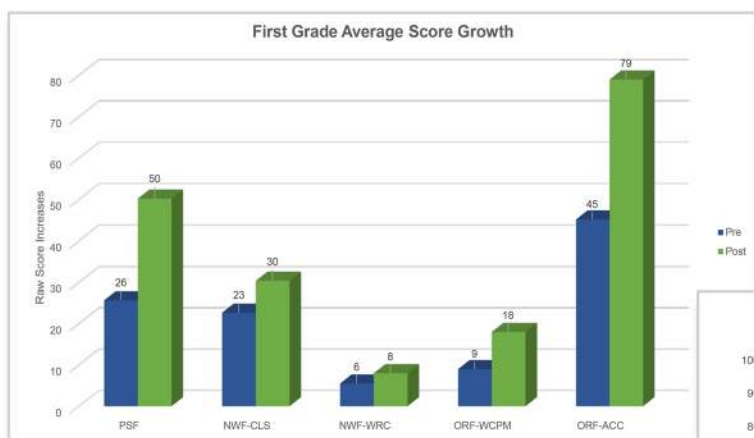
PSF = Phoneme Segmentation Fluency

NWF-CLS = Nonsense Word Fluency - Correct Letter Sounds

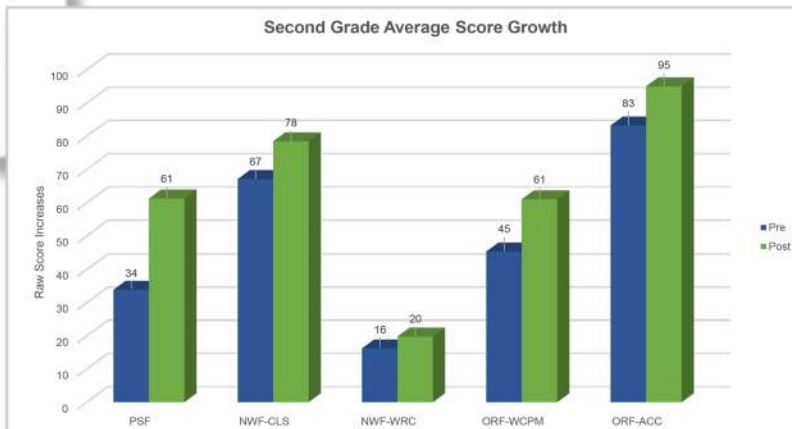
NWF-WRC = Nonsense Word Fluency - Total Words Recoded Completely & Correctly

ORF-WCPM = Oral Reading Fluency - Words Correct Per Minute

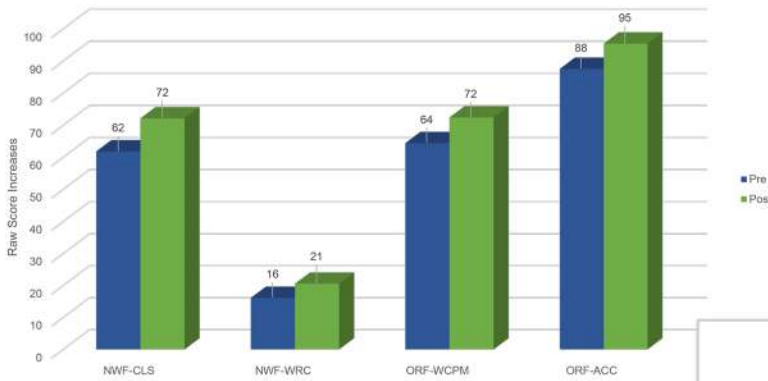
ORF-ACC = Oral Reading Fluency - Accuracy



Average Score Growth By Grade



Third Grade Average Score Growth



MEASUREMENT KEY:

PSF = Phoneme Segmentation Fluency

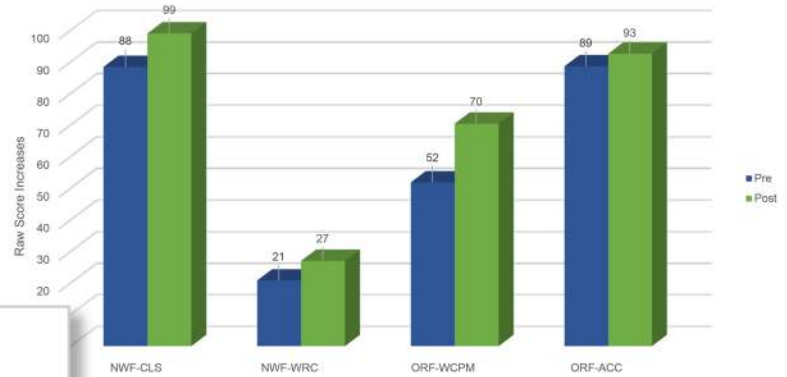
NWF-CLS = Nonsense Word Fluency - Correct Letter Sounds

NWF-WRC = Nonsense Word Fluency - Total Words Recoded Completely & Correctly

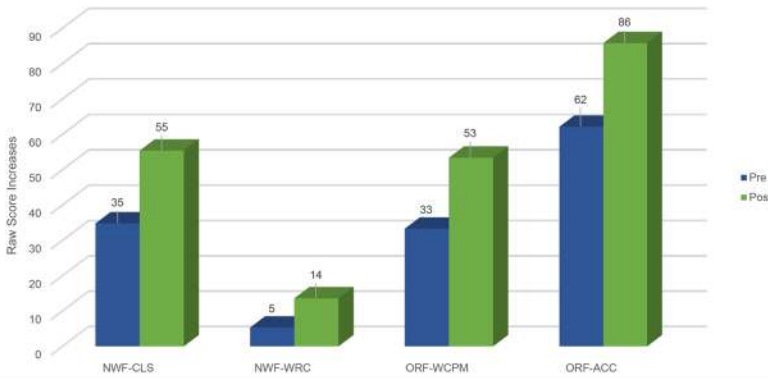
ORF-WCPM = Oral Reading Fluency - Words Correct Per Minute

ORF-ACC = Oral Reading Fluency - Accuracy

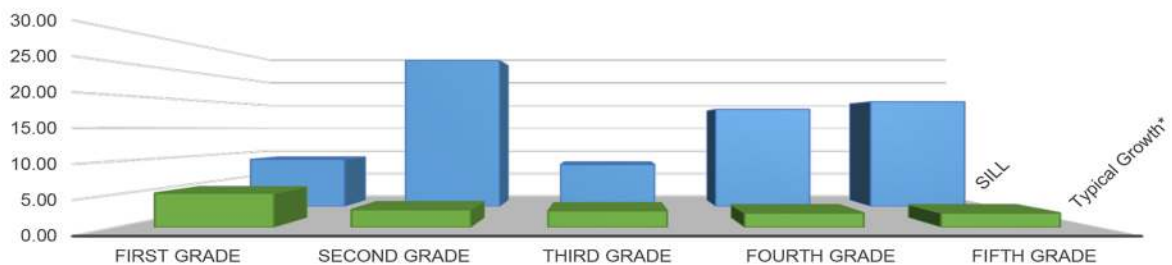
Fourth Grade Average Score Growth



Fifth/Sixth Grade Average Score Growth



ORF-WCPM Average Gains



*Typical Growth based on Hasbrouck & Tindal (2017) Compiled ORF Norms

	First Grade	Second Grade	Third Grade	Fourth Grade	Fifth Grade
Typical Growth*	5.17	2.67	2.50	2.17	2.17
SILL	9.0	28.0	8.0	18.6	20.1

Teacher Results

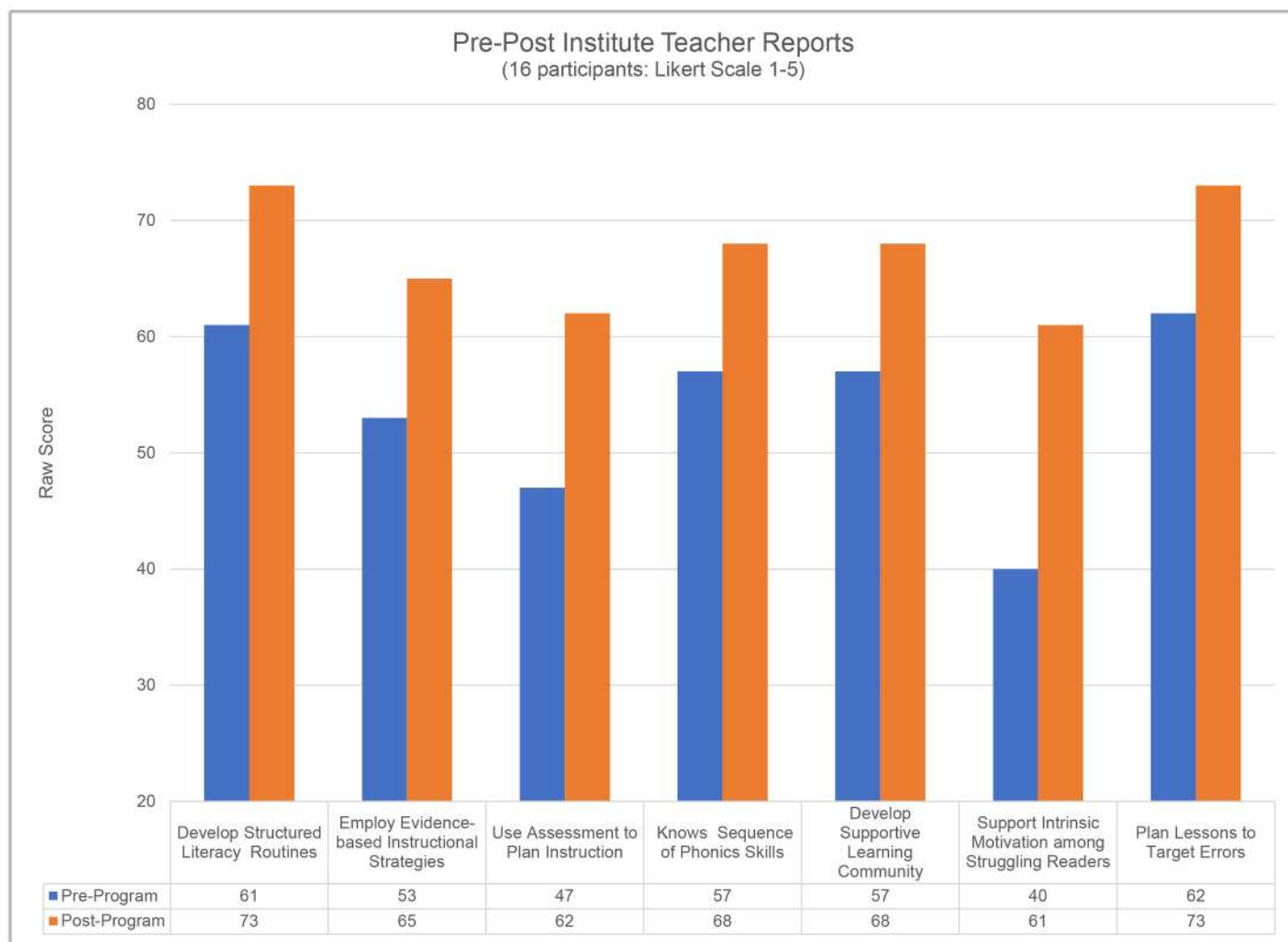
Approximately 20 educators from the Somerville Public School District and surrounding communities participated in the 2019 institute. Our inaugural teacher community was purposefully comprised of educators from a variety of contexts including classroom teachers, reading specialists, special educators, literacy specialists, and administrators. All teachers received three graduate credits for their participation.

The institute requirements included 12 hours of stand and deliver training, seven hours of online coursework, a one-week (20 hours) practicum, and six hours of follow-up workshops to support their implementation of strategies in school-year instruction. Additionally, 20 of the teachers received a salary for teaching full-time within the extended school year program.

Throughout the institute, teachers received ongoing support in instructional planning and delivery from a group of instruction coaches from HILL for Literacy.

After the institute, teachers reported increases in several critical areas of professional development. When rating themselves on a Likert scale of 1-5, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, **teachers reported greater competence in:**

- Developing Structured Literacy routines
- Employing evidence-based instructional strategies
- Using assessment results to plan instruction
- Following a systematic sequence for introducing phonics concepts
- Developing a supportive learning community that builds intrinsic motivation for learning
- Engaging in diagnostic lesson planning to target student errors



Summary

SILL 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, 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, structure literacy routines, lesson-planning, progress monitoring, and building intrinsic motivation. Students receive 40 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.

As a result of their participation, teachers reported increased knowledge and confidence in planning and delivering structured literacy routines. These newly acquired skills are critical to ensure proficiency in phonemic awareness, word recognition, and subsequent comprehension among developing readers. **Students who participated in the program demonstrated significant growth on measures of phonemic segmentation and oral reading fluency.**

Findings from the inaugural year of SILL hold promising implications for future initiatives. 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' skill development exceeded the expected average rate of growth. Furthermore, **institutes that focus on ensuring all educators have common knowledge about the science of reading, structure literacy routines, and targeting instruction towards students' weaknesses, provide an effective set of instructional practices for practitioners.**



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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 SILL 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.

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