

## Florida *Reading First* Guidance to LEAs

This document has been prepared to assist school districts in Florida to apply for grants under the *Reading First* Program. A substantial amount of its content is taken directly from the guidance prepared by the United States Department of Education for states. District personnel responsible for preparing applications for *Reading First* funds should study this document carefully, as funds will not be awarded unless the reading initiatives described in your application are in full compliance with the intent and specifications of the law.

### Purpose of the *Reading First* Program

#### **A-1. What is the purpose of the *Reading First* Program?**

The purpose of *Reading First* is to ensure that all American children learn to read well by the end of third grade.

It has long been recognized that teaching young children to read is the most critical educational priority facing this country. Fortunately, this is an area where some of the best and most rigorous scientifically based research is available. The *Reading First* program will help districts and schools apply this research - and the proven instructional and assessment tools consistent with the research - to teach all children to read.

The *Reading First* program will provide the necessary assistance to districts and schools to establish research-based reading programs for students in kindergarten through third grade. *Reading First* funds will be used to significantly increase teacher professional development to ensure that all teachers, including special education teachers, have the skills they need to effectively teach using scientifically based reading research strategies. Additionally, *Reading First* provides assistance to states and districts in preparing classroom teachers to effectively screen, identify and overcome reading barriers facing their students.

Quite simply, *Reading First* focuses on what works, and will place and support proven methods of reading instruction in classrooms. The program provides assistance to districts and schools in selecting and/or developing effective instructional materials, programs, learning systems and strategies to implement methods that have been proven to teach reading effectively. *Reading First* also provides assistance for the selection and administration of screening, diagnostic, progress monitoring, and outcome assessments with proven validity and reliability, to measure where students are and monitor the progress that they make.

Taken together, the complementary research-based programs, practices and tools required by *Reading First* will give teachers across the nation the skills and support they need to teach all children to read fluently by the end of 3<sup>rd</sup> grade.

## **A-2. What is the difference between *Reading First* and previous reading programs?**

*Reading First* is the largest – and yet most focused – early reading initiative this country has ever undertaken. *Reading First* provides an opportunity for every eligible school in the country to implement reading programs that help all students achieve reading mastery by the end of third grade. The program supports states as they work with their districts to ensure teachers learn about scientifically based reading research, implement programs that are based on this research, and use rigorous assessments with proven validity and reliability to help guide instruction and measure its effects.

In addition to the much larger scope and level of on-going support provided by *Reading First*, this program focuses more directly on *classroom* instruction than previous federal reading efforts. *Reading First* acknowledges that the most important teaching venue for early readers is the early elementary classroom, and it is therefore in the classroom where the program will build and support the scientifically based reading foundation. *Reading First* does not aim to remediate small sub-groups of children in pullout programs, or to provide instruction in any setting outside the main classroom environment. *Reading First* seeks to embed the essential components of reading instruction into all elements of the primary, mainstream K-3 teaching structures of each state.

Scientifically based reading research has identified five essential components of reading instruction (See Question B-1). This research demonstrates that children need to master skills in these five inter-related areas in order to become proficient, successful readers. *Reading First* focuses instructional methods, materials, assessments and professional development on these key areas. Programs funded under *Reading First* will have to demonstrate their ability to address these components in a comprehensive and effective manner.

## **Components of Effective Reading Programs**

### **B-1. What are the essential components of reading instruction?**

Scientifically based reading research has identified five essential components of effective reading instruction. Explicit and systematic instruction must be provided in these five areas:

1. Phonemic Awareness – The ability to hear, identify and manipulate the individual sounds – phonemes – in spoken words. Phonemic awareness is the understanding that the sounds of spoken language work together to make words.
2. Phonics – The understanding that there is a predictable relationship between phonemes – the sounds of spoken language – and graphemes – the letters and spellings that represent those sounds in written language. Readers use these relationships to recognize familiar words accurately and automatically and to decode unfamiliar words.

3. Vocabulary Development – Development of stored information about the meanings and pronunciation of words necessary for communication. There are four types of vocabulary:
  - Listening vocabulary – the words needed to understand what is heard
  - Speaking vocabulary – the words used when speaking
  - Reading vocabulary – the words needed to understand what is read
  - Writing vocabulary – the words used in writing
4. Reading fluency, including oral reading skills – Fluency is the ability to read text accurately and quickly. It provides a bridge between word recognition and comprehension. Fluent readers recognize words and comprehend at the same time.
5. Reading comprehension strategies – Strategies for understanding, remembering, and communicating with others about what has been read. Comprehension strategies are sets of steps that purposeful, active readers use to make sense of text.

## **B-2. What is scientifically based reading research?**

Scientifically based reading research is research that applies rigorous, systematic and objective procedures to obtain valid knowledge relevant to reading development, reading instruction, and reading difficulties. This includes research that:

1. Employs systematic, empirical methods that draw on observation or experiment;
2. Involves rigorous data analyses that are adequate to test the stated hypotheses and justify the general conclusions drawn;
3. Relies on measurements or observational methods that provide valid data across evaluators and observers and across multiple measurements and observations; and
4. Has been accepted by a peer-reviewed journal or approved by a panel of independent experts through a comparably rigorous, objective and scientific review.

## **B-3. What evidence is critical in evaluating scientifically based reading research?**

When reviewing research findings to determine whether they meet the criteria for scientifically based reading research, local educational agencies and schools should consider the extent to which the research meets each of the criteria.

Questions for consideration about each of the following criterion include:

1. *Use of rigorous, systematic and empirical methods* – Does the work have a solid theoretical or research foundation? Was it carefully designed to avoid biased findings and unwarranted claims of effectiveness? Does the research clearly delineate how the research was conducted, by whom it was conducted, and on whom it was conducted?

2. *Adequacy of the data analyses to test the stated hypotheses and justify the general conclusions drawn* – Was the research designed to minimize alternative explanations for observed effects? Are the observed effects consistent with the overall conclusions and claims of effectiveness? Does the research present convincing documentation that the observed results were the result of the intervention? Does the research make clear what populations were studied (i.e., does it describe the participants’ ages, as well as their demographic, cognitive, academic and behavioral characteristics) and does it describe to whom the findings can be generalized? Does the study provide a full description of the outcome measures?
3. *Reliance on measurements or observational methods that provided valid data across evaluators and observers and across multiple measurements and observations* – Are the data based on a single-investigator single-classroom study, or were similar data collected by multiple investigators in numerous locations? What procedures were in place to minimize researcher biases? Do observed results “hold up” over time? Are the study interventions described in sufficient detail to allow for replicability? Does the research explain how instructional fidelity was ensured and assessed?
4. *Acceptance by a peer-reviewed journal or approved by a panel of independent experts through a comparably rigorous, objective and scientific review* – Has the research been carefully reviewed by unbiased individuals who were not part of the research study? Have the findings been subjected to external scrutiny and verification?

**B-4. Must research related to instructional programs, methods and strategies meet all of the characteristics of scientifically based reading research?**

Yes. The law specifically requires these characteristics. For additional guidance, one may wish to consult standard references on reading research, such as the National Academy of Sciences’ National Research Council report *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children* (1998). The National Research Council, when conducting a review of reading research, followed basic guidelines for scientific method. The NRC wrote:

*Our review and summary of the literature are framed by some very basic principles of evidence evaluation. These principles derive from our commitment to the scientific method, which we view not as a strict set of rules but instead as a broad framework defined by some general guidelines. Some of the most important are that (1) science aims for knowledge that is publicly verifiable, (2) science seeks testable theories – not unquestioned edicts, and (3) science employs methods of systematic empiricism. Science renders knowledge public by such procedures as peer review and such mechanisms as systematic replication (p.34).*

**B-5. Are districts and schools that apply for *Reading First* funds responsible for ensuring that only programs based on scientifically based reading research are funded through *Reading First*?**

Yes. In our state level application to the USDE for *Reading First* funding, Florida provided assurances and procedures to show how we intend to help districts and schools in identifying instructional materials, programs, strategies and approaches based on scientifically based reading research, and how we will ensure that professional development activities related to reading instruction are based on scientifically based reading research. Because of these assurances, we have established a state level application process, technical assistance processes, and strategies for professional preparation that will ensure that all programs, strategies and activities proposed and implemented in the state of Florida meet the criteria for scientifically based reading research outlined in Question B-2. It is the responsibility of districts to ensure that all eligible schools who are awarded *Reading First* funds follow the procedures and programs outlined in the proposal that you will submit to the state of Florida.

**B-6. What references are available for more information about scientifically based reading research?**

Information on obtaining these resources is provided below. Electronic links are available at <http://www.ed.gov/index.jsp>

- *Put Reading First: The Research Building Blocks for Teaching Children to Read, Kindergarten through Grade 3-* September 2001

This publication was developed by the Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement (CIERA) and was funded by the National Institute for Literacy through the Educational Research and Development Center Program. To order this publication, call 1-877-4-ED-PUBS. Downloads can be obtained at <http://www.nifl.gov>.

- *Report of the National Reading Panel: Teaching Children to Read* April 2000

The National Reading Panel Report outlines the most effective approaches to teaching children to read, the status of the research on reading, and reading instructional practices that are ready to be used by teachers in classrooms. Both the report and the congressional testimony are available on line and in hard copy. Call 1-800-228-8813 for more information, and reference publication number EX0114p.

- *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children* December 1998

This landmark 1998 report of the National Research Council synthesizes the wealth of research on early reading development. It provides an integrated picture of how reading develops and how reading instruction should proceed. This book includes recommendations for practice and further research. Hardcover copies are available from the National Academy Press by calling 1-800-624-6242. Each book costs \$35.95 plus shipping and handling.

- *Starting Out Right: A Guide to Promoting Children's Reading Success* 1998

This guide, developed by the National Research Council, explains how children learn to read and how adults can help them. It provides ideas for the prevention of reading difficulties in early childhood and the primary grades. Copies are available from the National Academy Press by calling 1-800-624-6242. Each book costs \$14.95 plus shipping and handling.

- *How Should Reading Be Taught?* By Keith Rayner, Barbara Foorman, Charles Perfetti, David Pesetsky, and Mark Seidenberg. Published in the March 2002 issue of *Scientific American*.

This brief article provides an excellent overview of the basic research that supports the *Reading First* initiative. It is written in a way that is accessible to nontechnical personnel.

- *Catch Them Before They Fall* By Joseph Torgesen. Published in the Spring/Summer issue of *American Educator*, 1998.

This article provides a description of the essential elements and rationale of a school wide plan to prevent reading difficulties in young children.

- *Teaching Reading is Rocket Science* By Louisa Moats. Published by American Federation of Teachers, Washington, D.C. Call 202-393-5684 and ask for item number 372.

This brochure describes the essential knowledge and skill required to teach reading to children who experience difficulties learning to read. It also describes many of the basic research findings on which the *Reading First* initiative is based.

- *A Consumer's Guide to Evaluating a Core Reading Program Grades K-3: A Critical Elements Analysis*. College of Education, University of Oregon. Deborah C. Simmons, Ph.D. and Edward J. Kame'enui, Ph.D. This guide can be accessed at [www.myflorida.com/jrf](http://www.myflorida.com/jrf).

A critical review of reading programs requires objective and in-depth analysis. For these reasons, they offer the following recommendations and procedures for analyzing critical elements of programs. First, they address questions regarding the importance and process of a core program. Following, they specify the criteria for program evaluation organized by grade level and reading dimensions. Further, they offer guidelines regarding instructional time, differentiated instruction, and assessment.

## **Developing An Effective *Reading First* Program**

- C-1. What are the key elements of an effective reading program based on scientifically based reading research?**

A high-quality reading program that is based on scientifically based research must include instructional content based on the five essential components of reading instruction (See Question B-1) integrated into a coherent instructional design. A coherent design includes explicit instructional strategies, coordinated instructional sequences, ample practice opportunities and aligned student materials. The design should also consider the allocation of time, ensuring a protected, uninterrupted block of time for reading instruction of at least 90 minutes per day.

A high-quality reading program also includes assessment strategies for diagnosing student needs and measuring progress, as well as a professional development plan that ensures teachers have the skills and support necessary to effectively implement the program.

**C-2. What practices and strategies for classroom instruction should be evident in implementing a high-quality reading program based on scientifically based reading research?**

Certain elements should be visible in any *Reading First* classroom in the country, regardless of which specific program is in use. Standards and accountability are the foundation of the *Reading First* classroom. Expectations are clear, as are strategies for monitoring progress toward meeting them. The core reading program provides the basis for instruction, and connects meaningfully to supplemental materials. In-class grouping strategies are in use, including direct instruction to small groups of students at the same reading level. Student placement in groups is flexible, and different curricula may be in use to instruct these different groups. There is active student engagement in a variety of reading-based activities, which connect to the five essential components of reading and to overall, clearly articulated academic goals.

**C-3. What practices and strategies for professional development should be evident in an effective reading program?**

Professional development related to a high-quality, effective reading program should aim to increase student achievement by enabling and ensuring the implementation of the particular program(s). Research has shown that teachers who participate in well-designed professional development activities get better results from their students. Well-designed professional development aligns clearly with the instructional program, including its research base, as well as to state academic and performance standards. Adequate time must be available for teachers to learn new concepts and to practice what they have learned. Coaches, mentors, peers and outside experts provide feedback as new concepts are put into practice. Professional development must prepare all teachers to teach all of the essential components of reading instruction (See Question B-1), and know how they are related, the stages of reading development and the underlying structure of the English language. Teachers also must understand why some children fail to read well, and learn how to administer and interpret assessments of student progress.

**C-4. What practices and strategies for assessment should be evident in an effective reading program?**

A high quality, effective reading program must include rigorous assessments with proven validity and reliability. These assessments must measure progress in the five essential components of reading instruction (See Question B-1) and identify students who may be at risk for reading failure or who are already experiencing reading difficulty. A reading program must include screening assessments, diagnostic assessments, progress monitoring assessments, and outcome assessments. The administration of screening assessments determines which children are at-risk for reading difficulty and need additional support. Diagnostic assessments provide more in-depth information on students' skills and instructional needs that form the basis of the ideal instructional plan. Classroom-based progress monitoring assessments determine whether students are making adequate progress or need more support to achieve grade-level reading outcomes. Finally, outcome assessments tell teachers and school leaders whether the current reading program is "on target" to accomplish overall program goals.

## **State Awards to Districts**

### **D-1. Will all school districts be able to participate in *Reading First*?**

No. Only districts that have schools meeting specific criteria are eligible to apply. The criteria for Year 1 (2003-2004) eligibility are given below:

- Eligible districts have at least 30% of fourth grade students reading below grade level (scoring at Levels 1 and 2 on the 2001 FCAT) and at least 10% of children in the district from families below the federal poverty line.
- Eligible schools have more than the state average, 47%, of fourth grade students reading below grade level (scoring at Levels 1 and 2 on the 2001 FCAT) and at least 15% of students receiving free and reduced price lunch.

The state has determined district and school eligibility. A letter of district and school eligibility was sent to each Superintendent on April 17, 2002. Please refer to this official list of eligible schools in your planning.

We anticipate that all eligible districts and schools will participate in *Reading First* over the next six years. However, district applications will be held to rigorous standards for approval. District and school level plans must satisfactorily address all program requirements before the state will award *Reading First* funds. Technical assistance will be available to any district that needs support in developing its plan or meeting the approval criteria.

### **D-2. When will *Reading First* funds become available to districts?**

Florida received the first year of *Reading First* funds on July 1, 2002. These funds will be available to districts in the January 2003 subgrant competition and remain available to the state for award to districts until September 30, 2003. These funds remain available to districts for obligation through the 2003-2004 school year.

**D-3. When may districts submit their applications for *Reading First* funds?**

Year 1 district applications will be released on October 1, 2002, and are due to the Florida Department of Education by January 15, 2003. These applications will then be submitted to expert review, and awards will be announced by March 1, 2003. The review process will be coordinated by the Florida Center for Reading Research (FCRR). Review panels will consist of reading researchers and teacher educators, DOE personnel, and district level staff from districts that are not in the current competition for *Reading First* awards. New districts or districts that did not initially receive approval for Year 1 may submit the application again on April 15, 2003, and will be notified of the application's status by June 1, 2003.

For each consecutive year, applications will be due March 1, with notification of award to occur no later than April 1.

**D-4. What is the duration of *Reading First* awards to districts?**

The state will award *Reading First* grants to districts for a six-year period, subject to sufficient appropriations and submission and review of progress reports. At the conclusion of the first three years of the grant, districts who have shown significant progress in improving reading outcomes for K-3 students will receive a full six years of federal funding. Schools or districts that have not made significant progress in increasing student performance in reading in K-3 will not have their *Reading First* grants funded for the final three years.

**D-5. What happens if a District's application for *Reading First* funds is not approved?**

Any district that does not receive initial approval for its *Reading First* application on March 1, 2003, will have an opportunity to address the issues and concerns raised by the expert panel reviewers and resubmit the application by April 15, 2003. Thereafter, districts will be able to submit their applications by March 1 of each year for review by expert panel. The state level *Reading First* leadership team will provide focused technical assistance as needed and will continue to work with the district until the application satisfactorily addresses the questions outlined in section J of this document.

**D-6. May a consortium of local educational agencies apply to the State for *Reading First* funds?**

Yes. Consistent with EDGAR requirements, two or more local educational agencies may apply to the state as a consortium. Each local educational agency within the consortium must meet the eligibility requirements outlined in Question D-1. Any LEA that chooses to apply through a consortium must waive the right to submit individually.

**D-7. According to the law, on what basis shall the state of Florida award subgrants to eligible local educational agencies?**

The states are directed to award subgrants to eligible LEAs on a competitive basis. The state must subgrant at least 80 percent of its total *Reading First* award to eligible LEAs, a total of \$36,511,624 in Year 1.

In order to best address the intent of the legislation – that is, to ensure that every student can read at grade level or above by the end of third grade through the use of programs, materials, strategies and approaches based on scientifically based reading research – the states were directed to develop selection criteria that distinguish among the quality of programs and approaches proposed by applicants. Florida will fund those proposals that show the most promise for successful implementation, particularly at the classroom level, and for raising student achievement.

**D-8. Are there any required priorities for awarding *Reading First* subgrants?**

In making awards to local educational agencies, states must give priority to eligible local educational agencies that meet at least one of the following criteria:

1. At least fifteen percent of the students served by the eligible local educational agency are from families with incomes below the poverty line; or
2. At least 6,500 children served by the eligible local educational agency are from families with incomes below the poverty line.

**D-9. What discretion does a state educational agency have in selecting competitive criteria for its subgrant process?**

In addition to the required priority described in Question D-8, a state educational agency may establish other priorities as a part of its overall reform strategy that further the purposes of the *Reading First* program. However, such priorities will give LEAs or programs a competitive edge in the subgrant selection process, rather than entirely preclude non-priority LEAs or programs. No competitive priority will be of size or scope to supplement a weak portion of a LEA application; competitive priorities will carry less weight than the required components of the application.

In order to meet the statutory requirement that each LEA subgrant must be of sufficient size and scope to enable the LEA to improve reading instruction, the federal government strongly encouraged states to award a competitive priority to LEAs that progress using appropriate assessment instruments towards improving reading achievement in eligible schools. LEAs should establish these gains through objective measures that are valid and reliable. This is not an issue in Florida, because we are requiring that all *Reading First* Schools use the same valid and reliable instruments to monitor reading outcomes. States were also asked to consider awarding a priority to LEAs that can demonstrate established leadership and commitment to improving

reading achievement, as well as to LEAs that will leverage existing reading initiative components for maximum effect within an overall *Reading First* plan. The federal government advised states that subgrant competitions to districts that lead to smaller, diluted per-LEA awards would be in jeopardy of not being approved by the expert review panel for funding.

**D-10. What responsibility does the state of Florida have with respect to district and school choices of reading programs?**

In Florida's application for a *Reading First* award, the state was required to describe the process and selection criteria by which Florida will make competitive grants to eligible local educational agencies. We were also required to describe how we will ensure that instructional materials, programs, strategies and approaches, as well as professional development activities related to reading instruction, are based on scientifically based reading research. Thus, the state of Florida is responsible for ensuring that *Reading First* funds go only to LEAs that will implement high-quality programs that meet requirements of *Reading First*. In carrying out this responsibility, Florida has considerable flexibility. Districts should refer to the DRAFT Reading Program Specifications and the Consumer Guide (visit [www.myflorida.com/jrf](http://www.myflorida.com/jrf)) for guidance when selecting reading programs.

**D-11. May a state use a *Reading First* award as a planning grant to a local educational agency that is still developing its *Reading First* plan?**

No. *Reading First* grants are for implementation, not planning purposes. Planning activities, such as conducting a needs assessment, are not appropriate uses of *Reading First* funds.

**D-12. May *Reading First* funds be used to support districts and schools that are already implementing a reading program based on scientifically based reading research?**

Yes. The federal government encouraged states to award *Reading First* subgrants to local educational agencies that will use the funds to support schools that have begun to implement a reading program based on scientifically based reading research. These schools must meet all program requirements, and should use their *Reading First* funds to expand and strengthen their existing program.

**D-13. May districts and schools that received *Reading Excellence Act* funds also receive *Reading First* funds?**

Yes. Eligible *Reading First* districts and schools that received funds through the *Reading Excellence Act* may receive *Reading First* funds. These schools must meet all *Reading First* program requirements, and should use their *Reading First* funds to expand and strengthen their existing reading program. Particularly important will be the recognition of the mainstream K-3 classroom as the venue for *Reading First* activities, i.e. not home tutoring efforts, instruction in after-school settings, etc.

**D-14. What is the minimum amount of *Reading First* funds that a state educational agency may provide to a local educational agency?**

The percentage to an eligible LEA of *Reading First* funds subgranted by Florida may not be less than the percentage that LEA received of the total Title I Part A funds received by all LEAs in Florida for the preceding fiscal year. For example, if an LEA received 3 percent of the total amount of Title I Part A funds received by LEAs in Florida in FY 2001, that LEA must receive at least 3 percent of the total amount of *Reading First* funds subgranted in Florida in FY 2002, if awarded a *Reading First* grant.

Florida has determined the minimum amount that an LEA can receive as described above, and will ensure that *Reading First* subgrants are of sufficient size and scope to enable eligible LEAs to fully implement programs to improve reading instruction. The amount of funds awarded to an LEA must also relate to the number or percentage of students in kindergarten through grade 3 in that LEA who are reading below grade level. In order to ensure that schools are able to implement high quality *Reading First* programs, and in accordance with the guidance provided by the USDE, Florida anticipates making *Reading First* awards to successful applicants of between \$40,000 and \$175,000 per school for the initial year of the LEA *Reading First* subgrant.

**D-15. Are public charter schools eligible to participate in the *Reading First* program?**

Yes. Under Florida law, public charter schools are public schools within an LEA. As such, public charter schools are eligible for support on the same basis as other public schools in Florida. Charter schools must submit through the district.

**D-16. What are the implications of the Charter School Expansion Act of 1998 on *Reading First* awards?**

The Charter School Expansion Act reinforces USDE's policy that public charter schools must be able to compete for *Reading First* funds on an equal footing with other public schools and local educational agencies. They may not be discriminated against in competing for funds simply because of their charter school status, nor may competitive preferences or absolute priorities be established for the purpose of excluding charter schools from competing for *Reading First* funds.

**D-17. May an intermediate unit within a state apply for *Reading First* funds on behalf of eligible schools for which it provides services?**

An intermediate unit may only apply for *Reading First* funds if it is a local educational agency under section 9101(26) of ESEA and meets the eligibility requirements outlined in Question D-1.

**D-18. Are private school children eligible to participate in the *Reading First* program?**

Yes. Funds awarded to state educational agencies and local educational agencies under *Reading First* are subject to the requirements of Section 9501 of ESEA (Participation by Private School Children and Teachers). The statute requires LEAs to provide private school children and their teachers or other educational personnel with educational services that address their needs related to *Reading First* on an equitable basis with public school children and teachers. LEAs must provide these services in a timely manner.

The *Reading First* law requires that local education agencies must serve private school students in their *Reading First* subgrant proposal if there is substantial need for the services provided in *Reading First*. If there is not a substantial need for the services the district is not required to provide them but must give a rationale as to why the services are not needed.

The district is to serve students in need of assistance provided under *Reading First*. This does not need to be a whole school program for private schools as long as the students in need are served.

Districts are **not required** to follow the Title I model for *Reading First*. There are several ways for the districts to meet the needs of private school students, including allowing the participation of private school teachers in professional development opportunities at the school and district level.

Funds provided for educational services and other benefits for private school children and their teachers must be equal, taking into account the number and educational needs of the children to be served, to the funds provided for participating public school children.

All services and benefits provided to private school children and their teachers under *Reading First* must be secular, neutral, and non-ideological.

Local educational agencies seeking *Reading First* subgrants must consult with appropriate private school officials during the design and development of their *Reading First* plans on such issues as determining eligibility of private school children (see question D-20); identifying the children's needs; what services will be offered; how, where, and by whom services will be provided, and how the services will be assessed.

#### **D-19. How is the eligibility of private school children determined?**

In general, private school children in the areas served by public schools receiving *Reading First* funds would be eligible. This determination can be made either by the residence of private school children in the attendance area of a public school receiving *Reading First* funds or by the location of a private school in the attendance area of a public school receiving *Reading First* funds. For additional information on which public schools within an eligible local educational agency may receive *Reading First* funds, see question D-1.

## **Local Use of Funds**

### **E-1. In which schools may a local educational agency use *Reading First* funds?**

A local educational agency that receives a *Reading First* subgrant may only distribute funds to schools within that LEA that both:

1. Are among the schools served by the LEA with the highest percentages or numbers of students in kindergarten through grade 3 reading below grade level, based on currently available data (Florida used students in Level 1 and Level 2 on the 2001 Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test, Grade 4 Reading); and
2. Are identified for school improvement under section 1116(b) of ESEA or have the highest percentages or numbers of children counted under section 1124(c).

A list of eligible schools within a LEA for Year 1 has been sent to the respective superintendents.

### **E-2. May middle schools, junior high schools or high schools receive *Reading First* funds?**

No. The purpose of the *Reading First* program is to ensure that every student can read at grade level or above by the end of grade 3. Only schools that include kindergarten, grade 1, grade 2 and/or grade 3 may receive *Reading First* funds. Schools that include additional grades may only use *Reading First* funds for purposes related to kindergarten through grade 3 instruction.

### **E-3. May pre-kindergarten programs receive *Reading First* funds?**

No. *Reading First* funds may only serve students in kindergarten through grade 3. Early *Reading First*, a separate program authorized under Title I Part B Subpart 2, will award funds on a competitive basis to support local efforts to enhance the early language, literacy and prereading development of preschool age children through strategies and professional development that are based on scientifically based reading research. For more information on the relationship between *Reading First* and Early *Reading First*, see question F-2.

### **E-4. For what activities may a local educational agency or school use *Reading First* funds?**

An eligible local educational agency that receives a *Reading First* subgrant must use the funds to carry out the following activities:

1. Instructional reading assessments -- Selection and administration of rigorous screening, diagnostic, classroom-based progress monitoring and outcome assessments with proven validity and reliability. These assessments must measure progress in the essential components of reading instruction and identify students who may be at risk for reading failure or who are already experiencing reading difficulty. The outcome measures must

provide reliable and valid data about progress being made toward moving increasing numbers of children toward grade level reading standards in grades K-3.

2. Reading program -- Selection and implementation of a program of reading instruction based on scientifically based reading research that includes the essential components of reading instruction and provides such instruction to children in kindergarten through grade 3 in the schools served by the LEA, including children:
  - a) With reading difficulties
  - b) At risk of referral to special education based on those difficulties
  - c) Evaluated under section 614 of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act but not identified as having a disability (in accordance with IDEA section 614(b)(5) and as defined in section 602)
  - d) Served under IDEA primarily due to a specific learning disability related to reading (as defined in IDEA section 602)
  - e) Deficient in the essential components of reading instruction
  - f) Identified as having limited English proficiency

A high-quality reading program that is based on scientifically based research must include instructional content based on the five essential components of reading instruction integrated into a coherent instructional design. A coherent design includes explicit instructional strategies, coordinated instructional sequences, ample practice opportunities and aligned student materials. The design should also consider the allocation of time, ensuring a protected, uninterrupted block of time (90 minutes minimum) for reading instruction.

3. Instructional materials – Selection and implementation of instructional materials, including education technology such as software and other digital curricula, based on scientifically based reading research.
4. Professional development - Professional development for teachers of kindergarten through grade 3, and special education teachers of kindergarten through grade 12, that will prepare these teachers in all of the essential components of reading instruction. Professional development must be provided that will assist teachers in becoming fully qualified for reading instruction in accordance with the requirements of section 1119. Providers of professional development must base training in reading instruction on scientifically based reading research. Professional development must address:
  - a) Information, instructional materials, programs, strategies and approaches based on scientifically based reading research, including early intervention, classroom reading materials, and remedial programs and approaches; and

- b) Instruction in the use of screening, diagnostic, and classroom-based progress monitoring assessments and other procedures that effectively identify students who may be at risk for reading failure or who are having difficulty reading.
- 5. Evaluation strategies – Collection and summary of valid and reliable data to document the effectiveness of *Reading First* in individual schools and in the LEA as a whole and to stimulate and accelerate improvement by identifying the schools that produce significant gains in reading achievement.
- 6. Reporting – The LEA must report data for all students and categories of students described in section 1111(b)(2)(C)(iv)(II).
- 7. Access to reading material – Promotion of reading and library programs that provide access to engaging reading material.

There may be additional activities for which a LEA can use *Reading First* funds, provided they are based on scientifically based reading research and align with the LEA's overall *Reading First* plan.

**E-5. May programs or activities that are not based on scientifically based reading research be supported by *Reading First* funds?**

No. All materials, programs, strategies, approaches and professional development activities supported by *Reading First* must be based on scientifically based reading research.

**E-6. May a local educational agency use *Reading First* funds to cover costs for administrative expenses, technical assistance and evaluation activities?**

Yes. An eligible local educational agency that receives a subgrant may use up to 3.5 percent of its *Reading First* funds for its own planning and administration purposes. However, districts are not allowed to take state-determined indirect costs. The *Reading First* Federal legislation limits the amount retained at the district level for administrative purposes, *including indirect cost* to a maximum of 3.5 percent.

**E-7. May pre-award costs be charged to the *Reading First* subgrant?**

If a local educational agency incurs costs after receiving notification of its *Reading First* award, but before the effective date of the award, these costs may be charged to the *Reading First* grant to the extent they would have been allowable if incurred after the award date. The LEA must receive written approval from the FDOE.

**E-8. May *Reading First* funds be used by a local educational agency for costs incurred after the subgrant period?**

A local educational agency that receives a *Reading First* subgrant may only use *Reading First* funds for allowable costs during the subgrant award period. For example, an LEA is free to enter into a multi-year contract with a service provider; however, *Reading First* funds may only be used for allowable costs related to that contract that occur within the subgrant award period.

**E-9. To what extent may waivers be sought to facilitate the implementation of a local educational agency *Reading First* program?**

Florida will not grant any waiver that would undermine the intent and purposes of the *Reading First* program. Therefore, the state will only consider waivers related to *Reading First* under limited and exceptional circumstances. In those instances, and consistent with the waiver provisions and limitations of section 9401 of the Elementary and Secondary Education, a local educational agency that receives *Reading First* funds may apply to the department for waivers of *Reading First* requirements, if the requirements sought to be waived impede the LEAs ability to carry out its *Reading First* program.

However, a local educational agency that receives *Reading First* funds may apply to the department for waivers of requirements of other major federal education programs, if the requirements sought to be waived impede the LEAs ability to carry out its *Reading First* program.

**E-10. Does the Ed-Flex waiver authority apply to the *Reading First* program?**

No. SEAs and LEAs seeking waivers of *Reading First* requirements must apply to the USDE under the waiver authority in section 9401 of the ESEA. The USDE will not grant any waiver that would undermine the intent and purposes of the *Reading First* program.

**E-11. When does the period of availability for FY 2002 *Reading First* funds end?**

Grantees or subgrantees must obligate FY 2002 *Reading First* funds by September 30, 2004. The Department's regulations at 34 CFR 76.707 (available at: <http://www.ed.gov/offices/OCFO> ) describe when an obligation occurs with respect to various categories of activities. The awarding of subgrants to LEAs does not constitute an obligation.

## **Coordinating With Other Programs**

**F-1. How does *Reading First* fit with other federal programs and initiatives that support reading instruction?**

The clear goal of the *No Child Left Behind Act* is to dramatically improve the achievement of students across the country. *Reading First*, the academic cornerstone of the *No Child Left Behind Act*, focuses attention on the most critical element of reaching this goal: ensuring that students know how to read well by the end of third grade. Through *Reading First*, states and local educational agencies can leverage funds from other Federal programs, particularly Title I, Title II, and IDEA funds to improve reading instruction for all students. Although *Reading First* subgrants will only be available to targeted LEAs, states have a significant amount of funds available to provide statewide leadership and professional development in the application and expansion of scientifically based reading research to improve reading instruction. Thus, state leadership supported by *Reading First* should coordinate and align the use of funds from other Federal programs that focus on improving reading achievement.

### **F-2. What is the relationship between *Reading First* and *Early Reading First*?**

The goal of *Early Reading First* is to prepare children to enter kindergarten truly ready to learn, i.e. with the necessary cognitive skills for reading success. *Early Reading First* will focus its grants on proven programs with coherent skill-based instruction. *Reading First* K-3 classrooms are the preferred and most logical next step for eventual *Early Reading First* graduates, and USDE encourages SEAs and LEAs to coordinate their *Early Reading First* and *Reading First* activities.

### **F-3. How does *Reading First* coordinate with a Title I schoolwide plan or a Title I School Improvement plan?**

All Title I schools that operate schoolwide programs must implement a schoolwide plan. Title I schools that receive *Reading First* subgrants will need to coordinate and integrate their *Reading First* activities with this plan. *Reading First* activities can help focus schoolwide plans on the critical goal of improving reading achievement. Title I schools that receive *Reading First* subgrants must meet all the purposes of *Reading First*.

Similarly, all schools identified for improvement under Title I must implement a school improvement plan. Schools identified for improvement that receive *Reading First* subgrants must coordinate and integrate their *Reading First* activities with this plan and must meet all the purposes of *Reading First*.

## **Technical Assistance**

### **G-1. Will technical assistance be available to local educational agencies in preparing their *Reading First* applications?**

Yes. Extensive technical assistance will be available to local educational agencies as they prepare their *Reading First* applications. The following is a list of supports that will be provided:

- Publication of regular e-mail alerts to districts about the *Reading First* program that began early April 2002.

- Dissemination of eligible LEAs and schools within the LEA on April 17, 2002.
- Dissemination of the DRAFT Guidance to all eligible LEAs by Friday, May 3, 2002.
- Release the LEA application by October 1, 2002.
- Pre-application workshops held for eligible LEAs in October through December 2002 to assist in the preparation of their applications.
- LEA applications due to the Florida Department of Education on January 15, 2003.
- Ongoing technical assistance will be provided by the Florida DOE staff, the FCRR, and the FLaRE Center to those districts who must engage in substantial development work in order to submit a successful *Reading First* application, or to those districts that are not successful during the first application cycle.

**G-2. In what ways will the Federal government provide assistance and information to state educational agencies, local educational agencies and schools related to *Reading First*?**

The National Institute for Literacy (NIFL), in collaboration with the United States Department of Education, the United States Department of Health and Human Services and the National Institute for Child Health and Human Development, will disseminate information on scientifically based reading research pertaining to children, youth and adults. NIFL will also identify and disseminate information about schools, local educational agencies and state educational agencies that have developed and implemented effective classroom reading programs that meet the requirements of *Reading First*.

NIFL will support the continued identification and dissemination of information on reading programs that contain the essential components of reading instruction as supported by scientifically based reading research that can lead to improved reading outcomes for children, youth, and adults. This will include information identified through the external evaluation and peer review processes of the *Reading First* program.

**G-3. How can a local educational agency or school obtain information about reading programs based on scientifically based reading research?**

The consumers guide at [http://reading.uoregon.edu/big\\_ideas/consumer\\_guide.pdf](http://reading.uoregon.edu/big_ideas/consumer_guide.pdf) or [www.myflorida.com/jrf](http://www.myflorida.com/jrf) provides information on reading programs based on scientifically based reading research.

Another publication with useful information is *Put Reading First: The Research Building Blocks for Teaching Children to Read*. This publication can be ordered by contacting the National Institute for Literacy at ED Pubs at 1-800-228-8813 (phone), 301-430-1244 (fax) or [http://www.EdPubOrders@aspensys.com](mailto:http://www.EdPubOrders@aspensys.com) Additionally, it is available online at: <http://www.nifl.gov>. Other resources are described in Section B-6 of this guidance.

**National Evaluation**

## **H-1. How will the effectiveness of the *Reading First* program be evaluated?**

The state of Florida will conduct a rigorous evaluation of reading outcomes and instructional programs in schools and districts that receive *Reading First* support. All districts that receive funds from *Reading First* will be required to participate in this evaluation, which will involve the use of common progress monitoring and reading outcome measures. It will also require districts to respond to surveys about implementation processes and to participate in site visits. This part of the evaluation will be coordinated through the newly established Florida Center for Reading Research at Florida State University.

The state of Florida will also contract with an independent evaluator to examine the entire *Reading First* process in Florida from an external point of view. This independent evaluator may also require districts to respond to requests for information and to participate in site visits.

Finally, USDE will contract with an independent external organization to coordinate and conduct a five-year, quantitative evaluation of the *Reading First* program. This rigorous, scientifically valid evaluation will be designed to identify the effects of specific *Reading First* activities carried out by state educational agencies and local educational agencies on improving reading instruction and to take into account factors influencing student performance that are not controlled by teachers or education administrators.

The evaluation will include:

1. Essential components of reading instruction -- an analysis of the relationship between each of the essential components of reading instruction and overall reading proficiency
2. Assessment tools -- an analysis of whether assessment tools used by SEAs and LEAs measure the essential components of reading instruction
3. State reading standards -- an analysis of how state reading standards correlate with the essential components of reading instruction
4. Targeted assistance grants -- an analysis of whether the receipt of a targeted assistance grant under section 1204 results in an increase in the number of children who read proficiently
5. Instructional materials -- a measurement of the extent to which specific instructional materials improve reading proficiency
6. Identifying reading deficiencies -- a measurement of the extent to which specific screening, diagnostic, and classroom-based instructional reading assessments assist teachers in identifying specific reading deficiencies
7. Professional Development -- a measurement of the extent to which professional development programs implemented by SEAs using *Reading First* funds improve reading instruction

8. Pre-service preparation -- a measurement of how well prepared students entering the teaching profession are to teach the essential components of reading instruction
9. Student interest in reading -- an analysis of changes in students' interest in reading and time spent reading outside of school
10. Additional information -- any other pertinent analysis or measurement as determined by the Secretary.

The national evaluation of the *Reading First* program will also examine the impact of *Reading First* on students' referral to and eligibility for special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, based on difficulties learning to read.

The USDE will provide the findings of the national evaluation of the *Reading First* program to states and local educational agencies on a periodic basis use in program improvement.

### **State Level Activities Funded Through *Reading First***

#### **I-1. Will part of the *Reading First* funds awarded to Florida be used to support state level activities for improved reading outcomes for K-3 children?**

Yes. A state educational agency that receives a *Reading First* grant may reserve up to 20 percent of its total allocation to carry out activities related to professional inservice and preservice development; technical assistance for local educational agencies and schools; and planning, administration and reporting. By design, this unprecedented, significant level of funding will provide states with the resources and opportunity to extend this reading initiative and to improve instruction beyond the specific districts and schools that receive *Reading First* subgrants.

These funds will assist states in building and maintaining statewide capacity to effectively teach all children to read by third grade.

#### **I-2. How will the state of Florida use funds reserved at the state level to enhance the effectiveness of the *Reading First* program in our state?**

As mentioned in I-1, state level funds may be used for three purposes: 1) to provide and improve professional development for both continuing and preservice teachers; 2) providing technical assistance to districts and schools in the preparation and implementation of their *Reading First* programs; and 3) planning, administration, and reporting purposes. The primary focus of these activities will be to support the development of effective reading programs in schools that received *Reading First* funds. However, the law also encourages the state to develop statewide capacity leading to improved instructional effectiveness for all K-3 children in Florida. Thus, the state will also engage in activities to improve the use of programs, methods, and materials that are based on scientific research in reading in all elementary schools in Florida. We have outlined

below some of the major state level activities that will be funded in part or wholly through *Reading First* funds.

### *1. State Level Leadership Team*

The state of Florida has established a leadership “triangle” to guide implementation of Governor Bush’s state reading initiative called *Just Read, Florida!*, and these same leadership elements will play a crucial role in implementation of the *Reading First* grant in Florida. At the top of the triangle is the Florida Department of Education who, in conjunction with, the Reading and Literacy Partnership, coordinated the development of the state application and will assist in the oversight and evaluation of the state’s *Reading First* program. This partnership is composed of key education and political leaders in the state. To act as the executive arm of the Reading and Literacy Partnership, the Governor has established the *Just Read, Florida!* Office within the Florida Board of Education. This office reports directly to the Secretary of Education and is charged with responsibility for coordinating all elements of the *Just Read, Florida!* initiative as well as the K-3 part of that initiative that will be supported by the *Reading First* grant.

The two other corners of the reading leadership triangle in Florida are the Florida Center for Reading Research (FCRR) at Florida State University and the Florida Literacy and Reading Excellence (FLaRE) center at the University of Central Florida. The Director of the FCRR, Dr. Joseph Torgesen, is a well-known researcher in the area of early reading, assessment, and prevention of reading difficulties. Dr. Sandra Robinson, the leader of the FLaRE center, is a well-known teacher educator and Dean of the College of Education at UCF. The FLaRE center will have primary responsibility for providing technical assistance to districts for professional development, for directly providing professional development to K-3 teachers and K-12 special education teachers in *Reading First* Schools, and for developing and coordinating professional development for K-3 teachers statewide. The FCRR will work in cooperation with FLaRE to identify instructional materials and resources, as well as professional development materials and practices that are supported by scientific knowledge about reading and professional development. The FCRR will also play a central role in the collection and management of data from *Reading First* schools, and they, in partnership with FLaRE, will provide technical assistance to schools in using assessment information to guide the development and enhancement of their *Reading First* programs. Both the FLaRE center and the FCRR are intended to be centers for professional development and reading research that will increase the state’s capacity to provide support to districts in their efforts to increase reading outcomes for their students.

### *2. State level professional development activities*

The core of state level professional development activities for schools that receive *Reading First* funds will be provision of ongoing professional support for district level reading “coaches,” and coordination of four day *Reading First* Academies in the summer following the first year of *Reading First* implementation in each school.

The FLaRE center will hire and train regional *Reading First* professional development coordinators (coordinators) who will be responsible to provide ongoing professional development in *Reading First* Schools. Ongoing professional development will include direct support and training of Coaches hired at the district level, as well as visits to schools to engage in

problem solving activities with school level teams (including principals) to improve the coordination and management of school wide reading programs across grades K-3. Coordinators will also be available to provide direct professional development activities to teachers on an as needed basis in *Reading First* schools.

The FLARE center plans to coordinate the content and execution of four day *Reading First* Academies for all K-3 teachers in schools that receive *Reading First* funds. K-12 special education teachers from districts receiving *Reading First* support will also be invited to attend these academies, and there will be special break out sessions to address specific issues involved in providing reading instruction to children who experience the most difficulties in learning to read. These academies will be provided with *Reading First* support by educational consortia (organizations that serve multiple districts), by ACEEs which are funded to provide ongoing professional development support to schools, or by colleges and universities. These organizations will be involved in this effort in order to help Florida increase its permanent capacity for the delivery of high quality professional support to all schools in the state.

The purpose of the *Reading First* Academies will be to provide training in the principles of reading instruction that are based on scientific research. This will include information on instructional materials, programs, and strategies, as well as instruction in the use of valid and reliable screening, diagnostic and classroom-based instructional reading assessment instruments and other procedures to effectively identify students who may be at risk for reading failure or are having reading difficulty. The core content of these *Reading First* Academies will be derived from the materials developed in the state of Texas that have recently been adapted for use in other states. These materials are particularly suited for use in Florida because of their inclusion of content for children who are Limited English Proficient. They include high quality materials (including trainer scripts, overheads, and videos) that will help improve the consistency with which professional development is provided to teachers throughout the state. Because these materials were developed for three-day academies, we will develop additional training material and activities that will be directly focused on issues that arise during the first year of our experience with schools receiving *Reading First* schools. One of these issues will almost certainly involve additional training in the use of valid and reliable assessments to guide reading instruction. The FCRR will assist FLARE in this effort by preparing additional material to help communicate to teachers the scientific basis for the instructional practices for which they will receive training. This material will include information on the reading process, the development of reading skills, language structure, and the factors that make reading difficult for many children.

The FCRR, in cooperation with FLARE and the *Just Read, Florida!* Office, will prepare a brief guiding document that will be broadly disseminated and that will describe the components and features of a research based reading program. This document will reflect the Reading Program Specifications developed by the FDOE, and will be used to focus all discussion and training for teachers and other school personnel on the principles of effective reading programs that have been established by scientifically based research.

The FCRR and the FLARE will jointly plan and conduct two day training academies for school psychologists to increase their understanding of valid and reliable assessment practices to screen, diagnose, and monitor the progress of K-3 children in reading. These academies will also

provide information on the scientific basis of instructional practices being established in *Reading First* schools so that school psychologists may become more effective in their consultations with teachers and in their role as part of student decision making teams in schools.

FLaRE and FCRR will jointly conduct a review of teacher training practices in Florida to include examination of course content and teacher training practices. This review will include recommendations as to how state licensure and certification standards in the area of reading can be improved. The report will be submitted to the Reading Leadership Team, and be made available for public review via the internet.

### 3. *Technical assistance provided to schools and districts*

The *Just Read, Florida!* Office, as well as personnel from FLaRE and FCRR, will be available on an ongoing basis to provide technical assistance to districts and schools in the design and implementation of their *Reading First* programs. This assistance will include help in selecting and implementing a program(s) of reading instruction that is based on scientific research. They will also provide assistance in selecting rigorous screening, diagnostic, progress monitoring, and outcome assessments with proven validity and reliability. Further, *Just Read, Florida!* and FCRR will assist in identifying professional development providers who can assist FLaRE in preparing reading teachers to teach students using the programs, materials, and assessments they select.

The FCRR will assist schools and districts to monitor the effectiveness of their *Reading First* programs by providing timely reports to principals and district level leaders that are based on a common set of progress monitoring and outcome assessments that will be required in all *Reading First* schools. These reports (and training for use of the reports will be provided to districts and schools) will assist local school leaders to identify classrooms and schools that are achieving exemplary outcomes as well as those that may be in need of further support and training to achieve desired outcomes. The unique value of the FCRR's participation in this process will be to allow teachers, principals, and district level teachers to examine their own progress in relation to the progress of other schools that serve populations of children who enter K-3 classrooms with similar demographic and achievement characteristics. Broad participation in this evaluation process will establish a normative expectation for appropriate early assessments as an established component of effective reading programs. Expect that the progress monitoring and reporting components that will initially be required of all *Reading First* schools will prove sufficiently helpful that non-*Reading First* schools will desire to use the same system to improve and monitor their reading outcomes.

## **District Application Requirements**

### **J-1. What are the key issues that a district must address in its application for a competitive award under this program?**

In their consensus report titled "Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children," the National Research Council (Snow, Burns, & Griffen, 1998) concluded that effective classroom instruction in grades K-3 is the "first line of defense" against reading failure. However, it is also

true that classroom reading programs work best when effective implementation of the reading program is embedded within an effective school model for preventing reading difficulties. The other broad elements of effective school organization and practices to ensure that no child is left behind include: 1) the use of valid and reliable assessments to guide reading instruction and monitor its outcomes; 2) methods to provide additional, or more intense instruction to children who are lagging behind in reading; 3) an ongoing program of high-quality professional development for all school personnel who instruct and assess children; 4) and strong instructional leadership. The whole school model for preventing reading difficulties might be thought of as “Reading Programs PLUS.” In the district application for *Reading First* funds, you are to describe the model or models that will be implemented in your *Reading First* schools to prevent the emergence of reading difficulties in their students. LEAs and schools do not have to implement all elements of their long-term plan in the first year, but rather should describe the program as it will develop and maintain itself over a six year period, providing the district receives funding after the three year evaluation. Specifically, LEAs must address:

*1. How will districts ensure that instruction in grades K-3 is guided by appropriate assessments in the area of screening, diagnosis, and progress monitoring?* Districts must indicate what instruments will be used and how information from the assessments will be used to make instructional decisions.

The *Reading First* guidance document specifies that three types of assessment will be used for the purposes of guiding instruction. Schools will need to use screening assessments to identify children in need of extra instructional supports, diagnostic assessments to determine student’s specific instructional needs, and progress monitoring assessments to ensure that adequate progress in reading growth is being achieved throughout the year. The document further specifies that the state will have a plan to evaluate overall reading outcomes in schools that are supported by *Reading First* funds - “SEAs must use valid and reliable instruments to measure progress in improving student achievement.”

The four types of assessments that must be implemented in all *Reading First* schools are defined as follows:

- *Screening* – assessments that are administered to determine which children are at risk for reading difficulty and who will need additional intervention.
- *Diagnosis* – assessments that inform teachers of specific student strengths and weaknesses in major reading components to help teachers plan instruction that meets the needs of individual students.
- *Progress Monitoring* – assessments that determine if students are making adequate progress or need more intervention to achieve grade level reading outcomes.
- *Outcome* – assessments that provide a bottom-line evaluation of the effectiveness of the reading program.

Schools are required to choose assessments for screening and diagnosis that have adequate evidence of reliability and validity for the uses to which they will be applied. The National Institute for Literacy recently sponsored a review of 29 major reading assessment instruments, and the results of that review are available via the internet at a website titled “Analysis of Reading Assessment Instruments for K-3.” The address is <http://idea.uoregon.edu>. This site provides a helpful discussion of issues involved in selecting appropriate assessment instruments

in reading, and it also provides detailed information about the reliability and validity of a specific set of these instruments. In selecting instruments to use for screening and diagnostic purposes, districts must justify their choices in terms of specific information about the reliability and validity of the tests selected as they relate to the purposes for which the tests will be used.

In addition to describing which instruments will be used for screening and diagnostic purposes, districts must also describe how information from these instruments will be used in guiding instruction. Screening is not enough by itself, and is only valuable when followed with additional instructional interventions. Districts should describe the strategies they will employ to meet the needs of children identified as “at risk” by their screening instruments.

Diagnostic assessments may need to be applied to children identified as at risk by the screening measure who do not respond to the interventions that are provided to them. Often, it is most efficient to use screening measures to identify children in need of more intensive instruction, and then to track student progress with progress monitoring assessments. Children who do not respond well to the immediate intensive interventions provided may be in need of further diagnostic assessment. These assessments should help answer such questions as: 1) in which areas of important beginning reading skills is the student on track, and in which areas is instructional intervention needed; 2) which specific beginning reading skills has the student mastered or not mastered; 3) how much instructional intervention are the students likely to need; and 4) which students have similar instructional needs and will form an appropriate group for instruction?

Although the base of all diagnostic assessments should involve tests with established empirical evidence of reliability and validity, these tests can be supplemented with a variety of teacher-made or specialized assessments designed to produce information that is directly helpful in guiding instruction. For example, if students are having difficulty in phonemic awareness, can they identify initial sounds? Final sounds? At what level of complexity can they perform blending tasks? This type of information is useful in identifying a good starting point for intervention, and may also be useful in grouping children for instruction.

Diagnostic assessments should examine at least the following skill and knowledge areas at the grade levels given below:

- *Kindergarten* – phonemic awareness, knowledge of letters and phonics, oral language vocabulary
- *First Grade* – phonemic awareness, phonics, reading fluency, oral language vocabulary, and reading comprehension
- *Second Grade* – phonemic awareness, phonics, reading fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension
- *Third Grade* – phonemic awareness, phonics, reading fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension

In addition to specifying which instruments will be used to make these diagnostic assessments at each grade level, districts must also specify how this information will be used to guide instruction. For example, if a child is lagging behind in development of oral language vocabulary in kindergarten, how will this need be addressed? If a third grade child is still

struggling with phonemic decoding strategies, how will that need be addressed? Applications will be strengthened if districts are able to indicate specific instructional materials or strategies, or grouping practices that are responsive to the instructional needs of individual children as identified by diagnostic assessments.

All schools in Florida receiving support from *Reading First* funds will be required to use common progress monitoring instruments given four times a year during kindergarten through third grade. In addition, they will be required to administer a common set of outcome measures at the end of kindergarten through third grade. These latter two requirements are imposed so that the state may fulfill its responsibility to “effectively monitor the academic impact on its recipient LEAs” (Section E-5 (4)). Both of these types of assessments will also provide valuable information to schools that can be used to guide instructional decision-making.

The progress monitoring tools that must be administered by all schools receiving *Reading First* funds are taken from the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS, Kaminsky & Good, 1996). The instruments will be administered four times a year during the first two weeks of September, December, February, and May. Administering these probes four times during the year will provide at least three occasions (September, December, February) when instruction can be adjusted because the child is not making adequate progress in learning to read. Although we require that these instruments be given at least four times a year, districts may certainly administer progress monitoring instruments more frequently than this if they desire. More frequent monitoring of progress may be particularly helpful for children who are assigned to receive more intensive reading instruction because they are experiencing special difficulties learning to read (Fuchs, Deno, & Mirken, 1984).

*One advantage of these particular progress monitoring instruments is that they also meet the criteria for a screening instrument to be given at the beginning of each year.* Districts are free to select any additional screening instrument to supplement the DIBELS tests, but this is not necessary in order to meet *Reading First* assessment requirements. In fact, beginning in the 2002-2003 school year, Florida is requiring that all kindergarten children in Florida receive a standard screening instrument. In *Reading First* schools, we will be able to compare the results from the first of year DIBELS screening with the screening instrument required of all schools in the state.

The progress monitoring instruments that will be used for the first two assessments in kindergarten are Initial Sound Fluency (a measure of phonemic awareness) and Letter Naming Fluency (a measure of phonics knowledge). In February, Phoneme Segmentation Fluency (a measure of phonemic awareness) will be added to the battery, and the two measures given in May will be Letter Name Fluency and Phoneme Segmentation Fluency. The measures to be used for the first two assessments in Grade 1 are Phoneme Segmentation Fluency, Nonsense Word Fluency (a measure of alphabetic reading skill), and Oral reading fluency. Measures for the final two assessments in Grade 1 (February and May) and Grade 2 are Oral Reading Fluency (a measure of reading accuracy and fluency in text) and Nonsense Word Fluency. In grade 3, progress will be monitored using the Oral Reading Fluency measure. All of these measures are sufficiently reliable to provide a valid indication of progress toward acquisition of grade level reading skills by third grade (Kaminsky & Good, 1996), and they have multiple forms to

facilitate repeated measurement during the school year. Materials and training for use of all these progress monitoring assessments will be provided through the FCRR. Special district level assessment teams will be trained to conduct the first assessment in September. School level teams will be trained to do the assessments in December, February, and May. The data from progress monitoring assessments will be sent to the FCRR via a web site that will be established before the first assessment takes place. The FCRR will be able to provide informative reports back to teachers about the progress of students in their classes, and how the progress of their students compares to the progress of students in other classrooms serving similar populations of children.

The *Reading First* guidance document requires that *Reading First* schools report end of year outcomes in all the essential components of reading growth. The assessment committee for *Reading First* recommended that assessments be made in the following areas at each grade level from K-3:

End of Kindergarten – phonemic awareness, phonics, oral language vocabulary

End of First Grade – phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, comprehension, oral vocabulary

End of Second Grade – phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, comprehension, oral vocabulary, reading vocabulary

End of Third Grade – fluency, comprehension, oral vocabulary, reading vocabulary

The outcome measures that all *Reading First* schools must use in order to ensure uniform data on reading outcomes in all schools are:

*End of Kindergarten-*

1. Segmentation Fluency (phonemic awareness) from the DIBELS
2. Letter Naming Fluency- (phonics) from the DIBELS
3. A valid and reliable oral language vocabulary test that will be determined through an open bid process by the DOE by spring, 2003 (i.e. Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, Receptive One Word Test of Vocabulary, etc.).

*End of First Grade –*

1. Nonsense Word Fluency (phonemic awareness and phonics) from the DIBELS
2. Oral Reading of Passages (fluency) from the DIBELS
3. A valid and reliable group administered measure of reading comprehension that will be determined through an open bid process by the DOE by spring, 2003 (i.e. the SAT9 Gates-MacGinitie tests)
4. The same measure of oral language vocabulary given in kindergarten.

Note: Although the *Reading First* assessment committee recommends specific assessment of phonemic awareness at the end of first grade, we will not assess it separately from phonemic decoding fluency. After children have begun to learn to read, phonemic decoding efficiency is the most direct measure of alphabetic reading skill, and it is highly correlated with measures of phonemic awareness.

*End of Second Grade –*

1. Nonsense Word Fluency (phonemic awareness and phonics) from the DIBELS
2. Oral Reading of Passages (fluency) from the DIBELS
3. The same measure of reading comprehension used in first grade plus a measure of reading vocabulary.
4. The same measure of oral language vocabulary given in kindergarten and first grade

Note: Although the *Reading First* Assessment Committee did not recommend assessment of phonemic decoding at the end of second grade, we include the measure here because it is part of the progress monitoring that we will do in second grade.

*End of Third Grade –*

1. Oral Reading of Passages (fluency) from the DIBELS
2. The same measure of reading comprehension and reading vocabulary given in second grade
3. The same measure of oral language vocabulary given in kindergarten, first, and second grade

Note: FCAT (a highly developed and valid measure of reading comprehension) is administered to third graders in March in order to provide timely information for school grading purposes. We will continue to give another measure of reading comprehension at the end of third grade in order to adequately assess gains in reading achievement from end of second to end of third grade.

These assessment requirements are obviously greater, and they may be somewhat different, than schools are accustomed to using. Potential obstacles to successful implementation in this area include lack of understanding of the purposes of such assessment and realistic difficulties accomplishing them within the school setting.

For example, teachers or other personnel may object that many of these tests do not measure “real” reading (i.e. deriving or constructing meaning from text). Our answer is that the earlier schools identify children likely to experience difficulty learning to read, the earlier schools can intervene and thereby prevent serious, lifelong problems. Unfortunately, we can’t assess children’s ability to derive meaning from text for the purpose of early identification. Most kindergarten and first-grade children, whether or not they will eventually develop reading problems, can’t read “authentic” stories to answer questions about meaning. Fortunately, we can assess performance on precursor skills in the early grades to identify children who will experience difficulty deriving meaning from text in the later grades. The best early indicators that children will later experience difficulty with “real” reading are: a) kindergartners’ difficulty with phonemic awareness or letter sound fluency, b) early difficulties acquiring grade level oral language skills (vocabulary); and c) first through third graders’ difficulty in fluently translating text into spoken language. When we identify children who are struggling to develop these precursor skills, then we can make sure they receive extra help to learn those skills. This substantially increases the chances that these children will become competent readers, capable of deriving meaning from the text.

Another objection schools are likely to encounter is that “testing children in kindergarten is not developmentally appropriate.” At each of the grades from K-3, tests were selected because they

assess the skills children typically develop at that age. In this way, at each grade including kindergarten, testing is developmentally appropriate. Typically, developing children are capable of doing the tasks on these tests. Moreover, when testers behave in a friendly, sensitive way, children enjoy the testing experience.

Finally, teachers and other school personnel may experience these assessment requirements as “just one more thing we don’t have time to do.” To administrators, our response is that *Reading First* monies can and should be used to manage the testing and reporting requirements. Thanks to these new resources, the assessment activities will be manageable even as they keep you informed about whether your efforts to improve the quality of your reading programs are paying off.

Our response to teachers is that we have worked hard to select quick and easy assessment methods, and it is also why schools can hire extra staff to help administer and score the tests. It’s also important to recognize that this assessment information provides information to help you work efficiently and to “work smart.” With good assessment information, which is available on a frequent basis, you can avoid wasting time on skills that students have already mastered; instead, you can allocate your instructional time to the most critical content for any given child. The assessment information will also provide you access to extra help for children who require it.

*Reading First* plans should specify how results from screening, diagnostic, and progress monitoring assessments would be used to inform instructional decision making processes. As was mentioned earlier, the FCRR will provide training to district level teams for the September assessment and school level teams will be trained for the second through fourth assessments. *Reading First* budgets should reflect the costs of administering these assessments as well as costs to support attendance of assessment teams at the training provided by FCRR. Since training will be provided in close proximity to most districts, we do not anticipate that costs for overnight accommodations will need to be built into the training budget. The only two assessments that will need to be purchased by schools are the group administered test of reading comprehension and reading vocabulary, and the individually administered test of oral language vocabulary.

2. *How will they ensure that children in all K-3 classrooms in the school receive high-quality, explicit, and systematic instruction in the elements of reading skill that are appropriate at each grade level (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension strategies).* In this section, LEAs should address both the content and method of instruction. For example, how will they ensure that the elements of instruction are integrated into a “coherent instructional design” as defined in this guidance document (Section C-1).

In this section of the application, districts must describe the “core reading program” or programs, to be used in *Reading First* schools in the district. A core reading program is “the primary instructional tool that teachers use to teach children to learn to read and ensure they reach reading levels that meet or exceed grade-level standards. A core program should address the instructional needs of the majority of students in a respective school or district” (Simmons & Kame'enui, 2002). To be a *Reading First* school in Florida, schools must offer classroom instruction in reading in a dedicated, uninterrupted block of time of at least 90 minutes duration.

Schools that do not agree to schedule at least 90 protected minutes per day for reading instruction cannot be considered for a *Reading First* grant.

In selecting a core reading program for *Reading First* schools, districts and schools should be very careful to evaluate the program in terms of its capability to accomplish two critical goals: 1) provide a well organized and systematic program of explicit instruction and appropriate practice in the critical elements of reading growth for each grade level from kindergarten through third grade and 2) provide clear guidance to teachers about strategies for teaching the essential components and skills required to acquire grade level reading skills by third grade. Districts should also carefully keep in mind the characteristics and needs of children who attend schools to be served by *Reading First* grants. In general, these children have special needs for explicit and systematic instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension strategies (Foorman & Torgesen, 2001). In addition, they require extended and carefully organized practice using materials that are aligned with the instruction they are receiving. Programs that are used to provide instruction for these children should not feature “explicit instructional strategies” simply as a backup for intervention with weak readers, but should pervasively use explicit strategies for instruction to all children. Simmons and Kame'enui (2002) have written a “consumer’s guide” to evaluating a core reading program in grades K-3. Before a core reading program is selected for use in schools that LEAs intend to serve through the *Reading First* program, the program should be carefully evaluated in relationship to the criteria in this guide. This guide is available at [www.myflorida.com/jrf](http://www.myflorida.com/jrf) in the Reading First section.

The FCRR has conducted a careful review of all curriculums that are on the current state adopted list. Although all of these curricula are aligned with the Sunshine State Standards, they do not all meet the criteria outlined in the previous paragraph equally well. By the same token, there may be other reading programs suitable for use in *Reading First* schools that did not apply for state adoption, and that were not on the adopted list. The curriculum adoption committee for Florida was charged with selecting high quality programs that would be appropriate for schools in Florida with very diverse instructional needs. The schools eligible for *Reading First* funds serve a population of children that are less diverse than in the state as a whole. In addition, the criteria for reading programs outlined in *Reading First* documents are somewhat more restrictive than the criteria used by Florida’s adoption committee. A reading instructional program appropriate for a given school is one that provides classroom instruction appropriate for the majority of children in the class. Thus, different reading programs may be more or less appropriate for different schools, depending on the instructional needs of the majority of children in the school. Programs that provide less explicit and systematic instruction and less carefully aligned reading materials, or that provide less powerful and direct support to teachers in the use of explicit instructional strategies, are less appropriate for use in schools receiving *Reading First* funds.

The Florida requires *Reading First* schools to adopt core reading programs for all grades between kindergarten and third grade that implement the elements of scientifically based reading research and are consistent with the needs of the majority of their students for several reasons.

First, research has established that teaching reading to children who have difficulties learning is a very complex process. “The demands of the phonologic, alphabetic, semantic, and syntactic

systems of written language require a careful schedule and sequence of prioritized objectives, explicit strategies, and scaffolds that support students' initial learning and transfer of knowledge and skills to other contexts. The requirements of curriculum construction and instructional design that effectively move children through the 'learning to read' stage to the 'reading to learn' stage are simply too important to leave to the judgement of individuals. The better the core addresses instructional priorities, the less teachers will need to supplement and modify instruction for the majority of learners." (Simmons & Kame'enui 2002, p. 2).

Second, we believe that a well developed curriculum that blends explicit instructional strategies within a coherent instructional design acts as an important scaffold to guide teacher behaviors so they will be more consistent with the principles of effective instruction outlined in this document and other *Reading First* documents. Although teachers require broad and deep professional development to help them adapt their instruction to the needs of all children, a high-quality core reading program can help to ensure that the essential components of reading skill are systematically taught from kindergarten through third grade across all classrooms in a school. As high quality programs are implemented with increasingly high fidelity across all classrooms, schools move toward greater consistency in the provision of high quality classroom instruction in reading for all children.

The LEAs may document the validity of their choice of reading programs for *Reading First* schools in either of two ways: 1) provide scientifically valid evidence that the program is effective at the grade levels being served, and with children whose general characteristics are similar to those being served in *Reading First* schools or 2) provide evidence that the program has been carefully reviewed, and that it contains the instructional elements and characteristics described above and in the "consumer's guide" by Simmons and Kame'enui 2002. In addition to these criteria, any reading program used in *Reading First* schools must meet all the Sunshine State Standards for reading programs in grades K-3. The requirement for a common core reading program in grades K-3 does not mean that it must be the same program for all four grade levels. Schools may select different programs for use at different grade levels, as long as all the teachers at a given grade level are committed to using the same program. This provision is made to accommodate schools that may elect to use specific programs that provide particularly powerful support for reading instruction at a given grade level, but that may not be designed to provide a full program of instruction across all grades from K-3.

One strategy that LEAs should be careful to avoid is to choose supplemental programs that can be "layered" on top of non-research based programs that are already in use. For example, if a school is currently using a core reading program that does not meet the criteria for research-based instruction outline in this guidance document, it is not sufficient to supplement the program with "add-on" programs in order to make up for deficiencies in the core reading program. This practice too frequently produces fragmented instruction that is not well organized and coherent, and it is specifically prohibited in the federal *Reading First* guidance materials.

3. *How will LEAs ensure that all instructional materials used to support reading instruction in grades K-3 are consistent with scientifically based research?* The requirement here is to provide documentation in support of instructional materials used for K-3 children that go beyond the core reading program. These may include materials for supplemental and intervention programs for

struggling readers that are integrated with the comprehensive core reading program, or they may include materials and programs, including technology, to provide additional support in reading growth for all children.

The LEAs may document the validity of their choice of instructional materials for *Reading First* schools in the same way they provided evidence about their choice of core reading programs: 1) provide scientifically valid evidence that the program is effective at the grade levels being served, and with children whose general characteristics are similar to those being served in *Reading First* schools or 2) provide evidence that the program has been carefully reviewed, and that its instructional content and methods are consistent with scientifically based research in reading.

*4. How will LEAs ensure that strong leadership is provided for all schools served by their Reading First application?* LEAs must describe the leadership structure and roles that will ensure high quality implementation of their *Reading First* program.

For example, who will provide overall leadership for *Reading First* efforts at the district level? Because only 3.5% of the money from *Reading First* grants can be held at the district level for administrative purposes, it is likely that districts will have to use local funds to provide at least part of the leadership required to implement LEA *Reading First* plans. Leadership roles at the LEA level should involve such activities as: 1) providing technical assistance to schools in the evaluation of instructional materials and assessments that meet both state standards and the standards of scientifically based research in reading; 2) helping schools with setting goals and benchmarks; and, 3) developing budgets related for *Reading First* programs. Central leadership may also be required to assist schools that do not make adequate progress in the first two years of their *Reading First* efforts to make adjustments to their program so that they will qualify for continuing *Reading First* dollars after the third year.

LEAs should also specify how they will ensure that leadership at the school level is knowledgeable about the essential components of effective reading programs as well as the specific instructional programs and materials used in their buildings. More specifically, there must be personnel in place at the LEA or school level who can provide leadership to: 1) coordinate evaluation of school progress toward *Reading First* goals; 2) analyze and interpret achievement data; and 3) make school and classroom decisions based on continuous progress monitoring of student achievement data. The *Just Read, Florida!* Leadership Conference will be held annually for the first three years to train principals and other instructional leaders in the scientific base for effective reading programs, in the implementation and management process, and in methods of progress monitoring and data based decision making. However, LEAs should also specify their plan for ensuring that building principals are adequately prepared and supported in their roles as instructional leaders in their schools. The leadership plan for *Reading First* schools should also describe their policies and plans to promote continuity of leadership at the school level.

In the section on professional development in this document, the role of *Reading First* coaches is explained, and LEAs are expected to budget funds from their grant to provide an adequate number of coaches for the schools being served by the grant. The coaches can assist in providing

leadership to *Reading First* efforts at both the LEA and individual school level. Their first responsibility is to provide direct, classroom-based professional development for teachers through modeling of instruction and feedback to teachers. They can also assist LEAs in identifying specific needs for professional development across schools in the district, and they can participate in planning such district or multiple school professional development experiences. Coaches can also assist principals in developing grade level instructional teams at each school to monitor individual and classroom level progress in reading and to make data based decisions about instruction. Finally, coaches can assist principals and teachers by helping to coordinate the screening, diagnostic, progress monitoring, and outcome assessments that will be part of *Reading First* programs at each school. Please describe in this section how the LEA will use *Reading First* coaches to help manage the implementation of *Reading First* programs in the LEA.

*5. How will districts use Reading First funds to identify professional development providers knowledgeable in scientifically based reading research that can provide high quality and individualized ongoing professional development for teachers of kindergarten through grade 3 and special education teachers of kindergarten through grade 12?*

The state of Florida expects to work cooperatively with school districts receiving *Reading First* funds to provide high-quality professional development to all K-3 classroom teachers in *Reading First* schools and to all K-12 special education teachers in the district. All professional development supported with *Reading First* funds must be based on principles derived from scientific research, as specified in Florida's Professional Development System Evaluation Protocol (based upon the National Staff Development Council's standards) and the draft Reading Program Specifications. Districts must thoroughly describe the contents, contexts, and processes of their district and school-based professional development plans for both initial comprehensive professional development and professional development that is ongoing. Additionally, all professional development must align with the instructional reading program in *Reading First* schools and districts.

The overall state professional development plan for teachers in Florida's *Reading First* schools has three elements: 1) training and support to ensure consistently high fidelity implementations of the core reading instructional program in all K-3 classrooms; 2) ongoing support from coaches and outside experts to provide feedback as new instructional concepts and elements are put into practice; and 3) high quality teacher academies during the summer and professional development programs during the school year to deepen teachers' understanding of the reading process, language structure, individual differences in reading, and the use of assessments to guide instruction.

The teacher academies will, with other programmatic inservice offerings, increase teachers' understanding of the reading process so that they can flexibly adapt instruction to individual student needs. Through local educational agencies skilled at providing professional development, and under the overall direction and coordination of the FLaRE Center, each K-3 and special education teacher from *Reading First* schools will be provided with a four day teacher academy in the summer following the first full year of implementation of the *Reading First* program in their schools. As part of their first year budget, schools should designate funds

to support teacher attendance at these academies. Since academies will be held in close proximity to school locations, travel expenses will be minimal, and the primary cost will be a stipend for teachers to attend. The professional development provided in teacher academies and other inservice offerings have the overall goal of helping teachers acquire sufficiently deep understanding of reading and reading instruction that they will be able to flexibly use a variety of instructional strategies to meet the needs of all of their children.

Additionally, classroom and special education teachers in *Reading First* schools will receive the equivalent of four professional development days in reading during the first year of implementation of their *Reading First* grant. This professional development will be provided under the direction of the regional *Reading First* professional development coordinator who may involve the reading coaches in the planning and delivery of these professional development experiences.

As referenced earlier, Florida's *Reading First* professional development plan requires that all *Reading First* schools designate part of their allocation for the hiring of teacher coaches. The use of coaches in *Reading First* schools is required for three reasons. First, our current evaluation of *Reading Excellence Act* programs indicated that schools that used coaches as part of the plan had consistently higher levels of implementation than those that did not. Second, coaches who possess special expertise in scientifically based reading instruction are the best way to ensure follow-up for concepts and principals of instruction that are introduced in group level academies and inservice programs. Thirdly, this coach is the link that coordinates the state professional development plan with the district professional development plan.

These teacher coaches should be excellent teachers who will receive special training in the core reading programs being used by *Reading First* schools, as well as special training in the principles of reading instruction supported by scientifically based research in reading. This training, both initial comprehensive and follow-up, will be provided by the regional *Reading First* professional development coordinators as directed by the Triangle. One of the functions of the coaches will be to regularly visit classrooms to model lessons and provide instructional feedback to improve the overall fidelity of implementation of the core reading program in the school by classroom teachers. As these reading coaches acquire special expertise in the implementation of high quality programs, they will become a resource to ensure that, as new teachers come into each school, they will receive adequate support for high quality implementation of the school's reading program. Depending upon local needs, schools may choose to support one coach per school or to assign coaches to more than one school.

Coaches cannot be assigned to directly provide instruction to children on an ongoing or "substitute" basis. However, they can provide model lessons, help schools develop their instructional teams, and work to coordinate reading assessments. In fact, they will receive special training in the assessments required for *Reading First* schools, and they can help to coordinate these assessments and train others in proper test administration procedures. They can also provide consultation to principals on the overall elements and operation of a successful reading program in their schools.

The district has a significant and indispensable role in collaborating with the state to carry out the previously described state plan as well as creating a plan based on scientifically based reading research for each teacher in a *Reading First* school. Section 231.600, Florida Statutes, requires each district to develop a Professional Development System that is linked with personnel and student needs, and the law further requires school principals to maintain an Individual Professional Development Plan (IPDP) for each instructional employee. The teacher's individual plan must be based upon an assessment of student learning needs, and this analysis of student achievement data is essential to the creation of each teacher's professional development plan. In preparing the district *Reading First* professional development plan, districts should incorporate the analysis of individual professional development into each teacher's plan, ensuring that all teachers are met at their current level of expertise in order to address student needs, rather than providing the same "cookie cutter" professional development to all.

Charting teacher professional development growth, school administrator professional development management, and growth in student reading performance folds into the content, context, and process requirements of the Department's Professional Development System Evaluation Protocol. As part of Florida's professional development system, this protocol utilizes the NSDC's Standards as a framework for district evaluation of professional development and is incorporated as part of the Draft Reading Program Specifications.

In addition, the professional development plan created by a district in collaboration with the teacher and principal must provide a description of the ongoing scientifically based professional development in reading. This process will ensure that all teachers are appropriately supported in their professional growth. The district must describe in the *Reading First* proposal how they will address this ongoing professional development at the school and district level and how they will recruit and use individuals who are highly knowledgeable of scientifically based reading research. The district must document the validity of their choice of professional development providers in the proposal by providing scientifically valid evidence that the provider is effective for teachers and the grade level they teach and also provide evidence that the credentials of the provider have been carefully reviewed and found to be aligned to scientifically based reading research. State guidance on how to select appropriate inservice providers knowledgeable in scientifically based reading research is offered to schools and districts through the indicators in Strands 1, 2, and 3 of the Draft Reading Program Specifications. These specifications adhere to the expectations for content, context, and process in the Professional Development Standards of the National Staff Development Council. The standards can be accessed at [www.nsd.org](http://www.nsd.org).

The review process, coordinated by the FCRR, will evaluate the evidence provided by the district in the proposal regarding the plan for professional development. Further, as a result of Department's Professional Development System Evaluation Protocol, it is anticipated that best practices will be collected from districts in the area of reading to determine effective programs.

The district must submit a strong plan in the *Reading First* proposal indicating their understanding of scientifically based reading research in instruction, the selection of well-versed and qualified providers, (including the reading coach) and the provision of appropriate and differentiated professional development that is of sufficient length to positively impact teacher behavior pursuant to recommendations in *Every Child Reading: A Professional Development*

*Guide.* The LEA must describe a variety of professional development activities in the plan that will meet individual needs better than a “one-size-fits all” approach. Activities may include study groups, collaborative teams, individual projects, peer observations, demonstrations, apprenticeships, classroom research projects, observation and feedback from those who are more expert and pilot programs. The facilitators of these activities must be highly knowledgeable in scientifically based reading research.

The district must also describe how the professional development needs of teachers who have difficulty with classroom implementation and who need additional assistance with skills and strategies will be met. According to *Every Child Reading: A Professional Development Guide*, for a teacher to learn a new behavior and effectively transfer it to the classroom, several steps are involved: understanding the theory and rationale for the new content, observing a model in action, practicing the new behavior in a safe context and trying out the behavior with peer support in the classroom. This model reinforces the efficacy of classroom based professional development. Attending conferences and workshops without the classroom follow-up component does not provide adequate time and opportunity to impact change in teacher behaviors; teachers need ongoing support of the reading coach, the principal and other proficient peers in order to build capacity for differentiating instruction, to refine instructional delivery, and increase effectiveness. This guide can be accessed at [www.learningfirst.org](http://www.learningfirst.org).

In summary, the activities in the state’s professional plan are designed to support teachers in their professional growth, but the *Reading First* district must extend, enhance, and offer extensive and additional ongoing professional development that is comprehensive, evidence-based and individualized to a teacher’s needs.

*6. How will districts provide high quality technical assistance related to identifying professional development needs of individual schools, setting goals and benchmarks, and budgeting to participating schools?*

In the previous section on district and school based professional development, the infrastructure for providing professional development was delineated. In order to ensure that schools are receiving professional development that is high quality and specific to their needs, LEAs must describe the technical assistance that they will provide to ensure that this happens. This assistance might include, but not be limited to, assistance with:

- data analysis at the school level in order to inform instruction
- writing a professional development plan with goals and benchmarks
- budgeting to maximize the quantity and quality of professional development at the school site
- conducting a needs assessment for professional development
- promoting whole-school adoption of effective methods
- supporting action research by providing materials/books
- coordination with the *Reading First* coaches, assisting with scheduling, substitute pay as needed, and planning

The support of the LEA is a critical factor in ensuring quality of professional development at the school site. The department will continue to provide guidance and direction, as stated in the previous section, but the LEA must also play a major role in this partnership.

*7. How will LEAs and schools provide extra instructional support to children who lag behind in the development of critical reading skills?*

The purpose of monitoring progress in early reading skills is to identify children who may be in need of more intensive instruction, and to monitor the effectiveness of the special instruction that they receive. The *Reading First* plan submitted by each school district must identify how more intensive instruction will be provided to children identified as not making adequate progress in learning to read. This additional instruction could begin as early as the first semester of kindergarten for some children, and it should be available for as long as children need it in order to maintain adequate progress in learning to read. Specific issues that must be addressed are: 1) how will children be assigned to groups for additional instruction; 2) who will provide the additional instruction; 3) how will districts ensure that assignment to groups is flexible, and in keeping with the instructional needs of children; and 4) how will districts ensure that the additional instruction provided to children at-risk for reading difficulties is of consistently high quality and in keeping with principles derived from scientific research on reading.

The state of Florida already requires that any child who achieves below the 25<sup>th</sup> percentile on a measure of early reading ability receive special interventions through an Academic Improvement Plan (AIP). Thus, these requirements of the *Reading First* program are consistent with existing regulations in Florida. However, it is our expectation that schools applying for *Reading First* funding will propose ways to improve the interventions that are currently being provided to low performing children under existing requirements.

In this part of the application, it is particularly important for districts to show how state and local funds and resources from other programs will be used to support effective instruction in *Reading First* schools. For example, this is an ideal place to show how special education funds, Title I and Title II funds, as well as other support programs such as AmeriCorps personnel and school volunteers, will be integrated within the overall plan to prevent reading difficulties in young children attending *Reading First* schools.

The clear emphasis of *Reading First* is developing ways to provide extra support for learning to read within the context of the classroom. To quote from the federal *Reading First* guidance document, “*Reading First* acknowledges that the most important teaching venue for early readers is the early elementary classroom, and it is therefore in the classroom where the program will build and support the scientifically based reading foundation. *Reading First* does not aim to remediate small sub-groups of children in pullout programs, or to provide instruction in any setting outside the main classroom environment. *Reading First* seeks to embed the essential components of reading instruction into all elements of the primary, mainstream K-3 teaching structures of each state.” In other words, *Reading First* plans should develop ways to train and utilize special education teachers, AmeriCorps personnel, America Reads volunteers, parent volunteers, paraprofessional aides, other resource teachers, or other personnel to enhance instructional effectiveness with the regular classroom environment in which the child is expected

to learn to read. Although *Reading First* funds cannot be used to pay salaries for these support personnel, they can certainly be used to provide initial and ongoing professional development and training for them.

8. *What specific provision will districts make to provide the extra instructional support required by many LEP children in learning to read?*

(Districts must detail the plan used by *Reading First* schools to meet the specific instructional needs of LEP children.)

In this section, districts must explain their plan to address the specific instructional needs in reading for children with limited proficiency in English. Elements of the plan should address: 1) how will the instructional efforts of LEP teachers in schools be coordinated with those of classroom teachers to build reading and language skills for all students; 2) what provisions for extra, or more intensive instruction will be made for LEP students who are lagging behind in the development of critical reading and language skills; 3) how districts will ensure that teachers apply instructional strategies that are sensitive to the unique instructional needs of LEP students; 4) what plan districts will implement to align the reading instruction that takes place in the LEP classroom with the one in the general education classroom; 5) how districts will ensure that LEP teachers receive professional development in reading instruction for LEP students; 6) how districts will ensure that general education teachers are trained in LEP strategies specifically related to reading instruction; and 7) how LEP will students be assessed to monitor progress.

In their review of the literature titled “Improving Schooling for Language-Minority Children: A Research Agenda,” August and Hakuta (1997) found that the schools that were most successful in increasing reading skills among their LEP students were those that had high expectations, a climate of acceptance, and whose staff celebrated cultural differences. Districts should describe how they would integrate these features in their *Reading First* schools.

9. *How will activities and programs proposed for funding in Reading First schools build on, expand, enhance, or alter activities already begun in the districts whether from Reading Excellence Act Awards or from other means?*

In this section, districts that have received a *Reading Excellence Act* award must show how activities and programs to be supported by *Reading First* extend and improve the programs begun with support from the earlier *Reading Excellence Act* award. Additionally, any other ongoing programs that are consistent with scientifically based reading research can be expanded and improved with *Reading First* funds. The district must show how efforts supported by a *Reading First* award will be integrated with, complementary to, or enhance activities that are already part of each *Reading First* school’s approach to the prevention of reading difficulties.

10. *How will activities and programs supported with Reading First money be coordinated and integrated with programs and activities supported by Title I funds and other revenue sources?*

*Reading First* funds may be used to provide increased professional development, to purchase instructional materials including technology, to provide valid and reliable assessments for screening, diagnosis, progress monitoring, and outcomes, and to build a statewide accountability

and leadership structure. They may not be used to pay the salaries of instructional personnel who provide instruction in the classroom. Thus, to be maximally effective, *Reading First* activities must be coordinated to support and improve the effectiveness of *instructional personnel that are supported through other funding sources*. In particular, districts must describe how *Reading First* funds will be used to increase the effectiveness of instructional personnel funded through Title I. School districts are required to integrate funding for the *Reading First* programs because of the declining balance funding model. Districts will need to be descriptive about how *Reading First* money will be coordinated and integrated with programs and activities supported by Title I and Title II funds and other state and local revenue sources.

Additionally, federal funds allocated to school districts under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) will include a portion of discretionary funds that may be used, at the discretion of the school district, to supplement activities and programs funded with *Reading First* funds.

11. *How will the school district use evaluation data to make decisions about interventions and/or discontinuation of schools that are not making significant progress toward their achievement goals in reading?*

Districts can satisfy the requirement to evaluate their *Reading First* programs by agreeing to do four things in a timely and accurate manner. First, they must agree to provide data from progress monitoring and end of year outcome assessments in a timely fashion to the Florida Center for Reading Research. The FCRR will develop and train district personnel in test administration and efficient methods for organizing the testing with *Reading First* schools. Districts must agree to designate assessment personnel from existing resources or to use *Reading First* funds to pay for additional personnel to accomplish the progress monitoring and year-end assessments. To help districts plan for the costs of participating in the evaluation and progress monitoring assessments we have outlined below the personnel needs, training schedule, and assessment plan to be used in *Reading First* schools. Districts must agree to follow this plan in order to be considered for a *Reading First* grant.

As soon as possible after an LEA has been notified of its award and has identified personnel to serve as coaches, the coaches, along with other individuals who will serve on assessment teams (i.e. school psychologists, speech and language pathologists, retired teachers, etc.), will be trained to give the progress monitoring instruments for the September assessment (training will take six hours on one day). Districts must identify or hire five assessment team members for every five schools they have in their *Reading First* grant. Master trainers who have had extensive experience training testers in these procedures will conduct the training.

During the first two weeks of September, or as close to that as possible, the initial progress assessment will be made. Coaches will be responsible for coordinating and assisting with the assessment at their school(s). We estimate that the testing will be completed, including “make up” testing of students absent when the assessment team was at their school, during a two week period. Each assessment team will be responsible for testing all K-3 students at five *Reading First* schools. Certain members of the team will be assigned to enter the data on the web-based forms for FCRR.

During October, specially selected members of the district level assessment teams will receive training from master trainers to become assessment trainers themselves (1-2 days of training). During November, these newly trained trainers (district level trainers) will train an assessment team for each *Reading First* School in the district. The five members of the school based assessment team can be drawn from support staff or hired specifically to conduct the assessment in December. During the next three measurement periods (December, February, April/May) the school based assessment team, under the direction of the coach assigned to the school, will administer the three progress monitoring instruments and enter the data to FCRR's website.

These district level trainers represent a permanent increase in capacity for the districts receiving *Reading First* grants, because they will be available to train personnel from non-*Reading First* schools in administration of the progress monitoring tests should they choose to participate in the assessment and report program conducted by the FCRR. Additionally, they will be available to train individuals that become part of the staff of *Reading First* schools after the first year of implementation.

During March, personnel from the FCRR will train the district-based progress monitoring trainers in administration procedures for the end of year outcome measures in grades K-3. This training will most likely take place as a teleconference.

During April, the district based trainers will train an assessment team for each *Reading First* school in the district in procedures for administering the end of year assessments that are not part of the progress monitoring system.

During May, the school assessment team will administer the end of year assessments including the progress monitoring measures. The machine scored tests will be sent to the publisher for scoring, and the individually administered tests will be scored and entered into the FCRR website. Scores from the machine scored tests will be reported back to the school and directly to the FCRR by the test publisher.

In addition to agreeing to participate in this progress monitoring and outcome assessment procedure, districts applying for *Reading First* funds must agree to fill out and return specific implementation surveys that will be sent out periodically by the FCRR to address specific questions about *Reading First* implementations as they arise from experience. They must also agree to participate in site visits that will be conducted at a sample of schools that will be randomly selected to represent the geographic and demographic diversity of *Reading First* schools. Districts must agree to provide yearly implementation reports that will be structured by the FCRR in order to ensure that uniform descriptive data about each *Reading First* program in the state is provided for overall evaluation purposes. It will be the responsibility of the districts to ensure that both assessment data and report information are submitted in an accurate and timely fashion. Finally, districts must agree to cooperate with state or national level external evaluation agencies who may need to plan a site visit or request information in order to complete their evaluations.

If districts agree to administer and report the results from common progress monitoring and outcome assessments, fill out and return implementation surveys, participate cooperatively in site visits, and turn in yearly implementation reports to the FCRR, and cooperate with state or national level external evaluation agencies, they will have satisfied basic requirements to evaluate the effectiveness of their *Reading First* programs. If LEAs wish to propose additional procedures to evaluate the effectiveness of their programs, they are free to do so.

In addition to providing these evaluation data, however, districts must also have a clear plan to make decisions about their *Reading First* schools based on evaluation outcomes. The goal we are working toward in Florida is to have every child reading at or above grade level within 10 years. Florida has proposed yearly achievement standards for *Reading First* schools as a group that will lead to the achievement of this goal. These standards were developed by considering current levels of achievement in schools likely to qualify for *Reading First* grants, so that starting points for individual schools may vary considerably from these average figures. Some schools have farther to go to meet the goal than others, and their timetable for progress needs to reflect those differences. The average achievement standards proposed for all *Reading First* schools are given in the table below.

Overall Percentage of Students Reading At or Above grade Level in the Next Ten Years										
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10
<b>Kindergarten</b>	55%	60%	65%	70%	75%	80%	85%	90%	95%	100%
<b>First Grade</b>	50%	55%	65%	70%	75%	80%	85%	90%	95%	100%
<b>Second Grade</b>	45%	50%	60%	70%	75%	80%	85%	90%	95%	100%
<b>Third Grade</b>	40%	45%	55%	65%	75%	80%	85%	90%	95%	100%

Whether students meet the grade level standard will be determined by the primary test of reading skills administered at the end of the year. At the end of the kindergarten year, this will involve a combined index based on measures of phonemic awareness, letter knowledge, and vocabulary. At the end of first, second, and third grade, it will be based on the reading comprehension score from the standardized measure of reading comprehension given at the end of the year.

If a school proposed for *Reading First* funding has current achievement figures substantially below the average for all *Reading First* schools, its achievement standards at each of the next 10 years would start lower, but would need to accelerate faster, than the average in order to reach the ultimate goal of all children reading on grade level by the end of year 10. An example of such a table of achievement standards might look like the one given below.

Overall Percentage of Students Reading At or Above grade Level in the Next Ten Years										
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10
<b>Kindergarten</b>	45%	55%	65%	70%	75%	80%	85%	90%	95%	100%
<b>First Grade</b>	40%	50%	60%	70%	75%	80%	85%	90%	95%	100%
<b>Second Grade</b>	35%	45%	55%	65%	75%	80%	85%	90%	95%	100%
<b>Third Grade</b>	25%	35%	45%	55%	65%	75%	85%	90%	95%	100%

Districts are required to present a table of yearly achievement standards for each school in their proposal. These tables can vary to reflect the current levels of reading achievement in each

school, but they should all propose a schedule of improvement that reaches the goal of 100% of children at or above grade level within ten years.

Schools that do not meet their progress indicators at the end of the first year of their *Reading First* program will be identified by the FCRR during the summer of the first year of the *Reading First* program. Personnel from the State technical assistance team will meet with district representatives to formulate a technical assistance and support plan for any schools that did not meet their achievement goals after the first year. The technical assistance plan will be implemented by the LEA who may call upon the state technical assistance team for support. The same procedure will be followed at the end of year two of the *Reading First* grant. If a school does not meet its achievement standards for reading at or above grade level by the end of the third year of their *Reading First* grant, the LEA will be asked to make a determination about whether the school should be continued as part of their *Reading First* grant for the next three years.

As part of the *Reading First* application, LEAs must indicate some of the ways they might intervene with schools that are not making adequate progress in accomplishing their achievement standards. They must also describe a clear plan to make decisions about whether schools that do not accomplish their achievement standards by the end of the third year will be discontinued from the *Reading First* grant or provided additional technical assistance. The clear intent of the federal *Reading First* program is that schools that are not making satisfactory progress toward the goal of “no child left behind” in early reading by the end of the third year of the grant should not receive further funding from *Reading First*. Thus, LEAs must clearly describe the procedure they will follow to implement this policy.

*12. How will Reading First funds be used to improve access to engaging reading material in both the classroom and school libraries?*

In this section, districts must clearly describe their plan to satisfy the *Reading First* requirements regarding access to print. Students need much independent reading practice to accompany reading instruction. In the absence of a wealth of reading materials, the effectiveness of an elementary school’s reading program is compromised. State guidance for student access to print is provided to districts and schools through the Reading Program Specifications document.

District plans must illustrate the means for upholding the intent of Strand 4 of the Specifications (Reading Text Materials and Resources) in effectively creating a school and classroom print-rich environment that supports much independent reading for all students throughout the school year. The specifications for attaining a print-rich environment include: 1) a wide assortment of engaging text materials to read for a variety of purposes; 2) frequent accessibility to text materials; 3) a wide reading range of text materials that align with individual student reading development; and 4) an up-to-date quality collection.

*Reading First* funding must be used to increase the collection, availability, and usage of engaging and appropriate reading material. District budgets must reserve at least 5% of the total *Reading First* budget for the sole purpose and purchase of books for classroom libraries. The grant narrative must specifically describe how *Reading First* funding will increase classroom

collections in *Reading First* classrooms and provide a description of how the collection of classroom libraries at *Reading First* schools will match the individual reading needs and preferences of all students in order to offer equal access to print. Specific strategies for increasing the volume of diverse reading materials, such as expository texts, are appropriate for this section.

Proposals may also describe strategies to foster literacy and increase student access to print throughout *Reading First* schools. They may describe both the strategy and the frequency of providing student opportunities to access information in the library media center. Additionally, there may be a description of how the district and *Reading First* schools will promote the library media as a learning resource and information center so that both students and their families have access to print.