

November 2007

Nebraska Reading First Fall 2007 Report

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GREAT PLAINS INSTITUTE
OF READING AND WRITING

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SCIENCES

UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA LINCOLN

2007-08 FALL REPORT

NEBRASKA READING FIRST

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of Reading & Writing
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

OVERVIEW

In the Fall Report we provide an overview of student achievement based on fall assessments for the 2007-2008 school year in Nebraska Reading First schools. First, we provide a comparison of student demographics with state averages as well as comparisons across the past three years of implementation. Next, we compare student fall scores from the 2006-2007 school year to the current year at each grade level. At the end of each grade level section a comparison of student risk levels is made between Round I and Round II schools. All other achievement scores we report here are aggregates of Round I and Round II performance, while the risk level comparisons present Round I and Round II separately. We have made a conscious effort to make this report accessible and focused.

Please direct all questions to the evaluation team.

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STUDENT POPULATION

Student characteristics in 2007-08 vary slightly from previous years. The addition of Round II schools last year changed some demographics dramatically (See Table 1).

The percentage of English Language Learners has dropped slightly from last year, although it still remains higher than the state average. The percentage of students qualifying for special education has fluctuated over the past three years. While part of the fluctuations are linked to changes in reporting practices, we are doing our best to gather the most accurate data from schools to improve our ability to understand the impact of Reading First on students with disabilities. The percentage of students qualifying for free/reduced lunch in Reading First schools has increased consistently over the past three years, and is well above the state average as measured in 2006-2007. The overall percentages of African American and Hispanic students have dropped slightly, while the percentage of Native American students has increased slightly.

Table 1: Student demographics in Nebraska RF schools*

	<u>2006-2007</u>	<u>2005-2006</u>	<u>2006-2007</u>	<u>2007-2008</u>
	<u>State</u>	<u>Round I</u>	<u>Round I & II</u>	<u>Round I & II</u>
English Learners	6.49%	3.50%	11.90%	9.84%
Special Education	14.95%	7.20%	4.70%	12.18%
Free/Reduced Lunch	36.42%	43.00%	54.53%	57.51%
African American	7.70%	20.80%	26.38%	25.98%
Hispanic	12.20%	14.10%	24.43%	19.01%
Native American	1.70%	2.10%	1.53%	2.57%
White (non Hispanic)	76.50%	62.00%	46.90%	51.39%

* Numbers may not add to 100% because of rounding and overlapping categories

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

KINDERGARTEN

Kindergarten students are assessed each fall in two basic literacy skills that research identified as underlying literacy development: early phonemic awareness using Initial Sound Fluency (ISF) and letter knowledge using Letter Naming Fluency (LNF), both subtests of the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Literacy (DIBELS).

Figure 1 compares the early phonemic awareness scores (ISF) this fall with last fall's scores. The slightly lower average score seen in this year's performance is not significantly different from last year's. It is also not linked in any way to previous Reading First efforts as these students are entering the K-12 school system for the first time. However, both years' average scores are above the accepted benchmark of eight correct responses.

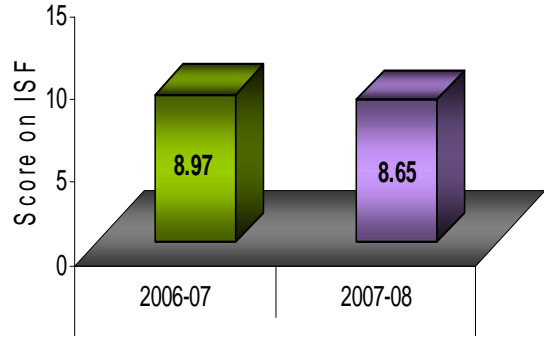


Figure 1

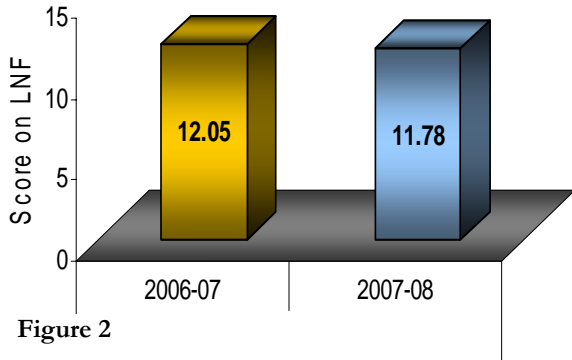


Figure 2

Kindergarten students' proficiency in letter naming (LNF) is above the benchmark (see Figure 2). As in beginning phonemic awareness the scores are slightly lower than last year, but not significantly so. While both early phonemic awareness and letter knowledge scores indicate that kindergartners are demonstrating early proficiency with sounds and letters, this is only a starting point and teachers need to continue supporting development of student skills in these areas.

Figure 3 compares kindergarten baseline performance in Round I and Round II schools using letter knowledge (LNF) as the criteria for determining risk level. About half of students in both Round I and Round II schools performed at or above grade level

expectations (low risk). Of the remaining students, more Round I students were in the at-risk category (30%) compared to 20% in Round II schools. Round I schools had nearly 19% of their students in the some risk category, while a larger percentage (nearly 29%) of Round II school students fell in this risk category.

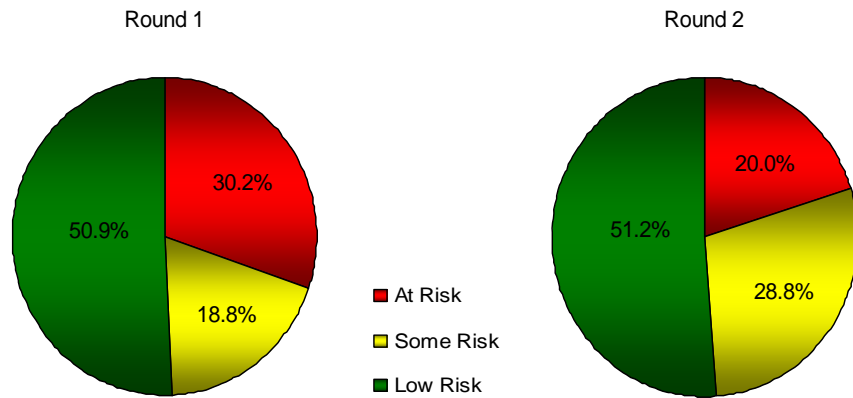


Figure 3

Results presented here show that kindergarten teachers are faced with considerable challenges. Nearly half of their students are starting their K-12 course with skills that fall below the minimal expectation set for beginning kindergarteners.

FIRST GRADE

As in kindergarten, first grade students are assessed each fall in letter knowledge using Letter Naming Fluency (LNF). First grade students are also assessed in advanced phonemic awareness using Phoneme Segmentation Fluency (PSF), and decoding skills using Nonsense Word Fluency (NWF). Figure 4 presents Fall performance in letter knowledge (LNF) for the last two years. Results in 2007-08 are slightly higher, potentially indicating better transfer from kindergarten. Both years' scores place the average student score in the low risk category.

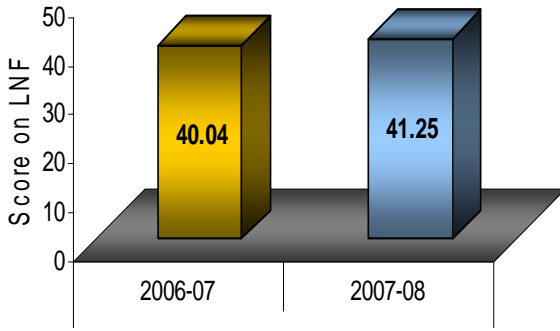


Figure 4

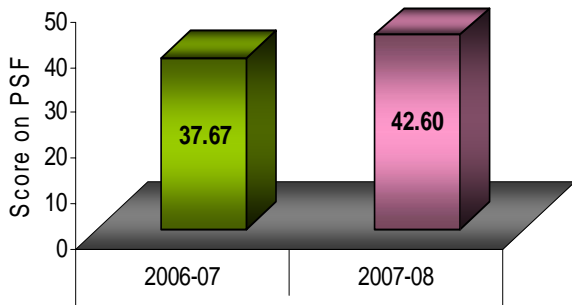


Figure 5

First grade performance in advanced phonemic awareness (PSF) is shown in Figure 5. Scores above 35 on this task indicate established skill in this area of reading development. The scores for first graders this year are significantly higher than last year by seven correct responses. This is a statistically and practically significant result showing that first grade students are acquiring better phonemic awareness in kindergarten and are therefore better prepared to acquire the complex decoding skills that are required in first grade.

First grade decoding performance (NWF) is shown in Figure 6. Fall scores above 24 on this measure place students in the low risk category. While not as large as the change in advanced phonemic awareness scores (PSF), it seems that first graders are starting this year able to decode with increased fluency. All three first grade fall indicators show that kindergarten teachers are successfully teaching basic literacy skills.

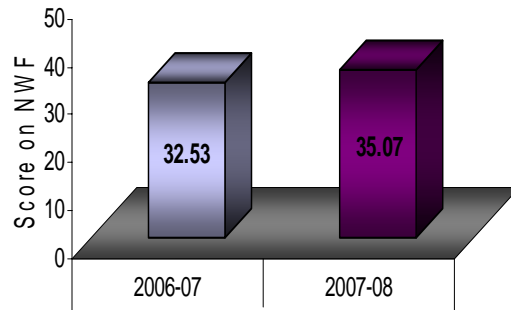


Figure 6

The scores in phonemic awareness and decoding should be considered against the backdrop of skill loss in students between Spring 2007 and Fall 2007. Figure 7 illustrates the drop in letter naming. When fall first grade scores for this

year are compared to spring kindergarten scores last year there is a noticeable decline in student skill level. A lack of reading practice over the summer may account for this. Since the benchmark score for first grade students on LNF is 37, this drop provides a powerful illustration of the important work that first grade teachers must do at the beginning of the year to regain the skills that have diminished over the summer months.

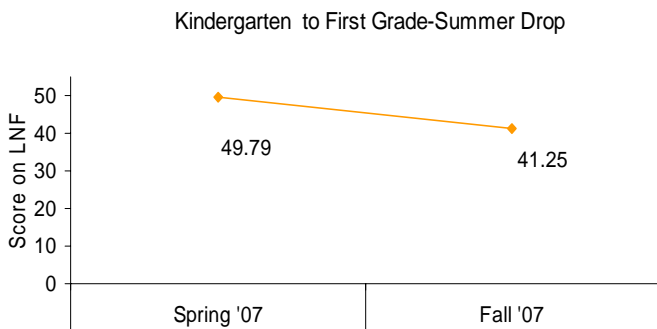


Figure 7

A drop of similar magnitude is seen when comparing first grade scores on advanced phonemic awareness (PSF) from Spring 2007 to Fall 2007 (see Figure 8).

Despite the drops, the overall picture at the beginning of first grade is positive. Figure 9 compares risk level for Round I and Round II schools during the Fall of 2007. More than 70% of students in both rounds scored within the low risk level on the Fall 2007 assessment of advanced phonemic awareness (PSF). However, close to 25% of all 1st grade students in Reading First schools are still at some risk for reading difficulty. There is still a great deal of work to be done in this fundamental skill area.

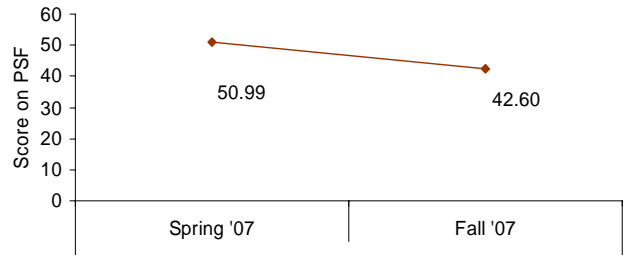


Figure 8

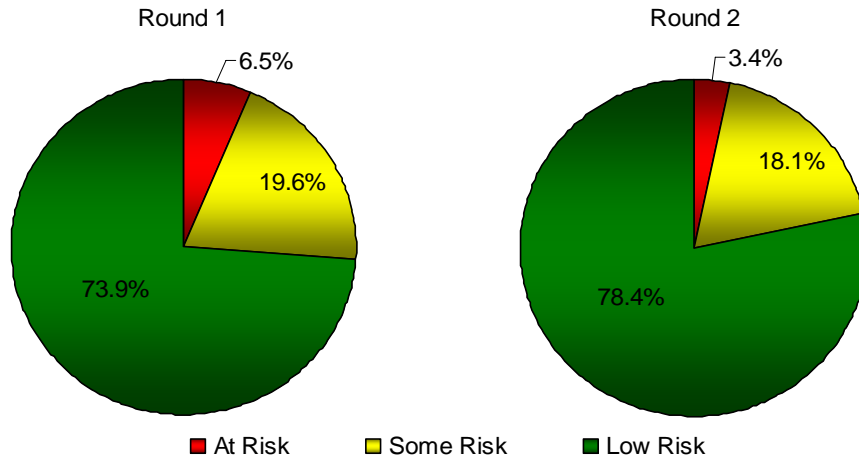


Figure 9

SECOND GRADE

Second grade students are assessed each fall on a decoding task, Nonsense Word Fluency (NWF) and on Oral Reading Fluency (ORF). Figure 10 shows decoding performance in Fall 2006 and Fall 2007. Benchmark for established skill in this area in second grade is a score of 50 words or more per minute. Results show that average scores are well above the established benchmark. This

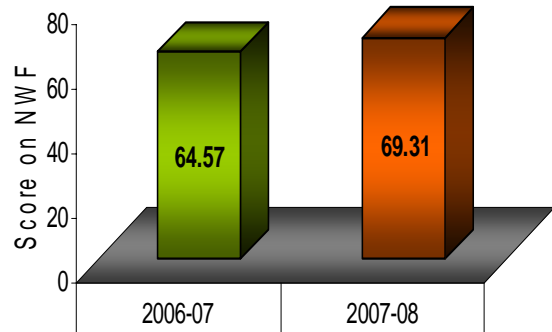


Figure 10

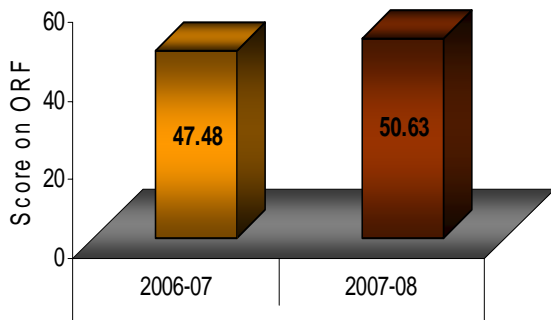


Figure 11

fall's scores reflect an encouraging pattern of improvement in decoding skills as measured by NWF. The improvement is statistically and practically significant. This indicator shows clearly that most

(though not all) students are ready to shift their attention from decoding to oral reading fluency goals.

Oral reading fluency scores (ORF) (see Figure 11) also continue a trend of improvement although less than in decoding. A score of 44 or more places a student at low risk. It appears that first grade teachers are making consistent and steady progress in helping their students develop these skills before they reach second grade. Just as in first grade, comparisons of scores from spring of first grade to fall of second grade show that students experienced a noticeable summer skill loss in decoding (see Figure 12). These setbacks provide further evidence of the impact of the summer break on reading skills. Recovery of these reading skills becomes the first priority for teachers in the fall and may delay the initiation and mastery of new skill development.

Figure 13 shows second grade risk levels for Round I and Round II students in Oral Reading Fluency (ORF). These risk levels are lower than they were in the beginning of the 2006-2007 school year. Reading First students are making steady progress in oral reading fluency. However, there is a pressing need to continue fluency instruction and practice across all Nebraska Reading First schools.

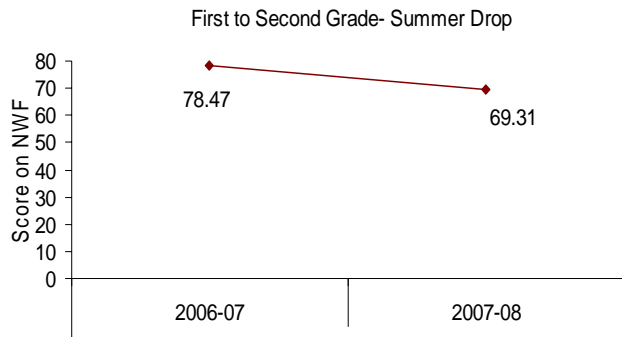


Figure 12

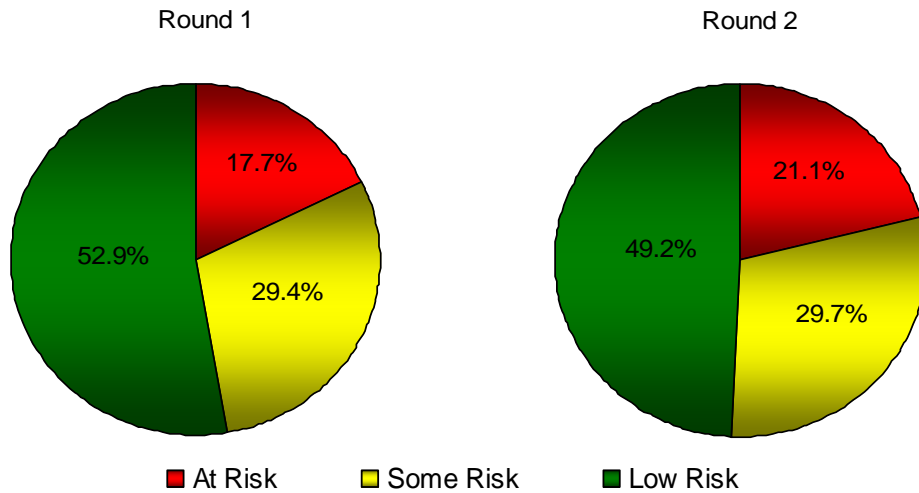


Figure 13

THIRD GRADE

Third grade students are assessed each fall in oral reading fluency (ORF). Figure 14 shows scores on this measure for Fall 2006 and 2007. A score of 77 or more places a student in the low risk category. Scores between 53 and 76 put a student at some risk for developing fluent reading skills. Average scores for Nebraska Reading First students at the beginning of third grade fall beneath the benchmark without a sign of

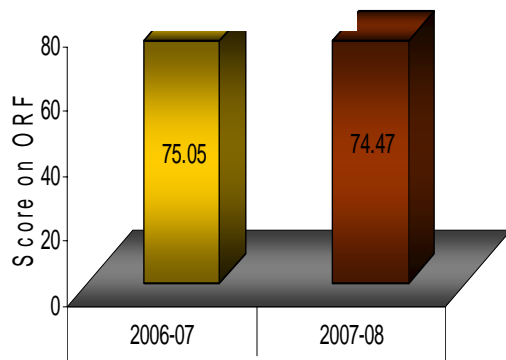


Figure 14

improvement from last year. The slightly lower score in 2007-2008 reading fluency is not statistically significant. It is, however, an indication that improvement in second grade reading fluency did not fully transfer to third grade.

The summer drop between second and third grade is the most dramatic of all the grade levels, highlighting the great challenge that teachers face in the fall of third grade (Figure 15). The impact of the summer months is felt most keenly in reading fluency. Since fluent reading is a crucial skill for comprehension of text, addressing the drop in skills over the summer will give third grade students and their teachers a much better starting point.

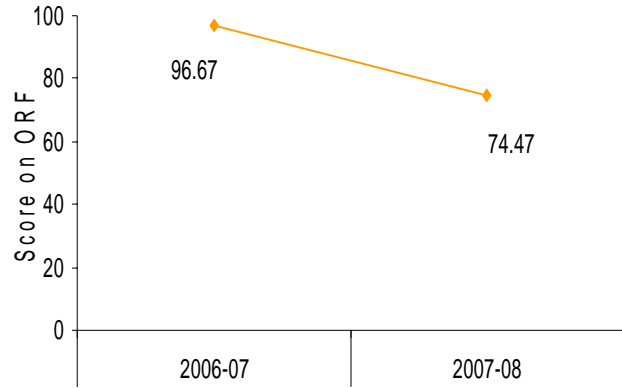


Figure 15

Figure 16 summarizes third grade risk level in Round I and Round II schools based on oral reading fluency scores. More than half of all third grade students in Nebraska Reading First schools are below benchmark for this reading skill. As in second grade, this is a skill that needs persistent, precise instructional attention in Reading First classrooms. The ability to read fluently is an essential prerequisite for comprehension of text. Developing and maintaining this skill becomes a critical and central task for teachers of second and third grade. The drop in scores on this measure between the end of second grade and the beginning of third grade undoubtedly contributes to the level of student risk seen in this comparison, which is similar across both rounds of Nebraska Reading First implementation.

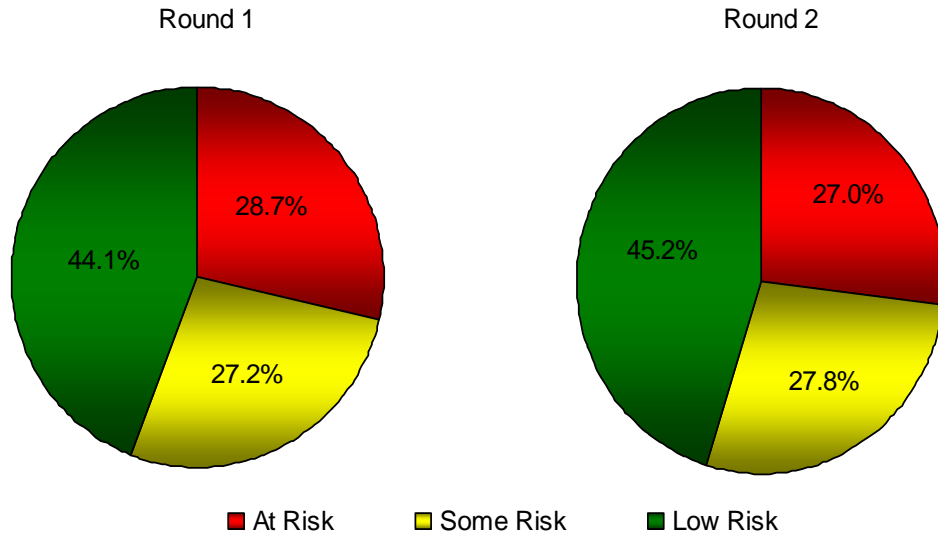


Figure 16

SUMMARY

Fall results show a few important patterns. The first positive is that the impact of Reading First practices is carried over from kindergarten and first grades to the following year. The second important note is that as a result, students in first and second grade are starting their academic year better than previous student cohorts.

Summer reading loss is evident across all grade levels. This problem is not new and has been reported in research and evaluation for over thirty years. The solution has much to do with students focusing on skills over the summer. The nature of effective instructional focus during summer months is not clear in the research literature. What is clear is that extending the school year (as in year-round schools) is not as effective as was hypothesized.

The biggest challenge in Nebraska Reading First schools is third grade students. Third grade students seem to have lost the most over the summer and are far below national averages in reading fluency. This calls for focused instruction in connected texts, combining fluency and comprehension foci. The focus on comprehension must be maintained for two reasons. The first is to avoid reading without comprehension; and the second is that the spring benchmarks for third grade are focused on comprehension and not reading fluency alone.