

New Self-Assessment Questionnaires Help Schools Identify Implementation Issues

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Editor's Note: Site coordinators, school principals, and teacher leaders will be excited to find three new tools designed to assist with the implementation of Reading Recovery and Descubriendo la Lectura. These individual self-assessment questionnaires provide sites with questions that can be used to explore needs, monitor progress, and collect formative evaluation. The questionnaires may be used in part or in combination to explore issues including communication, site and district coordination, teaching quality, efficiency issues, and performance outcomes. These tools have received great reviews from the pilot data gathered during the past year, as documented in this illustration received from Mary Jackson.

Last summer, Dr. Douglas Reeves, founder of The Leadership and Learning Center, was in our district speaking about change and school improvement. A major point he underscored was that if schools want to improve, they must have deep implementation of a few initiatives. As he put it, schools need to have deep implementation of what they know to be the right thing to do. In Fort Bend ISD for the past 14 years, one of our “right things” has been Reading Recovery, and from the start we have endeavored to make sure our implementation is strong and steady. Listening to Reeves, we felt validated for the work we had put into strengthening our implementation of Reading Recovery along the way, but

his words also reminded us that this work is often complex and requires constant diligence.

Given this background, our district was pleased to be one of the districts asked to pilot the draft self-assessment questionnaires developed by the North American Trainers Group (NATG) Implementation Committee. As strong supporters and partial instigators of these documents, we welcomed an opportunity to expand the scope of our analysis in Reading Recovery in order to improve our implementation. While the National Data Evaluation Center (NDEC) data have been quite helpful in our program analysis and evaluation, we also felt a need to look beyond the formal data to explore additional factors impacting our results.

An initial review of the documents by our Reading Recovery team of site coordinator, teacher leaders, and principals resulted in high marks for the content of the documents. Everyone agreed that the topics addressed were quite relevant to our implementation and worthy of study. The separate documents for site coordinators, teacher leaders, and principals made sense in terms of lenses through which to study our work. Comments included the fact that the self-assessments targeted to specific groups would help “build ownership” in terms of the monitoring and evaluation function of our implementation.

The teacher leaders and I immediately saw usefulness in these documents as monitoring tools to be used in our monthly meetings and annual retreat. Ours is a complex implementation involving many schools that represent a wide span of diversity in terms of student populations, poverty levels, teacher quality and years of experience, etc. The self-assessments will help us think more clearly and deeply about how to address this diversity in a meaningful way.

One of the first things I did as site coordinator was complete the Site Coordinator Self-Assessment. At the same time, the teacher leaders completed the draft teacher leader document. Our responses pointed to several clear themes. While we have a comprehensive, systematized process in place for sustaining and improving our implementation, our answers reminded us of the need for continuous monitoring in our implementation efforts. Some potential threats to our ongoing success included teacher burnout, the addition of new administrators who “inherit” Reading Recovery, and the marginal results of some of our highest-poverty campuses. At the same time, our responses pointed to several well-defined strengths that we agreed can help us address these threats. In particular, we have done a good job of maintaining communication about our implementation among campus administrators and teachers. Our school literacy teams continue to serve us well.

As site coordinator, one area became vividly clear to me through this initial use of the self-assessments. Our teacher leaders were working really hard. Our district is large — population-wise and geographically. We needed to think of ways to more efficiently and effectively monitor teacher lessons and provide support where needed. The three teacher leaders are outstanding, and I did not want them to burn out! Through their collaboration, they determined a plan of action to target their efforts, and I assisted by providing money to hire additional consulting services from a retired teacher leader. The power lessons the teacher leaders provided through continuing contact early in the year proved quite successful. As well, a teacher “recognition for successful results campaign,” devised by the teacher leaders, elevated the positive climate of our implementation throughout the system.

Parallel to our work as a central team, we asked principals to review the Principal Self-Assessment questionnaire. As part of their initial review, they were asked to develop recommendations of how they could use the tool. This session turned out to be quite productive and engendered a great deal of discussion (see shaded box). Later we will be meeting with our principals and using this document as a further discussion tool. The information from the self-assessment, along with the school literacy team report and NDEC data, will result in a comprehensive needs assessment leading to the development of one or two building goals for the coming year.

Principal Recommendations for How to Use Self-Assessment

- After completing the document, I could meet with my teacher leader to make sure we’re on track to implement Reading Recovery correctly.
- Discuss results with school literacy team and at team leader meetings.
- Use as a framework for monitoring results and to set goals.
- A good data-analysis tool to analyze results and set goals.
- Reinforces that everyone is accountable.
- Use as a tool to spur conversations about the “ideal” program with colleagues.
- Use as a point of reference for principals to review the necessary leadership needed to make the program successful.
- Develop an action plan based upon problem areas uncovered by the answers to the questionnaire.
- Use as a tool to help establish clear expectations that are the same for everyone.

While we have not formally implemented these documents with our principals as yet, their initial interest in the potential use of the Principal Self-Assessment leads us to believe that it will be a well-worn document over the coming years of our implementation. Already our site coordinator/teacher leader team is finding the use of these tools valuable in our implementation. They are guides for continuous improvement of the vein promoted by Dr. Reeves in his session in our district last fall. It is clear to us that these NATG tools have great potential to elevate our results over time.

The self-assessment questionnaires are available in the Implementation section of the RRCNA website. The new webpage also includes a feedback form. NATG Implementation Committee members hope that school leaders will use the online form to report how questionnaires were used and suggest needed changes or additions.