

What Works Clearinghouse



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WWC Quick Review of the Report “Supporting Literacy Across the Sunshine State: A Study of Florida Middle School Reading Coaches”[†]

What is this study about?

This study examined the effects on student test scores of hiring reading coaches to work with middle school teachers. The program was funded through the statewide *Just Read, Florida!* (JRF) literacy initiative.

The study included 987 Florida schools serving sixth- through eighth-graders.

The authors analyzed school-level student reading and mathematics test score data from 1998 to 2006 drawn from statewide databases.

Effects were measured by comparing school-level test score gains for several years before and after the reading coaches were hired and by comparing gains in schools that implemented the program to gains in schools that had not yet implemented it.

Key Features of the JRF Reading Coaches Program

Individualized approach to teacher professional development

Full-time coaches work on site with teachers to improve reading instruction

Coaching activities include mentoring, co-teaching, and classroom observations

Schools may tailor activities to fit their specific needs

Most coaches are experienced teachers with specialized training in reading

WWC Rating

The research described in this report is not consistent with WWC evidence standards

Cautions: The study compared student test score gains in 644 schools that implemented the reading coaches program with gains in 343 schools that did not have the program. The authors did not match schools with similar characteristics when creating their research groups. Because JRF funding was allocated first to low-performing schools, the two groups of schools had very different average test scores initially. Although the authors control for these differences in their analysis, there could be other differences between the schools that could influence test score gains. For example, the lowest-performing schools may have implemented other changes to improve students’ reading skills and these changes may have affected student test scores. For these reasons, differences in test score gains cannot be attributed with confidence to the effect of the reading coaches program.

What did the study authors report?

The study examined effects separately for four cohorts of schools, based on the year the schools implemented the program. The authors reported higher reading and mathematics test score gains for the earliest cohort and higher reading score gains for the third cohort.

The WWC does not consider these results to be conclusive because the groups of schools compared in the analysis were not initially equivalent.

[†]Marsh, J. A., Sloan-McCombs, J., Lockwood, J. R., Martorell, F., Gershwin, D., Nafel, S., Vi-Nhuan, L., Shea, M., Barney, H., & Crego, A. (2008). *Supporting literacy across the Sunshine State: A study of Florida middle school reading coaches*. Santa Monica, CA: The RAND Corporation.