

Using Enhanced Coaching of Teachers to Improve Reading Achievement in Grades PreK–2 in Chicago Public Schools

Chicago Public Schools is working to improve early literacy outcomes through a multiyear professional development initiative for preK–2 teachers. This initiative—the P–2 Balanced Literacy Initiative—aims to improve literacy instruction by training teachers to balance systematic foundational skills instruction with reading and writing instruction involving rich, complex texts.¹ The initiative began in 2016/17 and served 23 percent of all district elementary schools by 2018/19. The district designated 26 of the 115 elementary schools implementing the initiative in 2018/19 to receive enhanced supports, including more frequent, site-based coaching, to improve students' independent reading. This study compared the reading achievement of students who attended schools that received the enhanced supports (priority schools) with the reading achievement of students who attended similar schools that received only the initiative's standard supports (nonpriority schools). Chicago Public Schools leaders can use the findings from this study to make decisions about the design and use of the initiative with enhanced coaching.

Key findings

- **Attending a priority school did not lead to higher end-of-year reading achievement than attending a nonpriority school, after other factors were adjusted for.** There was no difference in K–2 students' 2018/19 end-of-year reading achievement between priority schools and similar nonpriority schools, after student and school characteristics were adjusted for. The absence of an effect was consistent across subgroups of students and schools. The lack of a difference in end-of-year reading achievement between students in priority schools and students in nonpriority schools suggests that leaders might want to look for ways to improve the enhanced services or consider other ways to support teachers participating in the initiative. Additional research on the implementation of the initiative in priority schools is needed.
- **Teachers in priority schools were more likely than teachers in nonpriority schools to participate in the professional development components of the initiative.** Teachers in priority schools (38 percent) were more likely than teachers in nonpriority schools (26 percent) to attend all three professional development sessions for the initiative and less likely to not participate at all. Priority schools were more likely than nonpriority schools to have at least one school administrator participate in all three professional development sessions, but the difference was not statistically significant.
- **Interviews with education leaders at multiple levels, instructional support coaches, and teachers suggested that school-based coaching was valuable but that instructional support coaches had a limited capacity and often could not dedicate sufficient time to all teachers.** District leaders might consider increasing the number of coaches available and limiting their competing priorities so they can focus on the initiative.

1. In a typical 75-minute literacy block, students in P–2 Balanced Literacy Initiative classrooms participate in systematic instruction in phonics, phonological awareness, and word study lessons with shared reading integration; interactive read aloud and independent reading; and independent literacy work time, which could include independent reading with or without the teacher, small group and individual conferences with the teacher, and independent or group literacy tasks.