

Reading First Schools in Michigan Are Making Noteworthy Progress!

The Reading First legislation (Part B of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001) allocates funding for every state with an approved plan to provide assistance to high poverty schools with chronic low achievement scores in reading. Michigan was one of the first states with an approved Reading First plan, and it was the first state to get its Reading First plan underway. An important question, nationwide, is whether Reading First will, in fact, bring about improvements in the reading of children in the early elementary grades.

An indication of the success of the Michigan's Reading First plan is gains in the percentage of students in grades 1 through 3 who are reading at or above grade level.

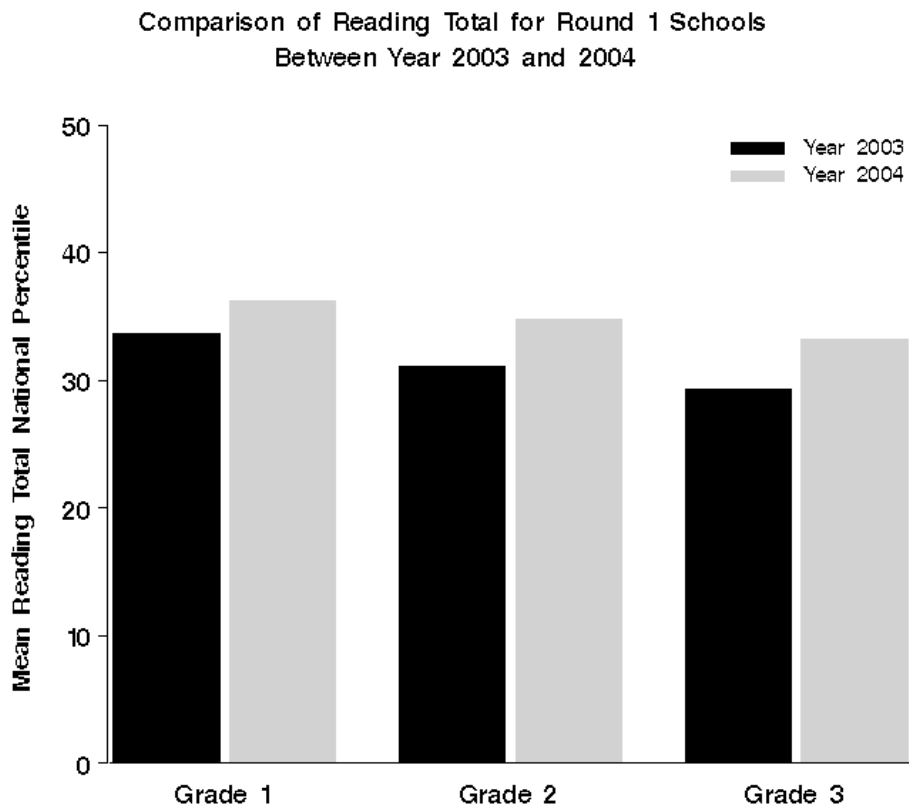
Analyses of the achievement on the Reading Total score on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, administered in spring 2003 and spring 2004, show significant gains in the percentage of students at all three grade levels who are reading at or above the 50th percentile. The gains can be seen by comparing the percentages of students reading at or above grade level in 2003 and 2004 in the following table:

	Year 1 (2003)	Year 2 (2004)	Gains
First grade	31%	34%	+5%
Second grade	22%	31%	+9%
Third grade	19%	29%	+10%

At each of these grade levels, there are more than 2,000 students in Reading First schools in years 1 and 2. A 10% increase for the third grade, therefore, means that in 2004 an additional 200 students (about) are reading at grade level. Because of the low reading achievement that characterizes Reading First schools, these figures are the first signs that the provisions of Reading First incorporated in the Michigan plan can break the cycle of failure.

Another way to represent the gains students are making in reading is the changes in the average reading percentile for the forty-four schools that had Reading First programs in both 2002-2003 and 2003-2004.

This analysis is unlike the percentages at grade level because it includes the performance of *all* students, not just those reading at grade level. The average percentile on Reading Total increased significantly at each grade level, as can be seen on the following bar graph.



Faith Stevens, the Coordinator of Reading First in Michigan, hopes that the significant progress in the first years of Reading First are only the start of a successful initiative for struggling readers. She has challenged her school leaders to aim for even greater gains in the upcoming school year.