

October 14, 2004

To: MMSD Board of Education
From: Art Rainwater
RE: Update on Federal Reading First Grants

Five Madison Schools (Hawthorne, Glendale, Orchard Ridge, Midvale and Lincoln) were awarded federal Reading First Grants by the Department of Public Instruction beginning with the 2003-04 school year. Federal grants are distributed through the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction but are ultimately based upon federal approval.

After several months of discussion with federal grant personnel, the MMSD has decided not to pursue the continuation of the Reading First Grants for the following reasons:

- The current MMSD Comprehensive Literacy Instructional Program is based on scientific research and is successful with 80% of our children.
- The program is resulting in continual growth in numbers of proficient and advanced readers and is resulting in a continued narrowing of the achievement gap.
- To this point we have made significant changes to our program to meet the criteria of Reading First which will result in improved achievement for our students, but the further specific changes that would be necessary for us to continue with the Reading First process would not be productive for our students and in fact could be detrimental to student progress.

Therefore we are notifying DPI that we are not continuing with Reading First grants. DPI will discontinue funding for MMSD schools for years 2-5. This memo details the background and rationale for this decision.

Background

In December, 2003, the Madison Metropolitan School District was notified by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction that some MMSD elementary schools were eligible to apply for Federal Reading First grants. Reading First is a national initiative and the criteria for grant approval are very prescriptive. DPI had just received approval of their Wisconsin Reading First Grant which in turn allowed them to provide grants to districts and/or schools throughout Wisconsin based on established criteria. The grant procedures called for applying a comprehensive evaluation process to a number of published core literacy programs and then making a selection of a published program to purchase. The MMSD hesitated to apply because

the criteria did not align with MMSD's approach to literacy instruction. However, in lieu of the purchase of a published reading program, there was one additional option for applying for the Reading First grant. A school or district could review the current literacy program in place in the school/district using a process called A Consumer's Guide to Evaluating a Core Reading Program Grades K-3: A Critical Elements Analysis (Simmons, D. & Kame'enuie, E., 2003). We were encouraged by DPI to consider this option and to apply.

After reviewing the criteria of the grant and the alternative option and in consultation with DPI, five schools and the MMSD central office staff made the decision to take this alternative option to apply for the grants. A review of the MMSD Balanced Literacy Program using the Consumer Guide was then conducted.

The results of this review, the MMSD Comprehensive Literacy Instructional Program or CLIP, became the basis for five Madison schools to complete the application for Reading First grants. CLIP includes the components of our current Balanced Literacy Program but organizes them into the five critical factors that were called for in the Reading First Grant:

- Phonemic Awareness
- Phonics
- Vocabulary
- Fluency
- Comprehension

Five grant proposals were submitted to DPI and each grant was awarded. The five Reading First Schools met with DPI personnel and selected and purchased additional core and supplemental materials during the last months of the first year of the grant. During the summer, the school personnel participated in all of the State's Reading First staff development activities.

In planning for the 2004-05 year, the CLIP was passed to the federal Western Regional Reading First Technical Assistance (WRRFTA) Center for the Midwest Region at the University of Oregon for final federal review. The person assigned to this review was Dr. Kathy Howe. On August 16, 2004, the district and DPI were notified by Dr. Howe that the Center would not recommend approval of the MMSD CLIP without the addition of a scope and sequence and specific lesson plans. In a letter dated September 8, 2004, Dr. Margaret Planner, Assistant Superintendent with the DPI, notified MMSD that second year funds for the Reading First Grant would be withheld until agreement could be reached with Dr. Howe and the WRRFTA Center about the additions needed. An ongoing conversation between the Center, MMSD and DPI occurred during the summer and early fall of the 04-05 school year to identify the expansions that were necessary. These included a scope and sequence, lesson plans and a way to ensure program implementation. During September, MMSD created the CLIP Scope and Sequence, CLIP Teacher Planning Guide and CLIP Implementation Monitoring System in response to the concerns noted from Dr. Howe. We felt that these expansions added value to our program.

On October 7, Dr. Jane Belmore, along with MMSD teaching and learning staff, and Reading First principals and school based coordinators, held a day long meeting with Dr. Howe. Dr. Howe gave an in-depth presentation regarding Reading First. She presented the scientifically based reading research evaluation process that the State of Oregon had completed to fulfill the requirements for its Reading First Grant. She used specific components from the Houghton Mifflin reading program as examples of a program that met the federally described criteria for a scientifically based reading program. However, she stated that to date there is no research that shows long term success with implementation of published programs such as this one.

Dr. Howe then received information from MMSD that specifically related our Comprehensive Literacy Instructional Program (CLIP) to the scientifically based reading research contained in the 2000 National Reading Panel Report, as well as to A Consumer's Guide to Evaluating a Core Reading Program (2003) and Dr. Simmons and Dr. Kame'enui's research based stages for school support of reading programs. In M. R. Shinn, H. M. Walker, & G. Stoner (Eds.), Interventions for academic and behavior problems II: Preventive and remedial approaches (pp. 537-569) Dr. Simmons and Dr. Kame'enui describe a core reading program in the following way:

“Benchmark intervention, or what typically includes the core instructional program in general education, should prepare 80% or more of the students to read at grade level. Approximately 15% of students will require strategic intervention, or what is provided in general education and some additional support, because they are not acquiring the beginning reading skills at high levels and rates of success. Finally, approximately 5% of students will require intensive intervention because they are significantly at-risk based on their poor performance on the screening measures.”

Dr. Howe was presented with MMSD student outcome data that shows the MMSD CLIP is a core reading program because it is successful for 80% of the students (see charts below). She was impressed with our data and was surprised that we were eligible for a Reading First grant because our data was so strong. While the overall data are strong, the five schools that meet the Wisconsin criteria for Reading First had 30% or more of the students not scoring proficient and advanced. One of the stated purposes of a Reading First grant is “to enable all students to become successful early readers”, thus the students in these schools are the very students for whom the Reading First Grant was designed.

Based on Dr. Howe's earlier suggestions for program modifications, the following additional components that had been developed were shared and discussed:

- a thorough CLIP Scope and Sequence covering skills in the critical component areas
- an explicit CLIP Teacher Planning Guide for teachers to follow in developing lesson plans in each critical area including a systematic way of planning instruction for struggling readers
- a structured Comprehensive Literacy Instruction Program implementation monitoring system that will ensure that teachers are implementing the program appropriately

Following a lengthy discussion and analysis of our work, we found it contradictory that although the MMSD CLIP met the 80% criteria for a core reading program, Dr. Howe stated it did not meet the scientifically based reading research criteria process specifically designed for Reading

First grants. While she applauded MMSD's efforts in completing the additional components, she stated that in order to be considered for approval for the Reading First grant the following must occur:

- teachers should be given “scripted daily lesson plans” that would not allow for “teacher judgment about instruction” (either MMSD should create these lesson plans or MMSD should consider purchasing a published program that includes scripted plans) – **this recommendation is in direct conflict with the research underlying the MMSD program that shows students learn best with highly trained teachers making sound judgments about the content, sequence and pacing of instruction for individual students.**
- early reading instruction should focus only on phonetic decoding and should not include “reading for meaning” – children should not be encouraged to use picture cues or make educated guesses about words they do not yet know- **this recommendation is in direct conflict with the research underlying our program that shows reading for meaning and using context cues in addition to phonics are strategies that students need to be successful readers.**

When questioned about the suggestion that MMSD should consider discontinuing the current Literacy Program and purchasing a published program, Dr. Howe was not able to assure the district that research has shown that the adoption of a published program would guarantee the same level of 80% success that MMSD is currently achieving. She stated that Reading First had not been in implementation long enough to determine these results.

Rationale

MMSD's Balanced Literacy Program has been carefully developed around research that indicates that:

- instruction should be based upon the assessment of a student's literacy strengths and needs
- each teacher should have the capacity (developed through a strong, cohesive, ongoing professional development program) to target specific literacy instruction to meet the identified student needs
- teachers are the most appropriate people to make decisions about the selection of instructional materials, and the content, sequence and pacing of instruction.

MMSD does not have one single published reading program; rather we have a range of appropriate texts and supporting materials available for teachers to select to meet the needs of students which support the instructional goals of the program.

In addition to having consistent instruction in all five critical areas of literacy, the contextual support provided for the MMSD Comprehensive Literacy Program ensures that appropriate interventions can be implemented based on the need of the student. An essential foundation for the MMSD program is that the teacher assesses each student's instructional levels to determine

the skills that they possess and the skills that they still need to acquire. Also essential to the MMSD program is the development of high quality teachers, who implement assessments, analyze the results and make ongoing decisions to plan and implement informed instruction for students. Research shows that these two essentials will result in student success. **MMSD student data shows that these two essentials along with the core program have produced success.**

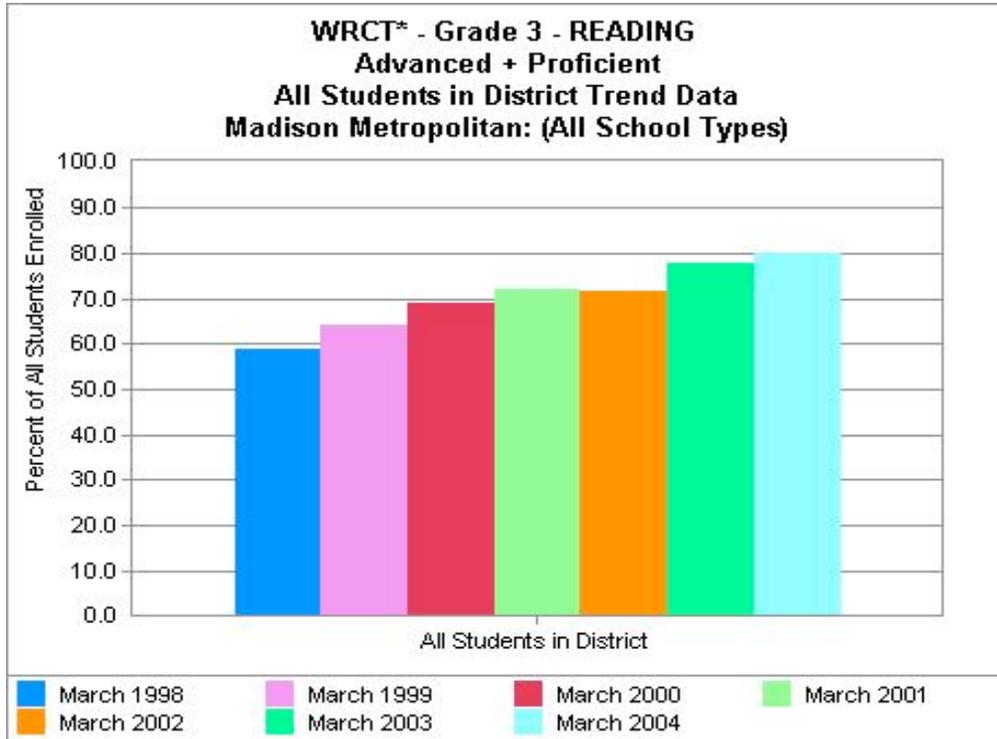
Conclusion

It is not reasonable nor would data support MMSD in following Dr. Howe's suggestion to eliminate our current program and purchase a single published program. The success of our current program indicates that we should not develop "scripted lesson plans" nor should we curtail the use of "meaning strategies" in instruction for young readers. The success of the MMSD Literacy Program is based on systematic instruction delivered by highly trained teachers making instructional decisions. Reading First would not support teachers making instructional decisions.

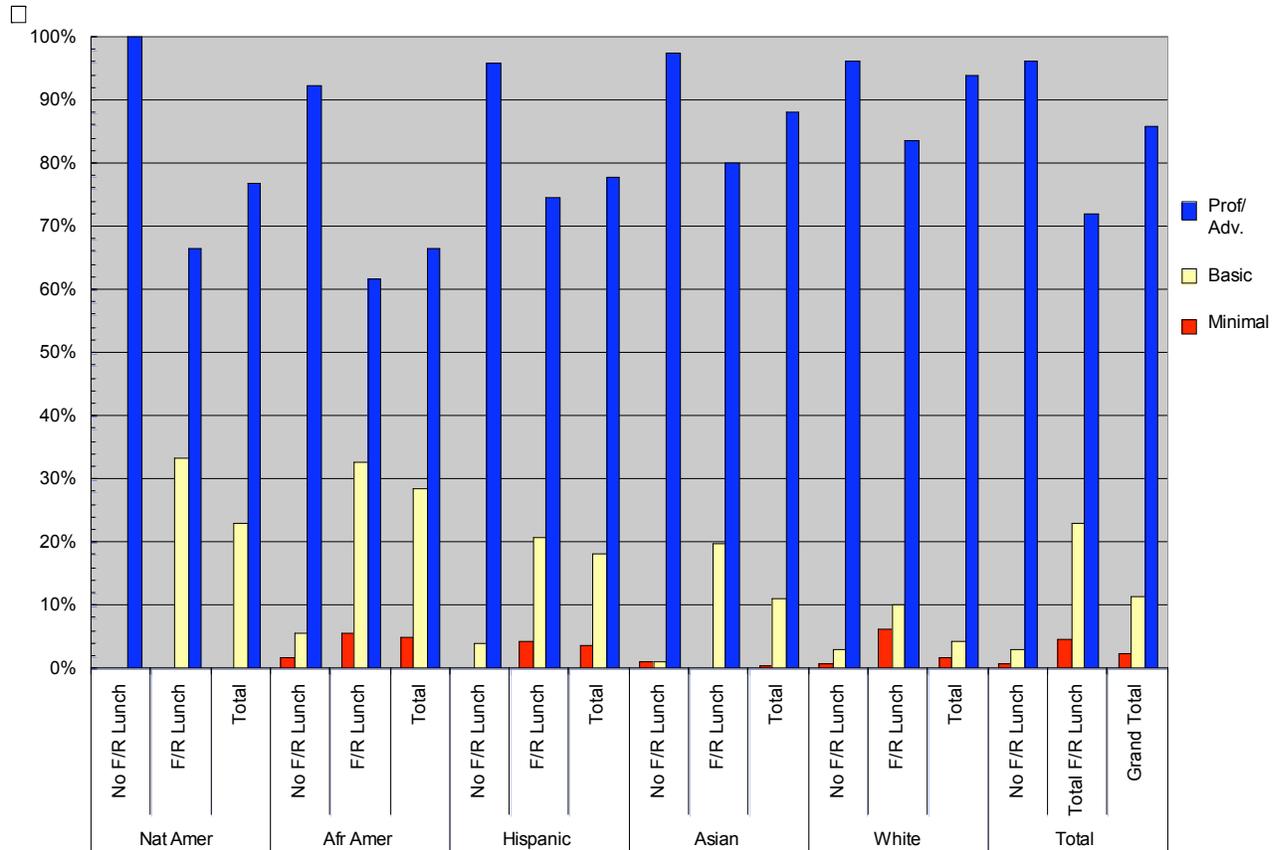
Further federal review and approval would not take place unless these significant changes were made. Therefore MMSD is electing not to continue to seek Reading First Grant funding.

Supporting Data:

Wisconsin Reading Comprehension Test : Madison Results 2003-04



Reaching the level of 80% of students becoming proficient in reading by third grade was achieved during years that saw significant demographic changes in the MMSD. The percent of students of poverty increased from 25% in 1998 to 35% in 2003. The percent of students for whom English is a second language has increased from 5% of total enrollment to 12%. The percent of students of color has increased from 25% of the total enrollment to 35%.



An analysis of third grade reading scores based on race and socio economic status shows that:

- **There is no statistical achievement gap for middle income students regardless of race.**
- **There is no statistical gap between any group in the minimal category.**
- **There continues to be a gap between low income students by race and between low income and middle income students regardless of race.**