An Evaluation of Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) as an Intervention in Low Performing Schools: Policy and Administrative Implications

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# Abstract

In the environment of accountability and ongoing debates about the quality of education in the United States, reading proficiency stands out as a necessary prerequisite in developing student self-confidence, motivation to learn, and school performance (National Institute for Literacy, 2003). Many researchers agree that in order to become better readers, students need to engage in authentic, uninterrupted reading as often as possible. Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) can provide students and teachers with time to read for enjoyment, develop relationships around reading, and facilitate the development of life-long reading habits. McDowell County Schools, in providing these authentic reading experiences to all students, implemented SSR in 2012-2013. This study explored the implementation of selected SSR components across district schools.

# Introduction

## Background

McDowell County schools initiated Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) during the 2012-2013 school year with the goal of helping students develop reading interests and, subsequently, improve their reading comprehension. Every school implements SSR in a different way, with some principals leaving it up to the teachers to integrate SSR throughout the day, while others establish SSR time in the daily or weekly school schedule. Thus, the scale of SSR implementation and teacher professional development practices varies from school to school.

Over the last two years, the district has seen a slight increase in student reading achievement on WESTEST 2, the state-mandated test, but the student reading and writing scores remain substantially below the state average. The high poverty level in McDowell County affects student achievement as well, as many students come to school with deficient vocabulary and struggle with decoding and comprehension from the early grades.

## Student Reading Achievement, Poverty, and SSR

The research findings that vocabulary development, phonological sensitivity, and alphabetic skills are extremely strong predictors of later reading proficiency (Snow et al., 1998) reinforce the urgency of addressing reading proficiency issues that children from low socioeconomic backgrounds cannot overcome themselves. Children who grow up in low-income environments engage in significantly fewer language and literacy interactions during the preschool years, have half as much experience listening and speaking to their parents as children in the average working-class families (616 words per hour versus 1251 words per hour), and less than one-third of the experience of the average child’s verbal interaction with parents in professional class families (616 words per hour versus 2153 words per hour) (Hart and Risley, 2003, Hersch, 2001; Snow et al., 1998). Children living in low-income environments rarely experience a book-oriented home atmosphere which, as Evans, Kelley, Sikora, and Treiman (2010) argue, provides students with vocabulary, information, rich imagination, and broad horizons for literacy.

The study performed by Evans et al. (2010) is especially significant in the magnitude of its findings in regard to the importance of literacy-infused environments on student success at school. The study, which encompassed about 70,000 15-year olds in 27 countries, suggests that children and teenagers in homes with 500 books stay in school three years longer than children in bookless homes. The researchers also found that the effect of books in the home was almost equivalent to the effect of parental education, twice as strong as the effect of the father’s occupation, and stronger than the effect of their standard of living. Thus, if the students are not exposed to print-rich environments at home, the schools need to provide those literacy-rich environments for the students to compensate for the literacy poor home environments.

Therefore, Sustained Silent Reading implementation is a critical step in helping students become exposed to authentic, rich, and diverse print materials aligned to their interests and reading levels. Research on SSR suggests that the amount of time spent on reading natural and meaningful text at school contributes significantly to gains in students’ reading achievement (Taylor, Frye, and Maruyama, 1990). Numerous studies have noted that more reading leads to better reading, and the time spent on independent reading is a statistically significant factor that distinguishes the most effective or moderately effective schools from the least effective ones (Taylor, Pressley, and Pearson, 2000). Allington (1977) notes that skills instruction is not enough to develop student reading skills. Students need to be given time to read meaningful and connected text to develop vocabulary knowledge, fluency and word recognition, and overall reading comprehension skills (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1998; Yopp & Yopp, 2003).

## Components of SSR

The need for immediate attention to the independent reading practices across all McDowell County schools was great. District administrators believed the implementation of SSR, supported by targeted professional development on best practices and the provision of diverse reading materials, could improve student reading achievement. Increased student access to diverse reading materials was felt to be vital, as the students needed to be given opportunities for choices in a variety of content areas and for interaction with the text without the constant support from adults (Sanden, 2012). Turner (1995) echoes this view by noting that students are more motivated to read when they can select their own reading materials.

Teacher behaviors during the SSR time are equally important. Sanden (2012) emphasizes the need for teacher monitoring of student choices, teaching reading behaviors, and focusing on student growth. “Expert behaviors” in the classroom become an indispensable part of student acculturation into the content knowledge and procedures that become a norm during the SSR time at schools (Freebody, 2003). Teachers need to serve as a support network, modeling the reading strategies and providing continuous feedback. The engagement in discourse about reading is essential to students’ reading achievement as well as the increase in their reading interests (Lee-Daniels & Murray, 2000). Clarke (2006) suggests that teachers who motivate students to read independently are voracious readers themselves and take time to proactively talk with students about the need to read. The “expert behaviors” advanced by Freebody (2003) are echoed by Clarke through his statement, “If a teacher who has a solid relationship with a student models a love of reading, then that student is likely to read” (p. 67).

# SSR Theory of Change

The implementation and initial evaluation of SSR in McDowell County was based on a theory-based model of program development and evaluation (Ross, Lipsey, and Freeman, 2004). Given appropriate resources and targeted interventions, short-term outcomes would be achieved. Achievement of short-term outcomes would result in the achievement of the long-term or distal objective. This model is illustrated graphically in Appendix A.

Several key inputs were identified for the successful implementation of the SSR process in schools, including administrators on the district and school level, teachers, community representatives, organizational structure, and adequate funding for professional development and libraries. The comprehensive support of the process by all inputs contributes to successful implementation of SSR in schools.

SSR implementation at the classroom level is a vital activity and intervention component of the program. Students need to be provided with the access to diverse reading materials, with the teachers monitoring student growth through student-teacher discourse, mini lessons, reading response documents, and scaffolding to continuously challenge students along their reading. Teachers must be skillful in the implementation of the best practices proven to be effective within the SSR research framework, to achieve maximum program effectiveness.

Short-term, a successfully implemented SSR process at schools should result in increased student engagement and reflection through reading and writing. Teachers will display increase in knowledge about student reading levels and engage students in setting reading goals while supporting these goals with reading materials aligned to the reading goals of the student as well as the content area. Students who engage in independent reading practices on a frequent basis display increased vocabulary, fluency and word recognition skills, as well as become better readers and listeners. Long-term, students continuously engaged in independent reading practices will develop a lifelong reading interests and capacity.

# Significance of the Study

This purpose of this study was to add to the body of knowledge about meaningful implementation of Sustained Silent Reading as a process where teacher commitment, knowledge of the process, and organizational structures contribute to successful delivery of the opportunities for increasing student achievement in reading. This study sought to establish a baseline on the implementation practices in district schools, thus facilitating the discussion of further implementation goals and research-based SSR strategies in a uniform manner. Consistent implementation of SSR should help students develop reading skills while engaged in reading texts of their choice which are aligned to their interests and reading levels.

Conclusions derived from study will serve to guide uniform development and implementation of the Sustained Silent Reading process across all McDowell County Schools. A further discussion of teacher and student involvement in the reading process, the effect of SSR on student fluency, vocabulary development, and comprehension will be facilitated on the basis of the findings. The discussion will also serve as a basis for recommendations for program administrators in developing support systems and professional development, which will facilitate increasing teacher SSR knowledge and use levels.

# Research Questions

The goal of this study was to evaluate the SSR implementation of the SSR program in McDowell County Schools System. Teacher perceptions about SSR, professional development related to SSR, classroom implementation levels, and the availability of diverse reading materials were collected. The study also sought to identify what teachers liked best about SSR and what they perceived to be their greatest challenges.

Specific questions addressed by the study included:

1. What models are used to implement SSR in individual schools?
2. To what extent do teachers implement SSR instructional strategies?
3. What is the nature of student access to materials during SSR?
4. How do schools interact with parents/community regarding SSR?
5. What are the differences in use of SSR instructional strategies based on selected attribute variables?
6. What do teachers see as the greatest challenges in using SSR?
7. What do teachers need to more effectively implement SSR?

# Methods

The survey design was a one-shot, cross-sectional design. The research on SSR research-based practices provided the foundation for the development of survey questions. Additionally, the survey questions explored the role of professional development and collaboration in SSR implementation. The survey was administered to all McDowell County teachers.

## Population/Sample

The primary stakeholders for the survey consisted of the school staff and the students in McDowell County schools. All McDowell County teachers, except CTC teachers, were identified as the survey population. The entire population was surveyed.

## Delimitations

The survey sought to identify teacher perceptions about SSR delivery at schools. However, the survey did not seek to answer questions about the effect of SSR on student achievement. The survey concentrated on the evaluation of the extent to which teachers exercise research-based behaviors during SSR and what teachers view as challenging or positive aspects of SSR.

## Limitations

The survey asked the teachers to answer a series of questions on the SSR implementation components in their school. Thus, the researcher used a self-report instrument which can limit the objectivity of responses provided by the subjects. The survey was delivered online, and even with two follow up emails, the numbers of teachers taking the survey remained low. Out of 300 teachers, only 62 teachers replied, a 21% response rate. Thus, the answers were limited to either implementation at a particular school or to certain grade levels.

## Instrumentation

The survey on teacher perceptions about SSR was developed by the co-investigator. The survey tool consisted of four parts. Part A collected information about teacher work location, the grade level taught, the amount of professional development received, and the organizational structure for implementing SSR. Part B explored the extent to which teachers use exemplary SSR instructional practices. Teacher responses were rated on a continuum of frequency of strategy implementation during SSR time. Part C responses provided insight into student activities during SSR in terms of their exposure to age appropriate, diverse reading materials as well as the extent of school-family communication about SSR use at school. Part D featured two open-ended questions designed to qualitatively explore teacher perceptions about SSR and support for its implementation. A copy of the instrument is provided in Appendix B.

## Data collection process

The data were collected online via Survey Monkey. The survey was opened to the recipients on February 19, 2013 and closed on April 13, 2013. School principals were contacted in a face-to-face administrative meeting as well as via email and asked if they would forward the instrument to the teachers. All of the principals agreed to do so. The principals then sent an email to the teachers that contained the link to the online survey and the electronic consent form.

# Findings

Survey findings are organized by the questions posted in the eight guiding questions identified for survey. The data from the online survey were analyzed quantitatively in evaluating the extent of teacher use of research-based SSR practices and qualitatively to analyze teacher perceptions about SSR and their views on support for continued SSR practices.

## Description of Respondents

The survey was completed by 62 McDowell County teachers. One in four of the respondents (27.4%; n= 23) taught grades PreK through 5; 29 % (n= 18) were middle school teachers, with 41.9 % (n= 26) teaching in a high school setting.

## Findings by Specific Question

What models are used to implement SSR in individual schools?

In exploring the level of implementation at schools, 17.7 % (n= 11) of respondents noted that each teacher at their school was encouraged to use SSR daily. Eleven percent (n= 7) of the teachers noted that school principal identified specific days and times each week for SSR. In 61.3 % (n= 38) of the responses, teachers reported that SSR time was scheduled at school every day, and 9.7 % (n= 6) noted that SSR was a part of their routine without administrative encouragement. These data are provided in Table 1.

Models of SSR vary in nature and range from independent student engagement in reading behaviors and little to no teacher engagement in discourse about reading selections to a more targeted approach to the program. Teacher behaviors during SSR play an important role in student acquisition of reading habits.

When asked about the professional development received, 49.2 % (n= 30) of teachers stated that they have not received any professional development. The remainder of the respondents (50.8 %; n= 31) reported receiving school-based professional development.

To what extent do teachers implement SSR instructional strategies?

The survey question about the teacher behaviors asked the teachers to use a Likert scale to outline the frequency of research-based instructional practices used in the classroom during SSR. Effective SSR teachers read alongside the students. Fifty four percent (n= 28) of the respondents regularly read alongside their students, with 23.5% (n= 12) reading frequently, and 19.6 % (n= 12) of the respondents reporting sometimes engaging in reading behaviors.

Effective SSR teachers help students align their reading choices to their interest and reading levels. According to the survey results, 30.2 percent (n= 13) regularly helped students find reading materials aligned to their interests. The same percentage (30.2 %) exhibited this behavior frequently, with 32.6 % (n= 14) of the respondents sometimes helping students select reading materials, and only 7 % (n= 3) rarely working with students on the selection of the materials aligned to their reading interests and levels.

In an effective SSR classroom, students have choices as to what they read. In McDowell County, 58.2 % (n= 32) of respondents stated that they regularly allow students to make choices of what they read, with 16.4 % (n= 9) frequently encouraging students to choose the reading materials, and the same percentage (16.4 %) sometimes encouraging student choice. Nine percent (n= 5) of the respondents stated that they rarely allow students to choose reading materials.

Teachers in effective SSR classrooms engage students in discourse about the works they have read. According to the survey results, 10.4 % (n= 5) of the respondents talked to students about the books they have read, with 39.6 % (n= 19) frequently engaging in this behavior, and 35.4 % (n= 17) sometimes discussing student read works. Fourteen percent (n= 7) of the respondents reported they rarely engage in discourse with students about their reading materials.

Research on SSR shows that teachers effective in delivering SSR conduct mini lessons to teach students independent reading behaviors. According to the survey responses, 6.5 % (n= 3) of the teachers regularly used mini lessons on reading strategies in their classrooms during SSR. Seventeen percent (n= 8) did so frequently, and 32. 6 % (n= 15) sometimes conducted mini lessons on independent reading behaviors. More than forty three percent (n= 20) of the respondents noted that they rarely conducted the mini lessons during SSR time.

In effective SSR classrooms, mini lessons on teaching vocabulary are also conducted frequently. In this case, 6.4 % (n= 3) of the responders regularly taught vocabulary mini lessons during SSR. Forty percent (n= 19) frequently engaged in delivering mini lessons on vocabulary, and 25.5 % (n= 12) did that sometimes. Twenty seven percent (n= 13) rarely engaged in teaching mini lessons on vocabulary to their students.

Student reflection on their reading via their reading logs is also an effective practice in SSR classrooms. Twelve percent (n= 7) of the respondents stated that they regularly asked students to reflect on their reading through reading response logs. Eight (14.5%) of the respondents did so frequently, with the 20 % (n= 11) sometimes engaging students in this behavior. Fifty two percent (n= 29) of the respondents rarely asked students to reflect on their reading through reading logs. These data are provided in Table 2.

What is the nature of student access to reading materials during SSR time?

Student access to diverse reading materials is a necessary prerequisite to a successful SSR implementation. In answering the question about the diverse reading materials in their classrooms, 46.8 % (n=29) of the respondents reported that their students have access to magazines matched to student interest. Seventy seven percent (n=44) of the respondents stated that their students have access to fiction appropriate to their age and reading levels, and 74.2 % (n= 46) provided student access to nonfiction. Fifty eight percent (n= 36) of the respondents stated that their students have access to textbooks during SSR time. Some teachers provided additional examples of the reading materials used during SSR. The examples include Scholastics books, topic books present in the classroom library, newspapers, electronic books, trading journals, content text sets, and the materials brought to the classroom by students. These data are provided in Table 3.

How do schools interact with parents/community regarding SSR?

Most of McDowell County students come from literacy-poor environments, so one of the vital components of SSR is the school’s collaboration with the students’ families in promoting their understanding of literacy and independent reading practices. According to the survey results, 24.2 % (n= 15) of the respondents reported that their schools did not communicate about SSR with the community and student families. Twenty two percent (n= 14) stated that they educate student families about SSR via monthly newsletters, while only 3.2 % (n=2) noted that the schools educated families about SSR during the community workshops. The highest percentage of respondents (43.5 percent, n= 27) shared information with the families during the parent teacher conferences. These data are provided in Table 4.

What are the differences in use of SSR instructional strategies based on selected attribute variables?

Survey findings were also analyzed to determine if there were significant differences in the use of SSR instructional strategies based on grade levels taught and participation in professional development. These results are presented in Tables 6 and 7. There were no significant differences in the use of SSR instructional strategies based on the grade levels taught. When SSR instructional strategies use was analyzed based on participation in professional development, significant differences were found for “engaging students in discourse about the works they have read.” Teachers who had participated in professional development reported a higher level of use than those who had not received professional development.

What do teachers need to more effectively implement SSR?

In answering the question about the types of support needed for effective implementation of SSR in their classrooms, 21 % (n= 13) of the respondents stated that additional professional development would help them implement SSR more effectively. Eleven percent (n= 7) asked for a specific time in the schedule, and 37.1 % (n=23) stated that having a more diverse library in the classroom or school would aid them in effective implementation of SSR. Twenty seven percent (n= 17) also noted that collaboration with other teachers or a librarian would help them implement SSR more effectively. These data are provided in Table 5.

Qualitative analysis of teacher survey responses in regards to their positive views of SSR revealed a variety of notes that could be grouped in the following categories:

* Reading for enjoyment
* Student choice of reading material
* Reading for all and value of reading
* Reading and vocabulary skill development, building background knowledge
* Teacher as a model
* Individualized approach
* Time to read

The respondents frequently stated that they like student choice in identifying and reading materials and saw the benefits of SSR in providing students with time to read for enjoyment. These were the two most frequently cited strategies deemed effective in developing student reading skills. Providing students with time to read for enjoyment and allowing for their choice in reading materials, while helping the students select the materials aligned to their interests and reading levels, provides continuous practice in reading and building background knowledge to transfer reading skill development to various subject areas.

What do teachers see as major challenges in using SSR?

When asked about their concerns about the SSR implementation in schools, the teachers provided responses that were categorized as following:

* Creating independent readers
* Time and schedule concerns
* Lack of variety of reading selections
* Consistency in SSR delivery across school

The most frequently posted teacher concern was about developing students into independent readers and having enough skill and knowledge to guide student development of reading behaviors during SSR. Teachers also cited the lack of a variety of reading materials as one of the major challenges in effectively delivering SSR. Time and schedule concerns were also identified as challenges to effective SSR implementation.

# Conclusions

As stated earlier, the overarching question for the study was, “What components of SSR implementation at school contribute to the program’s effectiveness?” The purpose of the survey was to explore the teacher behaviors during SSR, evaluate their prior professional development, and identify their views on SSR in terms of positive and challenging aspects of SSR implementation in McDowell County schools. After the analysis of the survey responses, teacher attitudes towards various components of SSR were established on the basis of their responses about the frequency of their engagement in research-based behaviors. This quantitative data combined with the open-ended question responses yielded rich data on what teachers value and find challenging about SSR. Before answering the overarching, essential question, it is necessary to evaluate survey results in the light of the answers to the study sub-questions.

What models are used to implement SSR in individual schools?

The prevalent model for the implementation of SSR is its daily integration into schools’ schedule. Two thirds of the responses indicated that a Sustained Silent Reading time is scheduled every day in schools. One fifth of the respondents also stated that they were encouraged to use SSR daily.

To what extent do teachers implement SSR instructional strategies?

Two thirds of respondents helped students align their reading choices to their interest and reading level, with the next most frequently cited strategy being the engagement of students in discourse about the works they have read. Half of the respondents also conducted mini lessons to teach vocabulary development skills with their students during SSR time.

What is the nature of student access to materials during SSR?

The majority of the materials available to students during SSR consisted of fiction appropriate to student age and reading levels and nonfiction. Magazine availability was the least available, trailing textbook use during SSR.

How do schools interact with parents/community regarding SSR?

The schools mostly communicated with the parents and community about their SSR practices through parent teacher conferences, followed by monthly newspapers. One fourth of respondents stated that there was no communication about SSR with the parents or community.

What are the differences in use of SSR instructional strategies based on selected attribute variables?

There was no difference noted in use of SSR instructional strategies based on respondent grade level or school. The only variable slightly affecting the teacher engagement in discourse about student read materials was their prior exposure to professional development on SSR.

What do teachers see as the greatest challenges in using SSR?

The teachers saw the student development into independent readers and their level of skills and knowledge to guide student development of reading behaviors as the greatest challenges in using SSR. Lack of reading materials was also identified as one of the major challenges by the respondents.

What do teachers need to more effectively implement SSR?

The teachers stated that more diverse library in the classroom or the school and more frequent collaboration with other teachers or school librarian would help them more effectively implement SSR at school.

# Discussion

Research unequivocally states that in order to become better readers, students need to engage in authentic, uninterrupted reading as often as possible. Just like any athlete, preparing for the big event and putting in tremendous amounts of practice to become better at what they do, students need to be provided with time to practice reading if they are to become better readers. Students from low socioeconomic backgrounds often come to school with a limited vocabulary due to literacy poor environments at home. However, instead of being provided with more time to read authentic, challenging materials, many high-poverty students are subjected to scripted reading programs that concentrate on lower skill development and recitation.

Time in reading classrooms is vital for each student, with SSR becoming a great supplement for reading instruction. SSR helps students develop a better understanding of themselves as readers and build positive relationships with their teachers on the basis of getting to know each other through books and reading interests.

The analysis of teacher responses suggests SSR implementation in McDowell County schools is in the early stages of implementation. With only 9 % of the teachers who responded to the survey reporting they implement SSR as a part of their classroom routine, the majority of teachers have the SSR schedule set for them. Many respondents cited time as one of the major challenges in the SSR implementation, so it would be advisable for the principals to allocate the time for SSR as a part of the school’s daily schedule. The teachers would feel less stressed about adding SSR to their schedule while already feeling overwhelmed with the requirements to teach their subjects.

In their responses, teachers indicated that access to more diverse reading materials and ongoing collaboration with their peers and librarians would facilitate SSR implementation. Thus, it is advisable for the school principals and literacy coordinators to provide targeted professional development for teachers. Following the PLC model and creating structures for collaboration among all the stakeholders for a more effective SSR delivery at schools would appear to be an appropriate delivery model for this professional development. Even though school budgets are continuously being reduced, school administrators and school board personnel should look to the Title I, Title II, School Improvement Grant (SIG), or Gear Up funds to allocate money to purchase classroom libraries and to supply more reading materials aligned to student interests and lexile levels.

As the schools move on with the SSR implementation, teacher perception surveys should be delivered to the teachers to assess their engagement in the research-based practices and their views on the challenging and positive aspects of SSR. Quantitative analysis of student achievement data through WESTEST2 or SRI data would be needed to evaluate student growth and compare the student achievement to the consistency in SSR structures at schools.

# Policy and Administrative Implications

Student access to diverse reading materials is vital, as the students need to be given opportunities for choices in a variety of content areas and for interaction with the text without the constant support from adults (Sanden, 2012). Students are more motivated to read when they can select their own reading. Thus, the essential components of SSR are in allowing students to select reading material based on their exposure to diverse texts and consistently providing students with time to read.

Student access to diverse materials and provision of time for uninterrupted, independent reading are the most widely known components of SSR. However, SSR has a variety of lesser known, additional structures that provide additional guidance to students during their independent reading time. During SSR, more structured approaches can be used in providing students with mini lessons on reading strategies and vocabulary acquisition, engaging them in discourse about their reading, and helping them select reading materials based on their interests and reading levels. According to the survey results, many teachers frequently engage in reading alongside students and help them select reading materials based on their reading interests and reading levels but seldom engage in conducting mini lessons on independent reading strategies or in discourse about student reading choices.

Teachers tend to view SSR as a completely independent reading activity during which little teacher intervention is welcomed. A more thorough look at the research on SSR, however, outlines other teacher behaviors that provide more structure in helping students enjoy reading while building their reading comprehension and vocabulary skills. Professional development on SSR provides teachers with skills and rationale for using research based strategies that are not conventionally associated with SSR. Thus, the lower percentages of teachers who conduct mini lessons to teach independent reading strategies or vocabulary development and engage in discourse about student-read materials, reflect the survey results where only 52.5 % of teachers received explicit professional development on SSR. Professional development through the professional learning community model could facilitate an increase in teacher comfort in engaging in a variety of instructional practices to help students become independent readers while being engaged in SSR.

The most frequently posted teacher concerns were about developing students into independent readers and having enough skill and knowledge to guide student development of reading behaviors during SSR. Many teachers also cited the lack of a variety of reading materials as one of the major challenges in effectively delivering SSR. Time and schedule concerns were also identified as challenges to the effective SSR implementation. After reviewing the survey results about a variety of SSR structures implemented in McDowell County schools and comparing teacher responses to the question about the challenges of SSR implementation, it is evident that teachers struggle with creating structures for sustained student engagement in independent reading. Teachers also feel worried about not having enough time to teach other subjects, especially within the elementary school setting. For other teachers, structured times allotted in the schedule are components of the effectively implemented SSR program. Thus, establishing the structures for consistency in SSR time is a necessary prerequisite for its implementation at school.

Another emerging teacher concern was the lack of consistency of teacher practices during SSR time. This concern reflects back to the inconsistency in professional development for teachers at the beginning of the year. Appropriate professional development would facilitate the consistency in SSR implementation and monitoring in individual schools.

Teacher behaviors during the SSR time are very important. Teachers need to monitor student choices, teach reading behaviors, and focus on student growth. “Expert behaviors” in the classroom become an indispensable part of student acculturation into the content knowledge and procedures that become a norm during the SSR time.(Freebody, 2003). Teachers need to serve as a support network modeling the reading strategies and providing continuous feedback. Clarke (2006) finds that the teachers who motivate students to read independently are voracious readers themselves and take time to proactively talk with students about the need to read.

Thus, professional development, another essential component of effective SSR implementation, affects teacher behaviors in a positive way. Even though only one third of the respondents wanted explicit professional development on SSR, many teachers expressed concern about their lack of skill to keep students on track during the SSR time, help them develop into independent readers, and establish structures for SSR that result in continuous student engagement in independent reading behaviors.

Teacher responses about the most liked aspects of SSR reveal that they value collaboration with each other in addition to having a variety of reading resources. Professional development is viewed as essential by 29.5 % of respondents, which could be an important aspect of planning SSR professional development through the professional learning community (PLC) model rather than through the trainer-led workshop.

The teachers who love reading shared this excitement in their responses. When asked what he or she likes about SSR, one teacher responded, “I love to read, so I love everything about it.” There are others, however, who were not completely dedicated to the implementation of SSR and expressed their concerns about the students not reading on the level or becoming bored. In this case, professional development and collaboration with other teachers and librarians would be helpful in allowing these teachers to build skill in providing students with various reading materials aligned to their interests and reading levels, thus avoiding the situations where students give up on books that are too challenging or boring for them and decide to engage in disruptive behavior instead. Exhibit A provides concrete suggestions for policy and administrative actions in regard to components of SSR implementations at school.

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# Appendix A

## Survey

Please, respond to the following questions:

**Part A**

1. Choose the school where you teach:
   1. Anawalt Elementary School
   2. Kimball Elementary School
   3. Iaeger Elementary School
   4. Welch Elementary School
   5. Fall River Elementary School
   6. Bradshaw Elementary School
   7. Southside K-8
   8. Sandy River Middle School
   9. River View High School
   10. Mount View High School
   11. McDowell County Career and Technical Center
2. What grades do you teach?
   1. Pre K
   2. K-2
   3. 3-5
   4. 6-8
   5. 9-12
3. Which of the following statements best describes how your school implements Sustained Silent Reading?
   1. Each teacher is encouraged to use SSR daily;
   2. Specific days and times each week have been identified for SSR;
   3. A sustained silent reading time is scheduled every day;
   4. SSR is a part of your daily routine without administrative encouragement and schedules;
4. What professional development did you receive before implementing SSR?
   1. No professional development;
   2. School-based professional development;
   3. County provided professional development;
   4. Other (Please, specify): \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Part B**

Following is a list of instructional strategies for use with SSR. Use the scale provided to indicate the frequency with which you use each of these in your classroom.

1= Rarely 2= Sometimes 3= Frequently 4= Regularly

1. Read alongside my students 1 2 3 4
2. Help students align reading choices to their interest and reading level

1 2 3 4

1. Engage students in discourse about the works they have read

1 2 3 4

1. Conduct mini lessons to teach independent reading behaviors

1 2 3 4

1. Conduct mini lessons to teach vocabulary development skills

1 2 3 4

1. Ask students to reflect on their reading through reading response logs.

1 2 3 4

**Part C**

1. In your classroom, how frequently do students have choices of what they read?
   1. Rarely
   2. Sometimes
   3. Frequently
   4. Regularly
2. What reading materials can your students access during SSR time? (Check all that apply)
   1. Magazines matched to their interests;
   2. Fiction appropriate to their age and reading levels;
   3. Nonfiction;
   4. Textbooks;
   5. Other (Please specify): \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
3. How does your school educate student families about SSR? (Check all that apply)
   1. No communication with families about SSR
   2. Monthly Newsletters
   3. Community workshops
   4. Parent teacher conferences
   5. Other (Please specify): \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
4. What would help you more effectively implement SSR at your school? (Check all that apply)
   1. More professional development
   2. Specific time in the schedule
   3. More diverse library in the classroom or at school
   4. Collaboration with other teachers or school librarian
   5. Other (please, specify) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Part D**

Please, respond to each of the following questions:

1. What do you like best about SSR? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. What is your major challenge using SSR? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Thank you**

# Appendix B

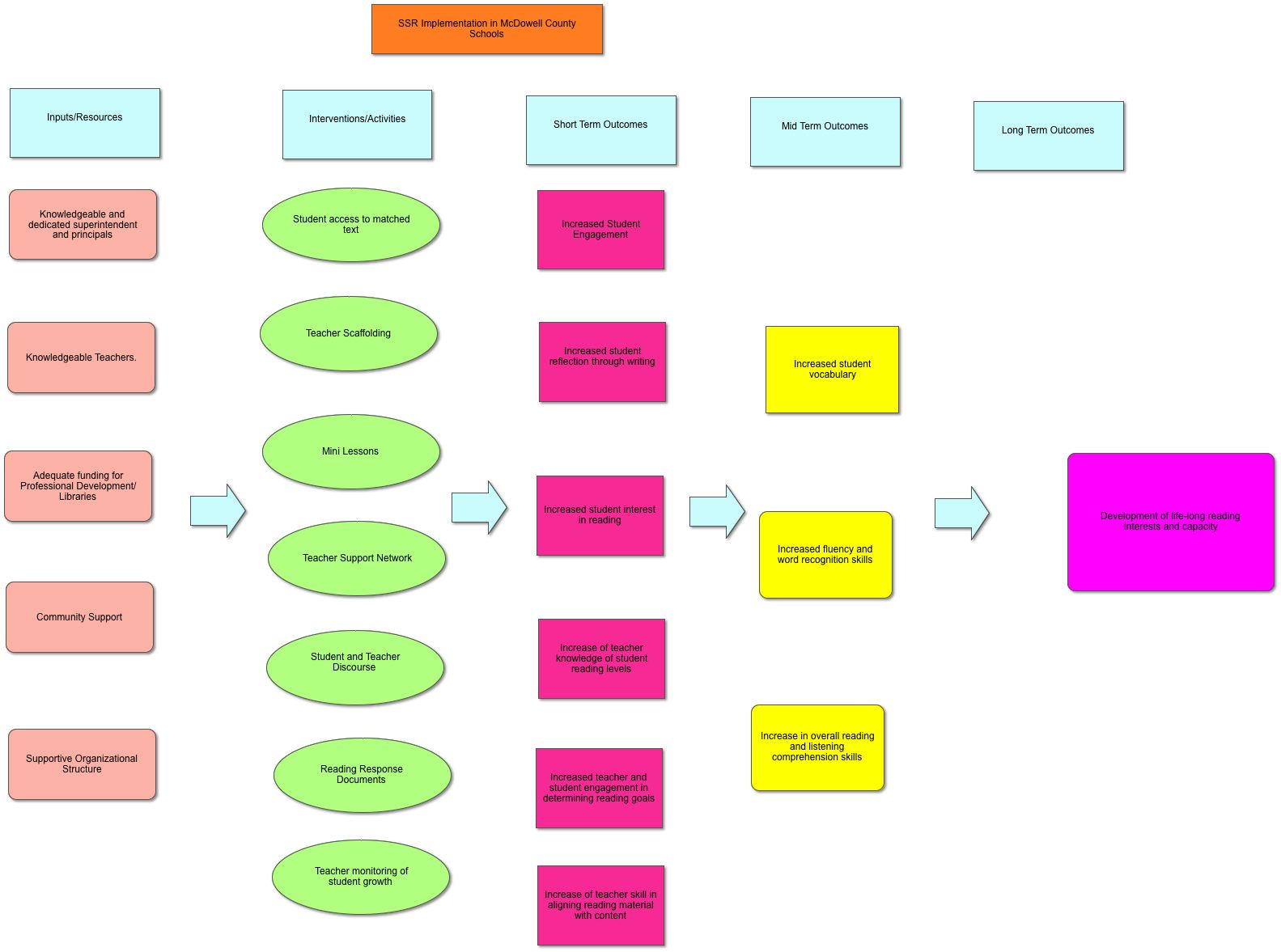


Table 1. *Which of the following statements best describes how your school implements Sustained Silent Reading?*

Practices \*n % \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Each teacher is encouraged to use SSR daily 11 17.7

Specific days and times each week have been identified for SSR 7 11.0

A Sustained Silent Reading time is scheduled every day 38 61.3

SSR is a part of your daily routine without administrative

encouragement and schedules 6 9.7

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

N = 73 \*Duplicated Count

Table 2. *Use the scale provided to indicate the frequency with which you use each of these in your classroom*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Practice | Frequency | | | | | | | |
| Rarely | | Sometimes | | Frequently | | Regularly | |
| n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % |
| Conduct mini lessons to teach independent reading behaviors | 20 | 43% | 15 | 32.6% | 8 | 17% | 3 | 6.5% |
| Conduct mini lessons to teach vocabulary development skills | 13 | 27% | 12 | 25.5% | 19 | 40% | 3 | 6.4% |
| Ask students to reflect on their reading through reading response logs | 29 | 52% | 11 | 20% | 8 | 14.5% | 7 | 12% |
| Engage students in discourse about the works they have read | 7 | 14% | 17 | 35.4% | 19 | 39.6% | 5 | 10.4% |
| Read alongside my students | 1 | 3% | 10 | 19.6% | 12 | 23.5% | 28 | 54% |
| Help students align reading choices to their interest and reading level | 3 | 7% | 14 | 32.6% | 13 | 30.2% | 13 | 30.2% |

N = 62

Table 3. *What reading materials can your students access during SSR time?*

Materials \*n % \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Magazines matched to their interest levels 29 46.8

Fiction appropriate to their age and reading levels 44 77.0

Nonfiction 46 74.2

Textbooks 36 58.0

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

N = 159 \*Duplicated count

Table 4. *How does your school educate student families about SSR?*

Communication \*n % \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

No communication with families 15 24.2

Monthly newsletters 14 22.0

Community workshops 2 3.2

Parent teacher conferences 27 43.5

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

N = 58

Table 5. *What would help you more effectively implement SSR at your school?*

Support \*n % \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

More professional development 13 21.0

Specific time in the schedule 7 11.0

More diverse library in the classroom or school 23 37.1

Collaboration with other teachers or school librarian 17 27.0

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

N = 60

Table 6. ANOVA Results of Frequency of SSR Instructional Strategy use Based on Grade Level Taught

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Instructional Strategy | Grade Levels Taught | | | | | | | |
| PreK-5 | | 5-8 | | 9-12 | |  | |
| M | SD | M | SD | M | SD | F | P |
| 1. Read alongside my students | 3.27 | .79 | 3.25 | 1.00 | 3.35 | .83 | .065 | .937 |
| 2. Helping students align reading choices to their interest and reading level | 3.20 | .79 | 3.00 | 1.12 | 2.61 | .94 | 1.532 | .229 |
| 3. Engage students in discourse about the works they have read | 2.83 | .94 | 2.50 | .80 | 2.62 | .86 | 1.728 | .189 |
| 4. Conduct mini lessons to teach independent reading behaviors | 2.00 | .67 | 1.92 | .86 | 1.82 | 1.10 | .137 | .873 |
| 5. Conduct mini lessons to teach vocabulary development skills | 2.25 | 1.04 | 2.23 | .927 | 2.09 | .921 | .839 | .439 |
| 6. Ask students to reflect on their reading through reading response logs | 1.77 | 1.09 | 2.11 | 1.18 | 1.74 | 1.05 | .641 | .531 |

N = 62 PreK-5 (n = 17); 5-8 (n = 18); 9-12 (n = 26)

Scale: 1 = Rarely; 2 = Sometimes; 3 = Frequently; 4 = Regularly

Table 7 *Independent Sample T-tests Results of Frequency of SSR Instructional Strategy Use Based on Participation in School-Based Professional Development*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Instructional Strategy | Participation in Professional Development | | | | | |
| Participant | | Non-participant | |  | |
| M | SD | M | SD | T Value | P |
| 1. Read alongside my students | 3.25 | .94 | 3.37 | .79 | .495 | .63 |
| 2. Helping students align reading choices to their interest and reading level | 2.94 | 1.06 | 2.76 | .88 | .624 | .54 |
| 3. Engage students in discourse about the works they have read | 2.76 | 1.80 | 2.22 | .79 | 2.208 | .032 |
| 4. Conduct mini lessons to teach independent reading behaviors | 2.10 | 1.02 | 1.69 | .84 | 1.488 | .144 |
| 5. Conduct mini lessons to teach vocabulary development skills | 2.33 | 1.02 | 2.19 | .90 | .505 | .616 |
| 6. Ask students to reflect on their reading through reading response logs | 2.00 | 1.20 | 1.76 | .99 | .818 | .417 |

N = 62 PD Participant (n = 30)

PD Non-participant (n = 31)

Scale: 1 = Rarely; 2 = Sometimes; 3 = Frequently; 4 = Regularly

**Exhibit A**

**Recommended Policy and Administrative Actions**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Focus Area | Strategies/Guidelines |
| Establishing Focus and Coherence | * Involve teachers in school decision-making process in regards to scheduling SSR; * Make SSR a non-negotiable at your school by focusing administrative walkthroughs on the SSR implementation at school, focus professional development on building teacher knowledge base about research supporting SSR, and model reading behaviors yourself; * Facilitate teacher learning and discussions based on promoting literacy practices school wide; * Monitor the use of instructional strategies via administrative walkthroughs |
| Supporting SSR implementation at school | * Engage teachers in theory-based professional development; * Make SSR time sacred; * Model instructional strategies to be implemented during SSR continuously; * Designate SSR time in the master schedule and monitor its implementation on a daily basis through administrative walkthroughs and continuous feedback |
| Building relationships with students based on their reading interests | * Provide students with diverse reading materials in the classroom and the school library; * Engage in conversation focused on their reading and read alongside students during the time designated for SSR. * Provide time in collaborative teams for teachers to share their strategies to build relationships with students |
| Maximizing Capacity | * Provide differentiated, job-embedded professional development to build teacher collegiality and instructional knowledge base in regard to SSR; * Provide support for expert teachers to share their practices with peers within the job-embedded environment. * Communicate with parents and community about reading initiatives at school via newsletters, parent conferences, or community nights. |
| Provide Professional Development | * Provide job-embedded professional development through the use of collaborative team practices geared towards understanding effective components of SSR; * Encourage teachers to implement research-based practices during SSR; * Create opportunities for all teachers to share their best practices during the instructional support days. |