

Middle School Bridge Program  
Program Evaluation  
School Year 2017-2018

Reading Public School District  
Reading, MA  
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## **INTRODUCTION**

A collaborative relationship between Melissa Orkin, Ph.D. and the Reading Public School Special Education Department administrators and staff was established to provide a comprehensive analysis of the current status of the district's middle school language-based program, called the Bridge program. This program is based at the Walter S. Parker Middle School. Over the last several years, the district has invested in professional consultation and coaching to support Bridge program faculty, and they are seeking an objective assessment of the implementation that has occurred to date.

## **GOALS**

Along those lines the current evaluation was conducted to learn more about how the current middle school Bridge program addresses the following:

1. The characteristics of instruction and the degree to which they align with best practices for language-based learning (both in direct specialized instruction and through supported content-area classes).
2. The employment of specialized remediation programs to maximize students' strengths and address weaknesses.
3. The degree to which the existing curricula aligns with grade-level expectations.
4. Modifications and accommodations which maximize student learning, including curriculum modifications and use of assistive technology.
5. Means for assessing student progress both towards individual goals, and grade-level benchmarks.
6. Instructional grouping
7. Resources provided for teachers including professional development, and planning time.

## **TIMELINE**

The program evaluation was initiated in February 2018, with classroom observations which continued into March 2018. Teacher and administrator interviews were conducted during February and March 2018. Parents of students enrolled in the middle school Bridge program were sent online surveys in April 2018 and given two weeks to complete the survey.

## METHODS

### DATA COLLECTION

Data was collected through a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods that relied on both structured tools (such as surveys, observation checklists, and inventories), and open-ended conversations. Below is a list of the tools utilized, each is briefly discussed in the results section to familiarize the reader with the nature of the instrument:

- Planning and Evaluation Tool-Revised (PET-R) Program Survey for Teachers & Administrators
- Interviews with Staff and Administrators
- Online Questionnaire for Parents
- Observations of Instruction
- Inventory of Assessments and Curricula

## RESULTS

### TEACHER FEEDBACK

**I. Planning and Evaluation Tool-Revised (PET-R) Program Survey for Teachers & Administrators.** An adapted version of the Planning and Evaluation Tool-Revised (PET-R, Kame'enui & Simmons, 2003) was utilized in order to identify instructional and administrative elements considered necessary for effective programs. The survey includes 7 categories: *goals and objectives, assessment, instructional programs and materials, differentiated instruction, administration, and professional development*. The elements in the survey provide an independent and objective standard to evaluate practices within the Bridge Program. Within each category, faculty and administrators responded to a series of questions using a scale of 0 - 2 (0 = Not in place, 1 = Partially in Place, and 2 = Fully in Place). Each question provided a space for comments.

The PET-R survey was distributed and discussed during focus group meetings which are described in detail (see section titled Focus Groups with Faculty and Administrators). A number of teachers noted that certain components of the survey did not relate to their responsibilities or felt the language was convoluted. Time was spent clarifying terms. The survey was completed by 10 teachers and 2 administrators, which as a group will collectively be referred to as “educators.”

Current educators in the Bridge program have **an average of 13 years of experience in the field** (ranging from 1 year - 30 years, all but one educator has more than 5 years of experience

in the field). On average, they have been employed at the present school for 8 years (ranging between 1 -18 years).

#### *A. Goals and Objectives*

The Goals and Objectives portion of the survey inquired about the clarity of student goals and the role goals play in formulating instruction. **Most educators (n = 8) felt that students' goals, as articulated in the IEPs, were realistic and based on current abilities, and guided their instructional and curricular decisions.** Areas of ongoing support included **a need to define and quantify goals in each content area and ensure that goals are commonly understood for particular students across grade levels,** in order to support vertical alignment over the course of middle school. Some (n = 4) commented that general **classroom teachers need better support in formulating and implementing student goals that simultaneously integrate remediation and access to grade-level content.**

#### *B. Assessment*

The Assessment portion of the survey inquired about the use of instruments and procedures to assess achievement among Bridge students. Educators' comments (n = 9) indicated that **curricular assessments are in place, and progress monitoring occurs for IEPs.** Yet there are **no consistent benchmarks assessments occurring across academic domains (n = 7), especially ELA and math.** There is also a **need to arrange formal data meetings which evaluate student progress and modify instruction accordingly.**

#### *C. Instructional Practices*

The Instructional Practices portion of the survey inquired about the use of evidence and/or research-based instructional programs that align with state standards and support the full range of learners. **Some teachers (n = 6) reported the use of specialized reading programs to address specific weaknesses in reading (LiPS, Visualizing & Verbalizing, Wilson) and in writing (Framing Your Thoughts).** They also reported **strategies endorsed by the Landmark School.** Other teachers (n = 6) reported **working independently to create materials and approaches.** Most teachers (n = 9) reported using the **"instructional best practices" that are associated language-based learning disabilities including systematic, explicit instruction with visual supports, and extensive repetition.** Most teachers (n = 9) also felt that instruction aligned with state standards while offering the scaffolds necessary to support independent work.

#### *D. Differentiated Instruction*

The Differentiated Instruction section asked respondents to comment on the degree to which a *Universal Design for Learning* (UDL) framework is followed in order to meet the needs of all students. Respondents were provided with a checklist of UDL practices

that address the three prominent domains: 1) multiple means of representation; 2) multiple means of action and expression; and, 3) multiple means of engagement. Only half the teachers (n = 6) felt that the guidelines from UDL are fully in place.

**Most teachers (n = 9) reported that students' performance is used to determine the level of instructional material. Student mastery is evaluated through formal (curricular tests) and informal assessments (assignment completion), and small flexible groups are formed based on students' needs in order to provide further assistance.**

#### *E. Administration*

The Administration portion of the survey asked respondents to comment on the Bridge program leadership, communication, organization, and allocation of resources. The majority of **respondents (n = 10) agreed that administrators are knowledgeable of state standards, language-based instructional programs, assessments, and practices.** There was **less agreement about the development and implementation of an instructional plan, communication plan with parents, and the establishment of grade-level teams to analyze students' achievement.** Only half of the respondents (n = 6) commented that these elements are fully in place and/or supported by administrators.

#### *F. Professional Development*

The Professional Development (PD) section of the survey asked respondents to comment on the degree to which ongoing PD is provided in order to further their instructional practice and understanding of language-based learning disabilities. The majority of **respondents (n = 9) felt they had a working knowledge of instructional-based practices, and accommodations/modifications. Areas of challenge included the systematic allocation of time towards planning, analyzing and refining instruction,** where the majority (n = 8) felt practices were only somewhat in place and responders noted that the **planning time was often "re-allocated," or felt "spread thin."** While others wished that **"all team members should be included."** Respondents also noted that PD in prior years was helpful, and hoped for ongoing opportunities.

## **II. Focus Groups with Faculty and Administrators**

Faculty and administrators met in small, largely grade-level, discussion groups and engaged in open-ended conversations about the successes of the Bridge Program. During these discussions, faculty and administrators were asked to identify areas of success and needs for ongoing support.

*Sixth Grade Team*

Teachers in the sixth-grade team noted that because of the small cohort (two students) they have **been able to provide highly target instruction, and communicate regularly with families about progress.** The appreciated previous **professional development delivered by Adam Hickey from the Landmark school** and are **seeking further information about how to modify assignments and readings, understanding strengths and weaknesses of students' profiles, and the means for thoughtfully integrating assistive technology.**

*Seventh Grade Team*

Teachers in the seventh-grade team identified the framework utilized across the classroom to **support students' ability to keep track of their materials including their class notes and assignments (a structure provided by a Landmark Professional Development workshop) as a significant area of success.** They also highlighted their ability to modify assessments, as needed, to accommodate students' learning profiles, and working as a grade-level team to anticipate students' needs. The teachers are **seeking opportunities to support content area learning, for example, mastering vocabulary necessary for science or social studies, and would like to use assistive technology to foster students' independence.** Finally, there is also a greater **desire to have specified planning time across the entire Bridge faculty and share resources with the SPED team.**

*Eighth Grade Team*

Teachers in the eighth grade highlighted several aspects of team placement that they feel has contributed to their overall success. The first is **consistent faculty assignment, including paraprofessionals,** for the last three years. They noted that a consistent team has resulted in efficient and proactive communication. The second aspect is **consistency with the content area curriculum for the last two years, which now affords the opportunity for differentiation.** The final aspect is **the implementation of recommendations from the professional development opportunities, in particular, consultation with Landmark.** The team has focused on developing consistent routines within the classroom, supporting students' higher level organization of materials and information, and using consistent templates and scaffolds in math. The team identified the nature of balancing remediation with supporting access to grade-level content as a significant challenge, particularly when students are weak in their abilities to regulate their own impulsive behaviors. They commented that **students' schedules are frequently packed with various specialized curriculum that it is difficult to find time to provide general academic support. Similarly, in some**

**cases, the faculty, particularly the math department, are off-schedule and do not have an opportunity to meet with grade level team members.**

### **Summary of Educator Feedback**

Educators in the Middle School Bridge program largely reported positive experiences and indicate that **strengths of the program** include:

- Cohesive grade-level teams that strengthen over time with staffing (including paraprofessional staff) and curriculum consistency.
- Realistic student goals, as articulated in IEPs.
- Use of curricular assessments.
- Integration of specialized instruction to remediate weaknesses in reading and writing.
- Administrators are knowledgeable about language-based practices and state standards.
- Previous professional development (specifically Adam Hickey), in helping to identify cross-content strategies for building executive function skills among students.

Areas for **ongoing support** include:

- Need for the development of an instructional plan that aligns across grade levels.
- Need for benchmark assessments.
- Allocating grade-level planning time that includes all faculty.
- Ongoing professional development support and consultation.
- Strategic use of assistive technology to foster independence.

## PARENT FEEDBACK

Parents of children in the Middle School Bridge program were asked to anonymously contribute to an **online evaluation** being conducted to determine areas of success, weakness, and needs for ongoing support. Parents were asked to comment on their child's overall achievement and emotional well-being since entering the Bridge Program, and their growth in specific content areas. On a scale of 1 - 5 (1 = Not Satisfied, 2 = Somewhat Satisfied, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Satisfied, 5 = Very Satisfied), parents indicated their level of satisfaction with each component of their child's educational experience and included specific comments. There are 14 students currently enrolled in the Bridge Program and 12 parents completed the survey (2 parents of 6th graders, 4 parents of 7th graders and 3 parents of 8th graders. One respondent did not identify their child's grade).

### Distribution of Disability Categories

The distribution of children's disabilities (according to Individualized Education Plans) among families who completed the survey were as follows: Specific Learning Disability in Reading (33%), Specific Learning Disability in Writing (30%), Specific Learning Disability in Math (15%), Health Impairment - ADHD (12%) and Communication Impairment (9%). In identifying their child's major area(s) of weakness, 24% of parents reported written expression, 20% of parents reported fluency, 18% of parents reported reading comprehension, and 16% reported spelling. Only 9% of parents reported decoding, and 6% reported arithmetic, and 4% reporting number sense.

### General Program Experience

In regards to communication with teachers and administrators, many parents felt satisfied or very satisfied. Approximately 50% of respondents felt very satisfied or satisfied with the expertise of Bridge program faculty and administrators. These parents reported an **extremely satisfactory experience, particularly the attention given to math. Families have observed teachers go "above and beyond," and "tremendous improvement" in their child.** Another 41% of respondents **do not feel that their child's learning profile is understood or a successful learning experience has been developed** for him/her. These families are concerned that **"skills are built in isolation and lack transfer,"** or **"lack norm-referenced data"** to objectively gauge growth.

Most parents felt not satisfied or only somewhat satisfied with the instructional grouping in their child's Bridge program classroom. Parents perceive a **wide-range of intellectual abilities** within the Middle School Bridge program.

In regards to the structure of their child's schedule, most parents felt unsatisfied or only somewhat satisfied, want to see **more room in the schedule for electives.** When asked to

comment on the nature of academic support received by their child, there was a split of responses. Academic support refers to assistance in staying organized, understanding homework assignments, preparing for quizzes & tests, accessing texts, conveying ideas and making-up work. Half of the parents reported high satisfaction or satisfaction and other half reported only some or no satisfaction. Parents who felt satisfied **noticed the presence of support**, parents who were unsatisfied **felt their children were “carried” but not given independent strategies**. Many parents commented that the Bridge **teachers are all accessible and available for review, others were concerned that study guides do not include multi-sensory strategies known to support students with language-based impairments**, such as visual aids and mnemonics devices.

When asked to characterize the overall change in their child, most parents **recognized a significant improvement or some improvement in their child** since starting the Bridge middle school program, parents noted that teachers **“understand how their child learns,” and “that sixth grade is the first year they have not seen him regress.”**

Families were **divided as to their satisfaction** that their child’s grades are an accurate reflection of their effort, knowledge and ability, 33% expressed some or high levels of satisfaction commenting that **grades seem to reflect output appropriately**. The 42% of parents who were not satisfied that grades are an accurate reflection, expressed **concerns about the objectivity of the grading system, questioned whether too much support is given**, and noted that their child may not be graded on the same scale as their peers, particularly when it comes to achieving honor roll status.

### **Language-Based Skills**

Of the families who responded, **25% were satisfied** with the progress their child had made in developing fluency and comprehension abilities, spelling abilities, and writing skills respectively. Satisfied families commented that the **structure of writing has improved**. In these same domains, **42% were not satisfied with their child’s growth** in fluency and comprehension, and 59% were only somewhat or dissatisfied with growth in writing. Unsatisfied families commented that **staff are not trained in structured writing programs, and not closing the gap compared to general education peers**.

### **Mathematical Skills**

Of the families who responded, **33% felt satisfied with the progress their child has made in their calculation abilities** (i.e. step by step sequence to complete a complex math problem), and **25% felt satisfied with the progress their child has made in their conceptual mathematical knowledge** (i.e. larger understanding of mathematical ideas including the ability the transfer knowledge to new situations). Satisfied families noted that progress has been made, but still a bit to go before the transfer of knowledge to new situations. In these same domains,

25% were not satisfied with their child's growth in calculations abilities, and 25% were not satisfied with conceptual mathematical knowledge. Unsatisfied families expressed concern that due to schedule constraints their child was placed in appropriate setting that was not adequately challenging. Some commented that there is no special education teacher in the program to support children with dyscalculia and dyslexia.

### **Content Areas (Social Studies and Science)**

Of families who responded, **50% felt very satisfied or satisfied with the progress their child is making in his/her knowledge of social studies content. In science, 42% of families felt satisfied, and 33% felt not satisfied.** One parent described the social studies teacher as very engaging and effective instruction including multi-sensory techniques and modified study guides. Another parent felt that science instruction is inherently multi-sensory and more engaging than social studies. Comments by dissatisfied parents included concerns that social studies and science courses are not true language programs, they should be co-taught by special educators, and supplementing at home is necessary to support learning.

When commenting on the implementation of accommodations and modifications in content area classes, approximately **36% of families reported being either very satisfied or satisfied, and approximately 30% reported either somewhat satisfied or not satisfied.** Several families expressed concerns that there is **not enough consistency in use of accommodations** and modification in general education classrooms, or that they are **used in place of teaching for the dyslexic child.** When asked to identify the use of specific accommodations and modifications extended testing time was the most common (30% use in social studies: 36% in science), followed by administration of test in a separate setting (24% in social studies, and 21% in science); then the provision of modified, completed or modeled notes (18% in both areas); and finally a reduction in the quantity of tested material (6% in social studies and 7% in science). No families reported the use of reading tests aloud or accessing an audio version of the text.

### **Summary of Parent Experiences**

Parents of students in the Middle School Bridge reported a mix of experiences. The areas of mostly positive sentiments include:

- Most parents reported that as a result of attending the Middle School Bridge program, they have witnessed **significant improvement or some improvement in their child.** Families specified that their child's profile is better understood by Bridge program teachers, and the program is the first that has been successful in preventing skill regression.
- The majority of families are satisfied with the progress their child is making in content area instruction (social studies and science) and perceive the classes as engaging and appropriate for their child.
- Most parents feel the communication from the teachers ranges between excellent and good.

Families reported a mix of satisfactory and unsatisfactory experiences in the following areas:

- **Study Skills/Academic Support:** Some families were highly satisfied or satisfied and noted teacher availability and support, while others were concerned that review materials were not designed for students with language-based learning disabilities, and felt as though their children were being “carried” but not given independent strategies.
- **Accommodations & Modifications:** Some families perceive is a lack of consistency across classrooms and are concerned that accommodations and modifications are used in place of instruction, while others were satisfied. The three most widely cited accommodations were extended testing time, test administration in a separate room, and modified notes.
- **Faculty Expertise:** One-half of the parents were satisfied or very satisfied and noted that teachers "go above and beyond." While 41% reported being somewhat or not satisfied and are concerned that "skills are built in isolation and lack transfer," or "lack norm-referenced data" to objectively gauge growth.
- **Students’ School Refusal:** Approximately 41% of parents reported that their child is often or somewhat avoidant, while 41% reported their child is rarely or never avoidant.
- **Content Area Performance:** In regards to social studies, 50% of families felt very satisfied or satisfied with the progress their child is making in his/her knowledge of social studies content. In science, 42% of families felt satisfied. Satisfied parents described social studies and science teachers as engaging and utilizing multi-sensory techniques. Dissatisfied parents were concerned that classes are not co-taught by special educators.
- **Grades As A Reflection of Ability:** Some parents are concerned that grades are inflated and do not reflect their child's true ability when compared to grade-matched peers, while others appreciate that grade reflect effort and strategy-use.
- **Mathematical Ability:** Parents who felt satisfied with the progress their child has made in their calculation abilities (i.e. step by step sequence to complete a complex math problem), and/or conceptual mathematical knowledge (i.e. larger understanding of mathematical ideas including the ability the transfer knowledge to new situations), were pleased with growth and hoped their child would be able to transfer knowledge to new situations. Unsatisfied families expressed concern that classes are not adequately challenging.

Families reported the greatest level of dissatisfaction in the following areas:

- **Reading Fluency and Comprehension:** Most families noted that instructional efforts are not closing the gap between their child’s abilities and grade-level expectations.
- **Written Expression:** Most families were only somewhat satisfied or dissatisfied with progress in written expression. Families were concerned that staff are not trained in structured writing programs.

## **OBSERVATIONS OF INSTRUCTION**

Over 40 hours of instructional observations were conducted over a two-month period between February and March 2018. Each grade level was observed over the course of two consecutive days to better understand how routines provided a gradual release of responsibility and concepts build in complexity. The general commentary is included below, detailed feedback can be found in the appendices.

### **Specialized Reading and Language Instruction (Intervention)**

Specialized small group and individualized literacy instruction were observed across the grade levels. Practitioners delivered lessons in *The Wilson Reading Program*, and *Lindamood Bell's LiPs* and *Seeing Stars* programs. A small group speech and language session for 7th-grade students was also observed. These sessions were comprised of the systematic, sequential, multisensory approaches that characterize specialized instruction. The practitioners who carried out the instruction **demonstrated knowledge and a high level of fidelity**. For a detailed description of observations see Appendix A.

### **English Language Arts Instruction**

Small group English Language Arts (ELA) instruction was observed over the three grade levels. The observed ELA lessons were taught by Bridge Program teachers and the format varied by grade level. For a detailed description of observations see Appendix B.

### ***Summary of Observed Strengths in Specialized Instruction and ELA***

- Specialized instruction (intervention) is delivered with a high degree of fidelity, by knowledgeable practitioners.
- Inclusion opportunities with traditional students were incorporated. For example in the 6th-grade students were grouped by book choice.
- In upper grades, the ELA curriculum was aligned with social studies content to provide a comprehensive "unit" of study.
- Teachers provide modification and accommodations as necessary such as reading aloud, scribing and use of technology for writing.
- Word banks for new vocabulary were utilized.
- The pacing of instruction matched the needs of the students.

Summary of **Recommendations** for Specialized Instruction and ELA:

**Integrating Specialized Remediation with ELA.** The observed specialized instruction (interventions) were delivered with fidelity, but because not all teachers or all students are familiar with specialized programs, the instruction can feel disjointed from the rest of the curriculum. Identifying a remedial literacy program that is more integrative in nature, and is specifically tailored towards building reading fluency and comprehension skills (an area of ongoing need according to parents) will be highly beneficial for most Bridge program students. One such program is called *Language! Live*. *Language! Live* is a specialized remediation program designed for students in fifth grade and higher and integrates decoding instruction with fluency, comprehension, and writing. *Language! Live* follows a blended instruction format in which part of the lesson is delivered directly by the teacher and part is delivered through an online platform.

**Use of Assistive Technology.** In order to facilitate student independence, it is recommended that any novel used in ELA is made accessible to students through a speech to text program. Voice Dream reader used in conjunction with Bookshare is one option.

**Reading Comprehension Instruction.** Instruction can be thought of as occurring in three parts:

- *Before reading* - Activate background knowledge, review previous learning (if appropriate) and set a purpose for reading through guided questions or a text-level activity.
- *During reading* - Graphic organizer is always employed to keep track of information. The teacher first models for students then engages with the student in the activity, and finally offers independent practice.
- *After reading* - Group discusses activity and outcomes. Plans for next time.

**Consistent Use of Graphic Organizers for Comprehension.** A delimited, rotating set of graphic organizers or mind maps should be identified and practiced with extensively (ideally every reading) to facilitate the internalization of strategies. Organizers that align with the goals of ELA at each grade level will be most helpful, these include main idea and details, character study, character development over time, compare and contrast, sequential, cause and effect, etc.

**Written Expression Instruction.** At the middle school level, students' writing will be largely derived from the novels and expository texts they are reading. Maintaining graphic organizers (see above) will go a long way to help streamline the process of integrating facts from texts into written responses and essays. Yet, the process of writing, both at the sentence level and the essay or passage level, is often difficult for students with language-based impairments. Writing is a complex process that requires the integration of literacy, comprehension, and self-regulation skills. The writing process from start (brainstorming, planning) to completion (publishing) needs to be explicitly taught explicitly and systematically practiced. While *Framing Your Thoughts* sentence level helps students in building high-quality sentences and understanding parts of speech, structured writing programs that support the

development of passages are also essential. There are several programs that are recommended including *EmPOWER* by Architects for Learning and *Step Up to Writing* by Voyager Sopris.

## **Math Instruction**

Math Instruction was observed in both small group settings and inclusion classrooms. In the inclusion setting, Bridge program students were seated at group tables, and the Special Educator in Math, along with an instructional aide assisted throughout the lesson. The classroom math teacher is also trained in Special Education. Overall, the math instruction across settings was highly explicit, systematic and multi-sensory. Instruction contained almost all of the elements essential to language-based programming in math including, gradual release of responsibility, connecting abstract concepts to practical application, use of manipulatives, frequent review, and appropriate pacing. Yet, despite high-quality instruction, it should be noted that during observations of the inclusion classroom, the teacher had to address behavioral outbursts on several occasions.

The recommendations below should be understood in light of the fact that the evaluator has been trained in the needs of students with language-based learning disabilities, but does not have a background in mathematics instruction. For detailed observations and recommendations see Appendix C.

### ***Summary of Observed Strengths in Mathematics Instruction***

- Instruction across a variety of contexts, both inclusion and intervention classrooms was explicit, systematic and employed critical principles of multi-sensory techniques.
- Specialized instruction is delivered with a high degree of fidelity, by knowledgeable practitioners.
- Clearly established routines supported students' transition and independence.
- Self-created resources "i.e. decimal fact sheet" reduced load on working memory and supported student's independence.
- Lessons incorporate engagement through movement (i.e. rotating through centers) and discussion.
- Abstract concepts are rooted in real-world applications.
- Teachers regularly check for comprehension.

### ***Summary of Recommendations for Mathematics Instruction***

**Use the warm-up routines to support the development of a specific skill.** For example, if the focus is developing estimation skills. Ask students to first put 10 candies in a box, and in units of 10 estimate, how many more candies might fit. Or to estimate the result of  $63-47$ , or  $114 + 23$ , etc. Estimation is a key skill for students with language-based challenges because they often become immersed in the procedural aspects of calculations and struggle to connect to the conceptual or "big picture" elements. Estimation helps students "check" their work through questions like "does that make sense given the calculation?"

**Closure Routines** to reiterate/revisit important concepts. **Closure Activities** end a lesson and create a lasting impression, a phenomenon sometimes referred to as the "recency effect." Here are some helpful tips about closure from a good Edutopia article (Finley, 2005).

Teachers use closure to:

- Check for understanding and inform subsequent instruction
- Emphasize key information
- Tie up loose ends
- Correct misunderstandings

Students find closure helpful for:

- Summarizing, reviewing, and demonstrating their understanding of major points
- Consolidating and internalizing key information
- Linking lesson ideas to a conceptual framework and/or previously-learned knowledge
- Transferring ideas to new situations

Sample Closure activities include:

- *Two-Dollar Summary.* Kids write a two-dollar (or more) summary of the lesson. Each word is worth ten cents. For extra scaffolding, ask students to include specific words in their statement.
- *Paper Slide.* On paper, small groups sketch and write what they learned. Then team representatives line up and, one and a time, slide their work under a video camera while quickly summarizing what was learned. The camera doesn't stop recording until each representative has completed his or her summary.
- *Sequence It.* Students can quickly create timelines with *Timetoast* to represent the sequence of a plot or historical events.
- *Simile Me.* Have students complete the following sentence: "The [concept, skill, word] is like \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_."

**Foster Self-Regulated Learning and Independent Application of Strategies.** For example, rather than instructing students on the particular "quick guide" to use as a resource when complete a problem (i.e. decimal conversion table), the teacher can **ask students to remind her, which folder has the percentage conversations.** If they struggle to remember a guide or map can be posted in the room that aligns the color of the folder with the topic of study.

**Support and/or Minimize "Shifting" Between Activities.** Students with language-based learning disabilities **need support in shifting strategies. A more streamlined approach involves a protocol in which students still work at stations but all stations tackle the same activity at the same time.** After students switch to the second station (no more than 2 stations in a classroom period), explicit instruction/modeling is provided again for the next type of problem.

**Use Manipulatives.** Whenever possible bring in manipulatives to make abstract ideas like percents, and fractions concrete. One popular website ([hand2mind.com](http://hand2mind.com)) is one resource.

**Consider a Classroom Management Curriculum that Fosters Self-Regulation.** There is a strong relationship between academic success and self-regulation. Students with language-based learning disabilities are prone to weaknesses in regulatory control and struggle to

inhibit impulsive behaviors like engaging in inappropriate behaviors, off-topic discussions, calling out, etc. However, self-regulation in addition to other social/emotional competencies is critical for academic success. By integrating strategies that explicitly teach and support the development of social-emotional and academic competencies, teachers will be able to establish a supportive and productive learning environment. Key elements of the environment include:

- Use of effective teacher language and lessons that are active and interactive.
- Explicit expectations for behavior that are arrived at through a collaborative process with teachers.
- Routines that promote autonomy and independence.
- Offering meaningful choices.
- Building a sense of shared community and purpose.

One evidence-based approach that has been modified for use with middle-school students is the *Responsive Classroom* program.

## Content Area Instruction

Across the grade-levels, content instruction occurred in inclusion classrooms. Students in the Bridge Program were seated at the front of the class (when possible) and paired with a typically performing peer. Instructional aides and Bridge program ELA teachers were present in the classes and circulated among Bridge program students making themselves available to facilitate access to the curriculum. For detailed comments on observations see Appendix C.

### *Summary of Observed Strengths in Content Area Instruction:*

- Consistent use of daily & weekly agendas
- Most classes began with a whole group discussion/debate
- Utilized visual prompts as catalysts for debates
- Previewed key vocabulary
- Engaging use of videos and audio/visual prompts.
- Multiple multi-sensory activities integrated into lessons to practice concepts and demonstrate knowledge
- Use of rubrics for assignments
- Opportunities for small group work and peer-mediated learning
- Modified notes and assessments
- Variety of note-taking formats employed
- Consistent use of organizational schema (i.e. Table of Contents)
- Bridge program teachers and aides provide accommodations and modifications during instruction

### *Summary of Recommendations for Content Area Instruction*

**Activate Prior Learning.** *Always* begin lessons with review questions for students to answer independently or in groups. As observed, teachers can vary the format of the questions (i.e. open-ended, multiple choice, select three words to describe, debate, etc.) and the prompts (visual, audio/visual, demonstration).

**Use Visual Aids and Multi-Sensory Elements Frequently.** The most simple and straightforward recommendation for content area teachers is **that every important element of instruction presented orally (directions, questions, etc.) needs to be presented visually.** Additional visual aids (videos, pictures, illustrations) and hands-on experiences (e.g. activities, manipulatives, and objects) are essential for supporting the consolidation of knowledge among Bridge program students. Teachers were very innovative and thoughtful in their integration of activities and can collaborate with each other in planning their instruction (see Vertical Planning Time below).

**Offer Opportunities for Analysis and Debate.** Engaging students in debates inherently requires higher-level analytical thinking because it **demand a strong justification for their**

**stated- ideas and opinions. Using audio/visual prompts as the catalyst for debate (as many Bridge program teachers were already noted to be doing) is highly beneficial because it does not constrain the participation of Bridge program students.** Furthermore, the act of debate supports the social/emotional growth of middle school students in a developmentally appropriate way. It is critical that teachers **model the appropriate protocols of debate** (i.e. what makes a good debate) and **collaborate with students to set ground rules that govern behavior.**

**Follow Gradual Release of Responsibility Model.** A gradual release of responsibility model follows **three systematic steps in which responsibility for a particular practice or activity incrementally shifts from the teacher’s domain to the student’s domain.** In the first step, teachers “explicitly model” a routine or activity, and explicitly discuss strategies or ask students what they notice about their strategy-use. The second step is “guided practice” in which the student tries out the routine with leadership and support from the teacher. For example in guided practice, the class reads the next section as a group (or a small group of students participate under the guidance of an aide), and complete the two-column notes as a group. The final step is "independent practice" in which students take charge and practice independently with scaffolded materials while the teacher clarifies, confirms and evaluates their performance.

**Limit Independent Work to 20 Minute Segments.** The stamina required to sustain more than 20 minutes of independent work often exceeds the skills of Bridge program students. Break up independent work with debates or mini-closure activities (see *Closure activities* in Math recommendations above).

**Use Note-Taking Scaffolds to Support Skill Development.** Not all note-taking methods are equal. The approach employed places demands on different types of cognitive and linguistic skills. As teachers select from various note-taking methods they can consider the purpose of the task.

- *Cornell Notes* - Two column notes are a simplified method for keeping tracking of key concepts and supporting information. The method by which Cornell notes are used can vary in complexity. Providing students with the key concept/main idea (often in the left-hand column) and asking them to find supporting details is an easier task than providing them with details and asking them to summarize into a key concept.
- *Skeleton Notes* - Provide statements that are missing a key fact, and students complete the blanks as they read. This notetaking is less taxing on reading skills but more taxing on comprehension and can be beneficial as a review/exam preparation.

**Vertical Planning Time Across Grade Levels.** Content area teachers are utilizing unique and innovative methodology across grade levels. Affording planning time for social studies

teachers or science teachers to discuss their instructional methodology will address the means for systematically building skills and modifying assignments for Bridge Program students across grade levels.

## Academic Support

Bridge students are provided with academic support on a daily basis. Classroom time is used to provide assistance in completing assignments, preparing for exams, and organizing their notes and materials. For a detailed description of observations please see Appendix E.

### *Summary of Observed Strengths in Academic Support*

- Opportunities for peer-mediated learning and review are regularly facilitated.
- The consistent use of a Table of Contents for organizing materials across contexts is highly beneficial for keeping track of notes.
- Students are observed to advocate for their needs during academic support time.
- The rapport between students and teachers is further strengthened during academic support time.

### *Summary of Recommendations for Academic Support*

The purpose of academic support is often two-fold, both to help students complete their assignments, but also to support the development of critical strategies that address weaknesses in executive function skills. Below are specific strategies and recommendations for addressing executive function weaknesses. The strategies are derived in part from the book *Promoting Executive Function in the Classroom*, Ed. Lynn Meltzer (2010).

**Provide Strategic Support Around Key Executive Function Skills.** Students with language-based learning disabilities often have trouble managing the high-level “executive function skills” essential for handling complex academic tasks. The following represent a selection of key executive function that will benefit from explicit support through strategy-use and routines:

- **Time Management** supports students' ability to manage and plan their time in the long-term by using weekly and monthly calendars and "to-do lists", and in the short-term by using daily calendars, checklists and/or visual representations of time to complete an individual task (i.e. time timers).
- **Goal Setting & Planning** helps students work backward from a larger goal (i.e. due date of a project) to set "mini-goals," or break down intimidating, complex tasks into manageable steps.
- **Checking** through the use of rubrics or checklists are beneficial in supporting students' ability to thoughtfully reflect on their work and the extent to which it fulfills the expectations of the task.

**Providing explicit instruction, practice and support in these areas will help students become more independent in their learning.** *Promoting Executive Function in the Classroom*, has a section on each topic above and can serve as a helpful resource.

**Strategies for Exam Preparation.** There are a number of wonderful multi-sensory strategies that teachers can use with students to help them prepare for an exam. Some examples include:

- **Cartoons** are pictures that help you remember a concept, phenomenon or definition (for example, the three branches of government).
- **Crazy Phrases or Acronyms** offer a brief mnemonic technique for memorizing lists of things like

- **Act It Out.** Whenever possible look for opportunities to make conceptual or abstract ideas into tangible activities by using manipulatives, audio/visual aids or dramatization.

## **INVENTORY OF ASSESSMENT, CURRICULA, AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT HISTORY**

Allison Wright, Team Chairperson at Parker Middle School generously compiled an inventory of existing assessments and curricular materials for Bridge program students at the middle school level.

### **Assessment Inventory**

Generally speaking, the assessment inventory is comprised of a good variety of curricular assessments and diagnostic assessments but contains few benchmark or progress monitoring assessments which are designed to evaluate how students are progressing toward grade-level benchmarks. For a detailed inventory of assessment measures see Appendix F.

#### **Strengths of Existing Assessment Inventory:**

- Wide-variety of valid and reliable diagnostic assessment measures for literacy-related skills.
- Trained practitioners available in the district

#### **Recommendations for Assessment Inventory**

**Balance out diagnostic measures** with items that identify students who have **naming speed deficits** and require specialized, intensive instruction in developing reading fluency. These measures include *Rapid Automatized Naming/Rapid Alternating Stimulus* (RAN/RAS) at the foundational reading level and the *Test of Word Reading Efficiency* (TOWRE-2) at the single word level.

Implement the use of a **benchmark assessment administered at three time periods** throughout the school year in order to assess how students are progressing towards grade-level expectations. Examples of these assessments are *AimsWeb* and *iReady*.

### **Curricula Inventory**

The district possesses a wide-variety of specialized programs that address the various linguistic language-based weaknesses common among students in the Bridge program. These weaknesses include decoding, fluency, comprehension and written expression. Yet, there is an inherent challenge in remediating language-based weaknesses at the middle school level, because the nature of the weaknesses often restrict students' exposure to a wide variety of texts. There is

significant research to suggest that the type of texts students can access, particularly beyond the fourth grade, has a large impact on their ability to become better readers.

This phenomenon can best be described as a *Matthew Effect* (Stanovich, 1999) in which challenges with reading limit the variety of vocabulary, sentence structure and content to which students are exposed. It is partially through their exposure to these very essential linguistic elements that high-level readers continue to develop their skills. This is particularly true in middle school, where the focus is on an integration of skills. Reading comprehension informs written expression, and practice with written expression builds grammatical and syntactic skills. The downside of most remedial, specialized reading programs at this stage is that they continue to build skills in isolation (e.g., focusing exclusively on phonics), and do not support the ability to integrate knowledge.

The district possesses a rich inventory of specialized reading programs; however, to meet the needs of struggling students in middle school is it important to bolster available programs that integrate skills. Integrative programs provide multi-componential instruction within a given lesson. Essentially, a single lesson will offer decoding support, then application to text, ELA instruction on the parts of speech and a brief writing activity. One such program is *Language! Live*. If students, who despite an integrative instructional model, continue to require specialized remedial instruction in one particular area then they should continue to receive it.

Furthermore, although the district possesses several specialized curricula for written expression, and many teachers have received training, there seems to a need for greater certification, or training in accordance with the publisher's recommendations. When teachers are certified they are often more fully able to implement the program in its entirety rather than selecting one or two elements.

#### **Strengths of Existing Assessment Inventory:**

- Wide-variety of research-based curricula designed to remediate language-based impairments, including programs for phonics, fluency, comprehension and written expression.
- Selection of materials and platforms on which to practice skills (e.g. decodable texts, Core 5).
- Trained and certified practitioners available in the district.

#### **Recommendations for Curricula Inventory**

**Focus on providing students with remedial programs that integrate instruction across the domains of English Language Arts** including decoding, fluency, part of speech/grammar, vocabulary, comprehension and written expression. One such program for middle school students is *Language Live!* If students, who despite an integrative instructional model, continue

to require specialized remedial instruction in order to make adequate progress, particularly in one particular area, then they should continue to receive it.

Support **certificate level training opportunities in specialized writing programs**, particularly those programs that focus on the passage level and facilitate the students' own self-regulation in the writing process. Examples of these writing programs are: *EmPOWER*, *Step Up to Writing*, *Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD)*. Once teachers are fully trained in accordance with the guidelines put forth by the educational publisher they are more likely to implement the program in its entirety.

### **Professional Development History**

A brief history of professional development opportunities offered at the school for Bridge program teachers over the last two years was provided by Allison Wright, Team Chairperson at Parker Middle School.

Over the last two years, there are have ongoing consultations with Adam Hickey from the Landmark School and Melissa Feller, SLP, CCC, from Massachusetts General Hospital. In their focus groups and on their survey, many teachers cited the consultations with Mr. Hickey as significant in impacting their instruction and highly beneficial in understanding the needs/profiles of students.

Decisions regarding ongoing professional development will be essential to continuing to develop strengths of the program. **It is recommended that a group or council of faculty that represents various aspects of the Bridge program prioritize instructional needs and find appropriate professional development.** Research has shown that the most effective professional development occurs by minimizing "stand and deliver" workshops and maximizing classroom consultation.

## CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This program evaluation was conducted at the request of administrators from the Reading Public School District. Findings from the report characterize the language-based Bridge program at Parker Middle School as a thoughtful, supportive, and engaging program that is comprised of dedicated, and collaborative faculty members. The program has numerous strengths that greatly benefit the complex learning needs of their students. There are also areas of the program that will benefit from ongoing resources or modification. These recommendations are summarized below.

### AREAS OF STRENGTH

There are many strengths to highlight within the program, most notably the **extensive training of the staff in specialized reading intervention programs**, and the **collaborative nature of grade-level teams**. The importance of a **supportive and reflective culture among faculty cannot be overstated** and the collaboration within the Bridge program was very impressive. Furthermore, the **professional development consultations** that have occurred over the last two years **have established high-quality routines across classrooms and grade levels**. These routines **include daily and weekly agendas, organizing classroom notes/materials, modification of notes and exams, and use of multi-sensory elements for instruction**.

In regards to assessment, the district utilizes a **nice range of diagnostic measures for evaluating students' language, decoding, and comprehension** abilities during core evaluations and IEP progress monitoring. Comments from families indicate that although they have some specific concerns, **most parents agree that as a result attending the Bridge program they have observed an improvement in their child**. They are particularly **satisfied with the progress their child is making in content area instruction (social studies and science)** and **perceive the classes as engaging and appropriate** for their child. Most **parents also feel the communication from the teachers ranges between excellent and good**.

Finally, observations of instruction highlighted strengths in each domain.

- In English Language Arts, **specialized interventions were delivered with a high degree of fidelity, by knowledgeable practitioners**. Whenever possible, **inclusion opportunities were facilitated with traditional students**, content was aligned with topics of study in social studies, and the pacing of instruction matched the needs of the students.
- In Mathematics, **instruction across inclusion and intervention classrooms was explicit, systematic and employed critical principles of multi-sensory techniques**.

Specialized instruction was delivered with a high degree of fidelity, by knowledgeable practitioners, and **clearly established routines supported students' transition and independence. Students had created resources** "i.e. decimal fact sheet" which **reduced the load on working memory** and supported their **ownership over the learning process**. Lessons incorporated engagement through movement (i.e. rotating through centers) and discussion. **Abstract concepts were rooted in real-world applications, and teachers regularly provided clarification and checked for comprehension.**

- In Content Area instruction (social studies and science), there were **clearly established routines that supported the transition into a traditional classroom** including consistent use of **daily & weekly agendas** and **beginning instruction with a whole group discussion/debate**. Teachers employed language-based practices including **utilizing audio/visual aids, previewing key vocabulary, rubrics for assignments, and modifying notes and note-taking formats**. There were multiple opportunities for small group work, and consistent use of organizational schema (i.e. Table of Contents).

## **AREAS FOR ONGOING SUPPORT and/or MODIFICATION**

Areas for ongoing support and/or modification have been identified through a variety of data collection methods including parent surveys, educator surveys, and focus groups, instructional observations and inventories of existing assessments and curricula. Specific areas for ongoing support were identified when they emerged themes across multiple domains or function as a critical element to students' achievement.

### **Assessment**

- Implement **Benchmark & Progress Monitoring Assessments** that can be administered at least three times over the course of the year to evaluate students' progress towards grade-level benchmarks, identify areas of strength and weaknesses, and provide recommendations for targeted instruction. Examples of some widely used assessments are *AiMsweb*, and *iReady*.
- Broaden diagnostic battery to **include measures that assess skills related to naming speed/retrieval and single word reading and decoding efficiency**. Recommended measures include the *Test of Word Reading Efficiency (TOWRE-2)*.

### **Educators' Experiences**

- **Development of vertical instruction plan** for Bridge program students will support the alignment of curricula across grade levels and explicitly address how skills build on each other in various domains (i.e. ELA, math, science, social studies). Furthermore, steps

can be taken to maximize students' self-regulation in learning through incremental increases in autonomy over the course of middle school.

- In response to concerns shared by Bridge program faculty, **grade-level planning time should include all faculty.**
- **Development of a Bridge program council or leadership team** that represents the interests of Bridge program faculty & administrators and also can prioritize the instructional needs of educators or the means for addressing recommendations from this report. The **team can make recommendations to administrators about instructional directions of the program, professional development support, and necessary resources, and materials.**

## INSTRUCTION & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- **Integrate specialized remediation with English Language Arts (ELA).** One prominent concern among families is the lack of a significant program in ELA skills. Identifying a remedial literacy program that is more integrative in nature, and is specifically tailored towards building reading fluency and comprehension skills would be highly beneficial for most Bridge program students. One such program is called *Language! Live*.
- **Consistently use graphic organizers for reading comprehension instruction.** A delimited, rotating set of graphic organizers or mind maps should be identified and practiced with extensively (ideally every reading) to facilitate the internalization of strategies. Organizers that align with the goals of ELA at each grade level will be most helpful, these include main idea and details, character study, character development over time, compare and contrast, sequential, cause and effect, etc.
- **Written expression instruction.** Writing is a complex process that requires the integration of literacy, comprehension and self-regulation skills, and this process needs to be taught explicitly and systematically. While *Framing Your Thoughts* sentence level helps students in building high-quality sentences and understanding parts of speech, systematic, multi-sensory structured writing programs that support the development of passages are also essential. Examples of these programs include *EmPOWER* and *Step Up to Writing*.
- **Follow the gradual release of responsibility model.** A gradual release of responsibility model follows three systematic steps in which responsibility for a particular practice or activity incrementally shifts from the teacher's domain to the student's domain. By in large, teachers provided students with some *explicit modeling* and many opportunities

for *independent practice* but needed to increase the time spent on the middle step - *guided instruction*.

- **Use academic support time to build executive function skills.** The **purpose of academic support** is often two-fold, both to help students **complete their assignments** but also to **support the development of critical strategies that address weaknesses in executive function skills**. There are a number of wonderful multi-sensory strategies that teachers can use with students to help them prepare for an exam, and align with best practices for building key *executive function skills*. One recommended resource is *Promoting Executive Function in the Classroom*, Ed. Lynn Meltzer (2010).
- **Employ closure routines** at the conclusion of each lesson to reiterate/revisit important concepts. **Closure Activities** end a lesson and create a lasting impression, a phenomenon sometimes referred to as the “recency effect.”
- **Consider a classroom management curriculum that fosters self-regulation.** There is a strong relationship between academic success and self-regulation. Students with language-based learning disabilities are prone to weaknesses in regulatory control and struggle to inhibit impulsive behaviors like engaging in inappropriate behaviors, off-topic discussions, calling out, etc. However, self-regulation in addition to other social/emotional competencies is critical for academic success. By integrating strategies that explicitly teach and support the development of social-emotional and academic competencies, teachers will be able to establish a supportive and productive learning environment. One evidence-based approach that has been modified for use with middle-school students is the *Responsive Classroom* program.
- A review of educator and family surveys revealed an opportunity to **leverage assistive technology resources as a means for facilitating autonomy among Bridge program students**. As they move into high school and beyond, students with documented language-based learning disabilities rely heavily on assistive technology tools to manage academic and professional demands. Familiarizing themselves with the tools and finding the beset resource for their needs will be highly beneficial in the long run. Resources within the district, like an Assistive Technology specialist or outside organizations like CAST (Center for Applied Special Technology) can provide excellent guidance on how to integrate these types of tools.

## COMMUNICATION WITH FAMILIES

A common concern among families is that their children are being “carried” rather than taught autonomous strategies which facilitate independent learning and achievement.

**Developing a platform that students can use to showcase their work, along with**

**metacognitive reflections** that describe areas of success, challenge and anticipated change in the future can be highly beneficial in sharing qualitative academic growth with families and supporting students' ownership of the learning process. See recommendations below.

- **Student blogs**, especially for ELA, can offer an online platform for sharing work. Some options include the platforms like *Edmodo*, *KidBlogs*, *Edublogs*, and *Ning*.
- **Metacognitive worksheets** that accompany student work are a straightforward way to facilitate reflective learning. Worksheets should include spaces to highlight areas of success or pride, discuss challenges, and comment on changes for next time. Worksheets can be found through a quick google search or can be created by teachers and students.

### CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

It has been a pleasure to conduct this review for the Reading Public School District. It is clear that the Department of Student Services is committed to improving the middle school language-based program. This commitment extends to all of the teachers, staff, and families of the students. They are passionate about building a relationship of trust and mutual respect within the community and continue to seek out opportunities to improve students' learning experiences. I am happy to answer any questions or provide clarifications regarding findings. I look forward to sharing the results with administrators, educators, and community members.

Respectfully submitted,



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Melissa Orkin, Ph.D.

May 21, 2018

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Date

## Appendix A

### Specialized Language Instruction - Observations and Commentary

Instructional Element	Commentary	Recommendation
<b>The LiPS program</b>	The instructor was knowledgeable about the LiPS program and was focused on her instruction. The student was eager to demonstrate his knowledge and had clearly mastered the content taught thus far.	Supporting the students' ability to transfer the strategies learned in LiPS across texts is critical for building independence. Bringing in leveled or decodable texts at least 3x/wk, if not every session will support the independent application of skills.
<b>The Wilson Language Program</b>	The instructor demonstrated her range of abilities in delivering Wilson instruction. Lessons were provided in two different ways, the first was a review to assess students' metacognitive knowledge of strategies and the second was taught with fidelity to the program.	Wilson instruction, which focuses almost exclusively on the phonetic code should always be paired with questions and activities that pertain to other, complementary aspects of word knowledge including parts of speech, morphology, and semantic/vocabulary skills.
<b>The Seeing Stars program</b>	The instructor demonstrated knowledge and fidelity to the program in delivering Seeing Star. Since the program offers minimal opportunities with text, she paired it with Great Leaps to build fluency with connected text.	No change recommended.
<b>Speech and Language Instruction</b>	The Speech and Language pathologist engaged a small group in systematic, and structured work to build their expressive language skills.	No change recommended.

## Appendix B

### English Language Arts Instruction - Observations and Commentary

Instructional Element	Commentary	Recommendation
In the sixth grade, students from the general classroom <b>joined Bridge program students to read and discuss their selected novel.</b>	The integration of mainstream and Bridge program students, particularly for small group work and discussion is positive to see.	Students can be <b>grouped according to their language comprehension and written expression abilities, with some consideration to their reading level</b> , although assistive technology can facilitate access to higher level texts.
In seventh grade, the <b>ELA curriculum is aligned with the era of study in social studies.</b> The ELA teacher discussed the historical context of the novel <b>using a timeline and visual aids</b> before the daily reading begins.	Activating background knowledge helps sets a context for learning, and integrates new content into existing knowledge.	No change recommended.
The <b>protocol for reading texts in small groups varied by grade-level.</b> Some teachers read the entire text aloud, and some teachers allowed the students to take turns (shared reading).	A variety of text reading strategies is helpful, as long as the text is at all students' reading level.	In order to facilitate students' independence, it is recommended that <b>any novel used in ELA is made accessible to students through a speech to text program.</b> <i>Voice Dream</i> reader used in conjunction with <i>Bookshare</i> is one option.
Across grade-levels, students <b>participated in a "close reading" and discussion of the novel.</b> The discussion was facilitated by the Bridge Program teacher, who led the group in answering factual questions, and summarizing chapters after reading.	Regular comprehension checks are always positive.	Prior to the beginning of reading, teachers should <b>write a series of questions or identify the purpose for reading. As reading occurs, teacher should model notetaking strategies (using a graphic organizer) to gather information that pertains to the guided questions.</b>
Across the grade levels, students utilized various note-taking approaches as they read from novels. Some teachers also wrote this information on the board, others' discussed orally.	Keeping track of information is essential.	A <b>clearly defined set of graphic organizers should be used every time students read novels.</b> Through the <b>Gradual Release of Responsibility Model, teachers can model, then provide guided practice and final independent opportunities.</b>
Writing assignments varied across grade levels, and were largely completed individually with teachers "checking in" on student progress. Students primarily worked on laptops.	Using assistive technology to support the development of essays is positive to see at the middle school level.	<b>Written Expression needs to be explicitly modeled and supported through a gradual release model.</b> Currently, teachers are relying on a mix of strategies, with the most common approach being <i>Framing Your Thoughts</i> . Teacher students a systematic, structured approach to passage writing is essential, one example of a program is <i>EmPOWER</i> .

## Appendix C

### Mathematics Instruction - Observations and Commentary

Instructional Element	Commentary	Recommendation
<p>Across contexts, <b>each lesson began with a warm-up activity or “Do Now.”</b> During the observations, which occurred around Valentine’s Day, students were estimating the number of candies in a box.</p>	<p>Do Now activities establishes a clear routine, support transitions, and orient students to the subject-matter.</p>	<p><b>Use the warm-up routines to support the development of a specific skill.</b> For example, to focus on estimation skills. Ask students place 10 candies in a box, and then estimate in 10 how many more might fit. Or to estimate the result of <math>63-47</math>, or <math>114 + 23</math>, etc.</p>
<p><b>Teaching is explicit and systematic and paced to match the learning needs of students.</b> The teacher used <b>structured notes to teach about calculating the percent of change.</b> Each section of the note-taking sheet was dedicated to a different aspect of the lesson (i.e. definition, formula, application, independent practice)</p>	<p>The teachers’ approaches minimized language demands and supported learning. When students needed clarification, the teacher provided excellent support and review.</p>	<p>At the end of the lesson, <b>a closure activity can reiterate learning and build self-regulation.</b> For example, a teacher might <b>ask students to highlight critical information in notes, or to share one strategy they find helpful.</b></p>
<p>The teachers <b>used audio/visual aids to explain mathematical concepts and reiterate/review facts conveyed through direct instruction.</b></p>	<p>The video acted as a multi-sensory illustrative example.</p>	<p>No change recommended.</p>
<p><b>Guided practice was highly scaffolded, and included teacher prompts</b> (i.e. write the percent of change formula at the top of the worksheet). As the lesson moved into independent work the teacher encouraged students to work independently and then reviewed answers.</p>	<p>Nice example of guided practice in which students engage in problem-solving with teacher support.</p>	<p>Students appeared to fatigue after 25 minutes of work. Following explicit instruction and guided practice but <b>before independent practice, there should be a movement break.</b></p>
<p>Throughout the activity, students are prompted to <b>refer to a math resource. They have created a “quick guide” which provides common decimal to percent conversions.</b></p>	<p>Students’ <b>creation of their own quick guide is an excellent idea</b> as it provides a critical tool for their learning and reduces working memory and retrieval demands.</p>	<p>Rather than instructing students on the particular guide to use, the teacher can <b>ask students to remind her which folder has the percentage conversations.</b> If they struggle to remember a guide or map can be posted in the room that aligns the color of the folder with the topic of study.</p>

Appendix C: Mathematics Instruction - Observations and Commentary (continued)

Instructional Element	Commentary	Recommendation
<p>In the inclusion classroom the mini lesson (explicit instruction) was <b>followed by small group guided support activities in small groups. Students rotated through groups or centers (while teachers remained stationary at a table) to practice a variety of different activities in preparation for an exam.</b></p>	<p>Moving around the room to stations is beneficially for the students, and having a teacher at each table provides the necessary guided support.</p>	<p>Students with language-based learning disabilities <b>need support in shifting strategies. A more streamlined approach to the rotation/center model involves a protocol in which students still work at stations but all stations tackle the same activity at the same time.</b> After students switch to the second station (no more than 2 stations in a classroom period), explicit instruction/modeling is provided again for the next type of problem. Do not group students randomly, develop groups that work well together.</p>
<p>Across contexts, <b>teachers are noted to continually probe students' conceptual understanding</b> asking questions like - How do you know? What does a system mean? What are we referring to when we think of a percentage?</p>	<p>Positive to see the emphasis on analytical thinking.</p>	<p>No change recommended</p>

## Appendix D

### Content Area (Science & Social Studies) Instruction - Observations and Commentary

Instructional Elements	Commentary	Recommendation
<p><b>Across all content area classes, teachers provided an agenda for the lesson on the board.</b> These agendas included the topic of study, guiding questions, and relevant materials that will be used during the lesson.</p>	<p><b>Daily agendas ease transitions, clearly articulate instructional objectives, and set a purpose for learning.</b> They also provide students with a context for new content.</p>	<p>No change recommended.</p>
<p>Across the grade levels, <b>teachers began with a whole group discussion and usually reviewed previous concepts. Some teachers presented review questions and asked students to prepare a response or discuss with peers as an initial class activity.</b></p>	<p>Reviewing previous concepts <b>activates students' background knowledge and helps to orient them to the current activity.</b> Also, continual retrieval of previously learned content helps solidify their understanding of the concepts.</p>	<p>All teachers can begin their lessons with review questions for students to answer independently or in groups. They can vary the format of the questions (i.e. open-ended, multiple choice, select three words to describe, debate, etc.).</p> <p><b>Every direction given by the teacher or question asked by a student should also be presented in written form on the board.</b></p>
<p>In previewing a new unit, <b>most teachers introduced key vocabulary.</b> One or two slides were presented to the whole class which contained key vocabulary from the reading (Nubia, Kush, Kerma).</p>	<p><b>Previewing key vocabulary in context, for example discussing the geographic location of Nubia, is essential for orienting students to the nature of the content.</b> The number of terms introduced on each slide may make it difficult for students to manage.</p>	<p><b>Limit one or two vocabulary terms to each slide and then provide Bridge students with copies of the slides to include in a "Glossary" section of their notes.</b> Students can use the Glossary to prepare for exams and complete assignments, and if appropriate complete an open-book exam.</p>
<p><b>Many teachers provided audio/visual aids or hands-on activities</b> to help students better understand the nature of the scientific phenomenon, geographic area or historical event being studied.</p>	<p>The importance of multi-sensory opportunities in supporting students with language-based impairments understand complex phenomenon and occurrences cannot be overstated. It is excellent to see the work teachers have put into their lessons to make them multi-sensory.</p>	<p>Continue to build in opportunities for multi-sensory, hands-on learning during instruction.</p>

Appendix D: Content Area Instruction - Observations and Commentary (continued)

Instructional Elements	Commentary	Recommendation
<p>Some teachers used <b>visual prompts (relevant image, illustration or video) as a catalyst for discussion and debate especially when introducing new content, asking for students' opinions and analysis.</b></p>	<p>Incorporating opportunities for debate (<b>especially when ideas and opinions are based on visual prompts and not limited by reading ability</b>) not only supports the social/emotional growth of middle school students in a developmentally appropriate way but also offers an opportunity to engage in high-level thinking skills and is a significant benefit of the inclusion model. Especially asking students to provide a rationale for the statements.</p>	<p>No change recommended.</p>
<p>Note taking occurred in a variety of formats including two column (Cornell) and skeleton notes.</p>	<p>Offering a variety of note-taking formats is beneficial.</p>	<p><b>Consider that different types of notes have different purposes and use accordingly</b> (see recommendations below).</p>
<p>In many of the social studies classes, <b>a significant amount of time is dedicated to reading a textbook and taking notes. Often times the process is modeled but not consistently across grade-levels.</b></p>		<p><b>Each time students embark on a note-taking activity, it should be explicitly modeled by the teacher following a gradual release of responsibility format.</b> Consider that <b>many students with attentional issues are unable to sustain more than 15-20 minute independent work</b> at a productive level.</p>
<p>Students work in pairs completing the two-column notes for the section until the end of the class.</p>	<p>Peer-based learning is highly beneficial for Bridge program students.</p>	<p><b>Allotting time at the end of class for a closure activity (see recommendations), even if students are in different stages of an assignment, supports the development of skills and content.</b> Especially if the purpose of the activity or overarching question introduced at the beginning of class is revisited at the end to discuss findings and conclusions.</p>
<p>Bridge students are <b>provided with modified notes which offer the same content but in a more manageable format.</b> For example, ambiguous terms are clarified, step by step instructions and questions include visual aids.</p>	<p>Modified text and notes are an effective tool in assisting Bridge students gain access to the grade-level content.</p>	<p>No change recommended.</p>

Appendix D: Content Area Instruction - Observations and Commentary (continued)

Instructional Elements	Commentary	Recommendation
<p>Across the grade levels, <b>Instructional Aides and Bridge Program teachers made themselves available to provide accommodations.</b> These accommodations included: asking students to restate directions, reading text aloud, supporting students' writing through scribing.</p>	<p>Accommodations are aligned with best practices for language-based instruction.</p>	<p>No change recommended.</p>
<p>Teachers provided <b>explicit instruction in organizing their notes using a system, by a Table of Contents in the front of each section and creating a corresponding page number.</b></p>	<p>The Table of Contents strategy was observed across grade-levels and content areas and is an effective strategy for fostering independent organization of materials.</p>	<p>No change recommended.</p>
<p><b>Tests are modified</b> in order to simplify language, provide word banks and/or reduce the number of questions.</p>	<p><b>Modified assessments are created by teachers to highlight the concepts essential to instruction and grade-level standards.</b></p>	<p>Examinations should focus on assessing students' knowledge of content and concepts and limit any unnecessary burden on language processes.</p>

## Appendix E

### Academic Support - Observations and Commentary

Instructional Elements	Commentary	Recommendation
In one class, students were given the task of quizzing each other on their notes to prepare for the upcoming exam.	Regular opportunities to discuss content with peers (peer-mediated learning) leads to better understanding. In fact, some teachers asked students to create a question they would like to ask the rest of the class.	Use a <b>structured approach to review</b> . For example, <b>taking factual notes and transforming them into questions to quiz peers is a systematic way to prepare for an exam</b> . This procedure should be modeled through a gradual release of responsibility model (See Recommendations).
Teachers conducted a binder check and supported students' organization of materials using a table of contents at the beginning of each section.	The development of a table of contents and usage across classes is an effective strategy that supports students' ability to independently organize their academic materials, in particular, their notes.	No change recommended.
Bridge program students were observed asking for help on tasks, and advocating for their needs among Academic Support teachers.	There is a clearly established rapport between Bridge program students and faculty. It is evident that <b>students' perceive the Bridge program classrooms as their "home base" and leave their materials, and check-in frequently throughout the day</b> . The positive rapport they have established with their teachers is very positive to see.	No change recommended.

## Appendix F

### Inventory of Assessments in the Reading Public School Districts

Name of Measure	In the District	Trained Personnel	Diagnostic Core Evaluation	Supplemental Assessment	Benchmark Measure	Progress Monitoring Tool
Comprehensive Test of Phonological Processing (CTOPP-2)	x	x		x		
Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals (CELF-5)	x	x		x		
Comprehensive Assessment of Speech and Language (CASL)	x	x		x		
Wilson Individualized Spelling Test (WIST)	x	x	x			
Wilson Assessment of Decoding and Encoding (WADE)	x	x			x	
Gray Oral Reading Test (GORT-5)	x	x	x			
Qualitative Reading Inventory (QRI)	x				x	
Weschler Individualized Achievement Tests (WIAT)	x	x	x			
Test of Written Language (TOWL)	x	x		x		
DIBELS (Oral Reading Fluency & DAZE)	x	x			x	
NWEAMaps	x					
Fountas & Pinnell	x				x	
Read Naturally/Great Leaps	x					x
CARS	x					x

## Appendix G

### Inventory of Curricula in the Reading Public School Districts

Program Name	Entire Curriculum	Selected Aspects of Curricula	# of Certified Teachers	# of Trained Teachers	# with < 2 yrs exp.	# with 2+ yrs exp.
<b><i>Phonics Programs</i></b>						
Wilson	x		4	1	1	4
Orton Gillingham	x		1	1	0	1
Project Read		x		5	1	4
Seeing Stars	x			3	3	0
LiPS	x		1	1	0	2
Just Words	x			1	1	0
<b><i>Decodable Texts</i></b>						
SPIRE		x				
High Noon		x				
<b><i>Fluency Programs</i></b>						
Great Leaps		x				
Read Naturally		x				
Language!		x		2	1	1
<b><i>Comprehension Programs &amp; Materials</i></b>						
Brainframes	x		1			
Project Read Report Form		x		1		
Project Read Story Form		x		1		

Appendix G: Inventory of Curricula in the Reading Public School Districts (continued)

<b>Program Name</b>	<b>Entire Curriculum</b>	<b>Selected Aspects of Curricula</b>	<b># of Certified Teachers</b>	<b># of Trained Teachers</b>	<b># of Teachers &lt; 2 yrs exp.</b>	<b># of Teachers 2+ yrs exp.</b>
Visualizing Verbalizing	x			approx. 5	2	3
Megawords		x				
Lexia Core 5	x					
Bookshare	x					
<b><i>Writing Programs</i></b>						
EmPOWER	x		1			1
Framing Your Thoughts	x			approx. 7		