

Launching Literacy in After-School Programs:

EARLY LESSONS FROM THE CORAL INITIATIVE

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Organizing
Resources to
Advance
Learning

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Public/Private Ventures is a national nonprofit organization that seeks to improve the effectiveness of social policies and programs. P/PV designs, tests and studies initiatives that increase supports, skills and opportunities of residents of low-income communities; works with policymakers to see that the lessons and evidence produced are reflected in policy; and provides training, technical assistance and learning opportunities to practitioners based on documented effective practices.

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Executive Summary

There is general agreement among policymakers, parents, practitioners and funders that children need safe places with adult supervision during the after-school hours. But beyond these basics of safety and supervision, what role can or should after-school programs play in children's lives? In fact, significant public and private funds have been invested over the last decade in after-school programs with the goal of improving the academic achievement of youth. But recent studies of several of the largest after-school initiatives have found that safe places and adult supervision, and even high-quality youth development activities, are not enough to significantly affect children's reading or math achievement levels.[1]

Several studies have concluded that the academic components (if any) of these large-scale after-school efforts have not been implemented at a level of quality, and youth have not attended with enough frequency, to fully judge the academic benefits that might be attainable. Some studies have found that the academic component is primarily homework help, which research has not linked to increased academic achievement.[2] Few of the studies, however, have learned enough about the specific strategies used or the quality of the instructional practices to determine if poorly implemented educational activities are the "culprit," although they have frequently been cited as such. Coming out of these studies is a theory to be tested—a theory suggesting that high-quality and consistent implementation of academic programming, offered in the after-school setting in an engaging manner to keep children's participation and retention levels high, may provide an approach that can effectively promote academic gains for large numbers of children.

This report presents the early results of one large-scale initiative—the Communities Organizing Resources to Advance Learning (CORAL) initiative—that is testing this approach. The evaluation gathers critical information on the quality of activities provided by the CORAL after-school programs and youth's reading-level progress to begin to address empirically what other studies have assumed—that the quality and consistency of the specific educational strategies implemented make a difference.

The following summary of the interim report is based on research conducted between Fall 2004 and Summer 2005 and highlights the initiative's progress toward implementing high-quality and consistent literacy programming. The summary identifies successful strategies the CORAL programs have undertaken to implement this model and challenges they have faced along the way, as well as early results in terms of youth's reading gains and the program components that appear to have contributed to these gains.

What Is CORAL?

The James Irvine Foundation launched the CORAL initiative in 1999 with the goal of helping to improve the academic achievement of children in the lowest-performing schools in five California cities—Pasadena, Long Beach, Fresno, San Jose and Sacramento. As a result of the Foundation's efforts, in the 2004-05 school year, 37 program sites in these cities served more than 5,000 youth from low-income, low-performing schools. Most of the youth were of elementary-school age, primarily first to fifth graders, with a small proportion in middle-school grades.

The initial CORAL philosophy reflected best practices in the fields of youth development programming and community initiatives: an emphasis on consistent staffing to help promote positive adult-youth relationships; widespread and significant support and assistance from school personnel; and policies and practices to promote regular and ongoing youth participation. But while all the CORAL cities shared the goal of improving youth's academic achievement, programming in the early years of implementation varied greatly from city to city in its educational content, and typically consisted of homework help and enrichment. In some cases, the enrichment activities had academic content specifically related to the school-day curriculum, but this aspect was not implemented consistently from city to city.

In Fall 2004, to reduce variability among the sites and increase the likelihood that the initiative, as a whole, would achieve its intended goals, CORAL adopted a much more targeted approach for its academic component: the implementation of three to four days a week of literacy activities that focused on concrete strategies for helping children far behind in reading skills improve, while also designed to engage these children in the after-school hours. Public/Private Ventures (P/PV) was asked to assist in this shift in programming and to evaluate the results. Over the course of 2004, CORAL cities modified their programs to build and integrate strong and regularly implemented structured literacy programming, while maintaining their schedules of enrichment, homework help and other academic instruction around it. By the fall of 2004, "balanced literacy" activities became the central feature across the CORAL programs in all five cities.

Though the CORAL cities implemented slightly different activities and schedules, in general youth who attended CORAL programs in 2004-2005 were offered balanced literacy activities three to four days a week for 75 to 90 minutes each day. Through these activities, youth had the opportunity to participate in the core strategies of balanced literacy, which reflect current best practices based on research on developing competent readers. They listened to staff reading literature aloud to them, practiced writing, talked about books and the vocabulary in books, practiced phonetics and word attack skills, and spent time reading books (of their choice) at a level where they could read fluently and with high comprehension. At the same time, children continued to be exposed to enrichment opportunities and (in most cities) were given time for homework help in the remaining 60 to 90 minutes of after-school programming each day.

The Evaluation

In September 2004, P/PV began documenting the progress of the CORAL initiative in implementing balanced literacy activities within the after-school setting. P/PV collected data in order to provide ongoing feedback to the cities for program improvement, help individual CORAL programs assess their progress and—most relevant to this report—address research questions of interest to the larger after-school audience.

P/PV has been collecting data from multiple sources since September 2004 and will continue to do so through June 2006. This interim report is based on the first nine months of data collection, using information from sources that include enrollment, attendance, activity and participation data from each city's Management Information System (MIS); extensive observations of on-the-ground literacy programming for 56 groups of children to assess the consistency and quality of programming; individual reading assessments gathered at two points in time with 383 CORAL youth to track reading gains; and extensive interviews with key informants, focus groups with parents and staff surveys to assess implementation of the balanced literacy program, understand the structure of CORAL programming, and learn about parents' and other stakeholders' impressions of the CORAL program.

After the full period of data collection, ending in June 2006, further information will be available on the impact of CORAL on youth's reading levels and attitudes. This report focuses on the early results regarding the process of implementing the program and the effects of participation, and makes early links between critical pieces of data in order to address questions about the relationships among participation, quality and benefits to youth.

Early Findings

Though all five cities implemented literacy activities fairly quickly, the quality of these activities varied; cities with the most successful implementation and outcomes adopted a few common strategies. Below we summarize key findings, including the early outcomes and the strategies the CORAL cities used to achieve them.

CORAL has emerged as a large-scale after-school program, serving large numbers of youth (5,321 in the 2004-05 school year) who stand to benefit from the literacy, enrichment and homework help services the CORAL programs offer.

Reflecting the schools and communities that CORAL programs were targeting to serve, CORAL youth are predominantly Latino (68 percent), with large numbers of African American and Asian populations as well. Over half are designated English Learners (53 percent), ranging from 38 percent to 68 percent in the CORAL cities.[3] In addition, 89 percent report receiving free or reduced-price lunch; and only 16 percent scored proficient or above on the English Language Arts portion of the 2004 California Standards Test.

The experiences of the CORAL cities demonstrate that it is possible to integrate a balanced literacy component into the after-school-program hours fairly quickly and at a moderate level of quality.

Observations of CORAL literacy activities indicate that the programs were successful at integrating literacy into their after-school programs, regularly providing youth with basic balanced literacy activities. This accomplishment is impressive given the scope (37 program sites) and large numbers of youth served. In all five cities, several factors facilitated more rapid and higher-quality implementation. These included:

- Strong leadership on the part of the CORAL lead agency in each city and strong relationships with the school districts and community partners helped to steer the initiative toward the vision of improving literacy.
- Having a literacy model to adopt—in this case the Kidzlit or Youth Education for Tomorrow (YET) model—was also critical. The model brought consistent, articulated goals and strategies for what the academic literacy component of the CORAL program should include in order to most benefit children. Having the model also allowed training to be more focused and concrete, a benefit for all site staff—irrespective of their educational level—who were leading the balanced literacy lessons in the after-school program.

Other strategies also strengthened implementation and helped to solidify the impact of the literacy program on children's reading-level gains. These included hiring a qualified literacy director as early in the transition as possible, and providing training, consistent follow-up monitoring and on-site coaching with feedback. However, these strategies were implemented more successfully and quickly in some cities than others, and the quality of the literacy instruction suffered when they were not in place. The strategies are described more fully below.

Literacy program quality mattered: consistently implementing the balanced literacy strategies was critical to supporting the greatest gains in reading levels.

The average gain for CORAL children was a third of a grade level in reading, which is modest but appreciable over an average of five months in the program. Importantly, reading levels improved most during the short period under investigation for this report when instructors more consistently implemented the core strategies that make up the balanced literacy approach: read alouds and independent reading, along with book discussions, writing, skill development activities and vocabulary development activities.

Although no groups of children were exposed to what might be considered the highest-quality programming during the first year, just over one third of the groups that we observed (36 percent) reached an overall moderate level of quality (i.e., consistently implemented read alouds, independent reading and one other strategy at a moderate level of quality). The remaining two thirds did not implement the strategies consistently at an adequate level of quality. Children in groups where implementation quality was most consistent (albeit moderate) showed significantly greater gains than did children

in groups where the strategies were not consistently implemented at adequate levels of quality (an average gain of 0.4 grade levels compared with 0.2).

Importantly, at this phase of the evaluation, CORAL participants who are English Learners showed similar average gains in reading levels as CORAL participants deemed proficient at English. This finding supports the appropriateness of the literacy strategies for helping all children learn to read, including English Learners, who make up a large percentage of the CORAL youth and are an increasingly large percentage of public school students in other cities and states in the country.

This evaluation does not include a comparison group; therefore, we cannot firmly conclude that the gains made by the CORAL youth are any different from what might be expected had they not taken part in the program. However, the findings that the quality and consistency with which CORAL instructors delivered the literacy strategies are related to reading-level gains suggest that the program has had some bearing on these gains.

The balanced literacy strategies used in the CORAL after-school program proved most promising for children who were farthest behind in reading.

An early look at children's reading-level gains suggests that the CORAL program, as implemented to date, is working most effectively with children reading two or more grade levels behind. These children showed reading gains of approximately three quarters of a grade level over a period of four to six months in the newly launched literacy program, gains that were greater than children one level behind or at or above grade level. (And in the groups exposed to higher-quality programming, the average gains were even higher: one full grade level compared to 0.73). These results are in keeping with prior research indicating that those farthest behind tend to show the greatest impact or benefit from social programs.[4]

These early findings suggest that targeting youth for the CORAL programs—beyond the targeting CORAL does by locating the programs in the lowest-performing schools—might maximize results achieved in the shortest amount of time.

Providing sufficient time for independent reading was the most critical literacy strategy in the first year of implementation. Investing in large numbers of leveled books and training staff in this strategy were a necessity.

In keeping with prior research that has examined what children need to improve their reading skills, time spent reading books at an appropriate level of difficulty emerged as a significant factor in predicting reading gains for the CORAL children.

In spite of the importance that schools place on reading, there is often little time for children to engage in independent reading during the school day because of the amount of material that teachers need to cover. The after-school program hours offer the time, space and the critical resource—books—that children can utilize so they are able to practice reading. However, the evaluation found that an upfront investment of resources to launch quality independent reading was crucial. This included adequate program time set aside specifically for independent reading; properly trained staff to coach and monitor children's book selection and reading comprehension; and an adequate supply of appropriately leveled books, obtained either through outright purchase or through the dedication of staff time to level donated books.

Once the CORAL cities recognized the need for significant numbers of books and dedicated time for independent reading—and staff received the needed training to understand the value of providing coaching to children during reading time to ensure that they were practicing reading at the right levels—the independent reading time increased significantly and the children in turn benefited.

Dedicated site staff, with cultural and linguistic competence, provided positive adult support for children, which helped strengthen program quality.

In keeping with the emphasis CORAL has placed on the importance of positive adult-youth relationships, adult support was the most consistently seen strength of the program across all the activities observed for the evaluation. Although adult support did not in and of itself relate to reading gains,

instructors who were better able to implement the literacy strategies were also most likely to do so in a warm, supportive and respectful environment.

On a broader level, underlying the strength of the CORAL programs have been the staff who interact with the children on a daily basis, providing literacy lessons, enrichment and homework help, and building strong relationships with them. The intentional strategy employed by all CORAL cities of grouping children with the same team leader(s) on a daily basis throughout the year likely contributed to these positive relationships.

In addition, by design, CORAL staff come from diverse backgrounds, reflecting the diversity of the children who participate in the program. The staff also have appropriate language skills for the communities in which they work and utilize those skills on a regular basis to connect with the children and their parents; this is particularly important in communities with high rates of English Learners and parents who speak a language other than English.

Having a literacy director with literacy experience and training was critically important. Program quality was highest when literacy directors had been hired while the balanced literacy program was being planned, and when they maintained authority and time to monitor program implementation.

Above all else, the earlier the CORAL cities hired a full-time director of literacy, the more smoothly the transition to providing quality balanced literacy programming went for them. It was essential that one person (or potentially more than one, in cities with many program sites), with advanced training and a strong background in literacy, was available to train, supervise and monitor staff during the implementation of balanced literacy programming. Moreover, in order to fully support quality implementation, the literacy director needed to have full access to, and some degree of authority over, the program instructors. The greatest improvement in quality of program implementation occurred once the literacy director came on board. In those cities that were slower to hire, program quality lagged as a result.

Development of strong program monitoring and quality control functions was also important for promoting program quality.

The best way to ensure consistent and quality implementation of the literacy strategies was to train staff and then monitor their literacy instruction on a regular basis to make sure they fully understood how to implement the strategies and were putting them into practice on a consistent basis. Best practices in program monitoring included creating an ongoing feedback loop, in which the literacy coordinator played a central role, and providing paid time for staff to plan lessons and attend training. Program monitoring was less effective when the literacy director did not have adequate time to observe programming at all sites and other staff members who were not skilled in literacy practice attempted to perform this monitoring function instead, or when the literacy director lacked sufficient authority to mandate needed program improvements by staff.

Maintaining the other core elements of the after-school program—enrichment and homework help—while implementing the literacy curriculum appeared to contribute to relatively high attendance rates for CORAL participants.

Children attended the CORAL after-school programs on a frequent and regular basis, for almost three hours a day, on average three days a week, between October 2004 and June 2005. (The average number of days attended during this period was 81.1.) These participation rates are higher than those reported in other national studies of after-school programs for youth of the same age.[5] Notably, children attended literacy and homework help at almost equal rates, at an average of 63 days, between October 4 and June 8, or roughly three fourths of the time they were at CORAL. Children attended enrichment programming slightly more than half the days they participated in CORAL (44.9 days). Parents and school staff reported that the participation rates were bolstered by the combination of activities and resources provided during the CORAL after-school hours, a combination that appeared to attract and sustain youth's regular attendance.

The high participation rates evidenced by CORAL participants bode well for helping youth achieve positive gains from program participation—gains that we would expect to increase further as the initiative develops and the evaluation examines outcomes over a longer period of time.

Conclusion

Though the evaluation is still in its early stages, results from the first year of CORAL's transition to a focus on literacy programming are very promising. Nine months into the implementation of a targeted literacy approach, in-depth observations of the programs suggest that implementation quality is improving and can be characterized as being at a moderate level of quality and consistency. An early look at children's reading-level gains suggests that the program, as implemented to date, is working most effectively with children reading two or more grade levels behind. For youth at all reading levels, gains have been greatest, during the short period under investigation for this report, when they received higher-quality balanced literacy strategies on a consistent basis. These findings are presented in the full report as a means to draw attention to the potential of an after-school approach that combines literacy instruction, enrichment programming and time for homework help as a way to attract children, keep them participating at relatively high rates and help them improve their reading.

The longer-term evaluation will continue to explore whether and how the quality of implementation of the literacy strategies improves during the second year of implementation and, in turn, the extent to which quality and participation continue to lead to better reading gains for children. In the second year, the evaluation will also examine the relationship between program quality and participation and additional outcomes, such as test scores, reading efficacy and attitudes toward school. In addition, based on the promising early findings, the evaluation will delve more deeply into understanding the effectiveness of the literacy strategies in helping the many English Learners who participate in the CORAL after-school programs.

The CORAL initiative's transition to a balanced literacy approach has emerged amidst a larger transition in the field of after-school, in which practitioners and policymakers are reevaluating the role of the after-school hours. Consequently, the longer-term evaluation of CORAL will provide important guidance not only from a programmatic standpoint, but also from a public policy perspective. An understanding of the ways in which CORAL is able to provide quality programming and, ultimately, to affect academic outcomes will further elucidate the potential role for after-school programs in the ongoing drive to improve youth achievement.

Executive Summary Notes

1 Granger, R. and T. Kane, 2004. "Improving the Quality of After-School Programs." *Education Week*, XXIII, (23), Feb. 18, http://www.wtgrantfoundation.org/usr_doc/EducationWeekCommentary.pdf.

2 See U.S. Department of Education, 2003. Office of the Under Secretary. *When Schools Stay Open Late: The National Evaluation of the 21st Century Learning Centers Program, First Year Findings.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education; Walker, Karen E., and Amy J. A. Arbreton, 2004. *After-School Pursuits: An Evaluation of Outcomes in the San Francisco Beacon Initiative.* Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures; and Lauer, Patricia A., Motoko Akiba, Stephanie B. Wilkerson, Helen S. Apthorp, David Snow, and Mya Martin-Glenn. *The Effectiveness of Out-of-School-Time Strategies in Assisting Low-Achieving Students in Reading and Mathematics; A Research Synthesis.* Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning, October 31, 2003. In addition to findings from these evaluations that specifically focus on after-school programs, general research on the link between time spent on homework and academic achievement is inconclusive as to its importance. Although research suggests a correlation between homework and achievement on standardized tests for middle-school and high-school youth, a similar relationship has not been found for elementary-school-age youth. See Cooper, Harris M., 2001. *The Battle Over Homework: Common Ground for Administrators, Teachers, and Parents.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

3 Children who receive this designation through the school system have a first language other than English and are in the process of acquiring English language skills.

4 Miller, B. M., 2003. *Critical Hours: Afterschool Programs and Educational Success.* Brookline, MA: Miller Midzik Research Associates for the Nellie Mae Education Foundation. Available at http://www.nmedfdn.org/CriticalHours.htm; U.S. Department of Education, 2003. Office of the Under Secretary. *When Schools Stay Open Late: The National Evaluation of the 21st-Century Learning Centers Program, First Year Findings,* Washington, DC; Grossman, Jean Baldwin and Amy W. Johnson, 1999. "Assessing the Effectiveness of Mentoring Programs," *Contemporary Issues in Mentoring.* Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures. DuBois et al., 2002.

5 U.S. Department of Education, Office of the Under Secretary, 2003.

Introduction

Chapter 1

There is general agreement among parents, practitioners, policymakers and funders on the importance of children having safe places with adult supervision during the after-school hours. There is less agreement about what role after-school programs can and should play in children's lives beyond those two things. In the early 1990s, after-school initiatives tended to focus on positive youth development: a general and holistic approach that emphasized providing youth with a range of opportunities and supports to help them thrive. However, in the last decade, many policymakers, practitioners and funders have begun to stress the more specific potential of after-school to boost participants' academic achievement. Nationwide concern over youth's academic performance in general and the academic performance of youth in low-income, low-performing schools in particular has been the primary force behind this trend.

Perhaps the most visible example of the increased academic focus is the federally supported 21st Century Community Learning Center program. This initiative received its first substantial appropriation in 1998 to fund after-school programs that offered expanded learning opportunities to youth. Priority for funding was given to programs that were designed to help students meet or exceed state and local standards in subjects such as reading, math and science.[1] A year earlier, the privately funded Extended-Service Schools initiative had similarly supported the creation of 60 after-school programs across the country, each of which was intended to promote academic development for young people.[2] Meanwhile, states such as California, Georgia and Delaware developed their own after-school initiatives with a primary goal of improving student academic achievement.[3]

However, while significant public and private funds have been spent during the last decade on after-school programs with the goal of improving the academic achievement of youth, there has, to date, been no panacean program proven to overcome the challenges faced by children who are far behind in their academic achievement. Recent studies of several of the largest after-school program efforts have found that safe places and adult supervision, and even high-quality youth development activities, may not be enough to significantly affect children's levels of reading or math achievement.[4]

Many of the studies have concluded that the academic enrichment components of these large-scale efforts have not been implemented at a level of sufficient quality, and youth have not attended with enough frequency, to fully judge the academic benefits that might be attainable.[5] Some studies have found that the academic component is primarily homework help, which research has not linked to increased academic achievement.[6] Few, if any, of the studies, however, have learned enough about the specific academic strategies used or the quality of the instructional practices to determine if poorly implemented educational activities are the "culprit," although they have frequently been cited as being so.

Coming out of these studies is a theory to be tested—a theory suggesting that high-quality and consistent implementation of academic programming, offered in an engaging manner to keep children's participation and retention levels high—may provide an approach that can effectively promote academic gains for children who participate. As such, there is still general optimism that high participation and high-quality instructional activities after school can bolster children's chances of doing better during the school day.

This report presents early findings from a two-year evaluation of a large-scale initiative, aimed at improving children's academic achievement, that is testing such an approach. The evaluation gathers critical information on the implementation of the academic component of a literacy-focused after-school program to begin to address empirically what other studies have assumed—that the quality and consistency of the specific educational strategies implemented make a difference.

Communities Organizing Resources to Advance Learning

Launched in 1999 by The James Irvine Foundation, Communities Organizing Resources to Advance Learning (CORAL) is an ambitious, statewide initiative in California that draws on elements from the youth development, after-school program and community-building areas to link communities, neighborhoods, institutions and residents around a common goal: improving student academic achievement through the provision of enriching out-of-school opportunities. Communities with low-income, low-achieving schools in five cities (Sacramento, San Jose, Fresno, Pasadena and Long Beach) were targeted for the initiative, and a local lead agency was selected to plan and run CORAL in each city.[7] The lead agencies were to receive funding over six years, with initial funding set at $2 million per year for each city, to work with schools and community-based organizations (CBOs) to provide high-quality after-school programming for youth.

Each CORAL city used the funding to establish after-school programs at multiple sites (including both school-based and community-based locations), serving primarily elementary-school-age youth; and each site was overseen by a coordinator, who acted for the after-school program as a principal might for the school day, providing management for site staff and daily activities. In two of the cities, the lead agency directly administered the programming at all sites, and CORAL staff—the site coordinators and team leaders who led the activities—were employees of that lead agency. In the other three cities, the lead agency contracted with local CBOs to operate some of the sites, although they typically also directly operated at least one site themselves. In those cities, some CORAL site staff were

Table 1: The CORAL Cities

	Fresno	Long Beach	Pasadena	Sacramento	San Jose
CORAL lead agency	Initially a collaboration between two agencies, it now operates as an independent 501(c)(3).	Large nonprofit organization.	Large nonprofit organization.	A collaboration between two nonprofit organizations, each with a history of working in different parts of the city.	Large nonprofit organization.
Program administration, 2004-05	Lead agency directly oversees programming at all sites.	Lead agency directly oversees some sites; contracts with local community-based organizations (CBOs) to operate other sites.	Lead agency contracts with local CBOs to operate all sites.	Lead agencies directly oversee some sites; contract with local CBOs to operate other sites.	Lead agency directly oversees programming at all sites.
Start of CORAL programming	October 2002	October 2001	January 2001	January 2003	February 2003
Total number of sites, 2004-05	12	5	5	7	8
Grade levels	Elementary: 10 Middle school: 2	Elementary: 5	Elementary: 4 One site is open to youth of all ages.	Elementary: 7	Elementary: 6 Middle school: 1 K-8: 1
Site location	Schools: 11 Community-based: 1	Schools: 5	Schools: 2 Community-based: 3	Schools: 5 Community-based: 2	Schools: 8

employees of the city's lead agency, and some were employed by the other CBOs. (See Table 1 on page 3 for an overview of CORAL in each city.)

Across the cities, the program, as designed, reflected best practices in the fields of youth development and community initiatives: an emphasis on consistent staffing to help promote positive adult-youth relationships; widespread and significant support and assistance from school personnel; and policies and practices in place to promote regular and ongoing youth participation. It also included a focus on project-based learning (an approach to instruction that emphasizes "students doing" instead of "teachers telling," and involves students in problem-solving, reflection and self-assessment); the use of technology in the after-school activities; and programming that corresponded to California's state content standards and the school-day curriculum. To help plan the initiative, select school sites and develop programming, the CORAL cities worked in close collaboration with their local school districts and schools. In several cases, the districts and CORAL also worked together to secure additional funding for the after-school program, including applying for (and receiving) federal Department of Education 21st Century Learning grants.[8]

Other facets of CORAL were intended to support students' academic achievement in ways that moved beyond the after-school programming itself. For example, CORAL sought to develop family involvement activities and classes; organize and convene site-level councils and governance groups; and create a summer Youth Institute for teenagers, who generally did not participate in the CORAL after-school programs, except in some cases as teen instructors.

Programming was gradually implemented in the five CORAL cities over a period of three years. Grounded in best practices, the initiative also had broad guidelines for implementation; and, as a result, there was great variation across the state in the approach and content of the after-school programs. While the sites typically provided youth with some mix of homework help and enrichment activities, the actual programming ranged from primarily a science-based enrichment curriculum, to mostly homework help, to a focus on art and cultural experiences.[9]

The Shift to a Focus on Literacy

In the Fall of 2003, in response to accumulating evidence that after-school programming focused on enrichment and homework help alone does not have an impact on academic achievement, the Foundation determined to intensify CORAL's educational focus. Public/Private Ventures (P/PV) was asked to assist in this work and to evaluate the results.

To reduce the variability among the sites and increase the likelihood that the initiative, as a whole, would achieve its intended goals, CORAL adopted a much more targeted approach: the implementation of three to four days a week of literacy activities that focused on concrete strategies for helping children far behind in reading skills improve, while also designed to engage these children in the after-school hours. While sites would continue to implement other forms of programming, including enrichment, all of the CORAL cities were required to implement regular literacy lessons. The specific approach taken was "balanced literacy," an approach shaped by tenets of reading research suggesting that increased reading skills result from children being exposed to "read alouds" (that allow them to hear fluent reading modeled), practicing writing, talking about books and the vocabulary in books, practicing phonetics and word attack skills, and actually spending time reading books (of their choice) at a level at which they can read fluently and with high comprehension.

In addition to this significant shift in programming, the Foundation concurrently reduced the funding level from $2 million to $1.6 million per CORAL city, and asked the cities to reduce their operating costs to approximately $2,000 per year for each child served (previously, they had been spending approximately $3,000 a year per child) in order to bring CORAL costs more in line with funding typically available for after-school programs. The Foundation funding would focus on literacy and enrichment programming in the after-school hours and no longer support the other CORAL components, such as the Youth Institute and community governance. These adjustments were intended to ensure stronger alignment between the initiative's activities and its academic goals, strengthen CORAL's effectiveness and prepare for long-term sustainability, but they also represented a tremendous shift for the cities.

The Focus of this Report

In October 2004, the CORAL cities began to provide literacy instruction on a routine and consistent basis as part of their after-school program hours, serving a total of more than 5,000 children at 31 school-based and 6 community-based sites. This report documents the successes and challenges of the first year of these efforts. It describes the implementation of sites' literacy strategies and their early effectiveness in retaining children and producing literacy gains.

The report as a whole addresses the following key question:

- Is it possible to integrate literacy activities into an existing after-school program with sufficient quality to promote reading gains?

In answering this overarching question, the report addresses several more specific issues:

- Who participated in CORAL? Is there early evidence of reading gains? Did some children benefit more than others?
- What programmatic strategies seemed most important in contributing to reading gains?
- What practices facilitated the implementation of higher-quality literacy instruction?

The report focuses primarily on literacy programming and reading gains and does not look as closely at other programmatic aspects, such as non-literacy time (e.g., homework help and enrichment activities), or the sites' relationships with youth's families. This report also does not yet look at other types of outcomes. A final report at the end of the evaluation period (after children have been in the program approximately 18 months) will examine the initiative's longer-term effectiveness in providing high-quality programming and contributing to positive changes in children's reading skills, reading attitudes and behaviors, general school attitudes and behaviors, and improved standardized test scores.

Evaluation Methodology

The findings presented in this report are based on nine months of data collection, from October 2004 to June 2005, using a variety of qualitative and quantitative research techniques. These data allow us to describe effective CORAL program policies and practices that best served the transition to a more focused approach to literacy programming and how these practices affected early program and youth outcomes, such as consistent and quality implementation of balanced literacy strategies, children's regular and sustained participation, and reading gains. (Details on methodology and data collection are presented in Appendix A.)

To assess implementation of the balanced literacy program and understand the structure of CORAL programming, P/PV researchers conducted extensive interviews with key informants (approximately 25 CORAL staff and collaborating partners and school staff per city), focus groups with parents and staff surveys.

To understand the population of youth served, their participation and outcomes, P/PV researchers are gathering school records information (on standardized test scores and demographics) from each of the school districts and analyzing each city's Management Information Systems' (MIS) enrollment and attendance information tracking daily participation and attendance in various types of programming at the after-school sites.

The study also seeks to address important questions about the quality of the after-school programming and how quality affects outcomes. In order to address these questions, the evaluation focuses on a subset of four to five sites in each city and a sample of third- and fourth-graders at each of those sites. For these intensive research sites and grade levels, extensive observations of on-the-ground programming were conducted; children completed surveys and individualized reading assessments; and their teachers completed rating forms.

There are several reasons why the most in-depth investigation of CORAL focuses on third- and fourth-grade children. First, there is a national call for all children to be reading at grade level by third

grade[10]—while, at the same time, studies have documented that regardless of initial reading skills, low-income children tend to fall steadily more behind in reading between first and fourth grades.[11] Second, because these grade levels represent a time of cognitive change among children, when they begin to compare themselves to others and better understand the differences between what they want to do well and what they are doing well, continued poor reading achievement can begin to deflate their self-confidence and their willingness to continue to try hard to learn in this and other subject areas. Third, the transition from third to fourth grade also represents a period of fundamental change in classroom practice around reading—when teachers are no longer spending as much time on the techniques of learning to read but are expecting children to use their reading skills to explore and understand diverse texts, including both literature and texts in other subject areas. For children behind or even tenuously at grade level at this point, getting up to speed or keeping up with grade-level reading when this type of instruction is not offered as part of the regular curriculum becomes challenging, and programs such as CORAL may be particularly valuable in providing the extra support these children need.

The Structure of the Report

The next chapter, Chapter II, provides an overview of CORAL programming after the shift to balanced literacy and describes the children who attended. Chapter III presents early outcomes, in terms of the quality of balanced literacy programming, participation and retention of youth, and early gains in reading scores. Chapter IV details strategies that proved effective in implementing the literacy instruction and contributed to higher-quality programming and stronger reading gains. A concluding chapter summarizes key lessons thus far, and outlines next steps in the evaluation.

The CORAL Initiative

Chapter II

Across the country, educators and policymakers are facing the challenge of improving academic outcomes for children attending underfunded and under-performing schools.[12] As they look to the after-school hours as a time to supplement the offerings provided during the school day, a large-scale, academic-oriented after-school program such as CORAL is appealing, offering the possibility of academic supports while at the same time providing other important enrichment experiences for youth. In this chapter, we provide an overview of CORAL's programming and participants as the initiative refocused its efforts and began to incorporate balanced literacy into the after-school hours during the 2004-05 academic year, with the hope of promoting literacy gains for the children who attended.

The After-School Programming

In their initial years, the CORAL cities had implemented a variety of programming, ranging from arts to science to homework help. In some cities, the enrichment programming had an academic focus. One city, for example, offered primarily science and math activities that were closely aligned with school district standards. Most often, however, the enrichment programming—while it often included high-quality activities such as art or dance provided by outside community-based organizations—was not implemented with an academic focus, and homework help was the only academic programming included in the after-school hours.

Research, however, suggests that after-school programs with targeted academic components, including well-defined curricula, structured approaches and regular implementation, are more likely to result in academic improvements for participants.[13]

Thus, as the Foundation adjusted the broader academic mission of CORAL to include the focused strategy of increasing literacy skills, cities were required to implement balanced literacy programming three or four days a week, for at least 75 to 90 minutes per day. Although this still allowed time to be devoted to homework help and enrichment activities, the focus on literacy represented a significant shift in scheduling and programming. In the 2004-05 school year, the CORAL cities moved from offering a variety of different programs to highly consistent programming across the state. In previous years, it would have been difficult to describe CORAL in general, given the vast differences among cities; but this year—while there are certainly still city and site variations—it is possible to describe the CORAL model.

The CORAL Day

The CORAL programs tended to be open four (one city) or five (four cities) days a week, for about three hours a day. They were not drop-in programs; rather, children were expected to attend every day the after-school program was open. As in previous years, the children who attended in 2004-05 were generally divided into groups based on grade level. Each group had between 12 and 20 children and was led by one or two staff members, called team leaders, who were most often college students. Throughout the after-school time, the group moved together from one activity to another.

A key aspect of the CORAL program continued to be the development of positive adult-youth relationships, and children therefore remained with the same team leader over the course of each program year. Except for one city, where certified teachers led the balanced literacy activities, the team leaders themselves taught those lessons. In some cases, they also led enrichment activities, although that programming was often led by staff from outside community organizations. In all cases, however, team leaders were present with the group for the entire afternoon.

Although the cities implemented slightly different activities and schedules, children who attended CORAL programs in 2004-05 participated in balanced literacy activities that were offered for about five hours a week, divided across three or four days;[14] homework help, which varied from as little as five

minutes a day in a few sites to up to 60 minutes a day; and cultural and academic enrichment activities, such as art, science, dance and cooking, that generally lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and occurred anywhere from two to five days a week.

Balanced Literacy

Balanced literacy was the central component of CORAL at each site. Several organizations and companies have produced curricula or models that include structures and resources for a balanced literacy program, although they all take slightly different approaches, such as suggesting different types of reading activities or different lengths of lessons. To help the CORAL cities implement this component, they were provided with information on two models, Youth Education for Tomorrow (YET) and Kidzlit, but they also had the option of finding and implementing a different program. (See the text box on the right for a description of these models.)[15]

To ensure consistency across the state, regardless of which model cities chose to implement, they were given guidelines for their balanced literacy program. Each lesson had to include, at a minimum, an opportunity for staff to read aloud to youth and an opportunity for youth to read individually (i.e., independent reading time with access to "leveled books"—books organized by specific reading levels). The program also had to include the other key balanced literacy strategies: book discussion, writing, vocabulary building, and "fun" activities to encourage the development of literacy skills. During any given balanced literacy lesson, in the first year of implementation, instructors generally led youth in about three of those literacy activities. (See the text box on page 10 for an example of a balanced literacy lesson.)

During **read alouds,** staff sometimes introduced the stories by asking youth questions related to the topic or having them predict what would happen based on the pictures. Staff read a variety of books, including short books that were read in a few minutes (*The Mud Puddle, The Principal's Haircut, Kat Kong*), longer, multi-chapter books that were read over the course of several days (*The Sneetches, Charlotte's Web, Bunnicula*) and occasionally nonfiction texts about topics as varied as civil rights, Diego Rivera and snakes.

These read alouds were sometimes followed by **book discussions**, which took varied formats. Staff sometimes asked youth to reflect on the text they had just read, such as "What was your favorite scene?" or "Why do you think Amelia was mean?" Other staff asked very targeted questions and recorded youth's short answers on the board. For example, after reading a book about a greedy

Two Balanced Literacy Models

While cities were given the option of choosing any appropriate balanced literacy model, the technical assistance providers gave them specific information on two programs that have been shown to be effective. The models are:

Kidzlit: Instructors reading to the group of youth (read alouds) is a focus of the program, which also includes "cool words" vocabulary exercises and writing exercises. Kidzlit also emphasizes additional strategies that allow youth to think more deeply about texts; these might take the form of discussion, art, drama or music activities related to the read aloud books. Kidzlit provides programs with books to use for read alouds, as well as accompanying guides with suggested activities that relate to those books. Although Kidzlit does not contain an independent reading component as part of its standard curriculum, the CORAL cities included this component in their programming in order to offer a complete balanced literacy curriculum.

Youth Education for Tomorrow (YET): This structured program includes five primary activities—read alouds, youth reading independently, skill activities to build youth's literacy skills, opportunities to talk about books during "shout out," and writing. Within this structure, instructors are free to choose their own books, lesson topics and skill activities, though YET does provide suggestions. For independent reading, YET works with 100 Book Challenge, an organization that provides sites with bins of leveled books to ensure that youth are reading at appropriate levels.

An Example of a CORAL Balanced Literacy Lesson

During this lesson, a group of 16 fourth-graders was led by two team leaders. One team leader began the lesson by reminding youth that they had been reading *Jackson Jones and the Puddle of Thorns*. Because the class included some youth who had not been present during previous lessons, the team leader prompted youth who had been present to give a summary of what they had read so far. The team leader then began the read aloud, reading with enthusiasm and at a good pace, and varying his intonation. He occasionally paused to ask questions such as, "Who is Mailbags again?" or "How many of you think he is jealous and why?" The team leader encouraged youth to participate and also paused once to ask, "Is everyone with me? Is anyone lost?"

After the read aloud, the team leader led a brief discussion about what it means to be "from the country," as one of the characters in the story was. Then he told the youth he was going to split them into four groups and that each group would write two separate lists, one describing the pros and cons of living in the country and the other describing the pros and cons of living in the city. He then asked youth for a few examples of each, so they could hear some ideas before they began writing. The team leader also wrote on the board a chart for "living in the country" and "living in the city," with pro and con columns under each. He asked youth to begin working and said they had about 10 to 15 minutes to complete the writing assignment. As the youth wrote, both team leaders walked around, answering questions and assisting the groups. After 15 minutes, one team leader told youth to stop writing and asked each group for an example of a pro and a con for living in the city and living in the country. As youth contributed, the other team leader wrote their responses on the board.

After 10 minutes of discussion, the team leader transitioned to independent reading. He first asked which youth had a book they usually read, and these youth got up and gathered those books. The youth without books then were told they had one minute to choose a book from the shelves. The team leader then told youth they should be thinking about the similarities and differences between their book and *Jackson Jones and the Puddle of Thorns*. As the youth began reading, both team leaders walked around the room and paused to talk to individual youth. The team leaders often had the youth read aloud a portion of their books to them or asked them to explain what the book was about. At one point, a boy said that his book was too hard. The team leader had him read aloud a portion, asked him, "How do you know it is too hard?" and then told him to choose another book. The team leader then had him read aloud a portion of the new book to ensure that it was not too hard. After about 15 minutes, the team leader told youth to "stop there" and asked for a few volunteers to share the connection they found in their books with the Jackson Jones book. Four youth were called on to share, and the team leader praised each of them when they were done.

character, one instructor asked, "What would you buy if you had $100?" and recorded one-word answers on the board.

Writing exercises sometimes followed, which in the best cases were extensions of the book discussion. Topics included, for example, comparing and contrasting things found in the 1890s versus things found today (after reading *If You Lived 100 Years Ago*); giving advice to two characters in a story; writing and illustrating their own scary stories (after reading one from *The Sneetches*); and describing what they would do if they were in Wilbur's position in *Charlotte's Web*.

Throughout these activities, staff sometimes incorporated **vocabulary** exercises that aimed to introduce or review words with youth. Many staff used Word Walls as vocabulary tools: They devoted a space on the wall—or even just a large poster board—to vocabulary and added new words to the wall every day. Staff often introduced vocabulary as part of the read aloud, either reviewing words with youth before reading or pausing during a reading to define a new word. Sometimes staff devoted more time to vocabulary—for example, having youth record words and definitions in journals or act out the meanings of new words.

Independent reading exercises generally occurred at the beginning or end of the literacy activity. In most cases, youth were able to choose from books at individualized reading levels—different color stickers indicated different reading levels. Youth mostly read fiction, ranging from Dr. Seuss to *The Boxcar Children*, and sometimes read nonfiction or comic books. The time spent reading ranged from fewer than 5 to more than 30 minutes, but averaged about 15 minutes.

Some balanced literacy lessons also included skill development activities, which were opportunities

Examples of Enrichment Offerings

Explorit: In this science activity, led by staff from a CBO, instructors generally structured their lessons by introducing a science concept and then leading youth through a hands-on activity related to that concept. In one lesson, for example, the instructor read aloud a book about stars and led a discussion in which youth shared their knowledge about stars and constellations. He then had youth make their own "constellation viewers" and design their own creative constellations. Nearly all youth were fully engaged in the activity and excited to bring their work home, and the staff made particular efforts to work one-on-one with youth who appeared less engaged.

Creative Writing: Led by a local consultant with experience in writing and literature, this activity—which took place once a week—engaged groups of youth in various writing exercises. During her first meeting with one group, the instructor asked them to record their name, family and "favorite things." Later, she had the youth interview each other and record responses. This lesson was intended to actively involve youth in writing and also gauge their initial skill levels. Though the instructor led a clear lesson, the presence of a team leader who was familiar with the youth also proved useful, since she was able to provide help to youth tailored to their individual abilities. During a later class close to Christmas, the instructor led youth in writing letters to Santa Claus by modeling a letter on the board and reviewing its components, such as date, heading and body.

Bhangra Dance: A local CBO provided lessons in this Indian dance form. During each class, the instructor taught youth a few more steps, building up to a complete routine to be performed at an end-of-the-year event. She began her classes by reviewing some of the cultural background of the dance, including its geographic and historical origins. She then led the youth to a stage and modeled a few dance steps for them. The group practiced these steps for the rest of the class, reviewing them several times to the music.

for youth to practice particular literacy skills, such as learning to write in complete sentences and practicing specific letter sounds. These activities occurred less frequently than other balanced literacy activities but included games such as Mad Libs, during which youth shouted out words of particular parts of speech to create silly stories, and "punctuation bingo."

Non-Literacy Time: Homework Help and Enrichment Activities

Across the state, cities continued to use the remaining program time for homework help and enrichment activities, the primary components from pre-2004 programming. Including these two components enabled programs to maintain some consistency from previous years, despite the shift to literacy. It also met the desire of some of their stakeholders (parents, school staff) to see youth completing their homework as well as participating in enrichment activities that were often not otherwise available to youth from low-income families.

The frequency of these non-literacy components varied somewhat across the state. In some cities, parents and school staff saw homework help as a key benefit of the CORAL program; in these cases, the sites devoted a significant amount of program time to homework in order to meet these stakeholders' requests. In most cases, however, cities were able to devote much of their non-literacy time to enrichment. These activities provided opportunities for youth that they rarely received in school, such as photography, dance, gardening and creative writing.

In all cities, enrichment was provided by a variety of staff: teachers from the school day, staff from external CBOs, individuals from the community and team leaders. The enrichment activities generally rotated on a six- to eight-week basis, so that youth participated in a variety of activities during the course of the year. (See the text box above for examples of enrichment activities.)

The CORAL cities had varying philosophies about the relationship between balanced literacy and enrichment activities. A few cities intentionally provided enrichment activities with a strong literacy focus. These cities looked for enrichment providers who already included literacy strategies such as writing and reading within their curriculum, or they trained providers to incorporate literacy into their existing curricula.

In other cases, the emphasis was on drawing a connection between the topics covered in balanced literacy lessons and the topics of enrichment activities.

For example, one team leader led an enrichment activity during which youth created their own quilts after reading the book *Luka's Quilt*. Finally, other cities focused on other beneficial aspects of enrichment activities, such as the exposure to new experiences and the opportunity for confidence-building, and did not incorporate any literacy-related instruction.

The CORAL Participants

The youth who attended these CORAL programs lived in neighborhoods with high levels of poverty and very low-performing schools—the communities CORAL had targeted since its inception. Thus, even without targeting specific groups of students within these schools, the programs would have been likely to reach children in high need of after-school opportunities and supports. From the beginning of the initiative, however, CORAL staff in all of the cities worked closely with school guidance counselors, teachers and principals to have them recommend students who could most benefit from the program, including children who were struggling academically or socially or who were English Learners. With the shift to balanced literacy in 2004, two of the CORAL cities began to work with the schools to intentionally target children who were well behind in reading, based on their standardized test scores. While the other three cities did not specifically target children who were below grade level in reading, they nevertheless served these children because of the overall low performance of students in the schools.

The profiles of the children enrolled in CORAL in 2004-05 reflect both the neighborhoods and schools from which they came and the struggles with reading that are characteristic of students in those schools and school districts. Total enrollment for the school year statewide was 5,321, ranging from 585 to 2,081 across the cities. Most youth served were elementary-school age, primarily first- to fifth-graders (81 percent), with a small proportion of youth in the middle-school grades.

Table 2 displays the demographic profiles of the children enrolled in the programs during the 2004-05 school year. The table also displays the proportion of CORAL youth designated as English Learners in 2004, as well as the proportion of CORAL youth who scored proficient (met the California content standards for their grade level) or higher on the California Standards Test (CST) English Language Arts section.

CORAL served youth of varied backgrounds and cultures, most prominently Hispanic youth (about 68 percent), followed by African American and Asian American youth, reflecting the schools and communities in which the initiative is located. More than half (53 percent) of CORAL children were designated English Learners, and 89 percent, overall, were recipients of free or reduced-price lunch. Scores on the CST available from Spring 2004 indicate that a significant percentage of CORAL children were far behind in reading, as only a small portion (16 percent) met the grade-level standards of proficiency on the English Language Arts portion of the test.

Whereas Table 2 presents data for all enrolled CORAL youth, Table 3 displays reading-level profiles for the sample of 520 CORAL youth in the third and fourth grades who were also administered individualized reading assessments. The results of the assessments indicate that a majority of these children were not reading at grade level in Fall 2004 (approximately 70 percent statewide scored below grade level, ranging from 60 percent to 86 percent across the cities, with 50 percent reading two or more grade levels below where they should have been). Approximately one fifth (20 percent) of the children in this sample scored proficient or better on the CST English Language Arts portion. Half of them were designated English Learners. Thus, although this is a sample of the CORAL students, they reflect the larger population served by the initiative.

Although the children in this sample were well behind where they should have been in reading, their attitudes and behaviors in the classroom, on average, were not cast as particularly negative. Teachers' assessments of these same CORAL youth indicate that, in the daytime classroom, the children did not tend to be overly aggressive (94 percent were rated as never or rarely being so), tended to engage in positive social relationships (41 percent sometimes/often and 58 percent very often/almost always), and tended to display cognitive concentration (47 percent sometimes/often and 43 percent very often/almost always).

Table 2: Demographic Profiles of CORAL Youth[16]

	Fresno	Long Beach	San Jose	Sacramento	Pasadena	TOTAL
Total number of enrolled youth	2,081	930	996	729	585	5,321
Ethnicity[17]						
African American	13%	11%	3%	24%	18%	14%
Caucasian	2%	3%	3%	7%	3%	3%
Asian	10%	3%	16%	8%	1%	10%
Hispanic	71%	68%	65%	30%	65%	68%
Other	1%	1%	1%	2%	1%	1%
Multiracial	2%	3%	3%	5%	4%	4%
English learners	57%	59%	68%	39%	38%	53%
Receive free or reduced-cost lunch	97%	84%	75%	89%	87%	89%
California Standards Test (CST) Language Arts proficient or above	8%	25%	15%	20%	23%	16%

According to responses on a youth survey administered at the same time as the fall reading assessments, these CORAL children reported that they had positive adults in their lives who cared about them and were available to them for support (98 percent) and that they liked school (90 percent). On a scale of one to five, they tended to report that they enjoyed reading (a mean of 4.4, on a scale of 1 to 5). Although they reported that they liked reading, they were less comfortable with their ability to do well in reading: the mean for reading efficacy was 3.7 (on a scale of 1 to 5). Indeed, these children were just reaching an age where they were beginning to compare themselves to others, make self-judgments about their ability that were more "realistic," and link interest and liking to things they were good at, making them a prime target for such an intervention—before efficacy and liking dropped too far.

Table 3: Reading Achievement Profiles of the Third- and Fourth-Grade Sample

Total Number of Youth Assessed	520
Youth reading at or above grade level	30%
Youth reading below grade level	70%
Youth reading one grade below level	20%
Youth reading two or more grades below level	50%

The initiative's shift to a focus on balanced literacy was specifically intended to help address the reading challenges that were, or were likely to become, a major barrier to these children's success in school. The next chapter describes the children's participation in the CORAL program during the 2004-05 academic year, the level of quality at which the literacy activities were implemented, and the extent to which participation and quality were related to children's early gains in reading.

What Are the Early Outcomes?

Chapter III

The CORAL programs' implementation of the literacy model described in the previous chapter has been under way for less than a year. Thus, the outcomes questions addressed in this report explore the achievement of shorter-term goals and early gains in programming and youth's reading levels. These early findings lay the groundwork for what we might expect to see as the initiative matures and the children are exposed to literacy programming for a longer period of time. Understanding how youth benefit from the literacy programming and under what conditions also helps us begin to address questions about effective practices, which we discuss in the next chapter.

In this chapter we describe the early outcomes in terms of youth's participation, the quality of programming and youth's reading-level gains. Previous studies of after-school programs that have looked at youth's outcomes in the specific areas of academic achievement or attitudes have suggested that poor outcomes in these areas may be related to infrequent attendance and, thus, less exposure to the programming.[18] Further, while researchers have suggested that poor outcomes may also be linked to poorly implemented and limited academic programming (e.g., homework time or homework help),[19] few, if any, studies have attempted to empirically link program instructional quality to outcomes.

This chapter, then, takes the first steps at drawing such connections, though we will be able to do so in much greater depth in our follow-up report, after two years of data collection. At this point, we are able to address the following questions:

- How often do youth participate in the CORAL programs?
- What is the general quality of the literacy programs in which these youth participate in?
- Are there any changes in youth's reading levels in the first four to six months of their exposure to the newly implemented literacy programming?
- To what extent are reading-level gains linked to participation? To what extent is it linked to the quality of the programming?

In addition, the chapter looks briefly at parents' perceptions of the ways participation in CORAL has benefited their children.

Participation and Retention

The CORAL initiative was designed to be a program for participants to attend on a regular and sustained basis. High standards for participation were set as policy in all the cities, based on the results of many years of research on after-school programs indicating that when increases in performance, behaviors and attitudes are found, the participants have attended on a regular basis—some studies suggest as often as three times a week or more—over a period of months and often years.[20] In contrast, activity-based programs a student attends only once or twice a week during the course of a single semester have been less likely to produce long-term effects. Thus, CORAL programs require regular attendance and do not operate on a drop-in basis. Policies and procedures are in place to explain this to parents, children and school personnel.

Importantly, programs that do not appeal to youth will not attract or retain them long enough to influence their development. One initial concern that staff had in shifting to spending three to four afternoons a week engaging youth in literacy activities was that participation and retention rates might drop because of fewer enrichment activities and an increased academic focus. In spite of these concerns, however, attendance data reveal a picture of consistent and regular participation during the first nine months of the programs' shift to a greater literacy focus.

Data from enrollment and attendance records suggest that participation rates are relatively high compared to other after-school programs.

Although available data do not allow for a comparison of the CORAL cities' attendance and retention rates with previous years (as the 2004-05 program year is the first year these types of data were collected consistently across the cities and sites), analysis of the attendance data reveals relatively high participation

Table 4:
CORAL Third- and Fourth-Grader Attendance and Retention, 2004-05 School Year*

	Fresno	Long Beach	Pasadena	Sacramento	San Jose	Total
Number of sites	4	5	4	5	5	23
Number of third- and fourth-grade youth in attendance	233	324	159	159	245	1,120
Average hours per day attended	3.01	3.18	2.73	2.96	2.74	2.94
Average days per week attended	3.28	3.44	3.20	2.44	2.35	2.98
Average days per week of *literacy* attended	2.56	2.04	2.81	2.19	2.20	2.31
Average attendance rate (days attended out of available days programs were open)	67%	72%	69%	51%	48%	62%
Percent of enrolled youth exited as of June 30, 2005	26%	16%	12%	30%	20%	21%

*Note: These numbers are calculated only for the 23 intensive research sites. The dates included are October 4, 2004, to June 8, 2005; attendance rates are calculated within a given city to account for differences in start and end dates and days that the programs were closed.

rates (see Table 4 above) that compare favorably with other studies of after-school programs. For the 2004-05 school year (between October 4 and June 8), third- and fourth-graders attended, on average, just under three days per week (2.98) for just under three hours per day (2.94).[21] The average number of days attended in the school year was 81.1, with 51 percent attending the program for more than 75 days (compared with 58.3 and 16.9 percent, respectively, found in the first-year evaluation of the 21st Century Learning Centers).[22] Retention rates show that 79 percent of the youth remained in the program as of June 30, 2005.

Importantly, frequency of attendance in the literacy activities was high. More than half (53 percent) of the third- and fourth-graders who were administered the Jerry L. Johns Informal Reading Inventory (IRI) in the fall and again in the spring attended literacy programming three or more days a week between IRI assessments; 36 percent attended two to fewer than three days per week during that period; 10 percent attended one to fewer than two days per week; and only 1 percent attended less than one day per week.

Along with their participation in literacy programming, CORAL youth continued to be exposed to homework help and enrichment activities on a consistent basis.

As Table 5 on the next page illustrates, although the CORAL programs shifted to a focus on literacy programming, they continued to provide homework help and enrichment on a regular basis. Children also participated, although less frequently, in physical education, other academic programming and field trips.

Notably, children attended literacy and homework help at almost equal rates, at an average of 63 days, between October 4 and June 8, or roughly three fourths of the time they were at CORAL. Children attended enrichment programming slightly more than half the days (44.9 days) they participated in CORAL. Although we do not have concrete evidence that this array of programming—including literacy, homework help, enrichment and other activities—contributed to youths' high participation rates, anecdotal evidence from interviews suggests it did. As one principal explained: "The best thing about CORAL? The literacy and the enrichment…. I love the enrichment, because they need that because they are too poor to afford the enrichment, so the blend of both has kept attendance up."

Table 5: Participation in Types of CORAL Activities by Third- and Fourth-Graders*

	Literacy	Other Academic	Homework Help	Enrichment	Field Trips	Physical Education
Average number of days	63.07	10.30	62.66	44.95	4.96	26.18
Median number of days	67	3	69	43	1	16

*Note: Table includes data from October 4, 2004, through June 8, 2005, for third- and fourth-grade youth at the CORAL intensive research sites (n=23 sites). The average number of days attended during this time period was 81. The maximum days possible was 170, given the days that CORAL programming was open.

Program Quality

Another measure of outcomes is the quality of programs provided in the 2004-05 school year. In Chapter II, we described the general structure and content of CORAL activities, but what was the quality of this programming? To answer this question, particularly with regard to literacy programming, P/PV undertook systematic observations of the literacy programming provided to all the third- and fourth-graders at each of the 23 intensive research sites across the five cities. A total of 56 groups were observed. Each group consisted of 12 to 20 students, and each was observed two to four times spread out between late October 2004 and mid-April 2005, with the majority (86 percent) observed three times. These structured observations allowed us to analyze, both qualitatively and quantitatively, the extent to which CORAL programming successfully incorporated each of the six balanced literacy strategies; provided high-quality instructional (e.g., clearly presented and organized), group management and connection-building (e.g., relating texts to youth's experiences) strategies; and offered examples of positive adult support (e.g., acting in a responsive way, helping and guiding children's learning). (See the text box on page 20 for an overview of the strategies assessed during the observations.)

Overall, CORAL staff provided balanced literacy programming of moderate quality, showing improvement over the course of the school year.

Table 6 on the next page displays the average rating—on a scale from 1 to 5—assigned to the balanced literacy lessons along various dimensions of quality. The average rating is about a 3, which indicates that the activities on average were implemented at a satisfactory level but contained significant areas that warranted improvement. Notably, in nearly every dimension, average quality increased at least slightly between our early observations in the fall and our later observations in the winter/spring. This improvement coincided, in many cities, with staff training that took place in the late fall or early winter, as well as staff's increasing familiarity and comfort with the balanced literacy model.

Researchers have emphasized read alouds and independent reading as two of the most critical strategies underlying a balanced literacy approach.[23] Based on this philosophy, CORAL cities were encouraged to focus their early efforts on implementing these two foundational strategies most frequently and strongly.

In line with the training and assistance the cities received, these two strategies—read alouds and independent readings—were observed during more observations than the other strategies. Overall, read alouds occurred during 80 percent of our observations and independent reading during 88 percent, as opposed to writing during 62 percent of our observations and book discussions during 57 percent.

Read alouds, in particular, were also one of the highest-quality strategies used during literacy lessons, as reflected in the high average rating. (See the text box for an example of a strong read aloud.) Independent reading took a bit longer to get off the ground, as several sites faced challenges such as having an insufficient number of books to meet all youth's individual reading levels, unclear early procedures for sharing books across classrooms to maximize resources, too little time

Table 6: Average Score on Quality Dimensions for Literacy Activities

Support and Instructional Strategies: (Scale of 1 to 5, with 5 the highest)	Oct. through Dec. 2004	Feb. through April 2005
Adult support	3.53	3.76
Instructional quality	3.03	3.08
Group management	3.46	3.54
Connection making	2.61	2.71

Balanced Literacy Strategies: (Scale of 1 to 5, with 5 the highest)	Oct. through Dec. 2004		Feb. through April 2005	
	Percent Implemented	Average Rating	Percent Implemented	Average Rating
Read alouds	71%	3.35	87%	3.58
Book discussions	57%	2.82	56%	3.14
Writing	60%	3.02	63%	3.12
Vocabulary	NA[24]	2.61	NA	2.03
Skill development	30%	3.20	90%	2.71
Independent reading	86%	2.97	89%	3.14
Average number of minutes children spent reading[25]	15.36		18.21	

scheduled for independent reading, and staff taking a passive role during the period and failing to ensure that youth were engaged. Many of these issues—particularly those related to materials and scheduling—were improved by the time of our later observations, making for better independent reading activities, as indicated by quality ratings that increased from an average of 2.97 in the fall to an average of 3.14 in the spring.

There were two dimensions in which the quality rating decreased: skill development and vocabulary. Although more instructors used skill development strategies in the second half of the year, the overall quality rating was lower. This may be a result of those instructors who chose to offer skill development activities earlier in the year having had a better handle on how to implement them well. And, as previously noted, most attention and technical assistance during the launch of literacy programming concentrated on getting the read aloud and independent reading pieces of the literacy instruction off the ground. Therefore, more instructors may have added skill development activities to their instructional time before they received the training to implement them well. Similarly, the score for vocabulary development was lower later in the year. Although it is difficult to determine exactly why this happened, the decline may also be a result of the instructors concentrating more on other aspects of literacy implementation.

Adult support started as, and remained, the strongest aspect of the activities across all observations, reflecting the importance CORAL has placed on fostering positive adult-youth relationships. General strategies related to instructional quality and group management were implemented with a greater degree of variation.

In addition to focusing on the quality of particular literacy strategies, observers also rated the quality of the overall instruction and support provided by staff. Observations indicated that, in general, staff were skilled at responding effectively to youth's questions and needs, and interacting with them in a warm and engaging manner. Across the state, we observed many positive instances of staff providing

Assessing Activity Quality

Between October 2004 and April 2005, trained researchers observed literacy programming at CORAL sites throughout the state. The following 10 dimensions of quality were assessed, falling within the broader areas of support/instruction and balanced literacy strategies (see Appendix A for a fuller description of each dimension):

Support and Instructional Strategies

Adult support: Do staff make efforts to help all youth succeed at the activity? Do they encourage youth who are struggling? Do they express interest in youth's thoughts and ideas? Do they display warmth toward youth and develop a supportive relationship with them?

Instructional quality: Do staff include a variety of successful instructional strategies, such as clear communication, organization and preparation? Do they motivate youth to participate? Do they challenge youth to move beyond their present skill levels?

Group management: Do staff show the ability to manage youth's behavior during the activity in a way that is appropriate for the age of the youth involved and the type of activity?

Connection making: Do staff make links between the youth and the text they are reading? Do they link parts of the lesson—for example, the read aloud and writing?

Balanced Literacy Strategies

Read aloud: Is the read aloud an interactive process that engages youth? Do staff introduce the text in a way that is interesting to youth? Do they encourage youth to be involved in the reading? Do they pause to ask questions?

Book discussion: Do staff ask clear questions to guide the discussion? Do they lead youth to draw connections between their lives and the story they are discussing? Do they encourage all youth to participate?

Writing: Is the activity flexible so all youth can work at a level appropriate to their skills? Does it provide an opportunity to write about topics that are relevant to a book they have read, their personal experience or current events? Do staff interact with youth throughout the exercise?

Independent reading: Are youth focused on reading for the majority of the time, with minimal distractions (e.g., getting up to choose new books, talking to a friend, etc.)? Are staff involved with youth, walking around the room to talk with them individually or calling them over to a table to work one-on-one?

Vocabulary: Do staff use strategies designed to increase or reinforce youth's vocabulary? Do they pause in a read aloud to define a new word? Do they write words on the board or post them on a wall? Do they create specific activities designed to increase vocabulary?

Skill development activities: What strategies do staff use to reinforce literacy skills? Do they use word games and other skill-building activities? Do they make these activities fun for youth and keep them engaged?

extra help for struggling youth; taking an interest in youth's interests and thoughts, as evidenced by the questions staff asked; smiling and laughing with youth; and being responsive to youth's individual needs. These indicators reflect staff's dedication to the program and to the participants, as well as their experience working with youth. Adult support was the most consistently positively implemented characteristic of programming observed across the state.

The instructional and group management strategies were also implemented at a moderate level, but there tended to be greater variation. On the positive side, we observed staff providing clear instructions, teaching organized lessons and employing strategies to motivate and challenge youth, such as praising their successes and having extra activities ready when youth finished the planned lesson—all useful strategies for helping them learn and succeed. In other cases, we did not observe staff members using such strategies as effectively. For example, one staff member, who was generally friendly and positive with youth, was not able to guide those who struggled with an activity. When children asked questions or asked for help with a writing assignment, the staff member encouraged them to "just have fun with it" or "don't worry about it" rather than providing specific guidance.

A Strong Read Aloud

In a lesson with a group of third-graders, the team leader read the book *Chang's Paper Pony* to the children. He began by reading the summary on the back of the book to give the youth an idea of the story's plot. He then opened the book and started at chapter one, reading at a good pace and with varying intonation.

After each page, the team leader held up the book to show the pictures and walked around the room to make sure all youth could see them. He also paused during the read aloud to define words and ask questions such as, "Would you want to go home [like the main character does]?" The team leader also paused to provide background, explaining that, during the time period in which the story took place, there was a war going on in China.

As the team leader continued reading aloud, he held open the book to show the Chinese letter characters he was talking about, pointing to each one as he said what it represented. The team leader also paused to ask an open-ended question: "Why did he [Chang] want a pony?" One child responded with "because he was lonely," and the team leader prompted the youth to explain why Chang may have been lonely.

The team leader also tried to include all youth in the discussion. For example, he called on Jose, who did not have his hand raised, and commented that he wanted to choose people who did not answer questions all the time.

On a related note, we also observed a few instructors who struggled with managing the behavior of youth. Although this was not consistent across all observations, it is notable in that where staff were unable to successfully manage youth's behavior, little to no balanced literacy instruction occurred. In these cases, staff spent their time on attempting to focus youth, quiet them down and prevent outbursts, sometimes to such an extent that they were unable to implement even one balanced literacy strategy. Although this was not the case in the majority of observations, it does suggest that successful behavior management is a prerequisite for balanced literacy instruction. Behavior management alone did not lead to successful lessons, but when it was lacking even slightly it could significantly undermine the quality of the lessons.

Successful strategies for connection making were observed the least frequently. In the stronger examples of connection making, staff devoted more time to this element of the lesson, such as having youth role-play scenes from read aloud texts or even come up with alternate endings to the text and act them out. Observations with low ratings in this area generally fell into two categories: either the connection making was so brief it was likely to have had little impact on youth, or the connection-making activity was well intentioned but not strongly implemented. An example of the former is staff who asked a couple of brief questions about the text while reading—a good initial strategy for engaging youth—but who did not follow up with any additional questions or statements. Other staff spent extensive time on connection-making activities but could have further clarified exactly how either the activities or discussions related to the texts. For example, after reading a book that dealt with prejudice, one staff member had youth act out different emotions. The group spent about 15 minutes on this activity, but the team leader did not make clear how it related to the discussion of prejudice in the text.

There was early evidence of instructors working to make the literacy activities fun.

In interviews with program staff, particularly in one city where the literacy strategies were well under way, we heard examples of how the staff developed their balanced literacy program with a vision of fun and energy, in order to keep children coming to the program and move beyond the constraints of the mandated school-day curricula.[26] One staff person provided the following description of her role:

> *I make children have fun and learn in the afterschool program. I help youth develop in all areas, like, for example, how to respect other cultures and how to act in society. I introduce youth to wonderful books and teach them how to tear them apart. We get to do projects, role-play stories and characters, [write] scripts, play, cook, etc. If they want to cook chicken soup, I teach them how… and we do all these things with the safety of youth in mind.*

Another staff person noted:

> *I try to catch their attention. It is all about relating the books to the kids' lives. So, for example, I may tell them, 'The character in the book is about your age.' The kids want to share about their*

lives and to tell me what it is like to be nine years old. We also try to bring out skills in art or other things they are not getting in school. For example, for the book Chang's Paper Pony, *we drew a picture of what they thought the land here looked like a hundred years ago.*

However, these efforts were not equal across the state. At sites that took longer to implement the basic balanced literacy strategies, less emphasis was placed on creating fun or engaging activities. These sites had their staff focus on implementing the basic strategies for read alouds and independent reading, such as reading at an appropriate pace, asking questions and helping youth find appropriate independent reading texts. In some activities that we observed, the focus on these procedures limited the energy spent on fun strategies.

Reading-Level Gains

Ultimately, the initiative seeks to improve children's academic skills, starting with the basics of their reading achievement—the cornerstone of all their other studies. To assess children's reading gains, trained administrators visited the CORAL cities approximately every six months to administer the Jerry L. Johns Informal Reading Inventory (IRI), an individualized reading assessment that assigns a grade-level reading designation, based on children's reading of a series of graded word lists and graded paragraphs, and their responses to comprehension questions after each paragraph. A reading level is assigned based on how well children perform on each of these different tasks.

Baseline IRI scores suggested that 70 percent of the 520 third- and fourth-graders sampled were reading below where they should be for their grade, and 50 percent were reading two or more levels below. Four to six months after the first assessment, children still participating in CORAL were assessed again (with interviewers blind to their prior reading levels), with a response rate of 74 percent, or 383 youth.[27]

Slight but significant gains in reading levels were apparent, as measured by individual reading assessments at the first follow-up.[28]

Third- and fourth-graders showed significant, but modest, gains between administration of the Fall 2004 and Spring 2005 reading assessments. (There was a four- to six-month interim period between assessments, an average of 171 calendar days or approximately 105 school days.) Overall, youth increased about a third of a grade level in reading. This is an appreciable amount for children already well behind in reading, who otherwise might be falling further and further behind.

Reading gains were greatest for youth who were two or more grade levels behind at the time of the first assessment.

The analyses examined whether reading gains differed for youth in different subgroups. The results indicate that those youth assessed to be the most behind in reading (two or more levels below their grade level) at the first assessment showed the most significant improvement, approximately three quarters (0.78) of a grade level in reading. (See Table 7 on the next page.) These findings are consistent with other studies which have found that those most in need of a program tend to show the greatest gains.[29]

Table 7 also indicates that those initially assessed at or above their grade level in reading showed an average loss in reading levels over the time period. It is possible that these children—although reading better than the other children in the study—are struggling with the more complicated word lists and passages that mark the higher grade levels on the assessment instrument. Of note, however, although the average scores are lower, the average decline does not drop them below their respective grade levels. (See Appendix B for additional analyses that display the average gains separately for third- and fourth-graders.) Importantly, as described in a later section, the average drop is less when children are exposed to higher-quality literacy strategies.

Youth's reading efficacy—evaluated using a survey when the children were first assessed—also significantly affected reading-level gains. Youth who felt a strong sense of efficacy—that they can learn to read and that reading is easy—showed stronger gains in reading than did children who felt a lower sense of reading efficacy.

Table 7: Changes in Reading Level

Baseline Reading Level	Number of Participants	Average Reading-Level Score at Baseline	Average Reading-Level Score at Follow-up	Average Reading-Level Change
2+ grades below	189	0.88	1.66	0.78
1 grade below	81	2.43	2.70	0.27
At or above grade level	113	4.19	3.76	-0.43
Overall	383	2.18	2.49	0.31

Other subgroups showed no differences in reading gains. Boys and girls and third- and fourth-graders showed similar patterns of reading-level gains, as did youth of different racial and ethnic backgrounds. Importantly, given the significant numbers of English Learners served by CORAL (53 percent overall; 50 percent in the IRI sample), reading gains were similar for youth designated by their teachers as English Proficient and as English Learners. These findings suggest that the literacy strategies may be a promising approach for both groups.

At this point in the evaluation, neither greater frequency of attendance in general nor frequency of attendance in literacy activities was related to reading gains. However, given the high rates of attendance—that is, even the children who attended least frequently still came relatively often—there may not have been enough variation thus far to determine the effect of attendance on reading levels.

With the data collected to this point, neither general participation rates nor participation specifically in the balanced-literacy program activities were found to be related to changes in IRI scores. The relatively strong attendance rates, described at the beginning of this chapter, may contribute to the lack of a connection between attendance and reading gains. Attendance rates for all youth were high—even children in the lowest-attendance group attended a literacy activity an average of one to two times per week between IRI administrations—and there was no critical attendance level that related to more positive gains. In contrast, as noted in the next section, regardless of how often a youth was exposed to literacy (perhaps because exposure was relatively high for all youth), the quality of implementation of the literacy strategies did matter for reading-level gains.

In the future, the evaluation will examine whether the duration of attendance affects changes in reading levels, as the evaluation will follow children whether they remain in CORAL or not.

Youth whose instructors more consistently implemented high-quality balanced literacy strategies showed greater gains than did youth in groups with fewer strategies implemented consistently over time.

In order to measure overall quality of implementation for a particular group—and then link this quality to a change in reading levels—we developed a Literacy Profile that allows us to assign a composite score, from 1 to 5, to the literacy activities experienced by each of the 56 groups of youth that we observed.

The Profile considers the quality of the primary balanced literacy strategies—read alouds, independent reading, writing, book discussions, vocabulary and skill development—using a rating of 3 (on our scale from 1 to 5) as the minimum criterion for implementation of moderate quality. It also considers frequency by taking into account whether each strategy was observed during at least half of the observations of a given group. A group that did not implement read alouds and independent reading—the two foundational strategies—at moderate quality at least half the time would be considered Profile 1; a group that implemented all six strategies at moderate to high quality at least half of the time would be in Profile 4 or 5. (See the text box on the next page for a description of the Literacy Profile.)

Table 8: Literacy Profiles and Average Change in Reading Level

Literacy Profile	Number of Groups	Number of Youth	Average Change in Reading Level
1	33	246	0.26
2	3	28	0.28
3	20	107	0.45
Total	56	381	0.31

The Literacy Profile

The overall Literacy Profile assigned to each group considers both the quality of balanced literacy strategies and the consistency of their implementation over the course of the year.

Literacy Profile 1: This group implemented read alouds and independent reading during fewer than half of our observations, or did so at low quality.

Literacy Profile 2: This group implemented read alouds and independent reading at a quality rating of at least 3 (on a scale of 1 to 5), during at least half of our observations.

Literacy Profile 3: This group implemented read alouds, independent reading and one other literacy strategy (writing, book discussions, skill development or vocabulary) at a quality rating of at least 3 (on a scale of 1 to 5), during at least half of our observations.

Literacy Profile 4: This group implemented read alouds and independent reading at a rating of at least 4, as well as all of the other four strategies at a rating of at least 3, during at least half of our observations.

Literacy Profile 5: This group implemented all six balanced literacy strategies at a rating of 4 during at least half of our observations.

During this first year of implementation, the majority of the groups (33 of 56, or 59 percent) were assigned to Literacy Profile 1 based on these criteria. This indicates that these 33 groups did not implement moderate-quality read alouds and independent reading during at least half of the observations. While just under half of these groups did implement one of these strategies—read alouds or independent reading—with consistency and moderate quality, they are assigned to Profile 1 because they did not implement both strategies consistently throughout the year (though most did implement these strategies by the end of the period under study).

Of the remaining groups, almost all (20 of 23) fall into Profile 3, indicating that they implemented read alouds, independent reading, and one or two other strategies at least half of the time. (No groups fell into Profile 4 or 5.) This breakout by Literacy Profile indicates that about half of the groups implemented zero or one strategy, and half of the groups implemented three or four strategies at a moderate or strong level of quality. This suggests a significant difference between the "weaker" groups, who fall into Profile 1, and the "stronger" groups, who fall into the higher Profile; there is very little "in between."

The Literacy Profile criteria represent high standards for balanced literacy programming. It is not at all surprising that, in its first year of implementing balanced literacy strategies, an after-school program would fall into Profile 1. In addition, these Profiles take into account programming observed over the course of the year, including early lessons that were not as strong as programming later in the year. The Profiles suggest that fewer than half of the groups received consistently strong balanced literacy programming over the course of the year. However, the data described earlier indicate that, by later in the year, many of the groups were receiving stronger programming.

A key advantage of the Profile is that it allows us to link the general quality of literacy instruction provided to a group of youth with the change in reading levels for youth in that group. These analyses indicate that greater fidelity to implementation

Table 9:
Literacy Profiles and Average Change in Reading Level, by Reading Level at Baseline

Literacy Profile	Baseline Reading Level	Number of Youth	Average Change in Reading Level
1			
	2 or more grades below	127	0.73
	1 grade below	56	0.13
	At or above grade level	63	–0.58
2			
	2 or more grades below	14	0.49
	1 grade below	6	1.00
	At or above grade level	8	–0.62
3			
	2 or more grades below	46	1.00
	1 grade below	19	0.47
	At or above grade level	42	–0.17
Total		381	0.31

of the balanced literacy strategies predicts greater gains in reading levels over time. Those instructors who provided read alouds and independent reading with at least a moderate level of quality, along with at least one other strategy (writing, book discussions, vocabulary, skill development), had youth who showed the greatest gains during the period of assessment. As Table 8 on page 24 indicates, those youth who were in groups of Literacy Profile 3 showed greater gains on average than those youth who were in groups of Literacy Profile 1 or 2.

Table 9 above shows the average change for children by reading grade level. Looking at youth whose scores were two or more grade levels behind at the first assessment, one grade level behind, and at or above grade level, an interesting pattern emerges. Those youth two or more levels behind who are in the highest quality group show the most gains.[30] Although youth who started at or above reading level tended to drop over time, those youth exposed to higher-quality literacy instruction did not experience the same drop in their scores as those exposed to lower-quality literacy programming. As noted earlier, the drop in scores may reflect, in part, the tenuous reading ability of the children when faced with the greater difficulty of the IRI reading passages as children get to the third- and fourth-grade reading levels. Higher-quality literacy strategies may have helped to "keep them afloat."

At this point in the CORAL initiative, the average length of independent reading time provided as part of the literacy lesson contributed to reading-level gains, over and above the contribution of any other literacy strategy.

In addition to finding that the overall quality of literacy programming youth received is linked to their reading-level gains, our analysis also considered whether higher-quality implementation of particular literacy strategies was linked to increased positive change. At least for this early stage of implementation, results suggest that how well instructors implemented independent reading strategies (e.g., coaching youth and, most importantly in these analyses, providing sufficient time for youth to read on a regular basis) was an important predictor of youth's reading-level gains, above and beyond

Qualities of Strong Independent Reading Activities

- Plenty of books are available for youth to choose from. These books are clearly organized by reading level and are easily accessible to youth.
- Staff remind youth of a routine for retrieving books, so that youth can choose books quickly and spend most of the activity time reading.
- Staff assist youth with choosing appropriate books—for example, directing them to the appropriate color bin (if book levels are indicated by color) and monitoring their choices at the beginning of the lesson.
- Youth are allowed to move to comfortable spaces for reading, such as pillows and rugs.
- Youth are given a focus for their reading, often connected with the topic they have been studying. For example, after reading a Dr. Seuss book as a group, youth might be instructed to look for examples of rhyming in their independent reading books.
- Staff are active and engaged with youth throughout the independent reading period. Staff spend time talking with individual youth, discussing the plots of their books or any questions they may have. Staff spend at least several minutes with many, if not all, youth.
- Staff are moving around the room during the lesson, supervising all youth, coaching youth and making themselves open to questions.
- Youth have an opportunity to share after reading—for example, responding to a focus question that was posed earlier or describing their favorite scene.
- The activity lasts at least 20 minutes, with the majority of the time devoted to children's on-the-page reading, rather than "housekeeping" activities (such as choosing books, signing reading logs, etc.).

Qualities of Weaker Independent Reading Activities

- Independent reading occurs after homework time or during free time, rather than as a unique activity scheduled into programming.
- The "housekeeping" involved in the lesson is inefficient: Youth spend much of the activity looking for books or recording their reading in journals, so that little of the time is spent actually reading.
- Staff do not help youth choose books or monitor that youth choose books at appropriate levels.
- Staff are not available to help youth: Staff leave the room, stay in one spot in the room, talk with a colleague, read themselves or work on other projects while youth are reading.
- Youth get up often from their seats, moving around the room or going to the bathroom.

how well instructors implemented any other literacy strategy. (See the text box above for characteristics of higher-quality and weaker-quality independent reading activities.) This finding is in keeping with a plethora of research indicating that time spent reading is the critical factor in improving reading skills and comprehension: students who read more in and out of school consistently outperform peers who read less.[31]

Interestingly, general instructional practices (such as good planning and organization), group management practices and connections made for youth between their experience and the text were not themselves predictors of greater gains for the children. Nevertheless, having these practices in place did help the instructors provide higher-quality literacy activities. Similarly, although the adult support ratings were highly correlated with higher-quality literacy instruction, the quality of the adult support did not in and of itself relate to stronger reading gains for children.

During the final year of the evaluation, we will continue to explore these variables to determine how literacy program strategies, instructional strategies and adult-youth support are related to more long-term reading-level gains, change in test scores, participation and/or retention, or change on other variables measured by the youth survey (e.g., reading efficacy, liking reading, problem solving, etc.).

Parents' Views of the Benefits of CORAL

During focus groups in four of the CORAL cities, parents offered their perspectives on the after-school programming and noted changes they had seen in their children, including benefits that were not necessarily measured in the evaluation. Some parents had chosen CORAL specifically because of the literacy focus, and several were encouraged by the improvements they had seen in their children since enrolling. One parent said:

> *My daughter is doing well. She is reading much better and is enjoying math. She was behind in school when she started, but now she is very interested in school. She pays a lot of attention to schoolwork, finishes her reports and homework. She is improving a lot.*

Another parent said:

> *Now that CORAL is offering more literacy and kids are reading and writing more, it's even better. The reading skills of my children have improved so much. It's not one hundred percent yet, but the program has helped them a lot.*

Parents were also pleased with other benefits their children received from CORAL. For example, several parents noted changes in their children's attitude toward school and reading (a topic this evaluation will track more closely next year through follow-up youth surveys). Parents said their children had become more structured and responsible in their study habits, had developed an interest and joy in learning, and had begun to trust in themselves and their abilities to do schoolwork. One father shared how his daughters are "paying attention to and enjoying school." He said:

> *Now my daughters are very interested in school and in learning, and they want to learn more and more. Most of the time homework is done before they get home, but if they have to do homework they enjoy doing it.*

Beyond the academic benefits, parents also spoke often about the positive effects of the enrichment programming and of their appreciation that CORAL exposed their children to activities they would not otherwise have been able to provide. They described CORAL enrichment as opening up the world to their children, and some parents identified those activities as a key attraction of having their children participate in the after-school program. As one parent explained:

> *I thought CORAL would be a great opportunity for my kid. I volunteer (in CORAL), and we do a lot of field trips together. We have seen great shows and have experienced great things. All these activities are opportunities for my child to see "past the neighborhood." Children are being exposed [to] and are getting to know other places.*

Other parents noted that their children had become passionate about particular subjects, such as singing or drawing, that they first learned in CORAL. Also, parents appreciated the physical aspect of some enrichment activities, noting that it improved their children's overall health.

In addition, parents in all four cities mentioned seeing improvements in their children's social skills and how those changes had helped them become better students. One parent mentioned that she used to worry because her son was a "loner," but that "since he started CORAL he has become a lot more sociable. Now what he likes most is coming to school and being around other children."

In this chapter, we examined the early outcomes of the CORAL program. Of key importance, youth in the program who were exposed to higher-quality implementation of the balanced literacy model showed greater reading gains than did their peers

who were not exposed to the same level and consistency of implementation of the balanced literacy strategies. Although, in the absence of a control group, these results cannot prove the CORAL literacy programming worked, they are indicative of the effectiveness of the program when it is implemented as intended.

The CORAL cities carried out a range of strategies and modifications during the 2004-2005 year to move their programming in line with the balanced literacy model, while still providing homework help, enrichment and the positive adult-youth relationships integral to their program philosophy. In the next chapter, we look at the practices employed by the CORAL cities that appeared to best facilitate implementation of the higher-quality literacy programming found to relate to greater reading-level gains in the early outcomes phase of the evaluation.

What Implementation Practices Contributed To the Positive Early Outcomes?

Chapter IV

Promising early findings showing reading gains for CORAL children, although moderate, suggest that an effective launch of literacy programming is possible in a relatively short period of time. That success is likely due to a combination of factors: strong partnerships with key stakeholders; the balanced literacy curriculum itself and full investment in its component strategies; experienced and qualified staff at the CORAL city lead agencies to train instructors and monitor and support the fidelity of its implementation; and dedicated and supportive site staff to deliver the balanced literacy lessons to the children. These factors, their contribution to effective implementation of quality literacy programming, and the challenges that accompanied them are explored in this chapter.

As discussed in Chapter II, CORAL programs had been built in collaboration with key partners, including local CBOs, school districts and school sites. As a first step to the implementation of balanced literacy, the CORAL cities had to do the crucial upfront work of getting buy-in from their partners on the new emphasis on literacy. The long history and strong nature of these partnerships allowed CORAL lead agency staff to have open discussions about the introduction of the balanced literacy curriculum and the ways in which that new component of the after-school programming would need to become consistent across all sites. In some cases, local CBOs that had been running the after-school programs at particular locations felt their mission did not fit well with the new programming, and they withdrew from the partnership. Those CBOs that remained part of the initiative either shared or were interested in moving to CORAL's focus on targeted literacy instruction.

The majority of CORAL sites are based in schools, which bring a number of benefits, including reduced cost for overhead, access to space to provide programming, ready access to students, and the involvement of school staff in recruiting students and supporting the CORAL staff. Close collaborations with school district and school site personnel are a hallmark of the CORAL cities, and the CORAL lead agencies were able to build on these pre-existing relationships to work out the best way to offer after-school literacy programming that would support the structured literacy curriculum offered during the school day.

The process of creating that in-school/after-school correspondence was made challenging by the fact that California school districts are mandated to choose from, and strictly adhere to, a limited number of curricula for their reading language arts programs. (The districts involved in the CORAL initiative use either Houghton Mifflin Reading or Open Court Reading for the elementary grades.)[32] Initially, school personnel were apprehensive about the potential conflict that could be presented by balanced literacy programming. As one school principal explained, she worked closely with the CORAL staff to ensure that the shift to balanced literacy would work well for her school and students:

> *At first, we were really nervous because we are a "Reading First" school.*[33] *We need to implement the Houghton Mifflin program to 100 percent, with no outside [influence on the approach]. [The CORAL staff] were like, "Let's sit down; let's see what they're doing." Our literacy coach looked at the program, and they worked it out. CORAL staff said, "Oh yeah, we could do that part."… That was a prefect example of how we work as a team.*

Working closely with their collaborative partners to get this kind of buy-in was a necessary precondition for implementing the balanced literacy curriculum and integrating it into the already-established homework help and enrichment components of the after-school programs. The remainder of this chapter discusses effective practices the CORAL cities used to implement the new programming, and explores how, when those practices were not in place, implementation progress and program quality lagged behind as a result.[34]

Effective Staffing

For each CORAL city, successful implementation of balanced literacy across multiple sites required a new level of training, support and oversight for the programs' instructional staff. That staff consisted primarily of team leaders; and from the beginning of CORAL, the expectations for them had been high—they developed their own lesson plans for enrichment activities with the support of site coordinators and, at some sites, educational liaisons (full-time teachers in a school where CORAL was located, who were employed by the after-school program for several hours per week to train and monitor team leaders). While these site-level staff typically had strong youth development skills, the introduction of the new curriculum meant that they would now also have to learn how to become effective literacy instructors. To ensure that team leaders could successfully fulfill their expanded responsibilities, the CORAL lead agencies had to strengthen their city-level staffing.

The literacy director had the key role in successfully implementing the new curriculum.

The most fundamental aspect of the staffing adjustment necessary to refocus programming proved to be the hiring of a literacy director—an expert with a solid background in the field of literacy, the skills necessary to train and support site staff in their efforts to provide literacy programming, and the time and ongoing authority to monitor program quality.[35] When they began implementing balanced literacy, most of the cities had a staff member with background and training in the field of education, but none of them had one who could devote herself exclusively to the tasks associated with balanced literacy. Two of the cities filled this position early in the implementation process, during the summer of 2004, while the other three did not do so until 2005.

The "early hiring" cities benefited from having the literacy director on board during the critical months before the actual introduction of balanced literacy programming began, and had a head start on putting crucial procedures in place. In those early months, the literacy director was able to develop and implement the balanced literacy training curriculum, play a crucial role in overseeing the development of the lesson-planning process that team leaders would follow during the year, and provide early program monitoring and feedback, all of which facilitated a smooth transition to providing balanced literacy. Their "later hiring" counterparts were still struggling to put these elements in place late into the spring of 2005.

Across the state, site staff quickly came to view the literacy directors as an invaluable resource. As one site coordinator explained, "She makes sure we are all on target and getting what we need." Nowhere was the importance of literacy directors felt more than in those cities that hired them later in the year and experienced the contrast of trying to implement balanced literacy first without that guidance, and then with it. As the executive director of one of the later-hiring cities explained, "We dragged our feet bringing on that person [the literacy director]. We didn't know how that person would fit in. I guess we were thinking that every site coordinator would focus on that within their own site. Wow, she brings the expertise that we really, really need."

Team leaders' interests, background and tenure allowed them to quickly adapt to literacy instruction and build strong relationships with program participants.

Though the literacy director played an overarching role in determining the success of balanced literacy programming, it was, of course, the instructional staff at the sites who had to be able to implement that programming in the classroom at a high level of quality. In one CORAL city, the balanced literacy instruction was provided primarily by certified teachers, with team leader assistants; but in the other four cities, team leaders who did not have teaching credentials were the literacy instructors, and it was essential that they have the background and skills to both lead the lessons and develop strong relationships with the participants.

Table 10:
Demographics of CORAL Direct Staff*

Average age	27.2 years
Gender	
Male	25%
Female	75%
Ethnicity	
African American	17%
Asian and Pacific Islander	16%
Hispanic	46%
White	13%
Other	2%
Mixed Race/Ethnicity	6%

*Note: Direct staff refers to staff who work on-site and come into regular contact with CORAL participants.

Many of these team leaders were still in the process of completing their college education (overall, 49 percent of CORAL direct staff had a high school diploma but had not yet completed a college degree), and many were studying to be teachers.[36] This educational background and interest appeared to be a key factor in the ability to implement quality balanced literacy programming. As one literacy director explained:

> *The ideal team leader is in college, enjoys working with kids, has a flexible schedule and is looking to go into education. We provide a lot of professional development; our team leaders have support, coaching. We match very nicely with a team leader who wants to be in education; it's a fabulous job for a college student—the professional development and exposure they get, no one else can beat that.… But still, we ask a lot of them for $8 an hour.*

However, other characteristics of the team leaders were at least as important as their interest in education. Research has consistently shown that effectiveness of after-school programs is highly related to positive relationships youth establish with adults and, as was discussed in the previous chapter, CORAL staff have demonstrated great skill in this area.[37] One key to this success has been the substantial investment the cities made to ensure that site staff shared a common heritage and experiences with the students who participated in the program. Many of the site coordinators and team leaders are from the communities where the programs are located; and as Table 10 illustrates, the diversity of the participants' ethnic backgrounds is reflected in the diversity of the staff.

All of the CORAL cities have taken great care to try and have the direct staff reflect the language backgrounds of their participants whenever possible. As one site coordinator explained:

> *Hiring bilingual staff is not only a challenge here, but throughout California. We're fortunate to have Hmong staff and Mexican staff, so we can target that [language skill] and make those connections. When we hire, we always try to see the demographics of the students, and we know what demographics are that we're looking for in the team leader.… We have situations where we have students who just arrived and they don't speak any English. We have to find strategies to run our programs so that we're not leaving those students behind.*

For several reasons, as this site coordinator suggests, the fact that CORAL staff shared a common background and first language with program participants proved to be an invaluable asset in launching balanced literacy in sites with a large number of English Learners. First, the instructors had the ability to make sure those students who were in the process of learning English were able to participate in the activities and maximize the benefits they received from that participation. Second, as discussed in the previous chapter, an important part of the balanced literacy strategies was staff's ability to make connections between youth's experiences and the texts that form the basis of the lessons. Because CORAL staff understood the experiences of, and could communicate with, program participants, they were able to help the youth create those crucial links with books and engage in reading—a key to program success.

This language capacity was an important bridge not only to the children who participated in the program, but to their parents as well. Across the cities, 65 percent of the direct staff reported that they used a language other than English sometimes or always when teaching CORAL students or talking with their parents. If a staff member did not speak the same language as a parent, they often had a colleague who did and could use that person as a translator. As the parents' views of CORAL discussed in the previous chapter reveal, they felt comfortable with the program and with their children attending it. Since in the elementary years it is primarily parents who make the decisions about where children spend their after-school hours, the staff's ability to communicate effectively with parents may have played an important role in the program's strong attendance rates.

An additional characteristic of CORAL site staff that contributed to the development of strong adult-youth relationships was their relatively long tenure in the program.[38] In CORAL, a group of program participants is assigned to one team leader (or, in some sites, a pair of team leaders) for the entire year, rather than being rotated through different personnel, as might be more typical of a drop-in program. Thus, it is important that team leaders remain with the program throughout the year so there is time for strong relationships to develop. In fact, site staff have worked an average of 17 months in the program, and 22 percent of those staff reported that they have worked in CORAL for longer than two years.

Fidelity to the Literacy Model

When provided with proper training and support, these team leaders (and the certified teachers in the one city where they worked for CORAL) were able to quickly implement the balanced literacy programming and begin, in many instances, to do so at a level of moderate quality. Having a literacy model to adopt—in this case, the Kidzlit or YET model—was critical. The model brought consistent, articulated goals and strategies for what the literacy component of the CORAL program should include in order to most benefit children. Having the model allowed training to be more focused and concrete, a benefit for all site staff—regardless of their educational level—who were leading the balanced literacy lessons. As the executive director of CORAL in one city explained: "Having a set curriculum that is easy and that didn't have to take months and months of training, and has been fairly easy to implement, that has been terrific."

In addition, CORAL staff—including educational liaisons, with their experience as full-time teachers—felt that having a detailed literacy model contributed to more effective implementation of the lessons and, in the words of one staff member, "removed some haphazard elements" that could otherwise undermine the quality of instruction. The model, she said, helped provide consistency and "created a more balanced and systematic approach to what our team leaders are able to do."

However, while the model itself hastened the speed of implementation and contributed to the quality of the programming, some of the literacy strategies were more challenging to implement than others. For the literacy activities to be implemented with fidelity to the model, the cities had to both make an up-front investment in materials and training and do the ongoing work of monitoring program quality.

Effectively implementing balanced literacy strategies within the larger context of CORAL after-school programming required careful attention to scheduling and the allocation of resources.

In discussing the effective strategies and challenges involved in rapidly implementing higher-quality balanced literacy programming, it is important to understand that the new curriculum was being integrated into an after-school program that continued to include CORAL's primary components from previous years: homework help and enrichment activities. While those components would now be offered fewer days per week and/or for shorter periods of time, they remained a vital part of CORAL, with children participating in homework help as frequently, and enrichment almost as frequently, as the literacy programming.

As one principal explained, in her view, while enrichment was no longer the focus of the CORAL program, it remained one of its strengths in the way

it expanded children's experiences beyond those offered during the traditional school day:

> *What is the biggest success of CORAL? When children come to the program and not only are being given extra literacy reinforcement but [also] the enrichment component, like computers, music, art and science. That has been really rewarding. Fine arts have really gone by the wayside in the everyday life of a child; those areas are not as strong as in the past years. When they participate in that area, you see their smiles; you see them wanting to share.*

Our data do not allow us to assess the impacts of participation in homework help and enrichment activities on youth's outcomes, but the popularity of these components suggests they may have played a crucial role in successful implementation of balanced literacy, perhaps in the way they helped attract students to the after-school programs. At the same time, however, these components could present challenges to the implementation of higher-quality literacy programming if they competed with that programming for time and resources.

The CORAL cities' experiences implementing the independent reading strategy provide a good example of those challenges. As discussed in the previous chapter, independent reading has, thus far, proved to be one of the most important aspects of balanced literacy for promoting reading gains. For independent reading to have this impact, however, adequate resources vis-à-vis reading materials, program time and staff training were necessary prerequisites for successful implementation. When these key resources were not in place, the quality of the independent reading time and the benefits program participants derived from it suffered as a result.

While at first glance, independent reading appears among the most straightforward of the balanced literacy strategies, its early implementation proved uniformly difficult across the state, and program quality did not improve in any of the CORAL cities until they worked through a varied set of challenges. Among those challenges was allocating the resources to ensure the presence of an adequate supply of "leveled" books in each classroom. Because participants read at different levels, and because those levels would change during the course of the school year, cities had to make sure they had an adequate number of leveled books for each CORAL classroom. Ascertaining the level of books is a costly process, either in terms of funds to purchase them, or staff time to sort and identify the reading level of donated books.

However, having the books was not, in itself, sufficient. One city, for example, made a substantial up-front investment in the purchase of leveled books, and had an ample supply of appropriately leveled books available at all of the program sites. Site coordinators diligently rotated the books through the classrooms at each site, and bins of books were swapped across sites several times during the academic year to ensure that students had fresh books from which to choose. While this served as model implementation vis-à-vis book supply, it was not alone sufficient to promote quality independent reading practice. At the same time, for the first few months of program implementation, literacy programming in this city's sites was limited to one hour per day, and students were typically provided with less than 15 minutes for independent reading per class period, less than is necessary if the strategy is going to contribute to reading gains.

In contrast, in several other cities, students were consistently given adequate time, approximately 30 minutes, for independent reading, but adequate numbers of leveled books were not available until later in the year, and the quality of independent reading practice lagged as a result. This typically occurred when cities attempted to avoid large up-front expenditures for leveled books, holding book drives or attempting to level large numbers of books themselves, a process they found to be both very time consuming and costly in staff hours.

Finally, in other cities, challenges early in the implementation process seemed to stem from staff being inadequately prepared to effectively lead independent reading activities. The circumstances in these situations varied. For example, sometimes instructors played a passive role during independent reading by simply having the students read silently and perhaps reading silently themselves, while at other times, they combined independent reading with time devoted to homework help.

To deliver the literacy model as designed, instructional staff needed both targeted initial training and ongoing monitoring and support.

Ultimately, whatever the strengths of the balanced literacy model adopted by each CORAL city, the quality of the programming that participants received depended on the ability of the instructional staff to deliver the lessons knowledgeably and skillfully. This required providing the staff with support through initial and ongoing training, and developing a strong program monitoring and quality control process.

Results from our staff survey indicate that the vast majority, but not all, of the CORAL instructional staff received training in the balanced literacy model, with 83 percent of the direct staff statewide reporting that they had attended training.[39] One challenge was scheduling the training. All of the team leaders and teachers who provided the literacy activities for children were employed by CORAL on a part-time basis and had constraints on their availability. Moreover, in several cities, programming occurred five days per week (in some cities on a year-round basis, because schools were in session year-round), and any weekday afternoon time taken for staff training would result in reduced programming for students. Cities went to great measures to compensate for these restrictions, including holding training on evenings and weekends, generally with positive results.

Staff training efforts were most successful when the literacy director played a leading role in both developing and delivering the training agenda, training began either in advance of launching balanced literacy or very early in the process, staff at all levels were involved, and training continued on an ongoing basis to strengthen the delivery of specific literacy strategies and improve the quality of programming overall. In the two cities that hired their literacy directors in the summer of 2004, before balanced literacy programming began, team leaders received comprehensive training from the literacy director in advance of beginning to teach; and they received further regular training—often (but not always) from the literacy director—on balanced literacy and other topics, most typically on a monthly basis.

In those cities where the literacy director did not join the staff until sometime in 2005 (after balanced literacy programming had begun), training was delayed and typically occurred in a less effective manner. In two of these "late hiring" cities, team leaders experienced a "train the trainers" model, where site coordinators received balanced literacy training from a literacy specialist and then they, in turn, trained the team leaders. In another city, training focused on other, non-literacy topics until a literacy director was hired. While programming improved over the course of the year in all cities, those cities that did not have a literacy director to provide training early in the year have not yet reached the quality level of the other cities.

The crucial role played by the literacy director in program monitoring and quality control was also a key factor contributing to the higher-quality implementation in the "early hiring" cities. While monitoring took different forms in each city, it functioned best and served to elevate program quality when the literacy director made frequent visits to the sites to observe programming. In the most successful example statewide, the literacy director in one city spent one afternoon each week at each CORAL site, observing programming in action, providing feedback to the instructors on their classroom practice and lesson plans, and using the information to further develop the training agenda.

In all of the cities, having the literacy director perform the entire quality control function at all sites represented a significant challenge, if not an impossibility. Thus, cities augmented the literacy director's monitoring role with other staff members in a variety of ways, some of which supported staff and program quality more effectively than others.

This collaborative approach to monitoring worked best when the other staff who were involved had received targeted training to take on a specific role or already had a strong background in literacy. The responsibility for reviewing lesson plans, for example, transitioned relatively smoothly from the literacy director to the site coordinators, who received training and supervision from the literacy director in this task. In one city, educational liaisons were available at each program site during the after-school hours to help reinforce the literacy

director's message and provide ongoing observations and feedback, and this proved highly effective. As one educational liaison explained her role: "My primary responsibility right now is to help observe and evaluate the team leaders and coach them so that they use effective strategies with the children. I'm the mediator, training them on things we know as teachers that work." These kinds of delegation of pieces of the quality control process, where appropriate—and, particularly, when it involved skilled teaching staff—provided a crucial support that promoted program quality.

In several instances, however, cities chose to distribute the crucial quality control functions to staff members who lacked literacy training, which compromised the effectiveness of the process and, as a result, the quality of literacy programming. Prior to hiring the literacy director, several cities left all program monitoring functions to site coordinators and other staff members, who had varied levels of experience in the areas of youth work and education, but no real expertise in literacy. As a result, program content and quality varied widely across the sites in these cities well into the first year of balanced literacy implementation.

This chapter has described the underlying operational practices, staffing and characteristics of the balanced literacy curriculum that supported and enhanced the ability of the CORAL cities to integrate literacy into their existing after-school programs quickly and, for the most part, with relative effectiveness. While each of the key practices described in this chapter is, alone, insufficient to guarantee that quality programming will occur, taken all together they have emerged as a crucial foundation of program success.

In the final chapter, we draw together information from this report to offer a series of concluding "lessons" regarding effective strategies for launching literacy programming in the after-school hours in a way that can increase the likelihood of enhancing program quality and positively affecting outcomes for youth.

Lessons From the First Year of Literacy Implementation and Next Steps for the Evaluation

Chapter v

The lessons derived from the 2004-2005 CORAL evaluation findings are offered at a critical juncture in the field of after-school, when policymakers and funders are questioning the likelihood of whether after-school program providers can and should be held responsible for helping to increase the academic achievement of the children who participate in their programs. Though still in the early stages of the evaluation, the findings from the first year are promising and are presented as a means to draw attention to the potential of an after-school approach that combines literacy instruction, enrichment programming and time for homework help as a way to attract children, keep them participating at relatively high rates and help them to improve their reading levels. Based on data collected during the first nine months of implementation of a targeted literacy approach, the evaluation findings suggest the following conclusions and lessons:

The experiences of the CORAL cities demonstrate that it is possible to integrate a balanced literacy component into the after-school program hours fairly quickly and at a moderate level of quality.

The evaluation results suggest that it is possible to integrate the literacy model into after-school programming on a relatively large scale (37 program sites, 5,000 participants) and to reach a moderate level of quality fairly quickly. Across all five cities, two factors facilitated more rapid and higher-quality implementation:

- Strong leadership on the part of the CORAL lead agency in each city and strong relationships with the school districts and community partners helped steer the initiative toward the vision of improving literacy.
- Having a literacy model to adopt—in this case the Youth Education for Tomorrow (YET) or Kidzlit model—was also critical. The model brought consistent, articulated goals and strategies for what the academic literacy component of the CORAL program should include in order to most benefit children. Having the model also allowed training to be more focused and concrete, a benefit for all site staff—irrespective of their educational level—who were leading the balanced literacy lessons in the after-school program.

Other strategies also strengthened program implementation and helped solidify the impact of the literacy program on children's reading-level gains. These included hiring a qualified literacy director as early in the transition as possible, and providing training and consistent follow-up monitoring and on-site coaching of staff. However, these strategies were implemented more successfully and quickly in some cities than others, and program quality suffered when they were not in place. The strategies are described more fully later in this chapter.

Literacy program quality mattered: consistently implementing the balanced literacy strategies was critical to supporting the greatest gains in reading levels.

For all CORAL participants, reading levels improved most during the short period under investigation for this report when instructors more consistently implemented the strategies that comprise the balanced literacy approach: read alouds and independent reading, along with book discussions, writing, skill development activities and vocabulary development activities.

Importantly, at this phase of the evaluation, CORAL participants who are English Learners showed similar average gains in reading levels as those participants deemed proficient in English. These finding support the appropriateness of the balanced literacy strategies for helping all children learn to read, including English Learners, who make up a large percentage of CORAL youth and are an increasingly large percentage of public school students in other cities and states across the nation.

This evaluation does not include a comparison group; therefore, we cannot firmly conclude that the gains made by the CORAL youth are any different from what might be expected had they not received the program. However, the findings that

the quality and consistency with which CORAL instructors delivered the literacy strategies are related to reading-level gains suggest that the program has had some bearing on the observed change.

These findings support what others have surmised: lackluster results in after-school programs may be related to poor-quality implementation. Although there has been a hope that giving children a safe place after school would help them do better academically, recent research on after-school programs that do not concentrate on quality academic programming has proved otherwise.[40] The findings reported here make intuitive sense: the higher quality the academically oriented programming, the greater the academic benefits for children.

The balanced literacy strategies used in the CORAL after-school program proved most promising for children who were farthest behind in reading.

An early look at children's reading-level gains suggests that the CORAL program, as implemented to date, is working most effectively with children reading two or more grade levels behind. These children showed reading gains of approximately three quarters of a grade level over a period of four to six months in the newly launched literacy program, gains that were greater than those for children who entered the program one level behind or at or above grade level. These results are in keeping with prior research indicating that those farthest behind tend to show the most impact or benefit from social programs.[41]

These early findings suggest that targeting youth for the CORAL programs—beyond the targeting CORAL does by locating its programs in the lowest-performing schools—might result in the biggest gains for the program in the shortest amount of time. The evaluation will explore whether other children not as far behind in reading show greater gains over an increased period of time or on additional outcome measures that are being tracked.

Independent reading was the most critical literacy strategy in the first year of implementation. Providing sufficient time for children to read, training staff appropriately and investing in large numbers of leveled books were all essential.

In keeping with prior research that has examined what children need to improve their reading skills, time spent reading books at an appropriate level of difficulty emerged as a significant factor in predicting reading gains for the CORAL children.

In spite of the importance that schools place on reading, there is often little time for children to engage in independent reading during the school day because of the amount of material that teachers need to cover. The after-school program hours offer the time, space and the critical resource—books—that children can utilize so they can practice their reading. However, the evaluation found that an upfront investment of resources to launch quality independent reading was crucial. This included:

- Adequate program time set aside specifically for independent reading;
- Properly trained staff to coach and monitor children's book selection and reading comprehension; and
- An adequate supply of appropriately leveled books, either through outright purchase, or dedication of sufficient staff time to level donated books.

Once the CORAL cities recognized the need for significant numbers of books and dedicated time for independent reading—and staff received the needed training to understand the value of providing coaching to children during reading time to ensure that they were practicing reading at the right levels for them—the independent reading time increased significantly and the children in turn benefited.

Dedicated site staff, with cultural and linguistic competence, provided positive adult support for children, which helped strengthen program quality.

In keeping with the emphasis CORAL has placed on the importance of positive adult-youth relationships, adult support was the most consistently seen strength of the program across all the activities observed for the evaluation. Although adult support did not in and of itself relate to reading gains, instructors who were better able to implement the literacy strategies were also most likely to do so in a warm, supportive and respectful environment.

On a broader level, underlying the strength of the CORAL programs have been the staff who interact with the children on a daily basis, providing literacy lessons, enrichment and homework help, and building strong relationships with them. The intentional strategy employed by all CORAL cities of grouping children with the same team leader(s) on a daily basis throughout the year likely contributed to these positive relationships.

In addition, by design, CORAL staff come from diverse backgrounds, reflecting the diversity of the children who participate in the program. The staff also have appropriate language skills for the communities in which they work and utilize those skills on a regular basis to connect with the children and their parents, a competence that is particularly important in these communities with high rates of English Learners and parents who speak a language other than English.

Having a literacy director with literacy experience and training was critically important. Program quality was highest when literacy directors had been hired while the balanced literacy program was being planned, and when they maintained authority and time to monitor program implementation.

Above all else, the earlier the CORAL cities hired a full-time literacy director, the more smoothly the transition to providing quality balanced literacy programming went for them. It was essential that one person at a minimum (or potentially more than one, in cities with many program sites), with advanced training and a strong background in literacy, be available to train, supervise and monitor the implementation of balanced literacy programming. Moreover, in order to fully support quality implementation, this literacy director needed to have full access to, and some degree of authority over, the staff in direct contact with program participants. The greatest improvement in the quality of program implementation occurred once the literacy director came on board. In those cities that were slower to hire, program quality lagged as a result.

Development of strong program monitoring and quality control functions were crucial for promoting program quality.

The best way to ensure consistent and quality implementation of the literacy strategies was by training staff and then monitoring their literacy instruction on a regular basis to ensure that they fully understood how to implement the strategies and were putting them into practice on a consistent basis. In the majority of sites in the initiative, team leaders, most of whom were college students, were responsible for providing the literacy instruction. The monitoring and support helped them to learn, practice and improve implementation of the strategies based on feedback and suggestions. Program monitoring was less effective when the literacy director did not have adequate time to observe programming at all sites, when other staff members who were not skilled in literacy practice attempted to perform this monitoring function instead, or when the literacy director lacked sufficient authority to request needed program improvements.

Maintaining the other core elements of the after-school program—enrichment and homework help—while implementing the literacy curriculum appeared to contribute to relatively high attendance rates for CORAL participants.

Children attended the CORAL after-school programs on a frequent and regular basis, for almost three hours a day, on average three days a week, between October 2004 and June 2005. These participation rates are higher than those reported in other national studies of after-school programs for youth of the same age.[42] Notably, children attended literacy and homework help at almost equal rates, for an average of 63 days, between October 4th and June 8th, or roughly three fourths of the time they were at CORAL. Children attended enrichment programming slightly more than half the days (44.9 days) they participated in CORAL. Parents and school staff reported that the participation rates were bolstered by the combination of activities and resources provided during the CORAL after-school hours, a combination that appeared to attract and sustain youth's regular attendance.

A review of prior outcomes research on after-school programs suggests that infrequent attendance may, in part, explain poor outcomes in terms of academic achievement.[43] The high participation rates evidenced by CORAL youth bode well for helping them achieve positive gains from program participation—gains that we would expect to increase as the initiative develops and the evaluation examines outcomes over a longer period of time.

Evaluation Next Steps

Although the findings from the 2004-2005 school year provide critical early lessons for the after-school field, the evaluation activities will continue through June 2006 and will be able to address additional and more long-term questions of interest. A final report will combine the findings from the first year with a second year of data collection, including observation of on-the-ground literacy programming, two additional follow-up IRI assessments, a parent survey, a follow-up youth survey, school records data for multiple years (2004, 2005 and 2006), CORAL program participation data, and interviews with CORAL staff conducted during intensive visits to each of the CORAL cities to learn about the second year of program implementation and plans for sustainability. The final report will examine areas that were only touched on in this report and will address the following questions:

Does the quality of CORAL literacy programming continue to improve over the second year of implementation?

For this crucial component of the P/PV evaluation, researchers will continue to observe the literacy strategies, the instructional strategies and the quality of the adult-youth relationships in the 2005-2006 school year to document the extent to which quality of implementation improves on each of these dimensions.

In all cities, the quality of the literacy programming improved over the course of the school year as staff became more familiar with the literacy strategies; in some cities, where the effective practices outlined in this report were put in place earlier in the school year, the improvement was more marked. By the end of the first year, all of the CORAL cities had leveled books for program youth and literacy directors to coordinate the training, support and supervision of instructional staff. Given what we learned from the first year of implementation, having all of these factors should lead to higher-quality literacy instruction in the next year of programming.

With the CORAL cities having a greater number of effective practices in place at the start of the second year of literacy programming, the evaluation will also explore more deeply issues regarding staffing, including the extent to which team leaders who are educationally oriented, but do not have teaching credentials, can be trained and supported to provide the highest-quality literacy instruction, and the role that the cultural competence of staff plays in engaging children in the literacy programs.

How do program quality and participation in CORAL over an extended period of time contribute to continued reading gains, as well as gains in other areas?

The evaluation will continue to look at reading gains, and examine questions such as: Do the CORAL children show sustained or continued improvement in reading levels over time? Does growth taper off? Do other literacy strategies (beyond independent reading and read alouds) take on more importance for continued or improved reading-level gains? Do children show a concurrent growth in reading skills if there is a marked increase in program quality? Does sustained participation over a longer period relate more to continued reading-level gains than frequency of participation over the shorter time period examined in this report?

The evaluation will also continue to examine the effectiveness of the program with targeted youth, such as those far behind in reading and English Learners. It will also explore additional outcomes, such as standardized test scores, reading efficacy, attitudes toward school, and school attendance rates.

How much does it cost and are these programs sustainable?

Although the evaluation will not include an in-depth study of costs, P/PV will explore the various costs incurred by the CORAL programs in each city and examine steps the cities take to reduce their costs to $2,000 per child, a figure more likely to be in line with available public funding sources than their prior costs of approximately $3,000 per child.

The final evaluation will also cover the cities' efforts at sustainability.[44] To date, interviews with CORAL staff suggest that the cities are in different phases of sustainability planning. CORAL lead agency staff have sought to leverage the funding they receive from The James Irvine Foundation by combining it with other after-school funding sources such as 21st Century Learning grants or CalWORKS childcare dollars. As of September 2005, four of the five cities had applied for and received Supplemental Education Services (SES) certification for their school district(s), with a fifth getting ready to apply.[45]

Final Thoughts

The report has drawn attention to what it takes to make a fundamental shift to providing high-quality literacy programming in the after-school hours. It remains to be seen whether this type of after-school approach—specific, targeted and consistent—might affect literacy gains over the long term, where other more broad-based approaches have not, because such large numbers of youth are spending time reading books at their interest and reading levels and being introduced to specific strategies that research has shown can help improve literacy skills. Analysis of early outcomes data suggests hope that the CORAL program—with its intentional focus on providing engaging literacy strategies in the after-school hours—may lead to increased achievement levels and other positive outcomes for children. The data collected for the evaluation have also pointed to key tenets of high-quality implementation, suggesting that, with necessary and sufficient attention to crucial practices—including ongoing training, support and program monitoring—reasonable quality programming can be implemented in a relatively short time period. A future report to be written after data from the 2005-2006 school year are collected and analyzed will continue to explore the key questions surrounding participation, program quality and youth outcomes.

The CORAL initiative's transition to a balanced literacy approach has emerged amidst a larger transition in the field of after-school, in which practitioners and policymakers are reevaluating the role of the after-school hours. Consequently, the longer-term evaluation of CORAL will provide important guidance not only from a programmatic standpoint, but also from a public policy perspective. An understanding of the ways in which CORAL is able to provide quality programming and, ultimately, to affect academic outcomes will further elucidate the potential role for after-school programs in the ongoing drive to improve youth achievement.

Endnotes

1 21st Century Community Learning Centers, 1998. "Notice Inviting Applications for New Awards for Fiscal Year 1999." *Federal Register* 63:67463-67465. http://www.ed.gov/legislation/FedRegister/announcements/1998-4/120798c.html

2 Grossman, Jean Baldwin, Marilyn L. Price, Veronica Fellerath, Linda Z. Jucovy, Lauren J. Kotloff, Rebecca Raley and Karen E. Walker, 2002. *Multiple Choices After School: Findings from the Extended-Service Schools Initiative*. Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures.

3 Gayle, Chrisanne L. *After-School Programs: Expanding Access and Ensuring Quality*. Progressive Policy Institute, July 2004. Available at http://www.ppionline.org/documents/afterschool_0704.pdf

4 Granger, R. and T. Kane, 2004. "Improving the Quality of After-School Programs." *Education Week*, XXIII (23), Feb. 18, http://www.wtgrantfoundation.org/usr_doc/EducationWeekCommentary.pdf.

5 Granger and Kane, 2004.

6 See U.S. Department of Education, Office of the Under Secretary, 2003. *When Schools Stay Open Late: The National Evaluation of the 21st Century Learning Centers Program, First Year Findings*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education; Walker, Karen E., and Amy J. A. Arbreton, 2004. *After-School Pursuits: An Evaluation of Outcomes in the San Francisco Beacon Initiative*. Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures; and Lauer, Patricia A., Motoko Akiba, Stephanie B. Wilkerson, Helen S. Apthorp, David Snow and Mya Martin-Glenn, 2003. *The Effectiveness of Out-of-School-Time Strategies in Assisting Low-Achieving Students in Reading and Mathematics; A Research Synthesis*. Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning. In addition to findings from these evaluations that specifically focus on after-school programs, general research on the link between time spent on homework and academic achievement is inconclusive about its importance. Although research suggests a correlation between homework and achievement on standardized tests for middle-school and high-school youth, a similar relationship has not been found for elementary-school-age youth. See Cooper, Harris M., 2001. *The Battle Over Homework: Common Ground for Administrators, Teachers, and Parents*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

7 An indication of the communities' low-achieving schools is student performance on standardized tests. As one example, district-wide student scores on the language arts portion of the California Standards Test are poor in all of the districts where CORAL is located. In Fresno, only 21 percent of students scored at or above proficient; in Pasadena, 28 percent; in Sacramento, 29 percent; in Long Beach, 33 percent; and in San Jose, 34 percent.

8 Four CORAL cities have received 21st Century Learning grants. CORAL in one city has also been named a provider for CalWORKS, the California Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. In that city, CalWORKS recipients can designate the CORAL program as their child-care provider for children under 12; the program thus receives state CalWORKS child-care dollars to provide after-school care for those children.

9 Throughout the report, the term "enrichment" refers to activities offered by the CORAL programs—in addition to literacy—that often provided opportunities for youth that they rarely received in school, such as photography, dance, gardening and creative writing.

10 See No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/reports/no-child-left-behind.html#3.

11 See Gee, J. P., 1999. "Critical Issues: Reading and the New Literacy Studies: Reframing the National Academy of Sciences Report on Reading." *Journal of Literacy Research*, 31, 355-374. Cited in Spielberger, Julie and Robert Halpern, 2002. *The Role of After-School Programs in Children's Literacy Development*. Chicago: Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago.

12 As a state, California faces the challenge of particularly low spending rates per pupil, with an average expenditure of 9 percent less per pupil compared with the average for all other states. See Rose, Heather, Jon Sonstelie, Ray Reinhard and Sharmaine Heng, 2003. *High Expectations, Modest Means: The Challenge Facing California Public Schools*. Public Policy Institute of California.

13 See Lauer, 2003.

14 There was some variation in how the CORAL sites scheduled literacy programming. For example, one city implemented balanced literacy for 90 minutes, three days a week, while another implemented it for between 60 and 75 minutes, four days a week. Some cities decided to divide up programming even more, for example implementing balanced literacy five days a week, but 60 minutes on some days and 30 minutes on others.

15 For additional information about Kidzlit, see http://www.devstu.org/, the website of the Developmental Studies Center. For additional information about YET, see yetkids.org.

16 With the exception of EL status and California Standards Test (CST) proficiency scores, the data for this table were taken from the cities' enrollment database. EL status and CST scores were determined from the school records data received from Pasadena Unified, Fresno Unified, Long Beach Unified, Sacramento City Unified, North Sacramento and Franklin-McKinley Unified school districts, and Sherman Oaks school. One school district in San Jose did not provide data. The number of CORAL participants for whom we have information on English Language designation and CST scores is lower than the total number of enrolled CORAL youth because we did not receive school records information from all the school districts or for all youth. School districts provided EL designation for more youth than CST information, possibly due to transience, with CST scores not following children to new districts. The numbers of youth for whom we received information on English Learner designation are 1,507 (Fresno), 653 (Long Beach), 373 (San Jose), 514 (Sacramento), 458 (Pasadena), 3,505 (total). The CST data are from these same districts, with the following number of students: 967 (Fresno), 382 (Long Beach), 235 (San Jose), 314 (Sacramento), 304 (Pasadena), 2,202 (total).

17 On the enrollment forms, indicating race/ethnicity was optional. The vast majority of parents (92 percent) did record their child's race/ethnicity, though the percent of parents who indicated this varied across the state, from a low of 76 percent in Sacramento to 99 percent in Fresno.

18 Granger and Kane, 2004.

19 U.S. Department of Education, Office of the Under Secretary, 2003; Walker, 2004; and Lauer, 2003.

20 Huang, D., B. Gribbons, S. K. Kyung, C. Lee, and E. Baker, 2002. *A Decade of Results: The Impact of the LA's BEST After-School Enrichment Program on Subsequent Student Achievement and Performance*. Los Angeles: UCLA Center for the Study of Evaluation (CSE), Graduate School of Education and Information Studies; Miller, B. M., 2003. *Critical Hours: Afterschool Programs and Educational Success*. Brookline, MA: Miller Midzik Research Associates for the Nellie Mae Education Foundation. Available at http://www.nmedfdn.org/CriticalHours.htm; Lauer et al.

21 A study of the multistate Extended Service Schools after-school initiative reported that youth in grades one through three attended 2.2 days per week and youth in grades four and five attended 1.9 days per week. See Grossman et al., 2002.

22 U.S. Department of Education, Office of the Under Secretary, 2003.

23 Ryan, L. M. Foster, M. L., and J. Cohen, 2002. *Enhancing Literacy Support in the After-School Programs*. Boston, MA: Boston Plan for Excellence (BPE). A report commissioned by Boston's After-School for All Partnership Learning Goal Research. Available at http://www.afterschoolforall.org/news/LG%20Research/Enhance%20Literacy_final.pdf

24 Because vocabulary development strategies could be observed during any of the other literacy strategies, it was not marked as absent or present but was only rated on the scale of 1 to 5; thus, we only have an average rating for this strategy.

25 The time devoted to the independent reading strategy was typically longer than the time children spent reading, as part of the strategy also involved the children going to the book bins to pick their books and, at the end of the reading time, sharing and discussing information from the books they read and completing an incentives chart. The number of minutes here refers to the length of time that the majority of the children spent reading.

26 The schools served by CORAL were mandated to closely adhere to a specific language arts curriculum—they all used either Houghton Mifflin or Open Court—for their school-day lessons.

27 At this point in data collection efforts, no attempts were made to administer the follow-up to children no longer in the program. T-tests and X-square analyses comparing children with and without follow-up IRI assessments indicated no differences between the two groups in terms of their baseline IRI scores, gender, grade level, ethnicity, reading efficacy or reading enjoyment.

28 The results presented in this chapter are based on a sample of 383 children for whom both baseline and follow-up IRI assessments were conducted and an independent-reading level could be determined. Data for two youth were dropped because independent reviewers could not assign a valid reading level. For 27 youth in the sample, the IRI scores changed three or more grade levels. The appendix presents information on reading growth with those 27 youth dropped from the analyses. All the findings related to the effect of baseline reading level and program quality described in this section persist with those 27 youth excluded from the analyses.

To assess reading-level growth, we created a large data set that linked the two IRI scores with the youth's survey data, their enrollment and attendance data, and the data assessing the quality of the literacy programming they attended. By linking these data, we are able to analyze whether attitudes and behaviors related to reading, CORAL attendance or the quality of activities youth attended help to explain changes in children's reading-level scores. For all the analyses presented in this section, we used HLM (hierarchical linear modeling) as a first step in order to take into account differences that might be attributable to various cities, sites and groups. The analyses also take into account each youth's baseline IRI assessment score so that we can look at the effect of the other variables (participation, activity quality, etc.) on change in children's reading levels. (See Appendix B for more detailed information on the specific analyses conducted.)

29 Miller, 2003; U.S. Department of Education, Office of the Under Secretary, 2003; Grossman, 1999. We are not able to determine if these children reading at the lowest levels are showing greater gains because of CORAL or because of extra services they may also receive during the school day. In analyses we did comparing youth at these levels who receive extra support services with those who do not, the youth who receive the support services tended to show lower gains over the time period. We speculate that it is likely a combination of the services children receive during and after school that most contribute to reading growth.

30 Although the data for the youth in Profile 2 are presented broken out by reading level at baseline, the numbers are so low as to prove inconclusive. The results of the analysis are strongest when comparing Profile 1 with Profile 3 youth.

31 See, for example Guthrie, J. T., A. Wigfield, J. Metsala and K. Cox, 1999. "Motivational and Cognitive Predictors of Text Comprehension and Reading Amount." *Scientific Studies of Reading* , 3(3), 231-256; U.S Department of Education, 1999. *NAEP Report Card for the Nation*; McBride-Chang, C., F. Manis, M. Seidnenberg, R. Custodio and L. Doe, 1999. "Print exposure as a Predictor of Word Reading and Reading Comprehension in Disabled and Nondisabled Readers." *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 85, 230-238.

32 A list of Reading Language Arts/English Language Development programs adopted by the State Board of Education is available on the California Department of Education website, http://www.cde.ca.gov.

33 Reading First is a federally funded program that helps schools provide a high-quality reading program to students in kindergarten through grade three.

34 While CORAL after-school programming is located in both community-based and school-based sites, the discussion in this chapter focuses primarily on the school locations, which were the majority (31 of 37) of CORAL sites in 2004-05. We collected both qualitative and quantitative data in both school-based and community-based program sites across all five cities; however, the vast majority (20 of 23) of our intensive research sites are located in schools. As a result, we have much more in-depth information about the implementation experiences of school-based locations. Moreover, in the past year, the initiative as a whole has moved to a more school-based emphasis as the cities increasingly shift their program locations to schools. School-based after-school programming tends to be more cost effective than community-based locations because of the savings in overhead costs for program space.

35 Throughout this report, we use the term "literacy director" to refer to the CORAL staff member who is responsible for overseeing the balanced literacy programming. Each of the CORAL cities refers to this position with a different title, and the job description varies somewhat from city to city; but in general, the literacy director is responsible for all aspects of the balanced literacy program, including staff training, overseeing lesson planning, program monitoring and quality control.

36 Statewide, while only 14 percent of the CORAL instructional staff had a teaching credential (and they were almost all in one city), 57 percent had studied, or were studying, teaching.

37 Miller, 2003; Hollister, R., 1999. *The Growth in After-School Programs and Their Impact*. Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution; National Research Council, 2002. *Community Programs to Promote Youth Development*. Washington: National Academies Press.

38 Though researchers have not set clear benchmarks for staff tenure, it is clear that maintaining staff is an important foundation for developing strong adult-youth relationships. When staff turnover is high, youth notice it, and they can be negatively affected. See Miller, 2003; Hollister, 2003; National Research Council, 2002; Walker and Arbreton, 2004.

39 The percentage of untrained staff was fairly evenly distributed across the five CORAL cities, and there are varying reasons why staff may have reported in our survey that they had not received training: 1) Staff hiring and training occurred on an ongoing basis in all CORAL cities. Thus, our data may have been collected after someone was hired and before they were trained. 2) Our conversations with CORAL staff suggest that some staff members may simply not have received extensive balanced literacy training. In particular, the certified teachers who taught balanced literacy in CORAL in one city received less in-depth training than team leaders, perhaps out of the sentiment that they were already skilled teachers and could provide quality programming with a brief introduction. 3) Some staff may just not have received training in balanced literacy, and the cities did not yet have systems in place to make sure that this error was corrected promptly.

40 Granger and Kane, 2004.

41 See Miller, 2003; U. S. Department of Education, 2003; DuBois et al., 2002; Grossman and Johnson, 1999.

42 U.S. Department of Education, 2003.

43 Granger and Kane, 2004.

44 The Finance Project, a nonprofit research and technical assistance organization, has contracted with the Irvine Foundation to assist the CORAL cities in developing plans for sustainability.

45 Supplemental Educational Services providers, authorized under the No Child Left Behind Act, provide tutoring or other supplemental academic activities beyond the regular school day for low-income students in the lowest-performing schools. To become an SES provider, an organization must submit an application and be approved by its State Department of Education. Parents of students who meet the eligibility requirements can choose to have their child receive services from any approved provider in the child's school district, and the provider receives public education dollars to support its services. See http://www.ed.gov/nclb/landing.jhtml.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Methodology and Data Collection

P/PV's evaluation of CORAL over the 2004-2005 school year involved several components: (1) a baseline youth survey administered to a sample of third- and fourth-grade CORAL participants; (2) an Informal Reading Inventory (IRI) administered one-on-one to the same sample of third- and fourth-graders; (3) systematic observations of CORAL programming over the course of the school year; (4) a survey administered to all CORAL staff; (5) an MIS system for tracking enrollment and attendance completed by all CORAL sites; and (6) interviews with staff and parents conducted during site visits. Each research element is described in detail below.

The staff survey and MIS data collection were implemented at all 37 CORAL sites across the state. To be able to collect sufficient data to gain an in-depth understanding of activity quality and outcomes questions, however, much of the research focused on a sample of four or five intensive research sites in each CORAL city (the CORAL cities each host between five and twelve sites) for a total of 23 intensive research sites. Within these intensive research sites, the evaluation focuses on third- and fourth-graders (and will follow these children as they move to fourth and fifth grades).

Youth Survey

P/PV contracted with the firm Population Research Systems (PRS) to administer the Youth Survey as well as the Independent Reading Inventory (see below). PRS researchers were trained to administer the survey consistently across the state. For the younger youth (third-graders), researchers read the survey questions out loud to individual youth and recorded their answers. For older youth (fourth-graders), researchers read the questions out loud to small groups of four or five youth, and youth recorded their own answers. The survey lasted approximately 20 minutes, and youth received small gifts for their participation.

The survey included questions covering key areas of program experiences and developmental outcomes of interest in this study, including sense of safety, social support from adults and peers, interesting activities, and conflict management skills. Additionally, several questions addressed youth's attitudes toward reading and school, including their enjoyment of reading, sense of efficacy as a reader, and effort and interest in school.

At the time the survey was administered, October to December 2004, P/PV had received completed permission forms from parents of 762 CORAL third- and fourth-graders. Of those, 738 parents (97 percent) agreed to allow their child to participate in the evaluation. Of those children with permission, 635 were randomly selected to be included in the youth survey and reading assessment cohort (approximately 125 per city). The final cohort of children surveyed included 515 youth: 280 third-graders and 235 fourth-graders. Eighty children had left the program before the survey administration took place; 24 were absent over the days of administration; and 5 were designated special education and determined by site staff as inappropriate to participate in the study.

The survey will also be administered to this same group of youth during Year Two of the evaluation, in Spring 2006.

Informal Reading Inventory

In Fall 2004 (mid-October to mid-December) and Spring 2005 (mid-April to mid-May), PRS researchers also administered the Jerry L. Johns Basic Reading Inventory (an informal reading inventory or IRI) to the sample of third- and fourth-graders at CORAL research sites who had also completed youth surveys (plus five children who had not completed the survey). The inventory is a means for assessing reading-level gains over time. The assessment has three components. First, the children were asked to read aloud from graded word lists as researchers recorded how many words were read accurately. Second, the children were given a series of short passages to read aloud. While each child read, researchers took notes on "significant" miscues: that is, errors that seriously altered the passage or sentence meaning, such as skipped words. Finally, after each passage, youth were asked to answer between five and ten comprehension questions based on what they had just read, as researchers recorded their responses. The assessment took approximately 20 to 30 minutes per child to complete and score.

PRS researchers met one-on-one with youth to administer the IRI. Immediately following administration of the IRI, PRS researchers assigned an "independent reading level" to each child based on their accuracy in reading the word lists and passages, and in answering the comprehension questions. The independent reading level is an assessment of what the child can read fluently and accurately and with 99 percent comprehension, without any assistance; the reading level is assigned as a grade-level equivalent, for example, reading at first-grade level, second-grade level, etc. For an additional element of consistency, all IRIs were also reviewed by P/PV researchers, who double-checked the reading-level assignments based on the children's responses. The IRI administrators were blind to any information about the

child's in-school reading levels and test scores at both baseline and follow-up so as not to bias either their interactions with the children or the reading-level assignment children received for evaluation purposes. In some cases, this meant that children's reading-level assignment was higher or lower than either a teacher or other assessment might place it, perhaps in cases where children were less or more familiar with certain reading passages or particularly comfortable or uncomfortable with an administrator. The baseline IRI scores are significantly correlated with the California Standards Test (CST) Language Arts scores from spring 2004 (0.49, $p<0.0001$).

In Fall 2004, IRIs were administered to 520 youth: 281 third-graders and 239 fourth- graders. In Spring 2005—four to six months after the initial administration—IRIs were administered to 383 youth still attending CORAL, for a follow-up rate of 74 percent. IRIs will be administered again in Fall 2005 and Spring 2006. For the final IRI administration, researchers will contact all youth who participated in the initial wave of IRIs, even if the children no longer participate in CORAL.

Activity Observations

In order to learn about the types of activities offered at the CORAL programs as well as evaluate the quality of these programs, P/PV undertook systematic observations of CORAL activities between Fall 2004 and Spring 2005. P/PV focused these observations on the balanced literacy activities offered to third- and fourth-graders at the intensive research sites. P/PV observed 56 groups of children in balanced literacy activities across the state. Each group was observed between two and four times over the course of the year, with most observed three times (48 of 56, or 86 percent).

The observations were structured to measure nine dimensions of quality, falling within the broader areas of support/instruction and balanced literacy strategies. An observation tool was developed for the project that let the researchers assign numerical scores of 1 through 5 to each dimension. Activities that scored 1 on a specific dimension were characterized by extremely negative behaviors and little to no positive strategies for working with youth. Activities that scored 5 on specific dimensions represented outstanding examples of that dimension in the field, characterized by the consistent use of strong strategies. A description of the dimensions follows.

Support and Instructional Quality

- *Emotional and Instrumental Support:* This dimension assesses staff's efforts to support youth, help all youth succeed at the activity, and develop an emotional relationship with youth. Did adults encourage youth who were struggling? Express an interest in youth's thoughts and ideas? Display warmth toward youth? On the negative side, we also observed whether the adults were discouraging of young people's questions or efforts, used sarcasm or anger, or interacted with young people in an unfriendly way.

- *Instructional Strategies:* This dimension includes a variety of strategies of successful instruction, such as clear communication, organization and preparation, motivating youth to participate and challenging youth beyond their present skill levels. Did staff give clear and accurate directions to youth? Did they keep students focused on the activity's goals? Did they present topics with a logical sequence? Did they demonstrate enthusiasm for the activity and convey its value?

- *Group Management:* This dimension looks at whether staff manage youth's behavior during the activity in a way that is appropriate for the age of the youth involved and the type of activity. Staff's discipline and management should be appropriate to the activity, be given in a supportive yet firm manner and maintain order without inhibiting youth. In strong examples of group management, staff display a firm but warm management style. This can be displayed in a number of ways, but in all cases the adults are able to redirect the youth and win their cooperation without yelling or resorting to critical, punitive or negative discipline tactics. If behavioral issues do occur, staff handle them calmly and resolve them quickly and successfully. The staff may be strict with youth, but are able to correct their behavior while maintaining a positive regard and respect for the youth.

- *Connection Making:* This dimension refers to the extent to which staff drew connections between the topics covered during the activity and youth's own experiences and interests. Staff could use multiple methods to create connections between youth and lesson topics—for example, having youth participate in role-playing games based on a story, or leading youth in a group discussion relating the story to their experiences. Staff could also draw connections to youth's neighborhoods, to their schools, to their cultures, or to media or pop culture that interests them. Staff who display strength in this dimension offer multiple opportunities for youth to be personally engaged in the material.

Balanced Literacy Strategies

- *Read Aloud:* A good read aloud consists of much more than an adult just reading from a text: it should be an interactive process that engages youth. Excellent read alouds begin with the adult introducing the text, perhaps by giving background information or making a connection between the book's content and the youth's experiences. During the reading, the adult uses engaging techniques, such as varying his/her tone of voice, encouraging youth to read along during repetitive lines or choruses, and pausing to ask questions. In general, in strong read alouds, staff make active efforts to ensure that youth are engaged and following along with the text.
- *Book Discussion:* This construct assesses the staff's ability to engage youth in a discussion of the text they have or are going to read aloud. For example, the staff may ask youth to think about why a character made a certain decision, or they may ask youth to think about a time they were in a similar situation. A successful discussion is organized and keeps all youth engaged. Staff should ask clear questions to guide the discussion and should encourage all youth to participate. An activity would score low on this construct if the staff did not attempt to engage youth, if the discussion seemed very slow-paced or if the discussion appeared very unrelated to the book read.
- *Writing:* Writing in CORAL can take a variety of formats, including youth writing stories and letters, or adding captions to drawings. An outstanding writing activity would give youth flexibility so that all youth can work at a level appropriate to their skills and abilities. It would also provide youth with the opportunity to write about relevant topics—the topic might be relevant to a book they have read, their personal experience or current events. Staff who rate highly on this construct provide youth with clear instructions and guidance for the writing exercise, including modeling the activity if appropriate. Staff should also interact with youth throughout the exercise, providing one-on-one instruction to multiple youth.
- *Independent Reading:* Independent reading, as assessed here, involves much more than youth just silently reading to themselves. The first step in a successful process is for youth to retrieve books in an organized, efficient manner. Youth should spend the majority of the time in this activity focused on the reading, with minimal distractions (e.g., getting up to choose new books, talk to a friend, etc.). A high rating on this construct indicates that staff are very involved with youth during independent reading. They should talk with youth individually or in small groups about what they are reading, and it is also an opportunity for staff to coach youth on specific literacy problems. During this activity, the instructor might walk around the room to talk with youth individually or call them over to a table to work one-on-one. If the staff are passive during this activity or leave the room, the activity should score low on this construct.
- *Skill Development Activities:* This construct is used to assess games or activities that teach youth literacy skills in a fun manner. Especially in the after-school context, these are an important way to reinforce literacy skills while keeping youth engaged and interested. A high rating on this construct indicates that staff are making efforts to engage youth in the activity and also clearly providing instruction in specific literacy skills.
- *Vocabulary:* This construct assesses the extent to which instructors included successful activities in their lessons designed to increase or reinforce youth's vocabulary. There are many ways instructors could help youth build their vocabulary: instructors might take small steps like writing a word on the board, pausing in a read aloud to define a new word, or pointing youth to a word posted on the wall. Or instructors might devote more time to this purpose with activities like vocabulary games. A low score on this construct would indicate that the instructor paid little to no attention to vocabulary, such as not mentioning any new words or not checking that youth understand the words in a text.

Staff Survey

In February and March 2005, P/PV sent a two-page survey to all CORAL staff, including team leaders, site coordinators, paraprofessionals, volunteers, educational liaisons, city directors, literacy directors, enrichment providers, and other staff who work closely with CORAL. These surveys were mailed to operations directors and site coordinators to distribute to CORAL staff. The surveys were returned to P/PV by mail in return-addressed, stamped envelopes provided by P/PV. The survey contained 15 brief questions about staff's educational background, experience, training, time with CORAL and responsibilities with CORAL. In March 2005, we sent follow-up emails or letters to staff who had not yet returned surveys, in an attempt to reach high response rates. Overall, staff surveys were mailed to 564 individuals, and were returned by 412 staff members, for a response rate of 73 percent.

Enrollment and Attendance Data

P/PV worked closely with the CORAL cities to develop a computer-based Management Information System (MIS) to record participants' enrollment and attendance information. Based on cities' input on the type of information they would like to collect, as well as research needs for particular data, P/PV developed a computer database, distributed this database to all CORAL sites, and trained CORAL staff on how to collect and enter data.

The MIS database provides fields for staff to enter several types of information that they collect when youth enroll, as well as daily attendance. The enrollment information includes each youth's name, grade, school, contact information and birth date. There are attendance fields that can be updated every day, indicating whether the youth was present or absent, which activities he or she participated in, and their time in and time out of the program.

CORAL staff were expected to continually update this database with new and corrected information, and submit the files to P/PV on a monthly basis. Each month, P/PV researchers reviewed the data files and pointed CORAL staff to areas where data were missing or incomplete. P/PV researchers also served as technical support for CORAL staff when they had questions about data entry or the computer database.

The enrollment data for all sites and grade levels were complete and up-to-date as of June 2005, when the analysis of the data was completed; thus, the information provided on numbers of youth served and their demographic characteristics reflects data from all CORAL sites and grade levels. In contrast, not all the sites were up-to-date with entering attendance for the 2004-2005 school year by the June 2005 cutoff date. In order to be able to conduct the analysis linking participation with outcomes for this report, P/PV emphasized to the cities the need to ensure that all attendance entries for their third- and fourth-graders were up-to-date for each of the intensive research sites in their cities. Because those data are the most up-to-date, the attendance data included in the report are based solely on the intensive research sites and their third- and fourth-grade enrollees.

Research Site Visits

The site visits included two major activities:

Staff Interviews. P/PV researchers conducted intensive research visits to four of the five CORAL cities in February and March 2005. The fifth city received a modified visit, as it was in transition at the time the visits were scheduled. During these visits, researchers interviewed various CORAL staff and stakeholders, including team leaders, city directors, board members, and principals of the school sites. The purpose of these interviews was to document information on various topics, including current staffing structures, staff training, participant recruitment and targeting strategies, lesson and activity planning, obstacles to implementation of the balanced literacy model, relationships with schools and other partners, and plans or goals for the future.

Focus Groups with Parents. During these weeklong site visits to each CORAL city, P/PV researchers also conducted focus groups with a sample of CORAL parents. We conducted focus groups at each of the intensive research sites in the CORAL cities, for a total of 19 focus groups. Approximately 170 Spanish-, Hmong- and English-speaking parents were interviewed across these 19 groups. Parents were asked three primary questions: Why did they choose to send their children to CORAL? How, if anything, have their children benefited by participating in CORAL? What is the quality of their interactions with CORAL staff? Each focus group was tape-recorded and lasted approximately 45 minutes.

Appendix B: Data Analysis for Chapter III

This appendix describes the analyses conducted to: 1) determine CORAL participants' attendance patterns and rates; 2) understand the factors that contributed to CORAL participants' reading-level gains; and 3) explicate the findings in more detail than is presented in the full report.

Participation Analyses

All analyses for this report were completed by exporting the enrollment and attendance data from each CORAL city's MIS database into Excel files, which were then imported as SAS program files. The enrollment information, reported in Table 2 in Chapter II, reflects enrollment for all CORAL youth across all 37 CORAL sites. The attendance information reported in Tables 4 and 5 in Chapter III, in contrast, was calculated across the 23 intensive research sites, for third- and fourth-grade participants only, as those data reflected the most up-to-date attendance data entered for each of the CORAL cities.

The time frame for calculating attendance covers the period from October 4, 2004 (representing the beginning of the literacy programming at most sites) through June 8, 2005 (when most sites ended their programming for this year). In conducting the attendance analyses, only youth who were marked present at least once over the time period of interest were included.

In the MIS database, for each programming day, CORAL staff record whether youth were present or absent and, if present, their "time in, time out" and activities participated in. To calculate the average numbers of hours children attended CORAL, we took the following approach: the analysis subtracted the recorded "time in" from the recorded "time out" for each day the youth attended, summed the total number of daily minutes attended across all the days that each child was marked present, divided the total number of minutes by the total number of days the child was marked present, and then calculated an average number of minutes attended per day across all the CORAL children in attendance.

The average number of days per week attended and average number of literacy days per week attended were calculated similarly. First the analysis summed the total number of days the child attended and divided that total by the total number of weeks the child attended. Then we calculated an average days-per-week figure by averaging across all the children in attendance. The average number of literacy days per week followed the same steps, but applied only to days when children were marked as having attended a literacy activity.

The **average attendance rate** took into account the total number of possible days the CORAL program was open between October 4 and June 8 and created a total possible days for each child as a denominator (taking into account when a child first enrolls and how often the program was open). Next, the total number of days the child attended was divided by the possible days the child could have attended. Average attendance rate provided an average across all the children in attendance.

In several sites, CORAL programs operate as part of year-round, multi-track schools. The CORAL database was designed to allow programs to mark children as absent/off-track to account for the rolling basis on which children were not in school and therefore less likely to attend CORAL. The average number of days per week attended and the attendance rate calculations took into account off-track children by subtracting the days from the denominator of "possible days" for children when they were marked absent and off-track.

Reading Gains Analyses

Paired T-tests were run to assess overall change in reading levels, and indicate that the increase from the baseline IRI score average of 2.2 (SE 0.08) to 2.5 (SE 0.09) is slight but statistically significant ($p<0.0001$).

Hierarchical Linear Modeling (HLM) was used to assess whether there were any subgroup differences in reading gains based on demographic characteristics (i.e., gender, grade level, ethnicity), participation in literacy activities (i.e., number of days of exposure to literacy programming between IRI administrations), the quality of the literacy strategies to which the children were exposed (i.e., the Literacy Profile, which takes into account the quality and consistency of implementation of each of the six literacy strategies—see Chapter III for a description of how the literacy profile was constructed), or other qualities of the literacy instruction (i.e., adult support, general instructional strategies, group management and connection making). In all the analyses, the variation in number of days between IRI assessments (which ranged from 126 to 231 days between assessments, and was correlated with reading gains, as noted in a later section of this appendix) was included as a control variable. The baseline (Fall 2004) IRI score was included in the analysis in order to measure the effect of the other variables on change in IRI levels over time.

Table B.1.
Predicting Reading Gains Based on Literacy Profile, Participation and Participant Demographics

Categories	Coefficients
Adjusted R-square	0.42
Girl	0.00
Grade 4	0.16
Grade4XGirl	0.32
Fall 2004 IRI score	0.64***
African American	0.09
White	–0.30
Asian	–0.34
Multi-race	0.13
Other race	–0.10
Number of days between IRIs	0.01**
Days of literacy child attended between IRIs	0.00
Literacy Profile Rating	0.22**

Coefficients presented are unstandardized regression coefficients. Excluded categories are Latino children, third-graders and boys.
* p<0.05
** p<0.01
*** p<0.001

Table B.2.
Predicting Reading Gains Based on Literacy Strategies and Demographics

Categories	Coefficients
Adjusted R-square	0.41
Girl	0.05
Grade 4	0.36
Grade4XGirl	0.35
Fall 2004 IRI score	0.62***
African American	0.15
White	–0.19
Asian	–0.20
Multi-race	0.14
Other race	–0.11
Number of days between IRIs	0.01***
Average read aloud rating	0.04
Average book talk rating	0.16
Average vocabulary rating	–0.13
Average writing rating	0.09
Average independent reading rating	0.19*

Coefficients presented are unstandardized regression coefficients. Excluded categories are Latino children, third-graders and boys. Ratings of literacy strategies are on a scale from 1-lowest to 5-highest.
* p<0.05
** p<0.01
*** p<0.001

The HLM approach was used in order to take into account that groups of CORAL children were "nested" in the literacy groups under observation (for which we had quality and literacy profile ratings), which themselves were nested in the CORAL sites. The results of the HLM, however, suggested that simpler regression analysis would be sufficient, as there were no significant nesting effects. Thus, regression analyses predicting reading gains using the same predictor and control variables were run, and the results are presented in Tables B.1 and B.2. The results of these analyses indicate that neither demographic characteristics nor participation were significant factors in explaining gains.

Although in the initial analyses that were run, with just the control variables, there was an interaction between gender and grade level, with fourth-grade girls showing slightly greater gains than other groups, the interaction is no longer significant once controlling for other factors. On the other hand, quality of literacy instruction (as captured by the Literacy Profile) was a significant predictor of reading gains; in addition, independent reading quality and number of independent reading minutes were also significant predictors of reading gains, even after taking into account the quality of the other literacy strategies. Quality of literacy instruction (as captured by the Literacy Profile) was a significant predictor of reading gains; independent reading quality and number of independent reading minutes were also significant predictors of reading gains, even after taking into account the quality of the other literacy strategies.

Table B.3.
Predicting Reading Gains Based on Quality of Adult Support, Instructional Strategies and Demographics

Categories	Coefficients
Adjusted R-square	0.42
Girl	0.04
Grade 4	0.43
Grade4XGirl	0.22
Fall 2004 IRI score	0.66***
African American	–0.06
White	–0.25
Asian	–0.42
Multi-race	0.13
Other race	0.14
Average peer cooperation quality rating	0.08
Average adult support quality rating	–0.02
Average instructional quality rating	0.21
Average connection making rating	–0.18

Coefficients presented are unstandardized regression coefficients. Excluded categories are Latino children, third-graders and boys. Ratings of strategies are on a scale from 1-lowest to 5-highest.
* p<0.05
** p<0.01
*** p<0.001

Additional Analyses

Additional analyses were conducted to help understand the effect of time between IRI administration, the average drops in reading scores found for children starting at or above grade level in reading, and the stability of the findings, given that some children appeared to drop or gain in reading levels more than might be expected over a short period of time.

Time Between Reading Assessments

Time between reading assessments (which ranged from 126 days to 231, with an average of 171 days and a standard deviation of 25 days) was significantly positively related to reading gains, as displayed in Table B.4. Therefore, the analyses conducted for the report controlled statistically for time between IRI assessments in order to understand the additional contribution of program quality and literacy participation on reading gains.

Drops in Reading Scores

As noted in Chapter III, although children assessed at or above grade level at baseline show an average decline in reading scores, as the tables below display they still average above their own grade level at both baseline and first follow-up, by 0.23 grade levels for third-graders and 0.29 grade levels for fourth-graders.

Table B.4.
Relating Days Between Tests to Reading Gains

Baseline Category	Days Between Tests	N	Average Grades Behind at T1	Average Gains
2+ grades below	121-180 days	137	–2.52	0.60
	181-240 days	51	–2.71	1.18
1 grade below	121-180 days	46	–1.00	0.14
	181-240 days	34	–1.00	0.43
At or above grade level	121-180 days	71	0.66	–0.51
	181-240 days	41	0.76	–0.28
Overall		380	–1.28	0.31

Table B.5.
Change in Reading Levels for At- or Above-Grade-Level Readers, Third-Graders

Baseline IRI	N	Average Baseline Score	Average Grades Behind at T1	Average Gains	Average T2 Reading Level
2+ grades below	104	0.73	–2.27	0.67	1.40
1 grade below	46	2.00	–1.00	0.20	2.20
At or above grade level	56	3.77	0.77	–0.54	3.23
Overall	206	1.84	–1.16	0.23	2.07

Table B.6.
Change in Reading Levels for At- or Above-Grade-Level Readers, Fourth-Graders

Baseline IRI	N	Average Baseline Score	Average Grades Behind at T1	Average Gains	Average T2 Reading Level
2+ grades below	85	1.05	–2.95	0.91	1.96
1 grade below	35	3.00	–1.00	0.37	3.37
At or above grade level	57	4.61	0.61	–0.32	4.29
Overall	177	2.58	–-1.42	0.41	2.99

Reading Gains Outliers

In conducting the analysis for the report, we found 27 potential "outliers," children who had gained (19) or lost (8) three or more grade levels in reading over the short four-to-six month period under investigation. We re-ran the same regression analyses without these outliers, and the underlying relationships remain the same: The literacy profile is the strongest predictor of reading gains; participation is not related to reading gains; and children in the lowest reading levels gain the most ground.

Table B.7.
Reading Gains by Literacy Profile, Outliers Removed

Literacy Profile	N	Average Baseline Score	Average Grades Behind at T1	Average Gains
1	230	1.99	–1.43	0.14
2	26	2.24	–1.22	0.31
3	98	2.55	–0.93	0.34
Overall	354	2.16	–1.29	0.21

Table B.8.
Reading Gains by Baseline Category, Outliers Removed

Baseline Category	N	Average Baseline Score	Average Grades Behind at T1	Average Gains
2+ grades below	176	0.85	–2.57	0.55
1 grade below	78	2.42	–1.00	0.14
At or above grade level	102	4.21	0.71	–0.34
Overall	356	2.16	–1.29	0.21

Appendix C:
CORAL City Operating Organizations

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