

Examination of Reading Specialist's Support of Structured Literacy in Elementary Schools

July 2023



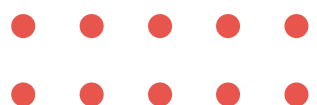
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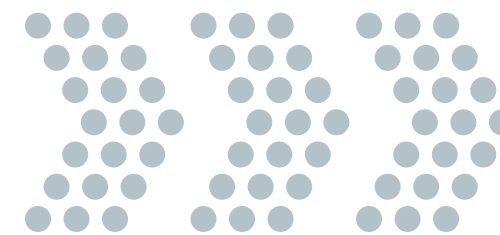
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Shared Accountability

Applied Research and Evaluation





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Examination of Reading Specialists Support of Structured Literacy



Executive Summary

Evaluation Scope

In pursuit of Academic Excellence, MCPS allocated funds to ensure that every elementary school had a full-time reading specialist to serve as a literacy coach. This evaluation focused on understanding how the reading specialist position supported teachers' increased capacity to implement the MCPS literacy program, including the shift to Structured Literacy in 2022–2023. This study is based on self-reported data from surveys, a focus group, and an interview. These sources provide insights into three key aspects: the role and responsibilities of reading specialists, the professional learning system established to support them, and the support given to teachers as they implemented the elementary literacy program.

Methods

Surveys were delivered on-line and used to gain perspectives of reading specialists and principals in all elementary schools. Response rates were 79% for reading specialists (N=109) and 59% for principals (N=82). Additionally, a focus group with six central office-level elementary language arts (ELA) specialists, and an interview with the ELA supervisor was conducted.

Results

The elementary ELA team reported that a comprehensive, multi-level professional learning system was implemented, and the influence of school administration was crucial to the successful utilization of the reading specialist's role. Furthermore, the additional ELA specialists, and cross-office collaboration was vital for successful implementation. **Reading specialists reported high participation and positive experiences from the Professional Learning (PL)** opportunities provided to them. Nearly all of them attended available PL sessions, including The Shift to Structured Literacy (99%), Anti-Bias, Anti-Racist Leaders Learning (95%), Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) (95%), and the English Language Arts (ELA) Team's office hours (89%). They particularly appreciated how these sessions enhanced their ability to provide PL to teachers in implementing Structured Literacy. Additionally, 87% of specialists found collaborating with their peers at the sessions as highly beneficial, and they reported that the PL module series supported their role by delivering a consistent message and building background knowledge.

Most reading specialists reported that they were able to implement the PL modules at their schools. Eight out of ten specialists reported the ELA PL was delivered to staff during team meetings; additionally, a majority also delivered PL at staff meetings (67%) and collaborative planning meetings (67%). **Reading specialists reported they are most frequently engaged in collaborative activities** with various school teams and the principal. More than one-third of respondents reported participating in collaborative planning meetings 2–4 times a week (36%), collaborating with the Core Team/ILT once a week (36%), and collaborating with the principal once a week (31%). About one-half engaged in or supported data analysis at team meetings 2–4 times a week (23%) or 2–3 times a month (27%).

Examination of Reading Specialists Support of Structured Literacy



Executive Summary

Results

A large majority of reading specialists reported delivering more group-level PL sessions (85%), examined more texts using an anti-bias and anti-racist lens (81%), and collaborated more in staff meetings (81%), compared to last year. Over one-third (39%) of reading specialists reported serving as a classroom substitute 1–2 times or more a week, while 57% reported once a month or a few times a year. About one-half (49%) reported delivering student interventions four or more times a week, and most reading specialists (79%) indicated they served as the school's testing coordinator at least sometimes.

Positive effects in teacher instruction were observed by both reading specialists and administrators. Specifically, reading specialists agreed there had been a significant increase in explicit instruction in foundational skills (95%), improvements in staff's understanding of how to use DIBELS (91%), increased utilization of decodable text (90%), and a rise in targeted small-group instruction (87%).

Most administrators reported an enhanced teacher capacity due to the work of reading specialists, with exceptional ratings in staff understanding of the Science of Reading's influence on the shift to Structured Literacy (97% a great deal), the utilization of decodable text (96%), and the use of formative and diagnostic data to adjust and inform instruction (95% respectively).

Although the overall findings were positive, there were reported challenges. The top reported challenges included: **needing more time to deliver the amount of PL to the staff, time taken away from their reading specialist role especially related to testing and covering classrooms, and shifting staff's thinking to Structured Literacy among some schools.** Additionally, 65% of reading specialists reported that the eight additional summer work days were insufficient to fulfill their role.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Findings revealed substantial progress towards increasing teacher capacity to implement Structured Literacy. Additionally, reading specialists delivered more PL, examined texts using an equity lens more often, and collaborated with staff more frequently. Recommendations based on the data collected from stakeholders include providing ways for the reading specialists to have enough designated time to deliver PL to their school staff; expanding professional learning opportunities to include topics of interest, particularly writing; creating professional learning communities for reading specialists; explore and address reasons some school staff seem more hesitant to make the shift to Structured Literacy; conduct a feasibility study to hire school-level testing coordinators; provide additional workdays during the summer for reading specialists; continue to collaborate with MCPS offices to align messaging; and continue efforts to solve the school-level substitute shortage.



In pursuit of Academic Excellence, a key objective of MCPS's strategic plan is to improve student achievement in literacy. MCPS allocated funds to ensure that every elementary school had a full-time reading specialist to serve as a literacy coach. This evaluation focused on understanding how the reading specialist position supported teachers' increased capacity to implement the MCPS literacy program, including the shift to Structured Literacy, during the 2022–2023 school year. This study is based on self-reported data from surveys, a focus group, and an interview. These sources provide insights into three key aspects: the role and responsibilities of reading specialists, the professional learning system established to support them, and the support given to teachers during the implementation of the elementary literacy program

Purpose of Evaluation



This study aims to explore the following from the perspectives of MCPS reading specialists, administrators, and central office staff.

- The role of the reading specialist in implementing district-wide initiatives to increase reading achievement,
- The professional learning and support provided to increase staff capacity to implement district-wide reading initiatives, and
- Improvements in early literacy instructional practices

Research Questions

1

How are schools using reading specialists to implement district and school-wide initiatives to increase reading achievement?

2

What are the experiences of reading specialists with respect to professional learning and the support they received to fulfill the responsibilities of their role?

3

What are the experiences of principals in working with reading specialists to implement related MCPS reading initiatives?

4

What are the experiences of the MCPS elementary ELA supervisor and team working with reading specialists and administrators to improve reading achievement?



Program Description

Overview

Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) is committed to promoting academic excellence and equity by prioritizing the improvement of student literacy achievement in its strategic plan. To accomplish this, one of MCPS's key strategies involves developing and training teacher leaders on new pacing guides in literacy (MCPS, 2023). These guides aim to support the teaching of foundational skills while maintaining grade-level instruction and content standards. MCPS has also set a target of having ninety percent or more elementary students meet Evidence of Learning attainment in literacy by 2024–2025 (MCPS, 2023). To achieve this goal, MCPS allocated \$19.1 million to ensure that every elementary school had a full-time reading specialist who would shift their role to that of a literacy coach. At the same time, the MCPS Elementary Language Arts Office worked to develop a robust system of professional learning that focused on building the capacity of reading specialists and teachers to deliver an evidence-based core reading program. By providing teachers with professional learning and literacy coaching, MCPS aims to improve teacher knowledge and skill in the near term, leading to better literacy outcomes in the midterm and better education and life outcomes in the long term.

Program Goals



Provide direct support to reading specialists in implementing the new reading curriculum in Grades K–2.



Develop a professional learning system that focuses on professional learning at the macro and micro level for both reading specialists and elementary reading teachers.



Elevate key components of the reading specialist role so they deliver more professional learning for staff, provide micro-learning at collaborative planning meetings, strengthen data analysis skills to support teachers, coach staff more often and provide constructive feedback, and model effective reading instruction.

Program Components



A full-time reading specialist in every school to support teachers in the implementation of high-quality core reading instruction grounded in the science of reading and a robust data collection and analysis system to support reading instruction.



Shift the role of the reading specialist to literacy coach who provides professional learning and coaching in reading and data analysis.



A comprehensive professional learning system for reading specialists and elementary teachers of reading.



A non-experimental design was employed to investigate the reading specialist's changing role and the professional learning system designed to support teachers and reading specialists. Surveys were used to measure the experiences of principals and reading specialists, while interviews and focus groups were conducted with the MCPS elementary supervisor and team.

Implementation Methods

Data & Measures

- An online survey was sent to all elementary reading specialists and all elementary school principals. Survey data was collected from May 31-June 16, 2023.
- A focus group was conducted with ELA specialists and an interview with the elementary ELA supervisor in June 2023.

Sample

- **Reading Specialist Survey (N=109) - 79% response rate**
 - Twelve of the respondents (11%) were in their first year of being a reading specialist, with another 15% in their second or third year.
 - A large majority (83%) of respondents had more than 15 years of teaching experience.
 - One-fifth (21%) were at their current school for the first year.

Sample

- **Principal Survey (N = 82) - 59% response rate**
 - Three of the respondents (4%) were in their first year of being an MCPS administrator.
 - Thirteen (16%) were at their current school for the first year.
- **Focus Group and Interview**
 - Six of the 7 specialists from the elementary ELA team participated in the focus group.
 - An interview was conducted with the elementary ELA supervisor.

Analysis

- The responses from surveys were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The analysis also included coding open-ended survey responses for common themes and categories.
- Focus group and interview data were coded for common themes.



Results: ELA Team Focus Group and Interview

What are the experiences of the MCPS elementary ELA team working with reading specialists and administrators to improve reading achievement?

LETRS, RGR, and Amplify DIBELS training helped to build the background knowledge for reading specialists, so when we present our [OCIP] PD series, they have something they can connect it to. They can feel more confident delivering it to their schools. Those without a background needed more micro-PD from us.

We have redefined the role and have more specialists, so we have a greater impact on teaching and learning. Before, there was very little school support from ELA specialists. This year, I've gotten feedback that RSs had not experienced support like this before, felt like they had thought partners, and they knew who to contact [for help].

An effective approach was us being able to go into schools and help develop a plan. Take the what and why they got from PL and think about how that applies to their data and students—walking them through the process of what they expect from school staff before they try to do it with their teachers. Coaching them through that micro piece is important before delivering to school staff, and [it's] more impactful.

The job-embedded support was the most effective way for us to ensure that what we were providing reading specialists was making it to the classroom.



Findings

Theme 1: A comprehensive, multi-level PL system was implemented.

- A comprehensive PL system was developed that aligned the content of vendor training with school-level training. The system included vendor-delivered training in the summer, modules developed by ELA specialists for delivery in schools, bi-monthly office hours led by ELA specialists, and job-embedded coaching.
- Vendors involved in the training were Really Great Reading (RGR), Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS), and Amplify. The team found DIBELS training crucial for developing background knowledge in the Science of Reading and utilizing DIBELS for instructional decisions. The ELA team considered PL sessions impactful in building background knowledge for reading specialists before implementation at the school level.
- Job-embedded coaching by ELA specialists, working alongside reading specialists in schools, was reported as the most effective approach to ensure program implementation. According to the ELA Team, this hands-on approach instilled confidence in reading specialists and ensured the effective delivery of PL at the classroom level.



Results: ELA Team Focus Group and Interview

What are the experiences of the MCPS elementary ELA team working with reading specialists and administrators to improve reading achievement?

“We were able to get in front of directors at the beginning of the school year and last school year to explain the shift to them and influence principals.”

“At the central level, we worked closely with special education. We shared information with the ELD department. We met with learning and achievement specialists and directors to talk about the shift in the RS's role.”

“We try to work in correlation with the directors who are closest to those administrators and have them see the work and explain the role shift we're doing and how we [the ELA team] can support the schools. How can we be collaborative at the bottom and the top?”

“We went to mid-year SIP reviews to support lots of questions they had. That was pivotal for our directors and principals to understand and hear it from us, not just their reading specialist - what the expectations are. It allowed reading specialists to have a voice at the table.”

“If a principal is using their reading specialist as a coach and a PD provider, then the support of the implementation has been much greater. However, if the RS is still doing a lot of tasks that aren't directly related to teaching and learning literacy like a lot of testing coordinator work and other things not directly related to coaching about literacy [then] their impact has not been as high.”



Findings

Theme 2: Cross-office collaboration is key to clarifying communication and aligning work across the system.

- The ELA elementary team worked with the Office of Student Support and Well-Being (OSSWB) to deliver presentations to key groups throughout the school year. These presentations aimed to ensure a clear understanding and communication regarding how the reading specialist will support the implementation of the new literacy program by increasing the professional learning they deliver at the school, team, and individual teacher level. The ELA Team presented to the core teams of elementary schools and at MCPS Leadership Forums. Additionally, they participated in mid-year School Improvement Plan (SIP) reviews alongside OSSWB staff.

Theme 3: The influence of school administration is critical to the successful utilization of the reading specialists' role.

- The ELA team reported that implementation of the reading program was greater in those schools where principals valued the reading specialists' expertise and allowed them to provide PL for literacy.



Results: ELA Team Focus Group and Interview

What are the experiences of the MCPS elementary ELA team working with reading specialists and administrators to improve reading achievement?

“It's a massive shift in the instructional program, and it's time-consuming.”

“We have 137 elementary schools – the frequency with which we can get into and work really close with schools isn't as often as want. One of the things we made clear is that school support is the priority. Yet, our only job isn't just school support. There are millions of guidance documents and PD we have to plan.”

“They have been teaching reading one way, and now we're asking them to do it a different way, and they're feeling the weight of it. So we have helped them [reading specialists] step back and really evaluate school communities and think about where they need to go with their teacher's learning and not get so wrapped up in the idea that we must do this all at once.”

“With the three new positions, we could implement RGR and change the assessments [to DIBELS] and were able to provide PL for teachers for both of those. We could observe classrooms on a larger scale, go into the classrooms, and see what instruction looked like.”



Findings

Theme 4: Additional central office specialists substantially increased the capacity of the ELA team to provide direct support to schools.

- The ELA team says that they supported numerous schools as part of their responsibilities, which can make it challenging to provide as much direct support to schools as they would like. The team highlighted that the three additional specialist positions were key in providing increased job-embedded support at the school level during 2022–2023. This included activities such as developing a learning progression for school staff based on insights gained from vendor training, assisting with implementation planning that catered to the specific needs of each school's staff, and providing professional learning. In addition, some reading specialist reported to the ELA team they were having challenges in implementing their roles and responsibilities, especially in conjunction with the introduction of a new literacy program.



Results: Reading Specialists

Participation in Professional Learning 2022—2023 (N=109)



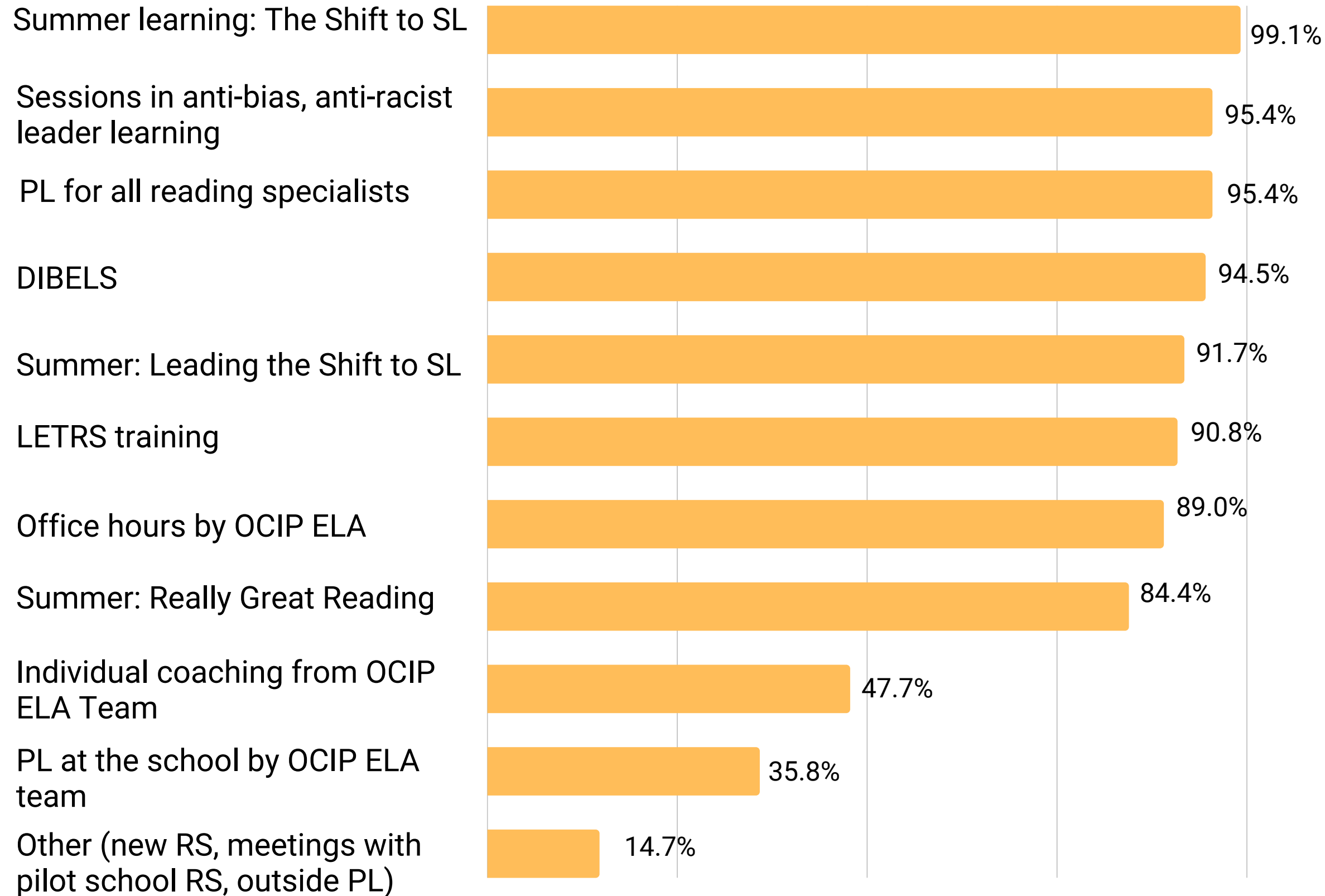
Findings

Most of the PL offered to reading specialists in 2022—2023 was well attended.

Almost all (99%) reported attending The Shift to SL in the summer.

Most reported attending sessions in anti-bias, anti-racist leader learning (95%), PL for all reading specialists (95%), DIBELS (95%), Leading the Shift to SL, held in the summer (92%), LETRS training (91%), office hours offered by the ELA Team (89%), and Really Great Reading, held in the summer (84%).

Less than one-half reported they participated in individual coaching from the ELA Team (48%) or in PL at their school delivered by the OCIP ELA team (36%).





Results: Reading Specialists

Helpful Topics During OCIP Office Hours (N=97)



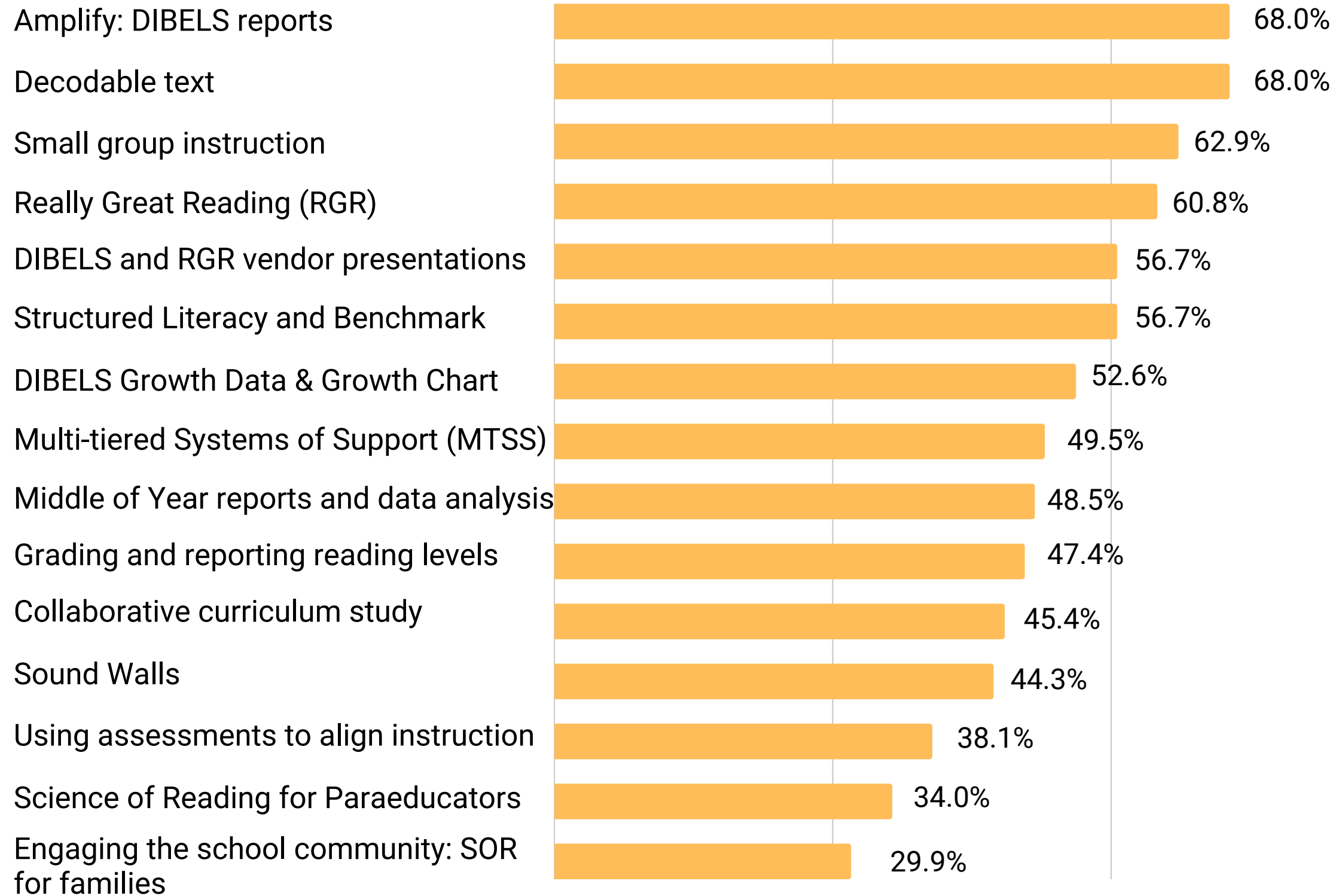
Findings

Many of the topics covered during the OCIP Office Hours were reported as helpful by more than one-half of the reading specialist respondents.

Amplify DIBELS reports and decodable text were the topics selected most often as helpful (68% each).

Additional helpful topics chosen by more than one-half of respondents were: small group instruction (63%), RGR (61%), DIBELS and RGR vendor presentations (57%), SL and Benchmark (57%), and DIBELS Growth data (53%).

The three topics chosen the least were: using assessments to align instruction (38%), Science of Reading for Paraeducators (34%), and engaging the school community (30%).



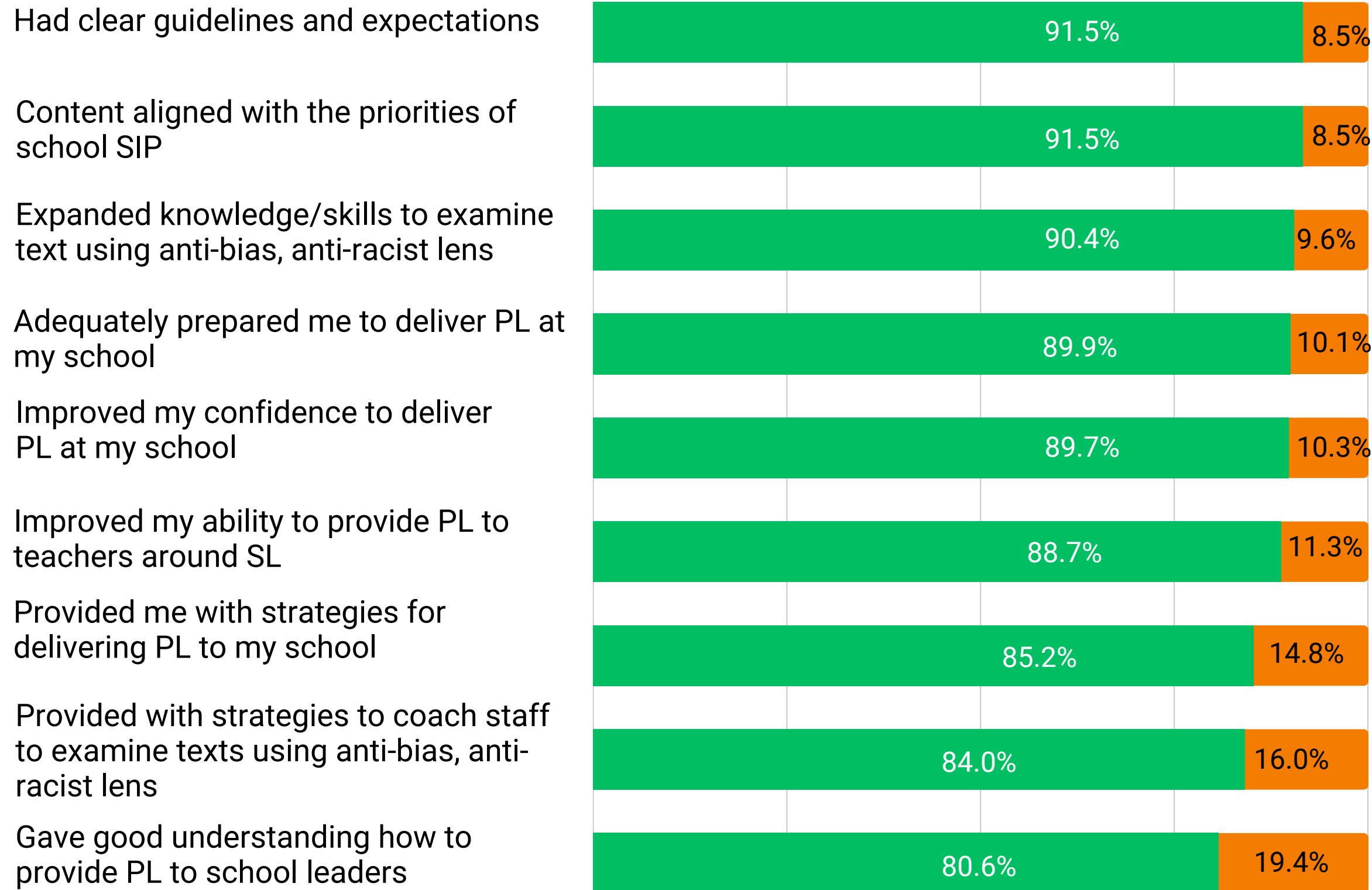
Note. Only respondents who reported they attended OCIP office hours were asked this question.



Results: Reading Specialists

Agreement with Statements About PL (N=109)

Strongly Agree/Agree Disagree/Strongly Disagree



Findings

Most reading specialists strongly agreed or agreed with statements regarding their experiences with the PL provided to them (81%–92%).

- Nearly 9 out of 10 specialists strongly agreed or agreed that the PL they received had clear guidelines and expectations (92%), content aligned with the priorities of the school SIP (92%), they expanded their skills to examine text using an anti-bias, ant-racist lens (90%), it adequately prepared them to deliver PL at their school (90%), it improved their confidence to deliver PL (90%) and their ability to provide PL around SL (89%).
- It is worth noting, of the 89% of specialists who strongly agreed or agreed that the professional learning they received improved their ability to provide PL to teachers around SL; 50% chose strongly agree.
- Furthermore, although 84% strongly agreed or agreed that the PL provided specialists with strategies to coach staff to examine texts using an anti-bias, ant-racist lens and that it gave a good understanding on how to provide PL to school leaders, only 24% and 27% respectively, strongly agreed.



Results: Reading Specialists

Interest in Future PL Topics (N=109)



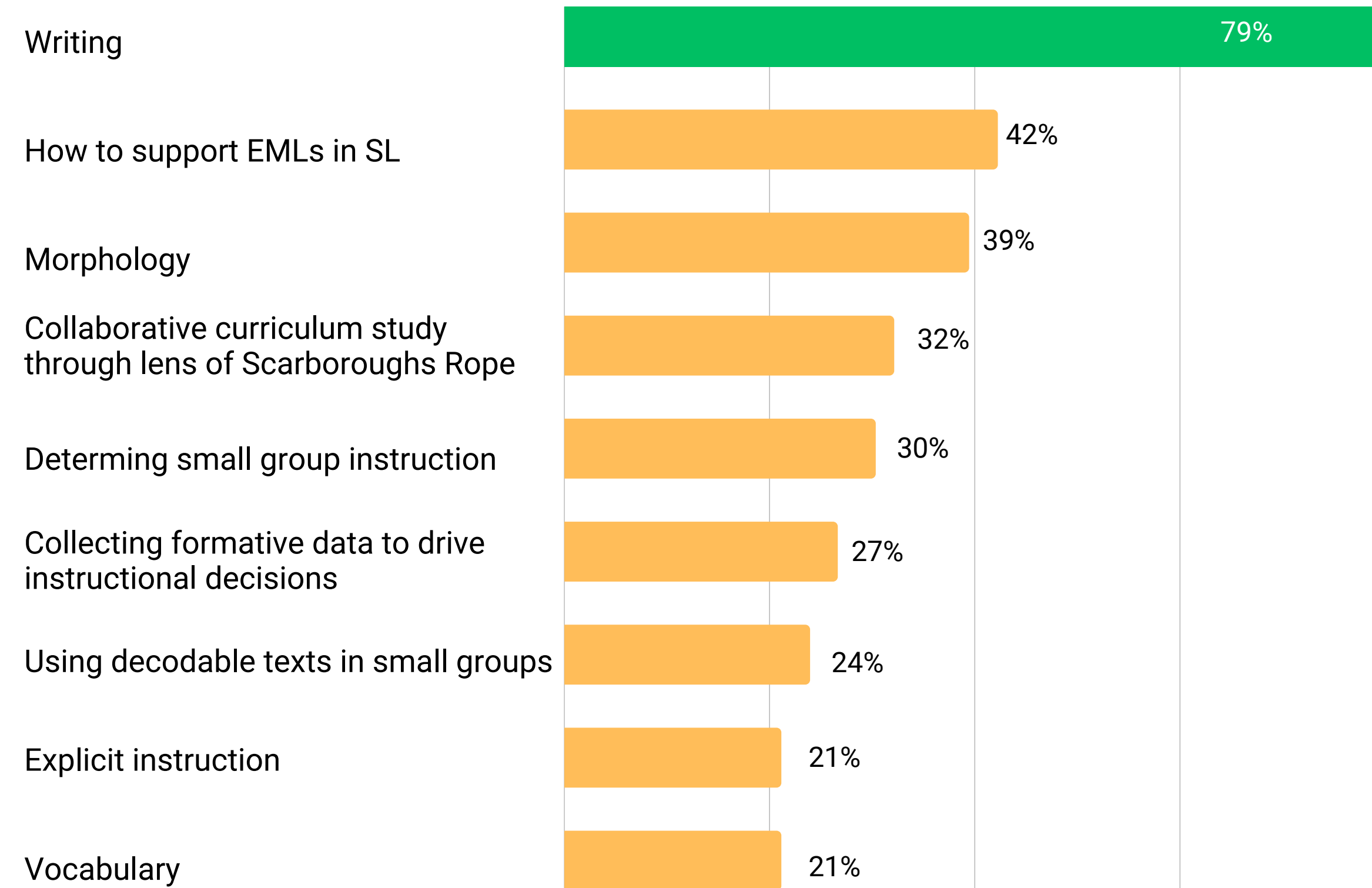
Findings

Reading specialists were asked to select their top topics of interest for future professional learning in 2023–2024.

By far, writing was chosen (79%) as the topic of interest compared to the other topic choices.

Approximately one-third or more of respondents chose how to support Emergent Multi-lingual Learners (EMLs) in SL (42%), Morphology (39%), collaborative curriculum study (32%), and determining small group instruction as future topics of interest.

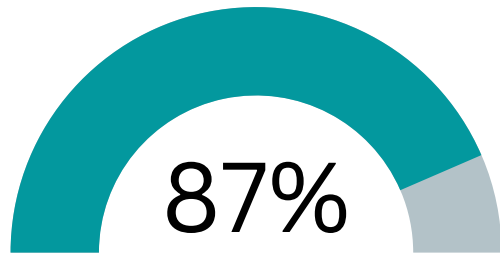
- It is worth noting, that topics not chosen as often are those which were focused on this school year.
- Topics with under 20% chosen are not shown.



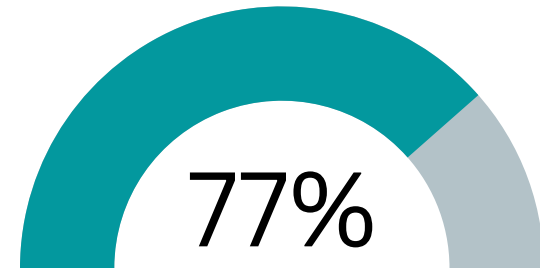


Results: Reading Specialists

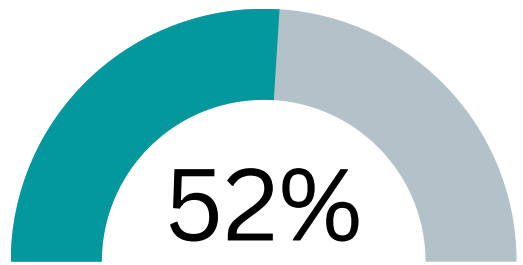
Reading Specialists' Reports of Beneficial Learning Formats



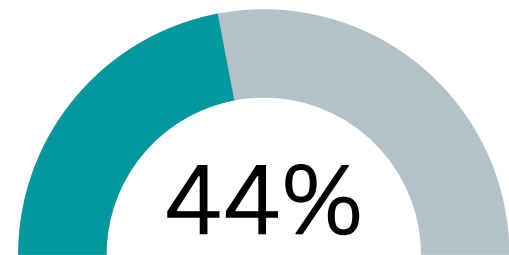
Collaboration with other reading specialists



Face-to-face learning opportunities



One-on-one coaching/modeling from ELA Team



Self-paced learning opportunities



Findings

Most respondents reported collaboration with other reading specialists (87%) and face-to-face opportunities (77%) were their most beneficial learning formats.

Just over one-half (52%) indicated one-on-one coaching or modeling from the ELA team was beneficial, and 44% indicated self-paced learning opportunities were beneficial.

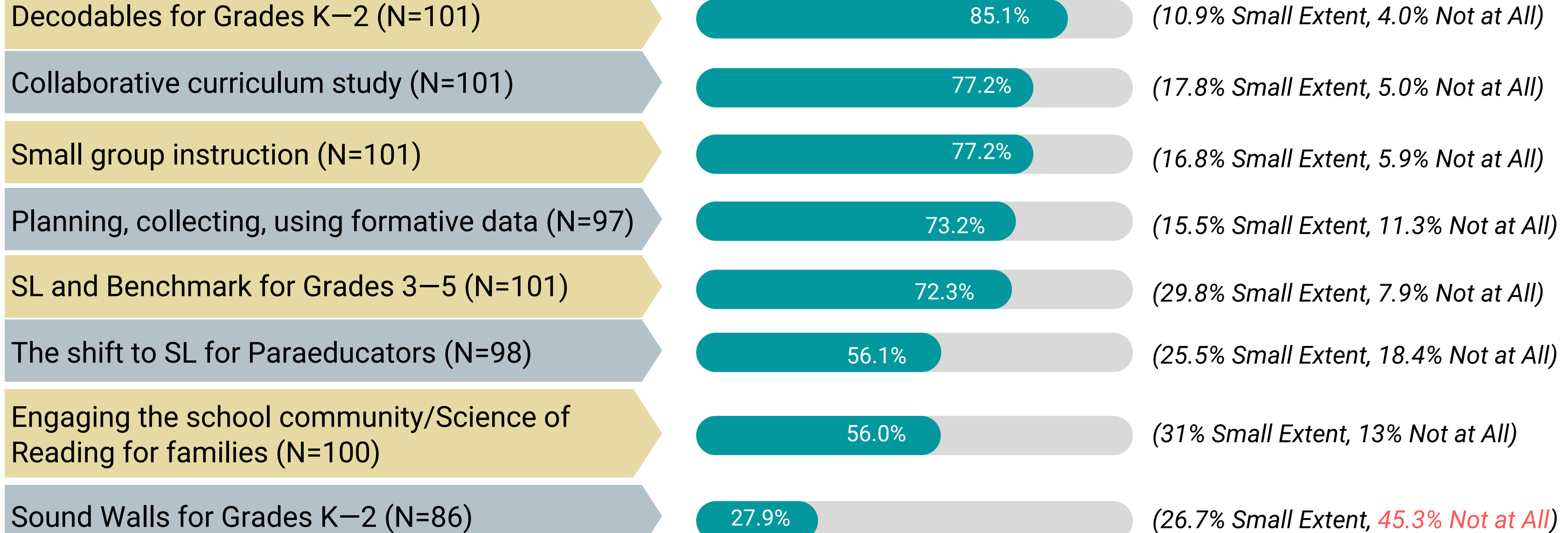


Results: Reading Specialists

Implementation of PL Modules to a Moderate/Great Extent

Scale used in survey:

- To a Great Extent
- To a Moderate Extent
- To a Small Extent
- Not at All



Findings

Reading specialists were asked to indicate how much they have been able to implement PL modules at their school. A large majority (85%) reported they implemented decodables for Grades K–2 to their staff to a great or moderate extent, and more than three-fourths reported they implemented collaborative curriculum study (77%) and small groups instruction (77%) to a great or moderate extent. Small group instruction and planning, collecting, and using formative data were also reported by 73% and 72% of respondents, respectively, as being implemented to a great or moderate extent.

Just under one-half (45%) reported that Sound Walls were not implemented at all to school staff.



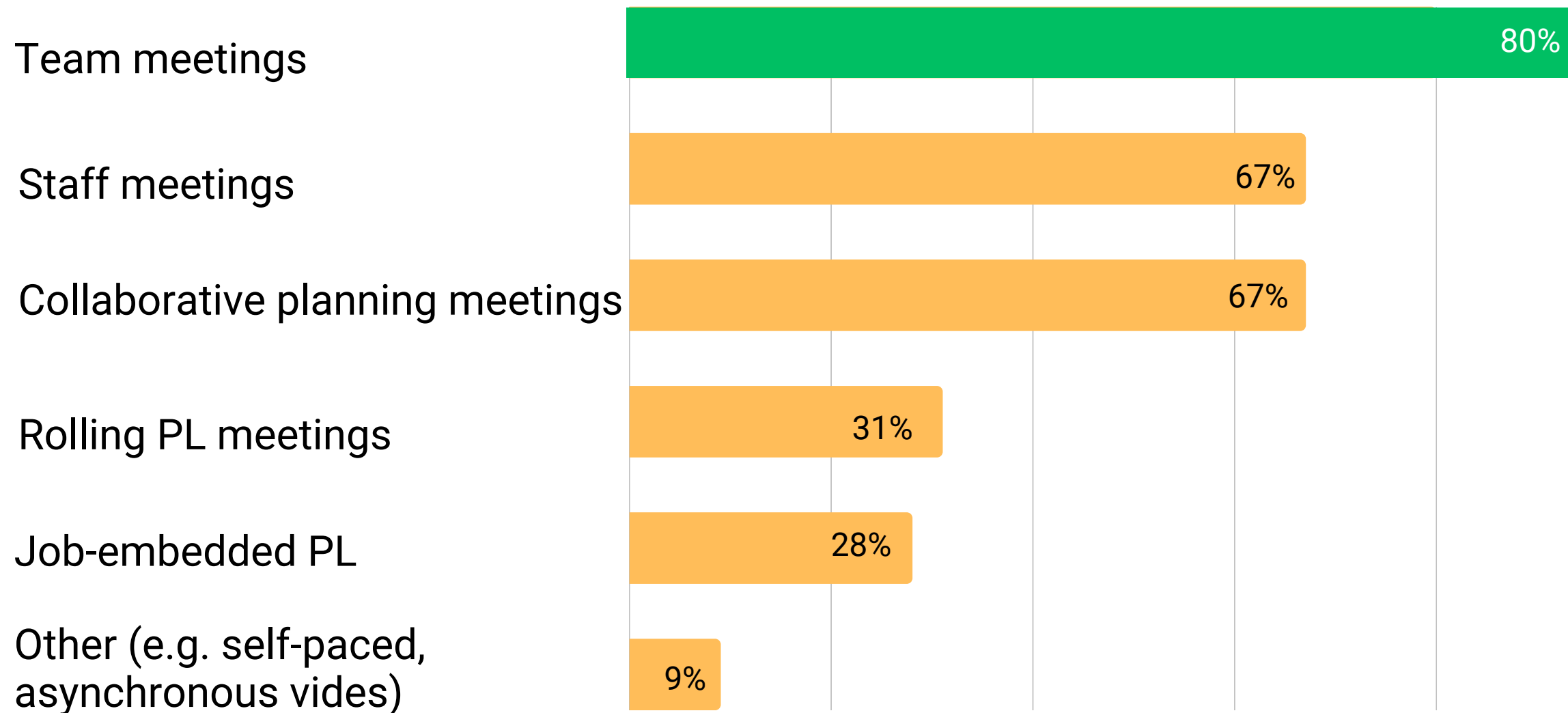
Results: Reading Specialists

Delivery of Professional Learning In Schools (N=109)



Findings

Delivery of ELA PL to school staff by reading specialists



Reading specialists were asked how they delivered the ELA professional learning to their school's teaching staff.

Team meetings was reported by 80% of reading specialists as the way they delivered professional learning to teachers. This was followed by staff meetings and collaborative planning meetings indicated by 67% of respondents respectively.

Less than one-third of reading specialists reported they delivered PL to their staff during rolling PL meetings (31%) or job-embedded PL (28%) this school year.



Results: Reading Specialists

Delivery of PL Module Topics to School Staff



Findings

MODULE TOPICS	Whole Staff	Grade level teams	Core Team	Para educators	Individual Teachers
Structured Literacy and Benchmark for Grades 3-5 (N=93)	17%	80%	--	--	1%
Decodables for Grades K-2 (N=93)	19%	77%	--	--	2%
Sound Walls for Grades K-2 (N=35)	--	71%	1%	--	14%
Planning/collecting/using formative data (N=86)	16%	66%	2%	--	12%
Collaborative Curriculum Study (N=92)	38%	59%	--	--	2%
Small group instruction (N=95)	32%	57%	1%	--	7%
Shift to Structured Literacy for Paraeducators (N=75)	3%	5%	1%	85%	3%
*Engaging the school community and families (N=83)	18%	5%	--	--	--

Reading specialists were asked how they delivered each PL topic to their school staff. Most topics were delivered to grade-level teams.

Eight of ten specialists reported delivering "SL and Benchmark for Grades 3-5" to teams; 77% reported delivering "Decodables for Grades K-2" and 71% reported delivering "Sound Walls for Grades K-2" to grade level teams.

- More than one-half also reported delivering "Collaborative Curriculum Study" (59%), using formative data (66%), and small group instruction (57%) to grade-level teams. "Collaborative Curriculum Study" and small group instruction were also delivered to the whole staff according to 38% and 32% of reading specialists, respectively.

*Engaging the school community and families was delivered to school staff in "other" ways, as reported by 76% of reading specialists



Results: Reading Specialists

Reading Specialists Time Spent in Collaboration with Staff



Findings

Job Activities: Collaboration with Staff	None at All	Few Times a Year	Once a Month	2-3 Times per Month	2-4 Times per Week	Once per Week	Daily
Sharing literacy updates with administration	0%	4%	8%	25%	9%	51%	4%
Collaboration with Core Team/Instructional Leadership Teams (ILT)	1%	2%	4%	19%	36%	36%	19%
Collaboration with Principal	4%	12%	7%	16%	19%	31%	12%
Participating in collaborative planning meetings	0%	3%	5%	11%	36%	21%	24%
Planning professional development with your Staff Development Teacher (SDT)	7%	13%	18%	31%	12%	14%	5%
Engaging in or supporting data analysis at grade-level team meetings	1%	17%	10%	27%	23%	17%	6%
Engaging in or supporting data analysis with individuals	4%	20%	24%	27%	14%	9%	3%
Supporting collaboration and coordination with other MCPS staff (e.g. ELA team)	14%	34%	20%	24%	2%	4%	3%

To understand how the role of reading specialist was utilized, reading specialists were asked how much time they spent on various activities as part of their job.

In terms of collaborative activities with staff, sharing literacy updates with the administration, collaborating with the school's core team, and collaborating with the principal, occurred once a week according to respondents (51%, 36%, and 31% respectively).

More than one-third of respondents (36%) reported participating in collaborative planning meetings 2-4 times a week, and about one-half engaged in or supported data analysis at team meetings 2-4 times a week (23%) or 2-3 times a month (27%).



Results: Reading Specialists

Reading Specialists Time Spent Delivering PL

Job Activities: Delivering Professional Learning	None at All	Few Times a Year	Once a Month	2-3 Times per Month	2-4 Times per Week	Once per Week	Daily
Delivering professional learning to the staff (group level or staff meeting)	0%	3%	5%	11%	36%	21%	24%
Preparing for professional learning to the staff	2%	16%	30%	33%	13%	5%	3%
Visiting classrooms and providing feedback	5%	47%	17%	18%	10%	4%	0%
Providing job-embedded professional learning (e.g. modeling lessons)	6%	43%	21%	22%	6%	2%	2%
Providing one-on-one coaching and reflective feedback to teachers	7%	30%	14%	23%	19%	3%	5%



Findings

More than one-third (36%) of reading specialists reported delivering PL to the staff 2-4 times a week with another 45% reporting once a week or daily. Approximately one-third reported preparing PL 2-3 times per month (33%) or once a month (30%).

The majority of reading specialists visit classrooms and provide feedback a few times a year (47%), while a smaller proportion do so once a month (17%).

- For job-embedded professional learning, the largest percentage of specialists engage in this activity a few times a year (43.0%), although 43% reporting engaging it once a month (21%) and 2-3 times per month (22%).
- One-third reported providing one-on-one coaching and reflective feedback a few times per year (30%), while 37% reported doing it at least once a month or 2-3 times per month .



Results: Reading Specialists

Reading Specialists Time Spent on Other Activities



Findings

Job Activities: Other Activities	None at All	Few Times a Year	Once a Month	2-3 Times per Month	2-4 Times per Week	Once per Week	Daily
Participating in job-related professional learning	0%	6%	29%	51%	4%	9%	2%
Data analysis and monitoring progress data	0%	4%	21%	35%	24%	8%	8%
Managing Materials	1%	14%	19%	30%	8%	13%	16%
Serving on Educational Management Team (EMT)/Individualized Educational Program (IEP) Meetings	13%	19%	19%	25%	5%	19%	1%
Coordinating interventions in support of Multi-tiered Systems of Support (MTSS)	5%	17%	17%	23%	9%	13%	17%
Preparing + Delivering communication to families	3%	55%	20%	15%	5%	3%	0%

One-half of reading specialists (51%) reported they participated in job-related PL for themselves 2-3 times a month and another 29% reported once a month.

One-third or more reported engaging in data analysis and monitoring progress data (35%) and materials management (30%) 2-3 times per month.

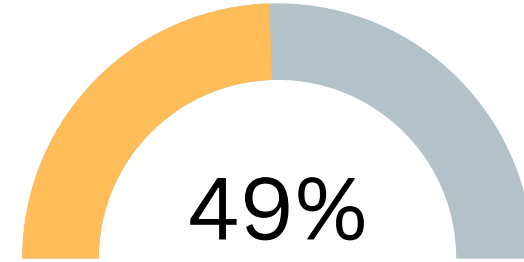
Over 20% reported serving on EMT/IEP meetings (25%) and coordinating interventions in support of MTSS (23%) 2–3 times per month.

Just over one-half (55%) reported delivering communication to families a few times a year.



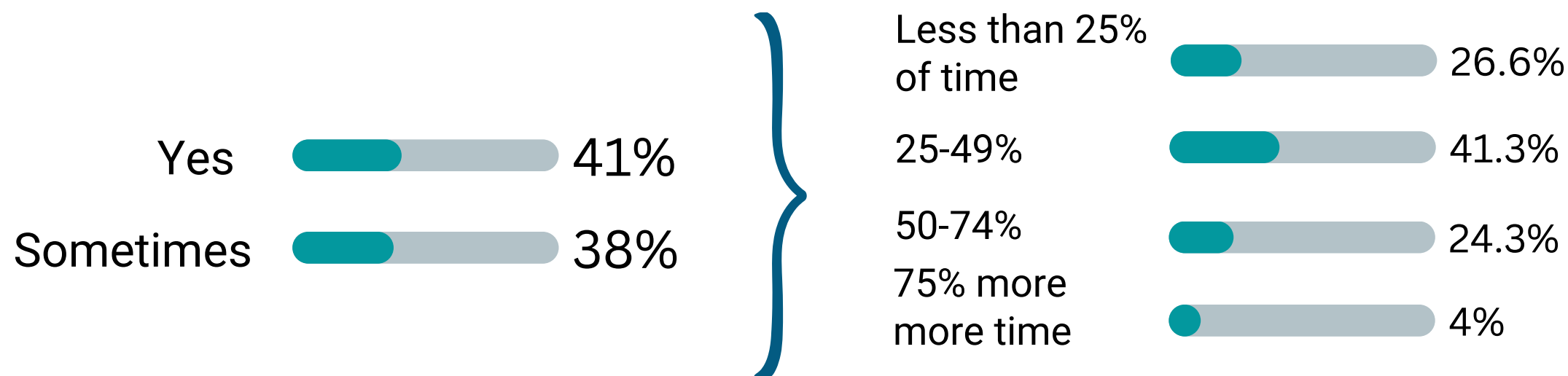
Findings

Served as a classroom substitute



Deliver student interventions 4 or more times a week (28% do not deliver intervention or instruction to students)

Served as school testing coordinator



Reading specialists were asked about additional job responsibilities such as being a class substitute, delivering interventions to students, and serving as their schools' testing coordinator.

- More than one-third (39%) of reading specialists reported they served as a classroom substitute one or two times a week or more than once a week. Additionally, about two-thirds (77%) reported they served as classroom substitute at least a few times a year or once a month.
- About one-half (49%), reported that they deliver interventions to students four or more times a week.
- A large majority (79%) of reading specialists serve as their schools' testing coordinator at least sometimes; 28% of respondents who indicated yes or sometimes, reported this takes up more than half of their time.



Results: Reading Specialists

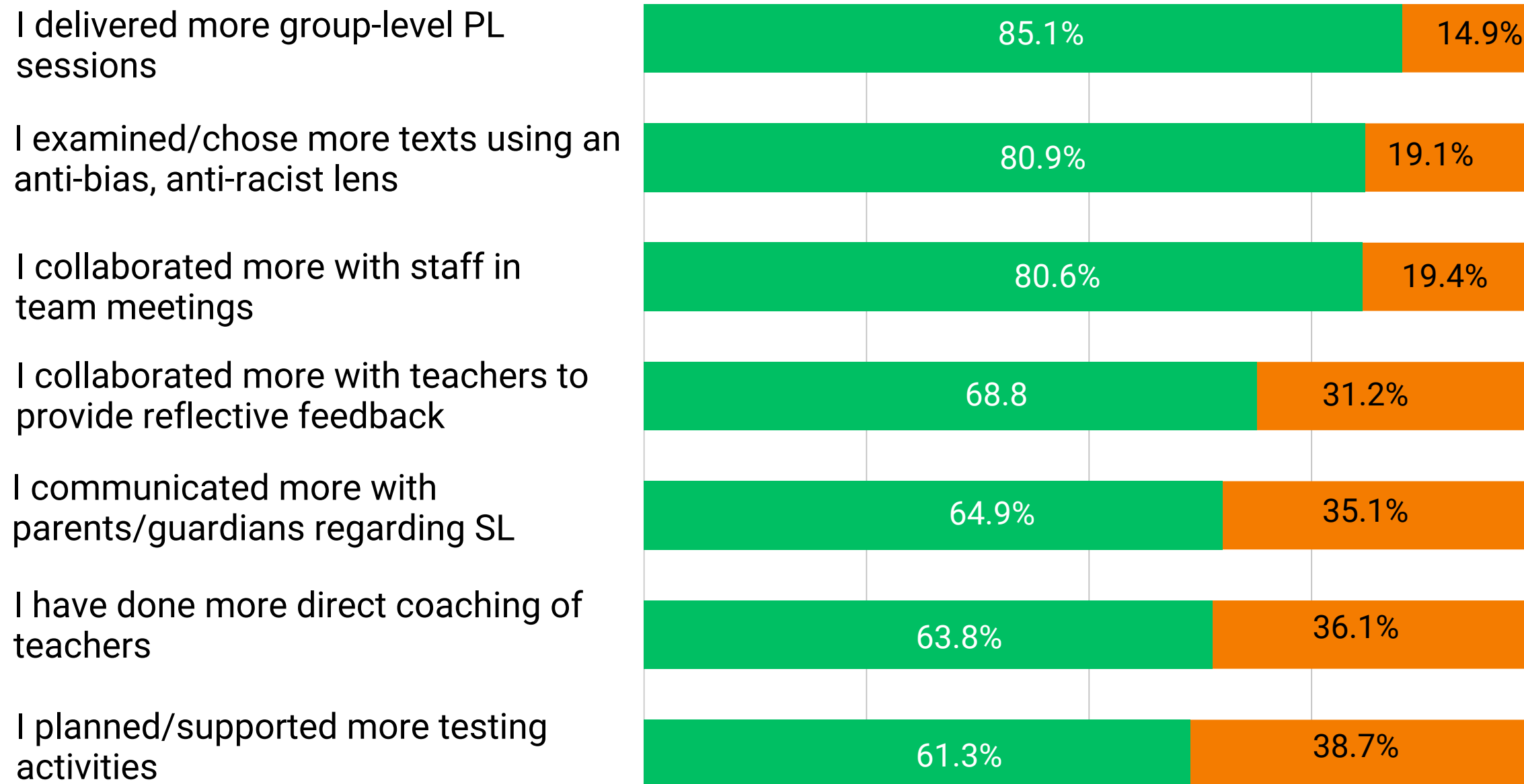
Agreement with statements about change in job activities (N=94)



Findings

Compared to last year.....

Strongly Agree /Agree Disagree/Strongly Disagree



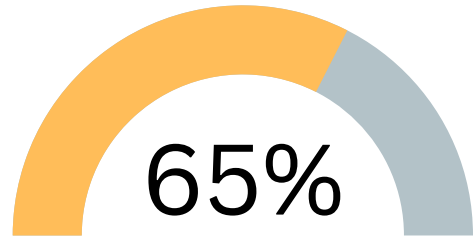
Reading specialists were asked about their level of agreement related to statements about job activities compared to last year.

- A great majority of respondents (85%) agreed that they delivered more group-level PL sessions this year than last year. And eight out of ten respondents agreed that they examined more texts using an anti-bias, anti-racist lens and collaborated more with teachers to provide reflective feedback.
- More than one-third of the reading specialist respondents disagreed that they planned or supported more testing activities compared to last year (39%), conducted more direct coaching of teachers (36%), or communicated more with parents/guardians regarding SL (35%).
- "Other" reported increase in job activities included: regularly covering a class/other school duties (n=20), supporting students and student behavior issues (n=13), various miscellaneous duties as needed (n=10), GT liaison (n=6), supporting teachers/long term subs (n=5), changing the book room (n=4), and grading and reporting (n=4).



Results: Reading Specialists

On the job experiences



Reported the 8 extra work days last summer were **not enough time** to close the year and prepare for next year (35% stated it was enough time.)

Key Reasons Not Considered Enough Time

- **ILT Summer Leadership:** Three of the days are used for ILT Summer Leadership.
- **Core Team Meetings:** Days are used for Core Team Meetings.
- **Planning for ILT, preservice days, other:** Days are used pre-planning.
- **Trainings:** Days are used for training such as RS training, mandatory trainings.
- **Materials Management:** Days are needed to pack/unpack materials, organize bookrooms, manage and distribute materials.
- **Other duties:** Some mentioned other tasks they need to accomplish over the summer, such as collaborating with the SDT, attending the kindergarten orientation, reviewing student data, and strategically preparing for the new year.

Also mentioned:

- **Used their own time for additional days:** Many cited that they go beyond the eight days on their own unpaid time.
- **Request for additional days:** Many requested additional days to be able to fulfill the duties mentioned above (e.g. planning and collaborating, materials management, reviewing student data, etc) beyond the ILT summer leadership days, core team meetings and trainings. Several pointed out that they are part of the ILT team and that SDT's get 15 days and counselors and media specialists also receive more days.



Findings

Almost two-thirds (65%) of respondents reported that the eight extra work days last summer were not enough time to close the year and prepare for next year; one-third said it was enough time.

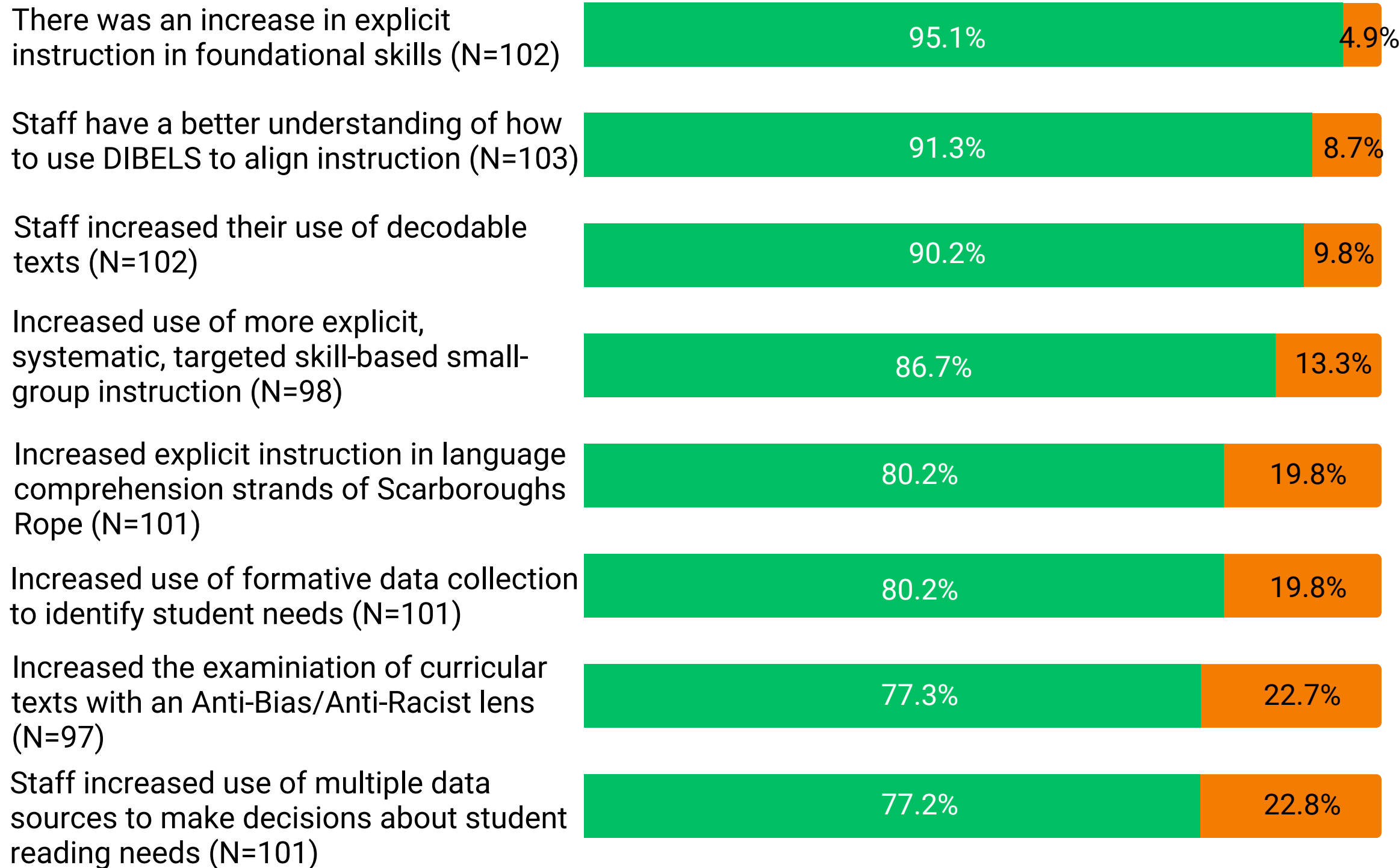
- Reading specialist respondents explained that after three days are used for ILT Summer Leadership, days are used for Core Team meetings and planning, and days are used to attend trainings, there is little or no time to manage the materials, organize the book room and conduct other duties they need to attend to over the summer.
- Many pointed out that they put in their own non-paid time over the summer and that they should get more days as part of the ILT team. Some pointed to other positions, such as the Staff Development Teacher (SDT), counselors, and media specialists, receiving more days.



Results: Reading Specialists

Agreement with Statements About Instructional Changes
(N=109)

Strongly Agree/Agree Disagree/Strongly Disagree



Findings

Reading specialists were asked about their agreement with statements regarding instructional changes they observed.

Almost all respondents (95%) strongly agreed or agreed that there was an increase in explicit instruction in foundational skills; it is worth noting that 64% strongly agreed.

Additionally, respondents strongly agreed or agreed that staff better understand how to use DIBELS to align instruction (91%) and increased their use of decodable texts (90%); 46% and 41% respectively strongly agreed with these statements.

- A lower percentage strongly agreed or agreed that they used formative data (80%), increased their examination with an Anti-Bias, Anti-Racist lens (77%) and increased their use of multiple data sources (77%).



Results: Reading Specialists

Factors that supported Reading Specialists' work

The following themes emerged from the open-ended question for the reading specialists that asked what factors best supported their work (N=86).

Key Themes: Support Factors

- 1 PL Module Series (n=44):** Just over one-half of those responding to this open-ended question pointed to the PL Module Series as a "very helpful," "great," and "fantastic" support for their role as a reading specialist, despite some needing to adapt it or make modifications. They explained that it delivered consistent messaging, helped with their staff training and preparation of PL, and helped build needed background knowledge among their staff. A few specialists specifically gave kudos to the dyslexia module.
- 2 Collaborating with the ELA Team (n=32):** Reading specialists appreciated the consistent access to the ELA team, describing them as "helpful", "supportive", "responsive", and willing to meet and collaborate. Team members were available to reading specialists by phone, email, in-person, and Zoom. Some specialists specifically gave a shout-out to their ELA representative and the helpful one-on-one support provided. One specialist explained "without the department's help, I would have had a harder time rolling out so many changes....it was great to have a lifeline and quick support as needed. Working with OCIP staff was helpful and would love to have that support next year."
- 3 Analyzing reading data and DIBELS (n=27):** Reading specialists reported that analyzing reading data with their schools' teams, including grade-level teams, was very helpful. Particularly helpful was analyzing DIBELS data which has a direct connection to instruction and guidance for next steps. They mentioned that time to analyze data, have data chats, and reflect was helpful to target instruction and monitor student progress. One specialist stated, "Data-driven instruction has a whole new meaning with DIBELS being so spot on with the next instructional steps for each student. The teachers really used the reports and suggested lessons effectively. We saw great growth in our students as a result."
- 4 Additional PL provided by the ELA team (n=19):** In addition to the PL Module Series provided by the ELA team, specialists reported that the PD days, regular office hours, and ongoing professional learning provided were also helpful in supporting their role.
- 5 Collaborating with other Reading Specialists [during PL] (n=15):** Reading specialists reported that the opportunity to meet and collaborate with other reading specialists was valuable. "Being the only reading specialist in a building can feel very isolating. It is great when there are opportunities to speak with others. Many times it seems we are having very similar problems and questions," explained one specialist. Another shared, "Some of my biggest support systems come from collaborating with my RS colleagues on what we are doing in the trenches."
- 6 LETRS Training (n=14):** LETRS training was specifically mentioned by reading specialists as a support factor. For example, "Taking LETRS has been very helpful in preparing me for leading my staff in the shift to SL," and "LETRS was incredible in helping build knowledge of the science of reading and SL."
- 7 Other Supportive Factors (n=8):** A supportive core team/administration (n=9); RGR and Amplify training and representatives (n=6); visiting or observing other schools (n=6); and varying other remarks.



Results: Reading Specialists

Challenges among Reading Specialists

The following themes emerged from the open-ended question for the reading specialists that asked what challenges, if any, they experienced delivering their school's literacy plan this year (N=90).

Key Themes: Challenges

- 1 Time to deliver PL (n=31):** Reading specialists cited time for delivering the amount of PL to staff as their biggest challenge. They pointed to not having designated PL time and competing demands with other priorities during staff and team meetings. Some explained that their scheduled time often was reduced or changed to other topics needing attention. Reading specialists often found themselves having to "pick and choose or deliver portions" of the PL. One explained "Using staff meeting time for PD was challenging due to the various programs and needs at my school," and " my school only has one staff meeting a month so there isn't time and teams only meet for one hour per week for planning all the subject areas, so delivering PD during that time is difficult." Also stated was, "we are given great resources but not the time to really present this information to the staff, " and "The PD presentations themselves were more time than I had."
- 2 Fulfilling other duties (n=24):** Reading specialists expressed the challenges of fulfilling their role while also performing other duties that take a lot of time such as managing testing, covering or regularly substituting for classes, supporting students, serving as the Gifted and Talented (GT) liaison, and other jobs. Specialists cited staffing, and specific student support needs at their school. Some examples include, "My biggest challenge was being asked to cover a class since we lack good long-term substitutes-staffing is a real challenge," "my time is split doing lots of tasks that are not reading related but necessary to run the school," and "testing takes the entire morning, then the afternoon to prepare for the next day. Prior to testing, hours and hours are spent on creating testing groups and triple checking accommodations. After scheduled testing, additional days/weeks are spent on make-up testing."(n=24)
- 3 Shifting staff to a Structured Literacy approach (n=21):** Some reading specialists encountered challenges with teacher buy-in, shifting teachers' thinking to structured literacy, or lack of team participation. One example shared was that school staff were hesitant to change their instruction believing it to be a "fad." Another explained, "my biggest challenge was supporting the shift to science of reading to teachers who are stuck in the balanced literacy mindset." Some reading specialists also pointed to a "lack of support from administrators" and "administrators with limited knowledge of SL and its rationale, and disconnected from the work."



Results: Reading Specialists

Challenges among Reading Specialists

The following themes emerged from the open-ended question for the reading specialists that asked what challenges, if any, they experienced delivering their school's literacy plan this year (N=90).

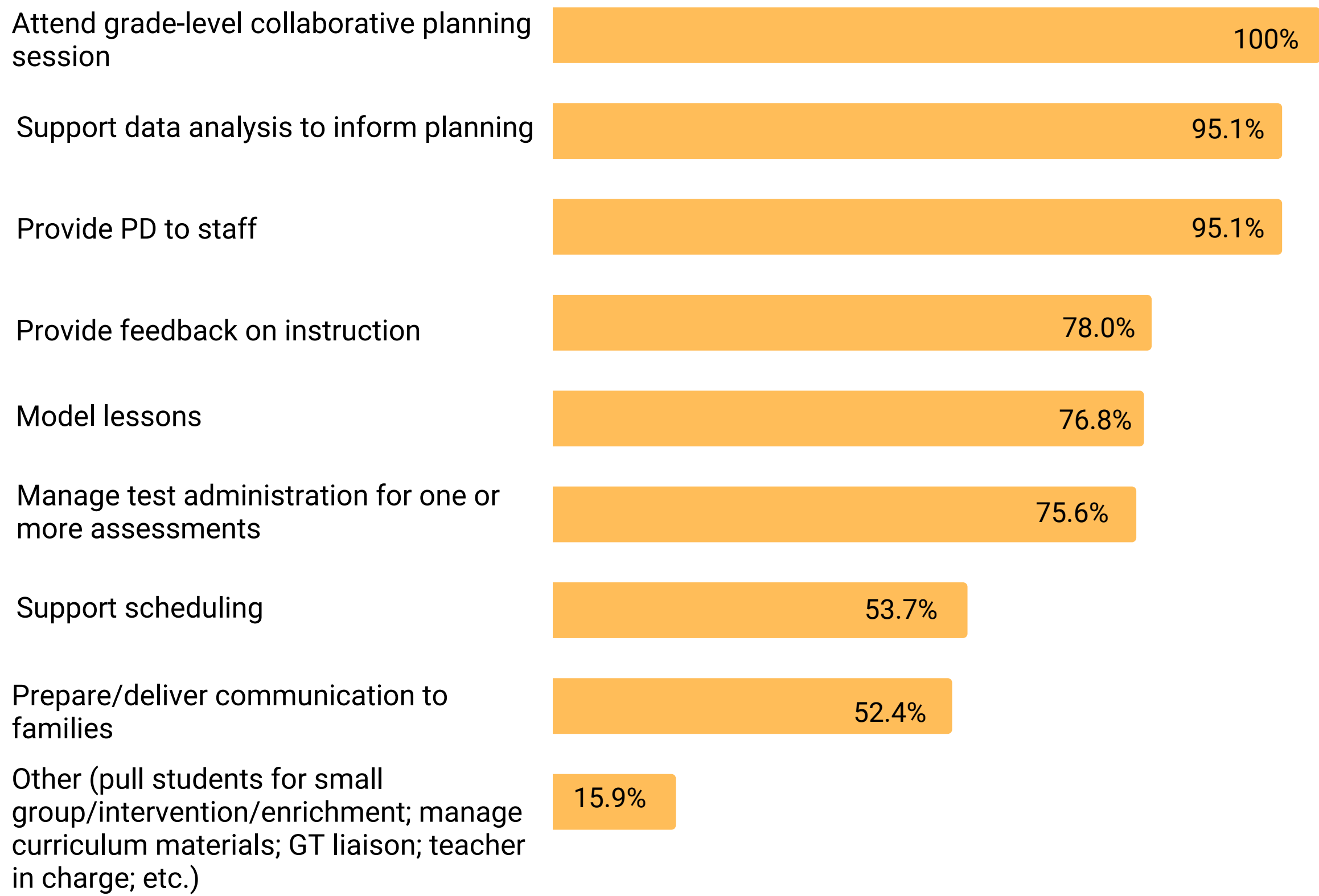
Key Themes: Challenges Continued

- 4 The use of Benchmark curriculum and lack of upper-grade ELA instruction (n=15):** Reading specialists were descriptive when pointing to the Benchmark curriculum as a challenge. Some pointed out the extra challenge of finding out late that they would continue to use this curriculum (n=10). Often, although not always, this challenge went hand-in-hand with another challenge of needing a writing or explicit and systematic phonics curriculum for the upper grades (n=10). One specialist expressed "it was very difficult to learn we are continuing Benchmark after being told we would be getting a new curriculum and signing up for training. This was very devastating for our upper elementary teachers in particular who must use Benchmark Phonics." Another explained, "Benchmark is a challenge. It does not follow all we know to be good teaching and we were a pilot." Two additional examples responses included, "The upper grades need a more explicit program for teaching students that still struggle with foundational skills. In addition, the Benchmark interims appear to be useless. We have students that score in the 90th percentile on MAPR but do not meet the MCPS benchmark on the Benchmark interim," and "Writing is such a struggle with Benchmark. Please consider how you can support us with writing next year."
- 5 Time to observe and follow-up with teachers (n=12):** In addition to finding time to deliver PD's, reading specialists also found it challenging to find the time to observe, follow up, and meet with teachers. One Reading Specialist explained, "[in addition to not enough time to plan and deliver], there is also not enough time to debrief with teachers regarding observations, class visits, or after modeling in a classroom."
- 6 Other Challenges (n=18):** Receiving late or conflicting information (e.g. regarding curriculum, approaches, or grading and reporting) and getting PL plans late and throughout the year (n=6); conflicting priorities between administrators, between central office and administrators, or between TWI and ELA offices (n=6); and lack of support or guidance (n=6).



Results: Administrators

Reading Specialist's Report of Job Responsibilities (N=82)



Findings

Elementary Administrators were asked to report their reading specialists primary job responsibilities.

- All or almost all indicated that the primary responsibilities were to attend grade-level collaborative planning sessions (100%), support data analysis to inform planning (95%), and provide PD to staff (95%).
- More than three-fourths indicated that reading specialists are to provide feedback on instruction (78%), model lessons (77%), and manage test administration for one or more assessments (76%).
- Just over one-half of administrators indicated that reading specialists are to support scheduling (54%) and prepare communication to families.

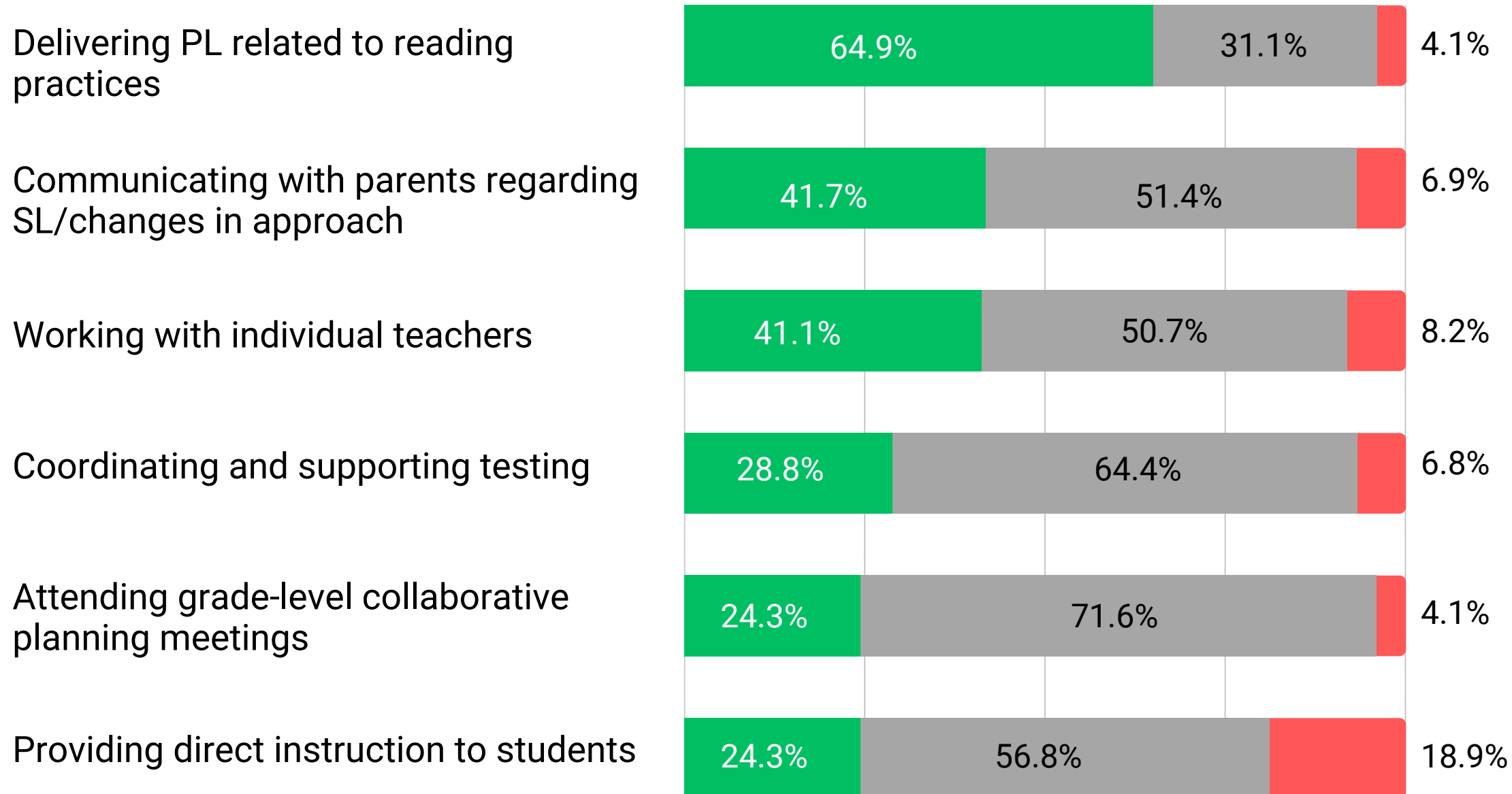


Results: Administrators

Change in Reading Specialists Activities (N=74)

Compared to last year...

Increased Stayed the Same Decreased



Findings

Administrators were asked whether specified job activities increased, stayed the same, or decreased for reading specialists compared to last year.

The majority (65%) of administrators reported that delivering PL related to reading practices increased for reading specialists compared to last year.

One-half or more of administrators reported that the remaining tasks stayed the same for reading specialists:

- Communicating with parents (51%), working with individual teachers (51%), coordinating and supporting testing (64%), attending grade-level planning meetings (72%), and providing direct instruction to students (57%).

Almost one-fifth (19%) reported that providing direct instruction to students decreased compared to last year.

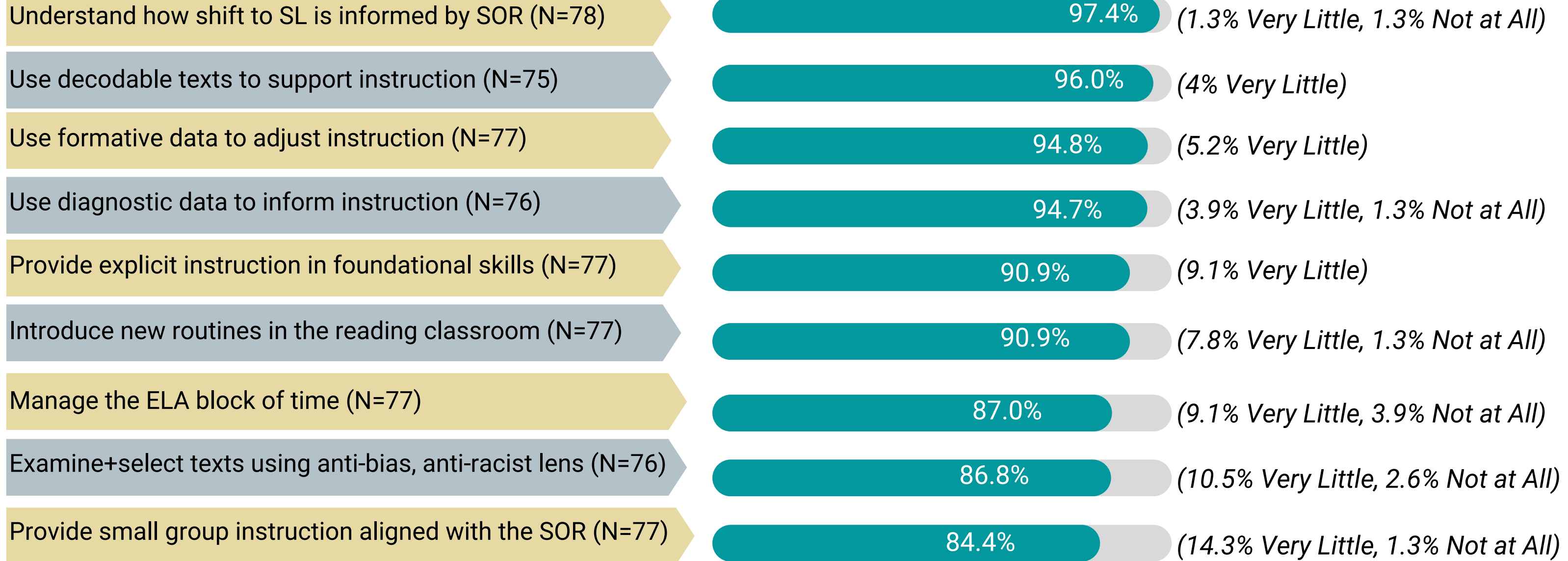


Results: Administrators

Increased Teacher Capacity by a Moderate Amount or Great Deal

Scale used in survey:

- A Great Deal
- A Moderate Amount
- Very Little
- Not at All



Note: SOR = Science of Reading, SL = Structured Literacy



Findings

Most administrator respondents reported that teacher capacity had increased a moderate amount or a great deal in various ways due to the reading specialist's work. In particular, capacity increased in understanding how the shift to Structured Literacy is informed by the Science of Reading (97%), using decodable texts to support instruction (96%), using formative data to adjust instruction (95%), and using diagnostic data to inform instruction and interventions (95%).



Results: Administrators

Challenges among Administrators

The following themes emerged from the open-ended question for administrators that asked what challenges, if any, they experienced in achieving goals they envisioned for using the Reading Specialist this year (N=54).

Key Themes: Challenges

- 1 Teacher absences and coverage needs (n=21):** Administrators reported that teacher absences and lack of substitutes were a challenge that resulted in reading specialists covering staffing needs and impacting their work. A few administrators also mentioned that teacher absences affected the delivery of the specialist's PL and the need to reschedule a teacher's missed PL. Examples of administrator responses included, "The lack of substitutes has greatly affected the consistency and schedule the Reading Specialist planned for the week," "Challenges are always coverage when someone is out," "Having to cover lunch and recess when no one is here, is a barrier," and "We lost a classroom teacher and could not find a substitute. My RS took over the literacy instruction for the second semester."
- 2 Testing takes much of reading specialists' time (n=7):** Administrator's mentioned that reading specialists are "heavily involved in testing", that it was "time consuming", and they had "limited availability during testing time." This impacted their ability to support teachers and fulfill their reading specialist role. One administrator responded with "TESTING, TESTING, TESTING!" and another stated "the lack of staff to support the coordination of testing" is a challenge.
- 3 Not enough time to deliver PL (n=6):** Administrators reported that there was not enough time for reading specialists to deliver their PL, especially with other competing priorities and topics needing attention, explaining that "scheduling and facilitating PD among the many competing priorities is a challenge" and "there is limited time and opportunities for PD due to contractual negotiated use of early release and full days designated for this purpose."
- 4 Would have liked more time to work with teachers (n=6):** Administrators expressed that because of time constraints, specialists could not directly work with teachers, including observing their classrooms and providing feedback.
- 5 Too much time spent in training and meetings (n=5):** Administrators pointed to the amount of training and meetings that reading specialists participated in as a challenge because it limited their ability to provide support to the school. Some explained, "There are too many times reading specialists have meetings with central office staff during the school day office hours..." and "the biggest challenge is the reading specialist being pulled from the school for numerous trainings, limiting their ability to be in the school providing support and PL to our actual school staff."
- 6 Other Challenges (n=13):** PL issues (e.g., not customized for school needs, delayed modules and communication) (n=4); other varying challenges (n=9)



Results: Administrators

Changes recommended among Administrators

The following themes emerged from the open-ended question for administrators that asked what changes they would they recommend for their school district to use the reading specialist to better support the delivery of effective early literacy instruction (N=39).

Key Themes: Recommended Changes

- 1 Hire a designated school testing coordinator(n=8):** Administrators expressed the need to hire a testing coordinator that would alleviate the reading specialist, and other non-classroom staff, from all the work that needs to be done surrounding testing and takes them from their primary job responsibilities. One administrator explained, "Elementary schools should have a staff member dedicated directly to overseeing the myriad of tests given throughout the year as coordination is a lot: Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA), Measures of Academic Progress (MAP), DIBELS, Maryland Comprehensive Assessment Program (MCAP), Maryland Integrated Science Assessment (MISA) and WIDA." Another stated, "provide each school with a part-time or shared testing coordinator to alleviate the assistant principal, reading specialist, staff development teacher, counselor, ESOL, and special education teacher from all of the work that has to be done and the hours needed for testing" and another added this could "also help teachers with local testing." Suggestions included full-time, part-time, or a shared position between several schools.
- 2 Address the sub shortage problem (n=6):** Administrators emphasized the need to solve the shortage of substitutes in the system. The lack of substitutes to cover teacher absences not only effects the reading specialist but other positions as well. Responses included hiring more substitutes, building a pool of substitutes for each school, or hiring a permanent substitute for each school.
- 3 Fewer reading specialist's meetings (n=5):** These responding administrators would like to see a reduction in the frequency of meetings and trainings that their reading specialist attends, taking their time away. One also suggested clarifying which meetings are mandatory.
- 4 Other comments related to professional learning content (n=8):** A variety of suggestions were made specifically surrounding PL. These included providing specialists with more training on: coaching and providing constructive feedback to teachers, interventions and fluency, strategies to be modeled, and meeting adults where they are. Suggestions also included continuing collaboration with other specialists, more in-depth PL to staff, acknowledging each school's needs are different, and Science of Reading for all K–5 grades.
- 5 Other changes (n=10):** Clearer direction on how much time should be used for direct student support; alignment of messaging between Accelerated and Enriched Instruction (AEI), the ELA unit, and Equity Initiative Unit; dividing the position into two for K-2 and 3–5; providing available resources; providing para support; more school autonomy; and fewer surveys.



Conclusions

Summary of Key Findings



ELA Team's Experiences Supporting Schools

Several themes emerged from a focus group and interview with the elementary ELA team regarding their experiences. A comprehensive, multi-level PL system was developed that aligned the content of vendor training with school-level training. It included job-embedded coaching by ELA specialists who worked alongside reading specialists in schools. This was reported by the ELA Team as the most effective approach to ensure program implementation. Additionally, cross-office collaboration was key to clarifying communication and aligning work across the system. The team also reported that the influence of school administration was critical to supporting the reading specialist's role and the additional central office specialists substantially increased the capacity of the ELA team to provide direct support to schools.

District Level Professional Learning for Reading Specialists

Reading specialists reported high participation and positive experiences from the professional learning (PL) opportunities provided to them. Nearly all reading specialists attended available PL sessions, including The Shift to Structured Literacy (99%), Anti-Bias, Anti-Racist Leaders Learning (95%), DIBELS (95%), and the ELA Team's office hours (89%); just under one-half received individual coaching this year. They particularly appreciated how these sessions enhanced their ability to provide PL to teachers in implementing Structured Literacy. The ELA Office Hour topics selected most often as being helpful were Amplify DIBELS reports and Decodable Texts (68% each). Most reading specialists (79%) would like to see writing as a topic in future PL. Additionally, 87% of specialists found collaborating with their peers at the sessions as highly beneficial (87%) in addition to face-to-face learning opportunities (77%). Reading specialists remarked that the PL module series was especially beneficial support to their role by delivering a consistent message and building background knowledge. Reading specialists also reported that collaborating with the responsive and supportive ELA team members was helpful, as was analyzing reading data with their school teams.

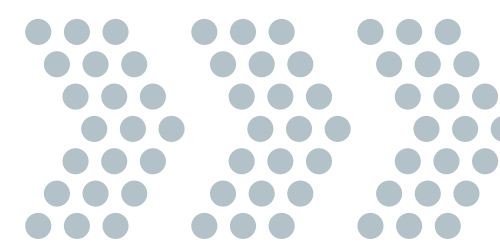
School-level PL Delivered by Reading Specialists

Most reading specialists reported that they were able to implement the professional learning modules at their school. A large majority reported that they were able to deliver the PL modules regarding decodables for Grades K–2 (85%) as well as collaborative curriculum study (77%), small group instruction (77%), using formative data (73%), and SL and Benchmark for Grades 3–5 (72%). Sound Walls for Grades K–2 was not delivered at all or, to a small extent, as reported by most reading specialists. Most reading specialists (80%) reported the ELA PL was delivered to staff at team meetings; however, a majority also delivered PL at staff meetings (67%) and collaborative planning meetings (67%).



Conclusions

Summary of Key Findings - Continued



Time Spent on Activities

Reading specialists reported being most frequently engaged in collaborative activities with various school teams and the principal. More than one-third of respondents reported participating in collaborative planning meetings 2–4 times a week (36%), collaborating with the Core Team/ILT once a week (36%), and collaborating with the principal once a week (31%). Also, about one-half engaged in or supported data analysis at team meetings 2–4 times a week (23%) or 2-3 times a month (27%). **Reading specialists engaged in delivering professional learning to individual teachers less frequently.** Job-embedded coaching is provided a few times a year (43%), once a month (21%), or 2-3 times per month (22%). Additionally, one-third reported providing one-on-one coaching (30%) and reflective feedback 2–3 times per year, while 37% reported providing it at least once a month or 2-3 times per month, and the majority reported visiting classrooms and giving feedback a few times a year (47%).

Over one-third (39%) of reading specialists reported serving as a classroom substitute 1–2 times or more a week, and about three-quarter (76%) reported once a month or a few times a year. About one-half (49%) reported delivering student interventions four or more times a week; 28% said they do not deliver interventions to students. Most reading specialists (79%) serve as the school's testing coordinator at least sometimes; some (28%) spend half or more than half of their time doing so. Compared to last year, a large majority of reading specialists delivered more group-level PL sessions (85%), examined more texts using an anti-bias, anti-racist lens (81%), and collaborated more in staff meetings (81%).

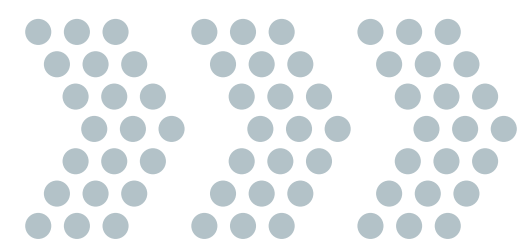
Effects of Professional Learning

Positive effects in teacher instruction were reported by both reading specialists and administrators. Reading specialists have reported notable changes in instruction following the delivery of PL. Specifically, there has been a significant increase in explicit instruction in foundational skills, with 95% of specialists strongly agreeing (64%) or agreeing (31%). Furthermore, reading specialists observed improvements in staff's understanding of how to use DIBELS (91% strongly agree or agree), increased utilization of decodable text (90% strongly agree or agree), and a rise in targeted small-group instruction (87% strongly agree or agree). Most administrators have also noticed an enhanced teacher capacity due to the work of reading specialists, with exceptional ratings in staff understanding of the Science of Reading's influence on the shift to Structured Literacy (97% a great deal), the utilization of decodable text (96%), and the use of formative and diagnostic data to adjust and inform instruction (95% respectively).



Conclusions

Summary of Key Findings - Continued



Challenges and Upgrades

Although the overall findings were positive, there were reported challenges. The top reported challenges included not having enough time to deliver the amount of PL to the staff, especially with competing priorities within the school and not having a dedicated time to deliver PL to school staff. Another challenge was time taken away from their role to fulfill other duties within the school, especially related to testing and covering for teacher absences. These themes were also the top challenges reported by administrators. Some reading specialists also reported the challenge of shifting teachers' thinking (and some administrators) to the new literacy program.

Some administrators offered recommended changes that directly aligned with the reported challenges. They recommended hiring a school testing coordinator to relieve the reading specialist and other staff of these duties and addressing the substitute teacher shortage problem by hiring more substitutes or a permanent substitute for each school. Some would also like to see the reading specialists not attend so many meetings and trainings that take them away from supporting the school.

Additionally, almost two-thirds (65%) of reading specialists reported that the eight extra work days provided last summer were insufficient to fulfill their role. Three of the days are used for ILT Summer Leadership, and additional days are used for core team planning and attendance to training, leaving little time left to manage the book room and materials as well as fulfill other duties over the summer.



Recommendations



1

Provide ways for the reading specialists to have enough designated time to deliver PL to their school staff.

In an open-ended question regarding implementation challenges, reading specialists cited the time for delivery of PL to their school staff as the most significant issue. They highlighted the lack of scheduled time and other competing demands within their school, forcing them to selectively present portions of the content. Research recommends that to transform teaching practices and student learning, PL needs to be sustained and offer multiple opportunities for teachers to engage in learning around a single set of concepts or practices (Darling-Hammond, et. al., 2017). Furthermore, when PL is incomplete, ensuring the faithful implementation of essential MCPS initiatives becomes challenging.

2

Expand professional learning opportunities to include topics of interest, particularly writing.

Most responding reading specialists (79%) reported writing as a future topic of interest for professional learning. In addition, about 40% reported interest in how to support Emergent Multilingual Learners in SL and morphology as topics. Additionally, some staff remarked on the need for more guidance and explicit instruction for Grades 3–5.

3

Create professional learning communities for reading specialists by similar schools.

A large majority of reading specialists (87%) reported that collaboration with other reading specialists was one of the most beneficial learning formats. Specialists also shared that having the opportunity to meet and collaborate with other reading specialists during PL was a valuable factor supporting their work. Consider creating professional learning communities for reading specialists who serve similar school communities, so they have more opportunities to share best practices and approaches to improve literacy instruction.



Recommendations



4

Explore and address reasons some school staff seem more hesitant to make the shift to Structured Literacy.

Reading specialists encountered challenges with teacher buy-in, shifting teachers' thinking from the balanced literacy mindset to Structured Literacy, or lack of team participation in some schools. Some also pointed to a lack disconnect and lack of support from some administrators (n=21). Additionally, the ELA team reported that the work associated with implementing the role and responsibilities of the reading specialists, including a new literacy program, were challenging for some school staff. They also reported that the influence of school administration was critical to a successful shift in the reading specialist role.



5

Conduct a feasibility study to hire school-level testing coordinators.

Both reading specialists and school administrators identified the management and support of testing as a significant challenge. Almost eight of ten reading specialists reported that they serve as their schools' testing coordinator some or all the time and elaborated on the challenge in an open-ended question. Administrators acknowledged the burden placed on reading specialists and other staff members due to the multitude of testing requirements. They emphasized the importance of hiring a dedicated testing coordinator who could assume the responsibility of managing the various assessments. This additional position would alleviate the workload and enable reading specialists, and other staff, to focus on their primary job responsibilities. Other recent MCPS studies on Staff Development Teachers (Maina, Wilson, and Wolanin, 2023) and single school administrators (Price, 2023), also highlighted the need for a designated testing administrator at the school-level.



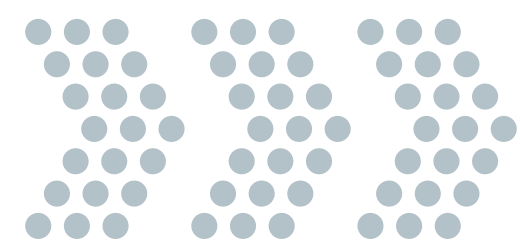
6

Provide additional work days during the summer for reading specialists.

Almost two-thirds (65%) of reading specialists reported that the eight extra work days provided last summer were not enough time to close the year and prepare for next year. Three of the days are used for ILT Summer Leadership, and additional days are used for core team planning and attendance to trainings. They remarked they need additional time to manage materials and the school book room as well as other duties over the summer. Many pointed out that they are part of ILT, and that other positions on the ILT, such as the SDT, counselors, and media specialists, receive more days in the summer.



Recommendations



7

Continue to collaborate with other MCPS offices to align messaging to schools.

The ELA Team reported that cross-office collaboration is key to clarifying communication and aligning work across the system. Additional work can be done in this area because some reading specialists reported, in an open-ended question, conflicting priorities and messaging between TWI, ELA, central office, and school administrators. Additionally, some administrators suggested a need for better messaging alignment between ELA, AEI, and EIU.



8

Continue efforts to solve the school-level substitute shortage.

More than one-fourth (27%) of reading specialists reported serving as a classroom substitute once or twice a week or more frequently. Reading specialists and administrators reported being pulled to cover classrooms due to frequent teacher absences as a top challenge. The need for substitutes also affects other non-classroom staff, who are frequently pulled to cover classrooms. Administrators suggested building a bigger pool of substitutes and hiring a permanent substitute position for each school to help alleviate disruption.

A recent article highlighted the growing issue of substitute teacher shortages at MCPS, where 45% (75,000 out of 164,000) of requests for short-term substitute teachers were not fulfilled. This is a stark increase from 2019 when only 19% of requests were unmet (Moco360, 2023).

Several studies have proposed potential solutions to this problem and are briefly reviewed in Appendix A. These studies suggest a multi-faceted approach to the substitute teacher shortage, emphasizing the need for better compensation, professional development, strategic recruitment, stronger support systems, and efficient use of data analysis.



CONTINUE IMPLEMENTATION

Results from this study support the continuation of a full-time reading specialist, serving as a literacy coach, at every school. Findings revealed substantial progress towards increasing teacher capacity to implement Structured Literacy and are aligned with program goals and the Academic Excellence pillar of the MCPS Strategic Plan.



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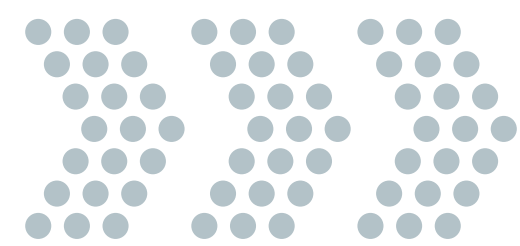
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Brief Literature Review: Substitute Teacher Shortage Solutions

A recent article highlighted the growing issue of substitute teacher shortages at Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS), where 45% (75,000 out of 164,000) of requests for short-term substitute teachers were not fulfilled. This is a stark increase from 2019, when only 19% of requests were unmet (Moco360, 2023). This does not include the need for long-term substitutes, also in short supply. Several studies have proposed potential solutions to this problem, which are briefly reviewed below and may have already been considered by MCPS.

According to a study of administrators by the EdWeek Research Center, five solutions emerged as ways to improve the substitute teaching shortage: increasing pay, providing professional development for substitutes, assigning substitutes with expertise in the field of the absent teacher, enhancing recruitment efforts, and a grow-your-own approach. The study emphasized professional development centered on effective teaching strategies and classroom management. The grow-your-own approach, resembling a similar strategy for full-time teachers, targets community-committed individuals like parents and college students (Kelly Education, 2020).

The Hechinger report highlighted the model of "floaters," permanent substitutes with benefits responsible for daily vacancy needs (Morton, 2022). This approach echoes/parallels the findings from the Teaching Channel (2022) which suggests that substitutes often express a need for better support and training and communication networks for substitute teachers. They offer a customized teacher channel site for resources to support substitute teachers (Teaching Channel, 2022).

An EdWeek opinion article advocated removing barriers for student teachers to serve as substitutes, thus providing them with practical teaching experience while addressing the shortage. (EdWeek, 2022). Finally, in a recent study of Chicago schools, researchers found that providing financial incentives, like a stipend, for substitutes in hard-to-staff schools, could be a promising solution (Kraft, Falken, Jorden, 2023.)

Frontline Education emphasized data analysis to diagnose the root cause of district substitute shortages. They suggest first, investigating whether teacher absenteeism are more than the national average (i.e. 11 times per school year) and if so, then consider whether leave policies are followed or whether timing of the absences is the problem. Additionally, districts should calculate the percentage of substitutes who are actively accepting jobs and their average number of workdays to uncover if engagement or retention is the key issue rather than a problem in hiring. They also encourage surveying substitutes to understand their motivations and reasons for accepting jobs or not. Finally, they suggest examining the teacher-to-substitute ratio to evaluate an overall staffing strategy by dividing the total number of teachers who would require a sub if they were absent by the total number of substitute teachers in the pool. (Frontline Education, 2023).

In summary, the literature proposes a multi-faceted approach to the substitute teacher shortage, emphasizing the need for better compensation, professional development, strategic recruitment, stronger support systems, and efficient use of data analysis.