

3-2023

Improving Fidelity of Implementation of a Tier I Phonics Program: an Improvement Science Study

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IMPROVING FIDELITY OF IMPLEMENTATION OF A TIER 1 PHONICS PROGRAM:

AN IMPROVEMENT SCIENCE STUDY

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A Dissertation Presented to the Faculty of the
Doctor of Educational Leadership Department

in partial fulfillment for the degree of

Doctor of Education

George Fox University

April 2023



GEORGE FOX
UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION | EdD

IMPROVING FIDELITY OF IMPLEMENTATION OF A TIER I PHONICS PROGRAM: AN IMPROVEMENT SCIENCE STUDY, a Doctoral research project prepared by DAVID MACK in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Education degree in Educational Leadership.

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to enhance the fidelity of the Tier 1 phonics program at an elementary school in Southwest Bakersfield, California. I used an explanatory mixed methods approach and the Improvement Science Dissertation in Practice as the research design. To improve the implementation fidelity of the Tier 1 phonics program, I employed the plan-do-study-act framework. During the cycle, the network improvement community convened to proactively identify problems and develop change ideas to enhance the overall fidelity of implementation of the Tier 1 phonics program. The study also involved a root cause analysis to determine the underlying issues responsible for the inadequate fidelity with which the Tier 1 phonics program had been implemented. The study conducted a systematic observation of 12 teachers of kindergarten to Grade 3 to assess the implementation of all program components. Furthermore, a pre- and postintervention interview protocol was used to gather information from the participating teachers on instructional delivery time, required resources, necessary support systems, progress reporting, and modifications to implement the intervention with fidelity. The results of the survey data indicated an increase in implementation fidelity after the network improvement community implemented the change ideas.

Acknowledgments

As I reflect on my journey as an educational leader, my heart swells with gratitude for those who supported me along the way. I am deeply indebted to the George Fox University Doctor of Education department for allowing me to grow as a scholar–practitioner in the realm of improvement science. Without their guidance, I would not be the scholar–practitioner I am today.

I am particularly grateful to my dissertation chair, Dr. Dane Joseph, who has been an unwavering source of support and encouragement throughout this journey. His thoughtful approach and motivational words were a beacon of light during the darkest moments of my research.

My family, especially my beloved wife, Angie Mack, has encouraged me throughout each step of this process. Angie’s unwavering support and belief in my abilities were the driving force that kept me going. I will forever cherish her countless hours proofreading my writing and providing feedback that pushed me to do my best.

I am also grateful to my parents, Lyle and Barbara Mack, who have been the most significant role models in my life and career as an educator. My father’s legacy in education inspires me to strive for excellence and to make a difference in the lives of the students I serve. My mother’s dedication to lifelong education and her delight in helping to expand the horizon for children has sparked my love of learning. I have reached this point in my education in the loving memory of my mother.

To my daughters, Sandy and Janie, I owe a debt of gratitude for their patience and for reminding me of the importance of family. Their love and support were my refuge from the academic demands that often threatened to overwhelm me.

I am grateful to Dr. Chris Deason for his unwavering support and guidance, which pushed me to become a more scholarly writer. I cannot forget to thank the study participants and the fantastic team of educators who made up my network improvement community. Their unwavering commitment to the Tier 1 phonics program and willingness to learn alongside me and jump headfirst into the task was invaluable.

Finally, I thank my savior, Jesus Christ, for his grace and mercy, which sustain me daily. His wonderful creation humbles me, and I pray that all may come to know the Lord's saving grace. As I look back on this journey, I am deeply grateful for those who believed in me, supported me, and loved me through it all. Thank you all from the bottom of my heart.

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Chapter 1: Problem and Aim of the Project

Currently, teachers at an elementary school district in Southeast Bakersfield, California, are not implementing the Tier I phonics program with fidelity. There are 640 students enrolled at the elementary level, as indicated by the data provided by the California School Dashboard (California Department of Education 2022). The majority of these children (86.7%) come from low-income families, and almost one-third are English language learners (30.5%) (California Department of Education 2022). The Acadience reading assessment evaluated the students' reading growth throughout the 2021–22 school year at the elementary level. Acadience assessment is an empirically derived criterion-referenced diagnostic to show if there is adequate reading progress (Gray et al., 2021). If the Tier I phonics program at the school I lead is not implemented with fidelity, there may be a lack of evidence to measure the extent to which the evidence-based intervention (EBI) is working as intended.

The aim of this study was to improve the implementation of the Tier 1 phonics program with fidelity at an elementary school located in Southeast Bakersfield, California. A systematic observation of the classrooms was conducted to assess the implementation of all program components by 12 teachers of kindergarten to Grade 3. The baseline observation revealed that the teachers spent 1 hr or more delivering the daily lessons of the Tier 1 phonics program. The objective of this study was to reduce the instructional delivery time to 30 min. A pre- and postintervention interview protocol was used to gather information from the participating teachers on instructional delivery time, resources needed, required support system, progress reporting, and modifications to implement the intervention with fidelity. I am a district administrator for the school district where the elementary school is located.

Educational leaders in charge of instruction must work tirelessly to improve the outcomes for their student groups. One specific approach that leaders take to improve the outcomes for their students is to implement interventions supported by evidence. In addition, it is necessary to use EBIs for federal education initiatives. These include No Child Left Behind, The Every Student Succeeds Act, and various other state and federal funds given to school districts to address learning loss after the COVID-19 pandemic. Instructional leaders should put their utmost effort into the intervention to improve their students' academic outcomes because using EBIs is mandatory.

EBIs are mandated to be implemented in schools so students can perform better on standardized tests and schools can address the learning loss caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and receive funding from their respective state and federal governments (California Department of Education, n.d.). The instructional leaders and members of the local school boards make judgments regarding the future of their local educational agency based on the data analyzed from EBIs. Unfortunately, there may be little evidence that an implemented EBI produces the findings the local education leaders are examining due to a lack of following fidelity (i.e., adherence to the EBIs). Dane and Schneider (1998) reviewed 139 studies and found that lower adherence to the implemented program was often associated with poor outcomes: Programs that had a higher rate of adherence to fidelity outperformed interventions with lower adherence to the fidelity of the program. Dane and Schneider concluded that a significant effect on outcome could be linked to adherence to the protocol.

The term *implementation fidelity* refers to how interventions are implemented compared to their original design (R. Fisher et al., 2014). For example, if a phonics-based intervention is designed for daily use but a reading intervention teacher adapts it to work with a pull-out group

once a week, the failure to adhere to the original design may limit the benefits of the intervention (Elliott & Mihalic, 2004). Dane and Schneider (1998) identified five factors that affect fidelity: adherence, exposure, quality of delivery, differentiation, and participant responsiveness.

Adherence measures the extent to which the implemented program adheres to the prescribed content, frequency, and duration. *Exposure* refers to the participant's engagement with the program and can be measured in terms of the number of sessions taken, their length, and the number of times they attend. *Quality of delivery* refers to how closely an implementer aligns materials with the theoretical framework of the intervention. *Differentiation* is the unique quality of the intervention that is essential for achieving the set goals. Finally, *participant responsiveness* refers to the participant's level of engagement and involvement.

Brown (2018) emphasized that the fidelity of implementation requires the involvement of instructional leaders. Feedback and involvement from instructional leaders have a direct impact on the intervention's fidelity and learning outcomes (Fallon & Kurtz, 2019). The accuracy of a teacher's adherence to program implementation affects fidelity as well (Klaft & Coddling, 2022). According to Klaft and Coddling (2022), teachers must use 80% of the intervention's components correctly to achieve effective adherence. The absence of training, monitoring, and clear expectations can prevent teachers from implementing EBIs as prescribed (Brown, 2018). Teachers' perceptions about the need for more or less time for different interventions can also influence adherence to program implementation (Dane & Schneider, 1998). Before the 1970s, researchers saw no need to investigate fidelity; they assumed that program implementation would naturally exhibit high fidelity, with implementers using the innovation in the same way as early adopters (O'Donnell, 2008).

Klaft and Coddling (2022) found that teachers demonstrated poor and inconsistent levels of implementation fidelity. Regular supervision is necessary to improve fidelity (Brown, 2018). Regular contact with project supervisors, as some have suggested, increases the sense of accountability among implementers. Increased monitoring also helps providers find solutions to problems that arise during the implementation of EBIs (McHugo et al., 1999). This highlights the importance of monitoring the implementation of EBIs, such as the Tier 1 phonics program at an elementary school in Southeast Bakersfield, California.

Tier 1 Phonics Program and Role of Leadership

The Southeast Bakersfield, California, school uses the Tier 1 phonics program as a crucial component of its literacy program. The program acts as a phonics-and-word-study strand that enhances the other vital strands of the literacy curriculum. The program instructs students in important tasks and topics such as read-alouds, oral language, vocabulary development, reading of authentic texts, comprehension instruction, writing strategies, and daily and scripted instructional practice. The Tier 1 phonics program requires strict adherence to detailed routines, including instruction in phonological awareness from kindergarten to third grade. It focuses on teaching letter–sound correspondence, letter formation, print concepts, explicit consonant-vowel-consonant word blending, and hands-on phonics patterns. The program emphasizes writing word chains, writing short responses, practicing sound-spelling patterns, improving word fluency, enhancing phrase fluency, and applying phonics knowledge to texts.

Student engagement is also at the forefront of the program's design. Various strategies are incorporated into the lesson plans for the Tier 1 phonics program. Engagement strategies keep students interested in the material and direct their attention to the essential visual information that facilitates an automatic recognition and reading of phonics patterns. Some

examples of engagement strategies are using gestures to differentiate the different syllable types, making hand-on-phonics chip movements to improve phonemic awareness, and writing words in a word chain to observe the difference in spelling. Other engagement strategies of the Tier 1 phonics program include analyzing how words change meaning by writing the prefixes in boxes surrounding Latin root or Anglo-Saxon base words. The structure of the Tier 1 program consists of a systematic lesson that is 20 min long, 5 days a week. The lessons begin with a phonemic awareness warm-up, daily phonics practice, sound-spelling mapping, reading fluency, sentence dictation, reading passages, and comprehension questions.

Phonics and phonemic awareness are often confused for each other, but they refer to distinct concepts (Ehri et al., 2001). A strong understanding of phonemic awareness is crucial for correct speech. For instance, the word “cat” is made up of three phonemes: /k/, /a/, and /t/ (Yopp, 1992). Phonemic awareness instruction does not focus on letters or graphemes but instead on the speech sounds, or *phonemes*, that make up words. Through phonemic awareness instruction, students learn to blend and segment words, identify initial and final sounds, and separate words into their onset and rhyme components (Mesmer & Kamback, 2022). In contrast, phonics instruction examines the relationship between phonemes and their written representation, the graphemes. The Tier I phonics program integrates phonemic awareness by incorporating written representations of speech sounds (Ehri, 2020). In this program, students learn to make connections between sounds and letters in a systematic and explicit manner (Lonigan & Shanahan, 2010).

Reading scientists agree that mastering the relationship between speech sounds and print is crucial for early reading success (Buckingham, 2020). The teaching approach used to help students decode and read words is called systematic phonics. In this approach, students learn

how written words' graphemes correspond to the speech sounds, or phonemes, used in spoken words (Buckingham, 2020).

Context of the Tier 1 Phonics Program

The idea of implementation fidelity as an essential factor in introducing EBIs is a critical factor when implementing a reading intervention at an elementary school because school leaders must be able to decide whether interventions are working as intended. The issue at hand ought to be how phonics instruction should be integrated as part of a comprehensive literacy plan in a time-efficient and effective way for all students (Blevins, 2019). Following a phonics program with fidelity may ensure that the program is promoting learning gains. Effective educators are aware that systematic phonics instruction yields the best results and calls for using a scope and sequence list (Mesmer & Kambach, 2022).

Scope and sequence refer to the concepts, themes, and overall content to be taught in a curriculum (Fishers One, 2021). Scope and sequence include specific materials, courses, or lesson plans. Scope involves skill content and development areas, whereas sequence refers to the gradual order in which these abilities are taught. Following a scope and sequence with fidelity allows learners to develop their learning through systematic phonics instruction (Ehri, 2022).

Conducting fidelity implementation assessments is essential to determine whether practitioners implement EBIs in a manner that is consistent with the intentions of their developers (Century et al., 2010). The practice of documenting and understanding the implementation process of an EBI is beneficial to improve and strengthen both research and practice of EBI fidelity (Lloyd et al., 2013). In addition, the research on implementation fidelity provides insight into the reasons and factors that could explain the presence or absence of

intervention effects (Dusenbury et al., 2003). Evaluating implementation fidelity can illuminate the areas of improvement needed (Dusenbury et al., 2003).

Whether or not an EBI was carried out in the manner that was intended appears to be a straightforward one; however, throughout the years, many variations of fidelity have been developed (Lemire et al., 2022). Established frameworks may help implementers identify local adaptations that do not contradict the underlying theory of the EBI. Established frameworks can also help researchers better understand the relationship between implementation fidelity and outcomes (O'Donnell, 2008). The issue of fidelity in EBIs is complex and has been approached from various perspectives. The framework proposed by Dane and Schneider (1998) identified five dimensions of fidelity and has been widely used to guide implementation fidelity. Meanwhile, O'Donnell (2008) suggested that a framework based on each individual EBI may be helpful to better understand the relationship between fidelity and outcomes and to identify local adaptations that do not contradict the underlying theory of the EBI. Rather than contradicting each other, the two approaches can be seen as complementary. The framework proposed by Dane and Schneider provided a general guide for implementing fidelity across various EBIs, whereas the approach suggested by O'Donnell proposed tailored frameworks to capture the nuances of fidelity and its relationship with outcomes in individual EBIs. Both approaches may ensure that EBIs are implemented with fidelity and can lead to positive outcomes.

Century et al. (2010) argued that there should be a conceptual framework that focuses on fidelity and the specific topic that focuses on procedural, educative, pedagogical, and student engagement. The procedural component of an intervention is the organizing elements that communicate to the user in the most fundamental sense what they should be doing (Century et al., 2010). The developers of EBIs understand that users need a particular body of knowledge to

enact the intervention as intended (Century et al., 2010). The pedagogical component represents the actions, behaviors, and interactions the user expects to engage in when enacting the intervention, including the user's interactions with the participants and recipients of the intervention. Finally, student engagement is the actions, behaviors, and interactions the instructor should engage in with pupils.

The framework for an EBI should be multidimensional and address the careful examination of the fidelity of implementation and the factors that influence the fidelity of implementation, such as the teachers' and instructional leaders' perception of the EBI. This study will look at the implementation of a Tier 1 phonics program, monitor the frequency and duration with which the program is used, and monitor the perception of the teachers implementing the phonics program. The literature guides of Dane and Schneider (1998) and O'Donnell (2008) focused on the importance of time in practice with the intervention regarding the frequency and duration of the given intervention. The teachers' and instructional leaders' perception of the program will also impact the program's implementation fidelity.

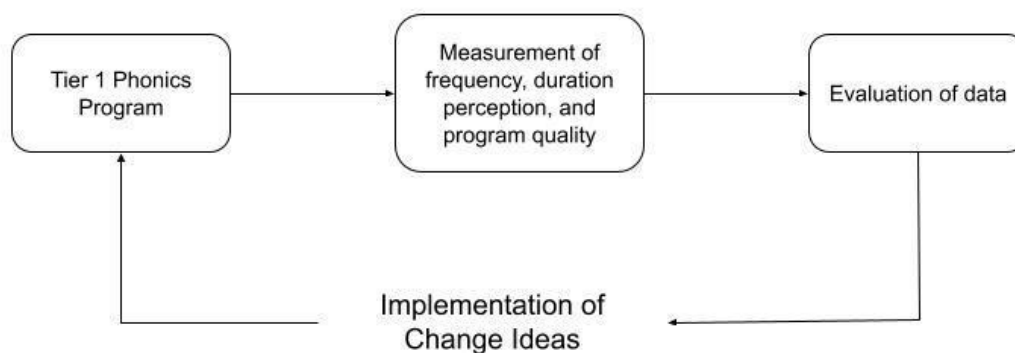
To evaluate the effectiveness, adherence, and frequency of the Tier 1 phonics program, I used an improvement science approach using a network improvement community (NIC). A NIC, consisting of a team of educators, examined the program's implementation by assessing its frequency, duration, and perception. A NIC is a deliberately structured social organization with a specific problem-solving focus, membership norms, roles and responsibilities, and the maintenance of narratives that describe its purpose and why membership is critical (Bryk, 2020).

Consistent and ongoing supervision has been identified as a crucial element in achieving fidelity in implementation (Dane & Schneider, 1998). To monitor implementation fidelity, it is important to measure adherence to the program, evaluate fidelity outcomes, and make

suggestions for improvement. Figure 1 illustrates a continuous improvement cycle that can be used to study and improve implementation fidelity. By collecting data on frequency, duration, perception, and program quality, it is possible to identify areas for improvement and create a plan of action to enact change. This cycle of improvement can be applied to monitoring implementation fidelity in a variety of contexts, not just for the Tier 1 phonics program specifically. The continuous improvement cycle is a process for achieving better performance and outcomes over time (Langley et al., 2009). By using this cycle of improvement to monitor implementation fidelity, organizations can identify opportunities for improvement, test and implement changes, and evaluate the impact of those changes to achieve better outcomes over time (Langley et al., 2009).

Figure 1

Continuous Improvement Cycle of a Tier 1 Phonics Program

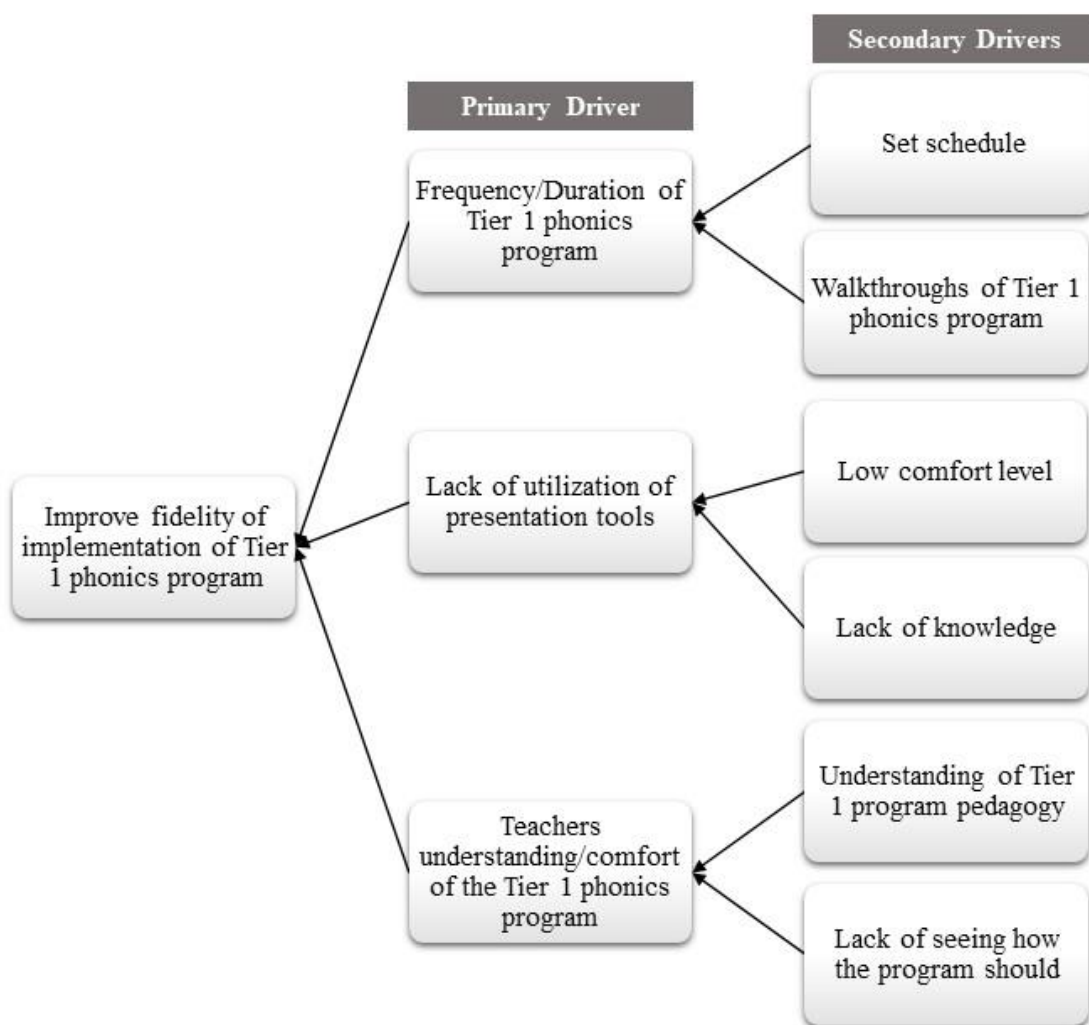


The first step that the NIC took in developing this Improvement Science Dissertation in Practice (ISDIP) was to analyze the Acadience scores obtained at the beginning of the 2022-2023 school year as well as the data collected from interviews with teachers who were implementing

the Tier 1 phonics program. After the analysis, the NIC conducted a root cause analysis. The NIC recognized a problem at the school site with a variance in adherence to the Tier 1 phonics program, exposure to it, and the quality of its delivery (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

Driver Diagram



Significance of the Study

This study may improve the literature on EBIs and program fidelity in several ways. It can serve as a model for other schools and educational leaders. It also highlights the importance of monitoring the implementation of EBIs and the five factors that affect implementation fidelity, which can inform future research on program implementation and effectiveness. The study can also contribute to the literature on NICs and their role in evaluating program implementation and effectiveness. Overall, the study provides practical insights and strategies for improving the implementation of EBIs, which can improve the literature and inform future research and practice.

Implementing the Tier I phonics program with fidelity can improve student learning and educational practices for teachers. The practical and empirical approach used in this study can validate the effectiveness of EBIs and offer useful lessons for future program revisions. Investigating implementation fidelity, including exposure, adherence, and quality, can benefit both faculty and students and ensure trustworthy data collection on the effectiveness of EBIs. Improving the measurement and reporting of implementation fidelity is essential to understanding the relationship between intervention effects and implementation quality, as observed effects may be influenced by implementation fidelity. The study by Akiba et al. (2022) highlighted the importance of measuring and reporting implementation fidelity to enhance implementation quality. Overall, this study can enhance the implementation fidelity of the Tier 1 phonics program and provide valuable insights for future program implementation.

Ethical Considerations

Conducting teacher interviews and surveys may create an imbalance of power. As a former site principal and current district administrator, I assured the instructors that participation

in the improvement science study would not affect their professional status. I obtained signed consent forms from each teacher prior to conducting interviews or surveys and informed them of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without any further obligation. Any educator who declined to participate was excluded from the study.

Qualitative researchers are not expected to achieve complete objectivity, nor is it necessarily desirable. Instead, researchers are required to set aside their preconceptions to allow for the genuine experiences of the participants to be conveyed in the analysis and reporting of the study (Ahern, 1999). Therefore, in this study, I had to set aside my assumptions and experiences to avoid any undue bias in the research and findings

As part of this study, I used the Acadience test score analysis as a student participation project. I took steps to ensure the confidentiality of the data by removing any identifiable information, and the NIC examined the data at the grade and school levels. To comply with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, I used both individualized and disaggregated data in the study.

Recognizing the potential power imbalance and discomfort that participants may experience in this study, I have disclosed my experience as both a district-level administrator and a site principal. Such power differentials may affect the ability of individuals to make ethical judgments, as noted by Gibson et al. (2014).

Furthermore, people in positions of authority tend to pay more attention to information that supports their opinions (Gibson et al., 2014). To minimize any discomfort or bias, instructors were reminded that I am not their supervisor and will not participate in any professional evaluations of their work. Additionally, I kept an open mind during the interviews and set aside

my assumptions. All teachers who were surveyed and interviewed provided explicit agreement, and they were free to withdraw from the study at any point during the research.

Definition of Terms

Driver diagram is a visual representation of a team's theory of what propels or aids in the accomplishment of a project goal.

Evidence-based intervention (EBI) is an intervention treatment that has been proven effective to some degree through outcome evaluations.

Improvement science is the use of small, measurable, and tailored changes to address specific problems in an educational environment and assist in identifying their root causes.

Network improvement community (NIC) is an intentionally designed social organization with a distinct problem-solving focus; roles, responsibilities, and membership norms; and the upkeep of narratives that detail what it is about and why membership is essential.

Phonics is a method of teaching beginners to read and pronounce words by learning the value of letters, letter groups, and especially syllables.

Phoneme is any of the abstract units of the phonetic system of a language that corresponds to a set of similar speech sounds, which are perceived to be a single, distinctive sound in the language.

Phonemic awareness is the ability to identify and manipulate individual sounds in spoken words.

Root cause analysis is an improvement science strategy used to systematically examine the underlying reasons for a current problem.

Chapter 2: Methodology and Research Design

The overarching plan used an explanatory mixed methods approach and applied the ISDIP research design. ISDIP, as described by Crow et al. (2019), refers to a systematic process of using improvement frameworks to enhance educational contexts and improve school leaders' capacity for institutional and organizational improvement. I used the plan-do-study-act (PDSA) framework (Figure 3), as described by Crow et al. (2019), as the conceptual framework. The PDSA framework guides institutions in making ongoing programmatic decisions by encouraging members of the organization to learn about the problem and its causes, collect data to make informed decisions, and make incremental improvements on a continual basis to the program.

Figure 3

PDSA Framework



In a practical sense, problems are rarely solved by a single individual (Crow et al., 2019). For example, EBIs are constantly being implemented in K–12 schools. For this reason, it is important to ensure EBIs are implemented with fidelity. Large sums of money are spent on solutions, and time is put into faculty training without anyone questioning why (M. Fisher, 2022). Rather than being in a reactive process, improvement science requires a team.

Using an improvement science process, a NIC was used in conjunction with the PDSA framework to leverage a way to improve the implementation fidelity of a Tier 1 phonics program. The essential characteristics that define a NIC are a well-specified common aim; a thorough understanding of the problem with a shared working theory to improve it; a method of improvement research to develop, test, and refine interventions; and an ability to implement interventions into the field (Bryk et al., 2015).

The NIC relied on the PDSA framework to facilitate and guide the planning, implementation, and analysis of a Tier 1 phonics program. The NIC chose to take a continuous improvement science approach to ensure that the new Tier 1 phonics program was implemented with fidelity. The NIC followed a 90-day PDSA cycle to study the implementation of the Tier 1 phonics program put in place by the district. Education and enhancement of understanding must focus on the problems at hand and their underlying causes. The PDSA method calls for the organization's NIC to examine the issue by collecting data and using it to make informed decisions and programmatic enhancements (Crow et al., 2019).

The NIC relied on a mix of qualitative and quantitative data in their planning. The qualitative data includes pre- and postintervention interviews from participating teachers. The quantitative data used in the study involved weekly surveys given to the participating teachers measuring their weekly frequency and duration of the Tier 1 phonics program to determine whether they were meeting the weekly objectives. (For surveys, see in Appendix B.) In addition, the study examined Acadience composite reading scores from 2018 to 2022 by comparing the average scores of each grade level at the beginning of the year. The NIC used an improvement science process called root cause analysis (RCA). An RCA is a systematic and logical examination of the underlying reasons for a current problem (Crow et al., 2019). For example,

the NIC conducted an RCA to determine the underlying issues responsible for the low fidelity with which the Tier 1 phonics program had been implemented.

Population and Sampling

The population was all K–3 teachers in the district I lead. I purposefully sampled 12 elementary teachers from an elementary school in Southeast Bakersfield, California. A purposeful criterion sample was used based on the teacher’s implementation of the new Tier 1 phonics program. The participants consisted of three kindergarten, three first grade, two second grade, and four third grade teachers, all of whom were female. Table 1 shows that teachers were between the ages of 20 and 60, with varying levels of experience. The highest amount of experience reported was 20+ years. On average, the class size for each grade was 23 students, with the majority coming from low-income households (86.7%); one-third were classified as English language learners (30.5%). Second grade students in this school began their educational careers with distance learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic, because the school was closed and could not provide in-person instruction.

Table 1

Teacher Participant Demographics

Grade taught	Age range	Teaching experience (years)
Kindergarten	Late 20s	10 or less
Kindergarten	Late 20s	5 or less
Kindergarten	30s	10 or less
1	Early 20s	<1
1	Early 20s	<1
1	50s	20+
2	50s	20+

Grade taught	Age range	Teaching experience (years)
2	50s	15
3	40s	20+
3	30s	5 or less
3	60s	15+
3	40s	<1

Note. All participants were female.

The NIC team consisted of six members: four women and two men, who were educational leaders from the school and district. The team included a site principal, coordinator of student support, chief administrator of business, reading specialist, English learner teacher on special assignment, and assistant superintendent of instruction. The members' ages ranged from 30s to 40s, and their experience ranged from 5+ years to 20+ years. Table 2 presents the NIC composition. During the 90-day study, the NIC team held both in-person and teleconference meetings. Participation of all NIC members was voluntary.

Table 2

NIC Professional Positions

Professional position	Gender	Age range	Experience (years)
Site principal	Female	40s	20+
Coordinator of student support	Female	30s	5+
Chief administrator of business	Male	30s	15+
Reading specialist	Female	30s	15+
English learner TOSA	Female	30s	10+
Assistant superintendent of instruction	Male	40s	20+

Note. TOSA = teacher on special assignment.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

Akiba et al. (2022) posited that implementation research is commonly used to improve practices, including adherence, through strategies such as training, coaching, and audit and feedback methods. Adherence to the Tier 1 phonics program, measured by duration and frequency, was evaluated in this study. Duration was measured in terms of the time spent on the Tier 1 phonics curriculum each day, and frequency was measured by the number of days per week the program was used.

In this improvement science study, additional qualitative factors were measured, including the participating teachers' perceptions of their understanding and comfort with the Tier 1 phonics program. The implementer's perceived belief in the intervention was evaluated based on the research conducted by Dane and Schneider (1998); they found that the level of adherence to an intervention is affected by the implementer's perceived belief in it.

Instrumentation for Data Collection

In order to determine the frequency of the Tier 1 phonics program that was being carried out at the school and its overall duration, a weekly check-in survey was used. The weekly check-in survey consisted of three questions.

1. What grade level do you teach?
2. How many days this week did you utilize the new Tier 1 phonics program?
3. What was the duration of your lesson this week?

These three questions were used to capture the grade level of the teachers, the adherence, and exposure to the Tier 1 phonics program with a quick survey. Participating teachers completed the survey digitally at the end of each week during the 90-day PDSA cycle. All

weekly check-in surveys were anonymous. The first check-in survey was given in September 2022.

During the 90-day PDSA cycle, pre- and postintervention interview protocol instruments were used. All of the participating teachers were involved in the interview protocol. The preintervention interview protocol occurred in September 2022, and the postintervention interview protocol occurred in December 2022. A semistructured approach was used to conduct the interviews in person. The pre- and postintervention interview questions are listed below.

1. What is your level of knowledge and/or experience with implementing the phonics program?
2. Explain the Tier 1 phonics program model of instruction.
3. How frequently do you utilize the phonics program with your students?
4. What resources are available to you that assist you in implementing the phonics program?
5. Is there a system of support for teachers if they need assistance in implementing the phonics program?
6. How is progress shared with school leaders to determine if the program is implemented as intended?
7. What resources or supports do you feel you need to implement the phonics program with fidelity?
8. What aspects of the implementation do you feel need to be modified?
9. Are there any problems associated with implementing the new phonics program with fidelity? If so, please explain.

10. Is there anything else that you would like to add regarding the fidelity of implementing the new phonics program?

The interview protocols were revised during the postintervention interview by adding three qualitative questions:

11. What do you believe would best support the implementation of the Tier 1 phonics program?
12. Did you participate in the peer observations? If yes, was it helpful?
13. How did the knowledge of being monitored affect the fidelity of implementation of the Tier 1 phonics program?

The NIC team also used Acadience scores to measure the students' early literacy skills. The NIC analyzed the Acadience composite scores at the beginning of the year. The Acadience assessment is an empirically derived criterion-referenced assessment to show if adequate reading progress is being made (Gray et al., 2021). The school site in the study regularly collects Acadience assessments.

Procedures Used for Analyzing the Data

Quantitative data were collected from the Acadience database to analyze early literacy test scores. Beginning-of-the-year (BOY) composite test scores from 2018 to 2022 were retrieved for each grade level from kindergarten to third grade. Average composite scores for each grade level were calculated and used for data analysis. Additionally, the composite scores from 2018 to 2020 were compared to the composite scores from 2021 to 2022. This split was based on pre-COVID and post-COVID test scores. The *t* test was used to compare the means of the two groups and determine whether there was a significant difference between them. The Acadience database provided the necessary information for the NIC team to conduct the study.

Data from the qualitative interviews were coded, sorted, and analyzed to look for saturation of patterns. In order to facilitate the process of sorting, categories for coding were decided upon before the data analysis was performed. Because specific patterns emerged in the data but did not neatly fall into any preidentified coding categories, additional codes had to be generated and implemented. The NIC team was able to make observations regarding potential areas of improvement after visualizations replaced the qualitative data.

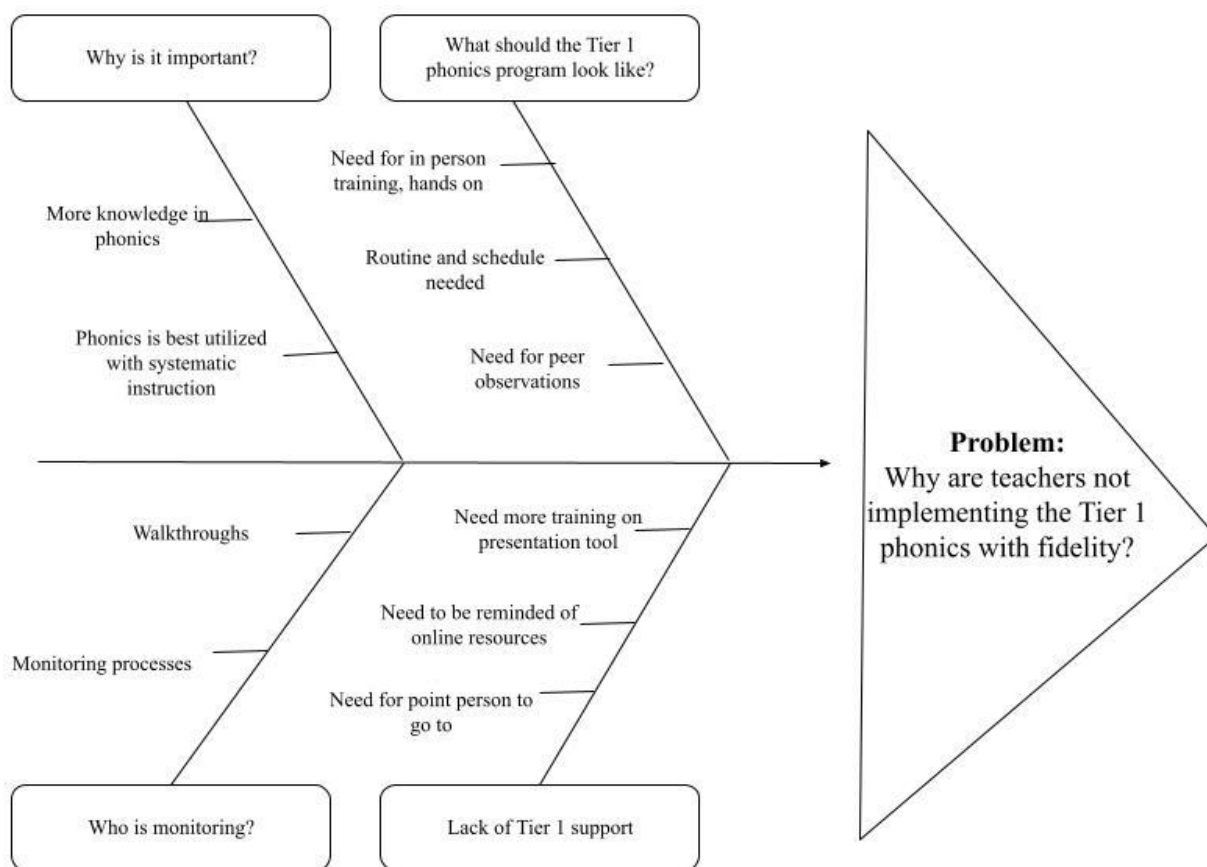
After each survey was completed for the week, the quantitative data from the weekly check-ins were entered into a spreadsheet. The NIC evaluated the average frequency and duration of the implementation of the Tier 1 phonics program. In October, these data were presented to the NIC team to help generate ideas for improving the fidelity of the implementation.

Root Cause Analysis (RCA)

The NIC met for the first time on September 13, 2022, with all six team members present. The NIC used a fishbone diagram to perform an RCA to develop a collaborative strategy for approaching the issue of practice. The NIC identified four topics to investigate to address the lack of implementation fidelity. The four topics were the necessity of the Tier 1 program, the desired appearance of the program, the lack of support for the Tier 1 phonics program, and the need for a monitoring mechanism for the Tier 1 phonics program. Figure 4 is a fishbone graphic that shows these four topics.

Figure 4

Fishbone Diagram Describing Why Teachers Are Not Implementing the Tier 1 Phonics Program With Fidelity



The Necessity of the Tier 1 Phonics Program

The BOY Acadience test results showed that average scores decreased between 2020 and 2021, corresponding with the period when schools in the United States were closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The decline of the first grade BOY Acadience test results from 2018 to 2022 is illustrated in Table 3. The findings indicate that first grade students experienced a decrease in average scores between 2020 and 2022.

Table 3*First Grade Average Acadience Beginning-of-the-Year Test Scores*

Year	Count	Average
2018	83	112.66
2019	103	107.84
2020	90	108.63
2021	60	83.16
2022	83	92.39

The NIC compared the Acadience BOY composite test scores for first grade students using an independent samples t test. The NIC compared the BOY Acadience first grade composite test scores of 2018–2020 pre-COVID to those of 2021–2022 post-COVID to determine any differences between the two time periods. The NIC assessed the normality of the BOY Acadience scores for the 2018–2020 time period and found that they were normally distributed, as confirmed by the Shapiro-Wilk test ($p > .05$). The independent samples t test showed a statistically significant difference between the first grade BOY scores of the 2018–2020 time period and the 2021–2022 time period. The first grade BOY Acadience scores from 2018–2020 were 20.7, 95% CI [11.3, 30.1], higher than those from 2021–2022. The results of the independent t test show that there is a statistically significant difference between the means of the two groups ($p < .001$) and that the post-COVID group has a mean difference of 20.7 lower compared to the pre-COVID group. The 141 ($M = 107.0$, $SD = 45.72$) students in first grade who were administered the Acadience test ($M = 86.3$, $SD = 46.6$) compared to the 271 in the pre-

COVID students Acadience scores ($M = 107.0$, $SD = 45.72$) had 20.7 points lower mean difference compared to the pre-COVID group. (See Tables 4 and 5.)

Table 4

Mean Scores of 1st Grade Acadience BOY Scores, Pre-COVID and Post-COVID

Time	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>SEM</i>
Pre-COVID	271	107.0	45.72	2.8
Post-COVID	141	86.3	46.6	3.9

Table 5

Independent Samples Test of BOY First Grade Acadience Scores

Variable	Levene's test for equality of variances		<i>t</i> test for equality of means					Mean difference	Standard error difference
	<i>F</i>	Sig.	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	One-sided <i>p</i>	Two-sided <i>p</i>			
Equal variances assumed	0.11	0.74	4.33	410.00	<.001	<.001	20.70	4.78	
Equal variances not assumed			4.31	279.16	<.001	<.001	20.70	4.81	

Note. Sig. = significance.

Preintervention Interview Data Collection and Results

Data of a qualitative nature were gathered using a semistructured pre- and postintervention interview format developed by me. The preintervention interview consisted of 10 questions, and the postintervention interview consisted of 13 questions. The first 10 questions

asked during the postintervention interview were identical to the first 10 questions in the preintervention interview. Both phases of interviews were conducted face-to-face. Nine of the 12 individuals took part in both pre- and postintervention interviews. The preintervention interviews occurred from September 7, 2022, to September 10, 2022, with 10 participants. The questions were of a qualitative, open-ended nature.

Question 1

In the preintervention interview, participants were asked, “What is your level of knowledge and experience with implementing the phonics program?” The purpose of the question was to collect baseline data on the participants’ perceptions of how comfortable they were with the Tier 1 phonics program. Analysis of the interviews revealed that teachers’ levels of knowledge and experience with the Tier 1 phonics program varied widely. The responses to the question revealed emergent themes, indicating that some teachers were new to the program, some had received some training, and others had varying levels of proficiency and comfort with implementing the Tier 1 phonics program in the classroom. Another emergent theme from the responses was the need for additional training.

One example of the emergent theme of being new to the program is evident in the responses of some teachers, such as, “I am new to the Tier 1 phonics program and I am learning as I go.” Another teacher reported, “I have a basic level of knowledge and am still working on mastering the program. There are some parts I have down, and others that I am getting used to. The area I am working on is the presentation tool.”

Teachers expressed various level of knowledge and experience with the program. One teacher reported, “I am somewhat knowledgeable about the Tier 1 phonics program, but I wouldn’t say I’ve mastered it yet.” Another teacher said, “I have a moderate level of knowledge;

not a beginner, but I have not mastered it. I am still working on becoming more proficient in the area.”

Although some teachers had received initial training, many expressed a need for ongoing training and support to feel confident in implementing the program in the classroom. For example, one teacher said, “We had a PD [professional development] day at the beginning of the year, but I still feel like I need more training to be able to use it effectively.” Another teacher added, “We had training in August, but it was conducted via Zoom, which can be challenging.” Overall, the findings suggest that while many teachers have some level of knowledge and experience with the Tier 1 phonics program, there is a need for ongoing training, support, and feedback to help them become more proficient and confident in using it in the classroom with fidelity.

Question 2

The second question from the interview asked the participant to explain the Tier 1 phonics program model of instruction. The question explored the participant’s understanding of the program’s overall model of instruction. The emergent themes from the responses to this question included the program’s use of an “I do, we do, you do” progression as well as its focus on developing students’ phonological awareness, phonics, and print concepts. In addition, another theme that emerged from the responses was that the Tier 1 phonics program was designed to supplement an existing English language arts program.

The qualitative data suggests an emerging theme that the Tier 1 phonics program follows an “I do, we do, you do” progression. One participant stated that the program is “I do, we do, you do model,” while another mentioned that the program introduces students to “working with onset

and rhyme,” “focus letters,” and “breaking down CVC [consonant-vowel-consonant] words,” all of which align with an “I do, we do, you do” progression.

According to one teacher,

The program introduces students to phonics, working with onset and rhyme. We move into focus letters and incorporate them into breaking down CVC words. It’s very interactive in the sense that they have to listen to the words, but there is a writing component, so they recognize them in print. It’s an I do, we do, you do model.

Another teacher explained, “It’s working on first sounds, letter names, spelling CVC words, and reading CVC words.”

Another response suggested that the Tier 1 phonics program also involved some form of whole-group instruction, with “tons of vocal exercises,” and a focus on “various phonics lessons, basic syllable type patterns, and phonograms.” Some teachers also mentioned that the program was designed to fill gaps and supplement the existing English language arts (ELA) program. As one teacher explained, “My understanding is that it is designed to fill the gaps and supplement the ELA program.”

Overall, the findings suggest that the Tier 1 phonics program model of instruction focused on developing students’ phonological awareness, phonics, and other related skills through an “I do, we do, you do” progression. The program aimed to supplement existing ELA programs and fill gaps in student understanding, with a focus on creating new words and breaking down CVC words.

Question 3

The third question from the interview asked how frequently the phonics program was used with their students. The response to this question was coded with a number representing the

number of days per week that the participant used the Tier 1 phonics program. All of the 10 teachers who participated in the study reported using the Tier 1 phonics program with their students. The frequency of use varied: four teachers reported using the program five times a week, four teachers reporting using the program four times a week, and two teachers reporting using it three times a week. One of the teachers who used the program daily reported that it was difficult to use the program as frequently as desired due to scheduling conflicts with time for the library and science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. Overall, the data suggested that most teachers (80%) used the Tier 1 phonics program four to five times a week, with a smaller proportion using it three times a week (20%). Table 6 shows the frequency of use by days per week by the participating teachers.

Table 6

Frequency of Tier 1 Phonics Program Use

Weekly frequency	Number of teachers
Five days	4
Four days	4
Three days	2
Two days	0
One day	0

Question 4

The fourth question asked what resources were available to assist teachers with implementing the Tier 1 phonics program. The availability of resources for teachers to implement the Tier 1 phonics program was a topic of interest in the interviews. In the preintervention interviews, teachers reported a variety of resources available to them, including

teacher's manuals, online presentation tools, and the Tier 1 phonics websites. One teacher reported using flashcards to engage students with the program. The presentation tool was especially praised; one teacher described it as "fabulous" and another called it "huge." Another teacher noted that the teacher's manuals had many helpful tips for doing the lessons.

These preintervention interview responses to the fourth question suggest that there were some resources available to assist teachers with implementing the program, with the presentation tool being the most popular. The presentation tool was viewed positively, indicating that it may have been particularly helpful. There was some variability in what resources were being used, as some teachers did not mention all of them. For example, one participant stated, "The teacher's edition, that's it." This shows a potential lack of understanding of all the resources for the Tier 1 phonics program.

Question 5

The fifth question asked if there was a system for supporting the teachers if they needed assistance implementing the Tier 1 phonics program. The inquiry was designed to see if the instructors thought they could get assistance. The qualitative analysis unveiled an emerging theme that 50% of the participants lacked awareness of any support systems, whereas the remaining 50% demonstrated some level of understanding of support systems. Some examples of support systems were supported by participants who stated the reading specialist was the person to contact if they needed help. One participant stated, "If I needed help, I could go to the reading specialist." Another participant added, "Just the reading specialist," and "We can always go to our wonderful reading specialist."

However, some participants were uncertain about whom to contact for support. One participant stated, “I’m not sure who,” and another said, “I’m not too aware of any.” Another participant stated, “I think it may be a me thing because I don’t know who to go to.”

Some participants said they would turn to their colleagues for support. One participant said, “We talk amongst are [our] grade level,” and another said, “I guess we could ask the reading specialist.” One participant mentioned reaching out to the principal or even the assistant superintendent for assistance, stating, “I think I could be a form of assistance, however, I would also reach out to my principal or even the assistant superintendent.”

Although the reading specialist was seen as the primary source of support for teachers who need assistance in implementing the phonics program, some participants were uncertain about whom to contact for help, and others would seek assistance from colleagues or school administrators.

Question 6

The sixth question asked how this program is shared with school leaders to determine if it was implemented as intended. This question was designed to see if there was a monitoring system for the Tier 1 phonics program implementation. When asked about how progress is shared with school leaders to determine if the phonics program is implemented as intended, many participants in the preintervention interview were unsure or lacked clarity on the reporting process. For instance, some participants stated that they were not aware of how progress was shared with school leaders, with responses such as “Not Sure,” “Not sure, I don’t think it was ever disclosed to us,” and “No clue.”

Three participants stated that they shared progress during weekly grade-level collaboration meetings or reported progress through student assessments. One participant stated,

“Every week we do progress monitoring with our spelling tests. We give that information to the principal.” Another participant stated, “Every Monday, we collaborate so we can discuss how the program is going. We look at the progress students have made towards mastering their letter sounds.”

Some participants mentioned that progress monitoring and reporting would happen in the future, likely on a quarterly basis, but did not provide specific details. For example, one participant stated, “We have not come to that. I know we will track growth, most likely quarterly,” and another stated, “Only twice a year.” In addition, one participant mentioned aligning homework to the Tier 1 phonics program and discussed this with the principal.

Overall, the preintervention interview responses to the sixth question demonstrated a lack of clarity on how progress is shared with school leaders to determine if the phonics program is implemented as intended.

Question 7

The seventh question asked, “What resources or supports do you feel you need to implement the phonics program with fidelity?” The question was open-ended. The responses showed various suggestions and requests for additional resources or support to implement the phonics program with fidelity. The prevailing theme emerged wherein six out of the 10 participants expressed a desire to observe someone else correctly present the Tier 1 phonics program. One participant stated that she was unsure of what resources she needed but thought that watching someone present a lesson would be beneficial. Another participant mentioned, “Maybe an actual lesson being taught so we can see what it should look like.”

Some participants requested more time to teach the phonics program, with responses such as “We need a thirty-minute longer day” and “I feel I don’t finish the whole day in thirty minutes

it takes me closer to an hour.” One participant suggested adding an assessment at the end of the week to monitor progress, while another mentioned shortening the weekly stories in the program as they were lengthy and not on grade level.

However, two participants felt that they had what they needed to implement the program with fidelity. One participant said, “I think we have what we need. Seeing it done would be great,” while another stated, “Currently, I am very happy with the program; I have to keep working at it, seeing a lesson by a pro would be helpful.”

Other resources requested by participants included better Internet access and more frequent check-ins with the team and other teachers. One participant stated, “Better internet would help,” while another mentioned, “Maybe more frequent check-ins with our team and with other teachers. I would love to see others trying it out.”

Overall, the preintervention interview responses to the seventh question showed that there were various requests and suggestions for additional resources or support to implement the phonics program with fidelity.

Question 8

Question 8 asked participants, “What aspects of the implementation do you feel need to be modified?” The responses showed aspects of the implementation that could be modified to improve the phonics program. One theme was that the length of the daily lessons or the passages needed to be shortened. One participant stated, “The length of the daily lessons needs to be modified to a shorter length of time,” while another mentioned, “The passages are too long,” and yet another mentioned, “The passages are a bit too long. The level is on grade level; however, the length of the passage is time-consuming.” Some participants felt that the phonics program was too challenging for kindergarten students and suggested that it be modified or chunked into

smaller parts. One participant stated, “It’s a lot for Kinder. We are trying to chunk it to keep my kids on topic.”

Other participants were unsure if any modifications were needed or thought that the program was working well. One participant stated, “I am not really sure if we should modify it,” while another mentioned, “I don’t think we should change anything; we just need to see it more.” A few participants suggested that the stories needed to be more grade-level friendly, while another participant mentioned that the program pushed sight words too quickly, before students had mastered letter sounds. The preintervention interview responses showed that various aspects of the implementation could be modified, such as the length of the lessons or passages, the level of challenge for kindergarten students, and the focus on sight words over letter sounds.

Question 9

In Question 9, participants were asked, “Are there any problems associated with implementing the new Tier 1 phonics program with fidelity?” All of the participants either reported no problems or were uncertain. For instance, one participant said, “No problem implementing,” while another stated, “I have not come across any.”

A few participants requested more time to implement the program, with responses such as “Need more time” and “Not sure, sometimes we need to put a daily schedule together.” One participant mentioned a need for follow-up or continued support to ensure fidelity of implementation, stating, “Follow-ups, we need follow-up.” The responses demonstrated that there were few problems associated with implementing the new Tier 1 phonics program with fidelity, but some participants requested more time or follow-up support.

Question 10

Question 10 asked, “Is there anything else that you would like to add regarding the fidelity of implementing the new phonics program?” The question was open-ended and designed to elicit a range of responses. Most participants did not have any additional comments. One participant stated, “Nothing specifically,” while another mentioned, “Not at this time,” and yet another simply stated, “None at this time.”

A few participants suggested additional resources or changes that could help support implementation, such as a longer day, phonics worksheets, or more training. One participant mentioned, “Maybe seeing it,” indicating that seeing somebody model a lesson would be helpful. Another participant mentioned, “The more training the better.”

One participant noted that she had already seen positive changes in her students and that continued improvement would come with further implementation of the program. Another participant stressed the importance of having a positive attitude about the program and implementing it during “rug time.” The preintervention interview responses showed that most participants did not have any additional comments regarding the fidelity of implementing the new phonics program.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the preintervention interview data collection sheds light on the teachers’ level of knowledge and experience with the Tier 1 phonics program and their understanding of the program’s model of instruction, the frequency of its use, available resources, support systems, and any necessary modifications to the implementation. The results suggest that while many teachers have some level of knowledge and experience with the program, there is a need for ongoing training and support to help them become more confident in using it in the

classroom. The results also indicate that the presentation tool is seen positively and that the reading specialist is perceived as the primary source of support for teachers who need assistance. There were some requests for additional resources, modifications to the length of lessons or passages, and more time for implementation. The majority of the participants did not report any problems associated with implementing the program, but some suggested follow-up or additional training. Overall, the preintervention interview data provide valuable insights into the teachers' perspectives on the Tier 1 phonics program and highlight areas for improvement. The NIC used the qualitative data along with weekly check-ins to monitor the duration and frequency of the Tier 1 phonics program, which formed the basis for the NIC's recommendations for program improvement

Weekly Check-In for Duration and Frequency of Tier 1 Phonics Program

The purpose of the weekly check-in was to collect data on the implementation of a Tier 1 phonics program in various grade levels from the participating teachers. The check-in survey asked the participants about their use of the program during the previous week. The data collected included the grade level of the teachers, the number of days they used the Tier 1 phonics program during the week, and the duration of their Tier 1 phonics lessons. Starting in the last week of October, the survey asked whether the participants used the presentation tool and completed all components of the lesson daily. The weekly check-in survey used to collect these data can be found in Appendix C.

The survey data were collected from September 12, 2022, to December 12, 2022. They show that several grade levels used the Tier 1 phonics program in their classes, with varying levels of frequency and duration. For instance, most of the first grade teachers (83%) used the program 5 days a week, whereas only a few of the second grade teachers (42%) used it at the

same frequency. Moreover, more than half of the kindergarten teachers (67%) used the program for more than 45 min per day, whereas most third grade teachers (50%) used it for 30–45 min. The weekly check-in survey data also suggest that most teachers completed all components of the lesson daily (60%), whereas fewer teachers (40%) used the presentation tool.

NIC Proposed Changes

In October, the NIC team met again to review the data from the interviews and the weekly check-ins. The NIC team members were able to review the interview responses and create a driver diagram to incorporate some theories of change to improve the Tier 1 phonics program implementation. The NIC proposed the following five steps to improve the fidelity of implementation of the Tier 1 phonics program:

1. Establish a set schedule for each grade level to implement the program.
2. Implement a peer observation system for the program's implementation.
3. Develop a model for participants on how to use the presentation tool of the Tier 1 phonics program.
4. Implement a system to observe and monitor the Tier 1 phonics program.
5. Provide more formal in-person training for the program.

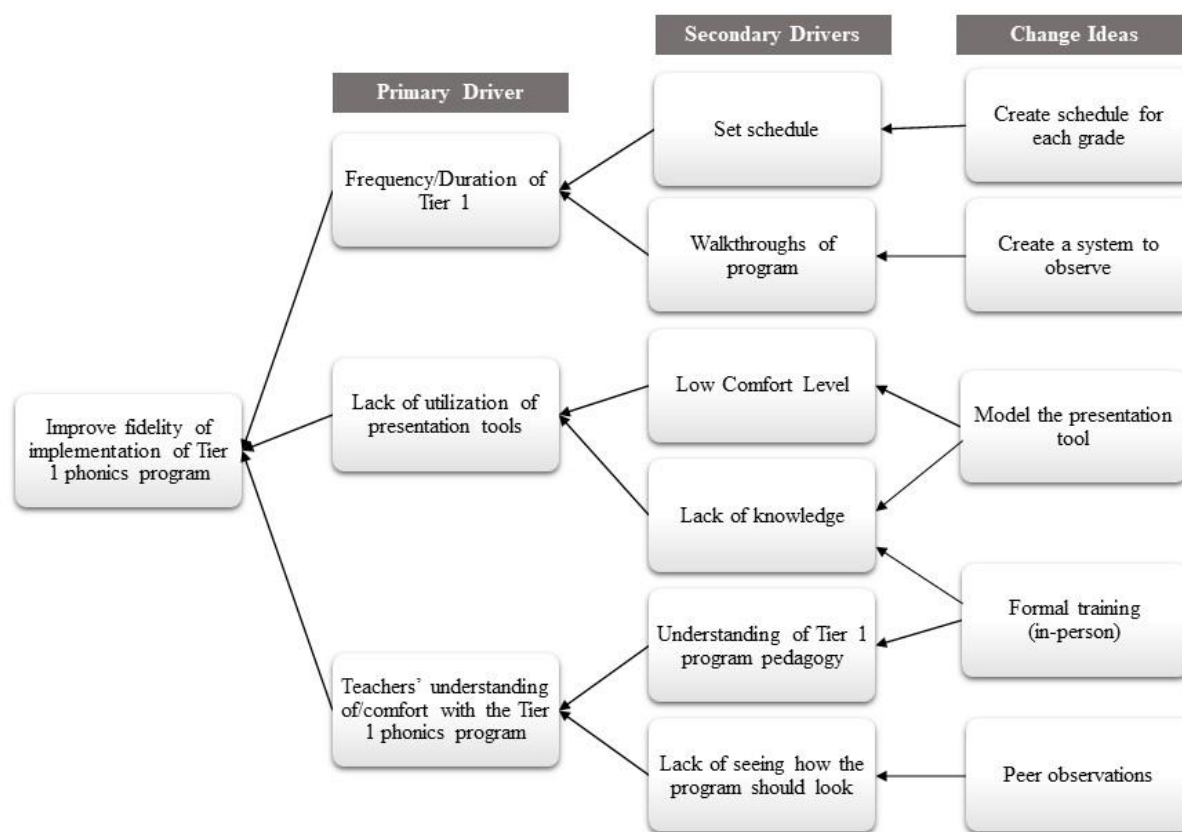
The NIC identified primary and secondary drivers for each change idea, which were believed to be contributing to the lack of implementation fidelity. By addressing these drivers, the NIC hoped to improve the fidelity of implementing the Tier 1 phonics program and ultimately improve the outcomes for students.

The driver diagram illustrates the group's aims to improve the fidelity of implementing a Tier 1 phonics program, following the conceptual framework of Dane and Schneider (1998). One primary driver identified was to increase the frequency and duration of the Tier 1 phonics

program, with the secondary drivers being the need for a set schedule and the need for walkthroughs of the program. The change ideas identified to support this primary driver were to create a schedule for each grade level and implement a system to observe the Tier 1 phonics program in action.

Another primary driver identified was to improve the usage of the Tier 1 phonics presentation tool, with secondary drivers being participants' low comfort level with the presentation tool and their lack of knowledge about how to use it. The change idea for this primary driver was to model the presentation tool for the participants so that they could use it more effectively.

A third primary driver was teachers' lack of understanding and comfort with the Tier 1 phonics program, with secondary drivers being their lack of understanding of the program's pedagogy and the lack of actual exposure to how the lessons should be taught. The change ideas identified to support this primary driver were to provide more formal in-person training and to create a system of peer observation, which would allow fellow participants to observe the lessons in action. Figure 5 displays the primary drivers, secondary drivers, and change ideas that were identified to improve the implementation of the Tier 1 phonics program.

Figure 5*Driver Diagram With Change Ideas***Changes Proposed****System of Support**

During the implementation phase of the Tier 1 phonics program, the level of support provided to instructors was found to be inadequate. To address this issue, the NIC developed a system of support for teachers to use in their daily work. To ensure accessibility for all teachers, the NIC designated a grade-level representative as the primary resource for the Tier 1 phonics program in each grade level. These representatives met with NIC members to review the

program's requirements and available support resources. In October collaboration meetings, the representatives then demonstrated the presentation tool and manipulatives to their fellow grade-level members. This approach aimed to improve accessibility and provide greater support for instructors, ultimately enhancing their ability to effectively implement the program.

What Should the Program Look Like?

Teachers in this study received a 2-hr video conference training on the Tier 1 phonics curriculum on August 15, 2022. The instructors received all their resources for teaching with the program and student books on the same day. That school year's first day of class was August 17, 2022. This fast-paced training and limited time to study materials before school began provided minimal opportunity for instructors to engage with the new EBI. The NIC was concerned about the program's fidelity because of this approach. The teachers had never seen this program in action with actual students. Looking at the response from the preintervention interview, the NIC determined that participants would benefit from the opportunity to observe other teachers implementing the Tier 1 phonics program. A teacher in each participating grade level was asked if she would let other teachers observe her teaching a Tier 1 phonics lesson with her class. Each grade level had a participant who consented. A schedule was created, and substitute teachers were arranged. On November 16, 2022, nine of the 12 participants took time to observe fellow teachers complete a Tier 1 phonics lesson with students. After the peer observation, the teachers were able to debrief in the following Monday's grade-level collaboration, including monitoring.

Monitoring Mechanism

As the program was new, a monitoring component was deemed necessary by the NIC to improve the implementation of the Tier 1 phonics program. A plan was established by the NIC for effective supervision of the program by visiting the participating grade levels and scheduling

a daily 30-min implementation of the evidence-based program at the same time of day, as recommended by the program. Table 7 displays the established timetable for each grade level, ensuring that the program was observable at specific times.

Table 7

Tier 1 Phonics Daily Schedule

Grade	Time
Kindergarten	8:30–9:00 AM
1	8:50–9:20 AM
2	10:45–11:15 AM
3	9:15–9:45 AM

A walk-through tool was developed by the NIC to monitor the implementation of the Tier 1 phonics program. The tool included various areas of observation, such as the use of presentation tools for instruction, readily accessible student booklets, evidence of lesson plans, and posted phonics instructions in the classroom. Other areas that were assessed included direct instruction; checking for understanding through instant feedback; and the use of academic vocabulary, sound boxes, and phonics chips. The administrators also noted the engagement of all students through strategies such as choral response, A/B partner, and hand motions, as well as physical evidence of student learning and demonstration of understanding through exit tickets, whiteboards, and spelling tests. The specific observation tool can be seen in Table 8. Members of the NIC would see if certain aspects of the Tier 1 phonics program were being observed or not observed. A copy of the tool was shared with the participants after the observation was completed. The goal was to make sure the participants were aware of specific aspects of the Tier 1 phonics program that were observed or not observed while completing a lesson. In October, all

of the participants met with the NIC team to go over the observation tool. The participants were told that the observation tool was not evaluating their job performance and that the goal was to improve the fidelity of implementation for the Tier 1 phonics program. Table 8 presents the walk-through tool that was employed during the implementation process as a monitoring mechanism.

Table 8

Tier 1 Phonics Walk-Through Tool

Teaching Practices	Observed	Not observed
Use of presentation tool for instruction		
Student booklets are readily accessible		
Evidence of Tier 1 phonics lesson plans		
Evidence of Tier 1 phonics posted in the classroom		
Direct instruction (I do, we do, you do)		
Checking for understanding (instant feedback: stars and stickers, thumbs up, thumbs down, circulating, random calling)		
Use of academic vocabulary (segmenting, finger stretching, blending, etc.)		
Use of sound boxes and chip		
All students are engaged during the instruction		
There is proof of student practice in booklets		
Student engagement (choral response, a/b partner, hand motions, etc.)		
There is physical evidence of student learning		
Students demonstrate understanding (exit tickets, whiteboards, spelling tests)		
Use of sound boxes and chips		

Additional Formal Training

After watching the interview, the NIC also took action to provide additional formal training for the teachers implementing the Tier 1 phonics program. A 3-hr in-person training session was scheduled for the teachers, specific to each grade level. The training would cover the various components of the Tier 1 phonics program, including phonological awareness, direct phonics instruction, decodable text, and written comprehension skills. However, because this was a 90-day PDSA study and the formal training required time to organize travel and purchase order agreements, the training could not be arranged within the research's short time frame. The training was scheduled to take place in February 2023.

Postintervention Interview Data

After NIC applied the change ideas they had developed to increase the fidelity of the Tier 1 phonics program implementation, a postintervention interview was conducted with the participants to determine whether there had been any improvement in adherence, frequency, or quality. Nine of the 12 participants were able to complete the in-person postintervention interview. The first 10 questions of the postintervention interview protocol were identical to those of the preintervention interview protocol, but the postintervention interview protocol added three new questions.

11. What do you believe would best support the implementation?
12. Did you participate in the peer observations? If yes, was it helpful?
13. How did the knowledge of being monitored affect your implementation of the Tier 1 phonics program?

The postintervention interviews took place from December 19, 2022, to December 22, 2022, with nine teachers participating. The questions were qualitative and open ended.

Question 1

Again, the first question asked in the postintervention interviews of the participants during the preliminary interview was, “What is your level of knowledge and experience with implementing the phonics program?” Analysis of the follow-up interviews indicated that teachers’ levels of knowledge and experience with the Tier 1 phonics program had improved after the implementation of change ideas by the NIC. The theme that emerged from the responses to the first question shifted from one of new and basic knowledge to that of confident and adequate knowledge and experience with the Tier 1 phonics program.

For example, one teacher reported,

It is now routine and much more comfortable using the program. I feel I am adequately prepared to implement this program and am able to help and model lessons for my fellow teachers. I feel very comfortable with the program.

Another teacher expressed a similar sentiment, saying, “I feel confident but not an expert, but I have a strong understanding. I am a semi pro by now.”

Although some teachers still felt they were in the process of learning and improving, many reported feeling more comfortable and proficient with the program than they had before. One teacher said, “Not basic, but I’m not a pro. I am getting a rhythm with it.” Another teacher reported, “At first, it was hard, but after a few weeks, myself and the students got into a routine. As a team, we took a pause, reviewed the process, and we got much better the second time.”

Several teachers also reported feeling more comfortable with the idea of collaborating with their colleagues to improve their teaching. One teacher said, “I feel like I am getting better at it and more familiar every day. I am one of the teachers who is having other teachers peer review, so I feel comfortable doing that.”

Overall, the findings of the first question suggest that implementing change ideas by the NIC positively impacted teachers' levels of knowledge and experience with the Tier 1 phonics program. Many teachers reported feeling more confident and comfortable with the program, and some felt they had improved significantly. However, some teachers still felt they were in the process of learning and improving; there may be a need for ongoing support and feedback to help them become even more proficient and confident in using the program.

Question 2

The second postintervention interview question asked what teachers' understanding of the Tier 1 phonics program model of instruction is. Analysis of the second question revealed that teachers' understanding of the Tier 1 phonics program model of instruction had improved following the implementation of the NIC's change ideas. The program was described as starting with phonemic awareness and phonics lessons, then progressing to sight words, writing, spelling, and word manipulation. The theme shifted from a basic understanding of the "I do, we do, you do" approach to a more systematic scope and sequence of phonics instruction.

One teacher reported, "The program is all teacher led, and they start with the introduction of phonemic and phonetic concepts and work together, I do, we do, you do. All verbal at the beginning/warm-up." Another teacher stated, "The program is implemented for every one whole group with a presentation following the program with fidelity every day. It is here to improve phonics and teach the students early literacy skills."

Some teachers commented on the scripted nature of the program, with one teacher saying,

As a teacher, we are expected to model the instruction; It is very scripted, the Teacher says, students say. Tell us how we should do it and when. It also expects students to be

engaged. Students enjoy the phonemic awareness aspect and are engaged in the learning.

They are not distracted. Higher readers can be disengaged.

The Tier 1 phonics program was also described as scaffolded, with teachers taking a phonics skill and breaking it down systematically into different parts. According to one teacher, “The program asks us to take a phonics skill and scaffolds it systematically into different parts.” The postintervention interview responses indicated an improvement in teachers’ understanding of the Tier 1 phonics program’s model of instruction, with a systematic approach that emphasized phonemic awareness, phonics, and other early literacy skills.

Question 3

The third question in the postintervention interview asked, “How frequently do you utilize the phonics program with your students?” Of the nine teachers who reported using the Tier 1 phonics program, all reported using it daily or almost daily. The reported frequency ranged from 4 to 5 days a week, with six teachers reporting daily use and three teachers reporting using it at least 4 days a week. The reported lesson duration ranged from 20 to 45 min; most teachers (78%) reported using the program for 30 min or less per day. One teacher reported an initial lesson duration of 50 min, which was subsequently reduced to 30 min.

Overall, the data suggested that among teachers who reported using the Tier 1 phonics program, the majority (67%) used it daily for 30 min or less; a smaller proportion used it at least 4 days a week for a similar duration (33%).

Compared to preintervention interviews, a higher proportion of teachers reported using the Tier 1 phonics program daily or almost daily in the postintervention interviews. There was also a trend toward using the program for shorter durations, with most teachers reporting using it for 30 min or less per day. However, the reported frequency of use did not differ substantially

between preintervention and postintervention interviews; the majority of teachers reported using the program 4 to 5 days a week.

Question 4

The fourth postintervention interview question asked, “What resources are available to you that assist you in implementing the phonics program?” Based on the qualitative data collected from the postintervention interview, it appears that a range of resources was available to support teachers in implementing the Tier 1 phonics program, including teacher’s manuals, presentation tools, manipulatives, and online resources. Additionally, collaboration with fellow teachers and observing other classrooms were cited as helpful resources.

When comparing the preintervention interview responses to the postintervention interview responses, there seemed to be an increase in the perceived usefulness of the presentation tool and online resources, as well as a greater emphasis on collaboration and peer support. This suggests that the NIC’s efforts to create a system of support for the program were successful in improving teacher access to resources and collaboration opportunities, leading to greater satisfaction with the program and more effective implementation.

Question 5

The fifth postintervention interview question asked, “Is there a system for support for teachers if they need assistance in implementing the phonics program?” In the postintervention interview responses, several sources of support were mentioned for teachers who need assistance in implementing the phonics program. Many participants mentioned that they collaborate with their grade-level colleagues and observe other teachers to see the lessons in practice. One participant stated, “The biggest system of support is the ability to observe other teachers and see

the lessons in practice.” Another participant mentioned, “Each grade level has had a teacher that was designated as the go-to. It has been nice to get help from her.”

Additionally, several participants mentioned the support provided by administrators. One participant stated, “Yes, there is a system of support. We can observe ourselves complete lessons. Set lead teachers have been assigned to each grade level to help support the implementation.” Another participant mentioned, “Yes, with admin, and each grade level was given a peer teacher to ask for help.” Another participant mentioned, “We have an amazing reading specialist and administration.”

Peer observations and working with each other were also mentioned as sources of support. One participant said, “Peer observations, working with each other, the website as well as the TE.” Another participant stated, “Many of us were struggling, so we got to get an assigned teacher to go to, and that made a big difference in support.”

Overall, the postintervention interview responses provided more specific examples of support available to teachers, including assigned lead teachers and peer teachers, peer observations, and support from the reading specialist and administration. These qualitative data suggest that the teachers had a better understanding of the Tier 1 phonics program and a defined system of support. Additionally, the postintervention interview responses demonstrated a greater sense of awareness of available support systems among the participants.

Compared to the preintervention interview responses to the fifth question, the postintervention interview responses provided more detailed and varied sources of support available to teachers, such as peer teachers, lead teachers, peer observations, and support from administrators. The preintervention interview responses were more focused on the reading specialist as the primary source of support, and some participants were uncertain about whom to

contact for assistance. However, both pre- and postintervention interview responses mentioned seeking support from colleagues within the grade level.

Question 6

Question 6 in the postintervention interview asked, “How is progress shared with school leaders to determine if the program is implemented as intended?” In the postintervention interview responses, there was more clarity and specificity on how progress is shared with school leaders to determine if the phonics program is implemented as intended. Many participants mentioned sharing progress during weekly grade-level collaboration meetings or through assessments based on the program. One participant stated, “We use the information from the program to assess the students and take the data to collaboration to share with the grade level and administrators.” Another participant said, “Yes, we share and look at the upcoming lessons every Monday in collaboration,” while another mentioned, “Weekly PLC [professional learning community], we share our phonics program with the principal and grade-level team.”

Several participants mentioned using assessments to monitor progress and share data with school leaders. One participant said, “We do a weekly assessment based on the lesson and we track what amount of students reach the goal,” while another mentioned, “We use the spelling test to compare the data among our grade level to go back and support our students.”

Some participants stated that they were unsure about how progress is shared with school leaders or that they are still discussing it at a grade level. One participant simply stated, “I don’t know.” Overall, the postintervention interview responses showed more clarity and specificity on the reporting process of progress to school leaders, with more emphasis on weekly assessments and collaboration meetings.

Compared to the preintervention interview responses to the sixth question, the responses provided more specific examples of how progress is shared with school leaders, such as using assessments, sharing information during weekly grade-level collaboration meetings and through PLCs, and collaborating with administrators. The postintervention interview responses demonstrated a greater sense of awareness and understanding of the reporting process among the participants. In contrast, the preintervention interview responses showed more uncertainty and lack of clarity on how progress is shared with school leaders.

Questions 7 and 8

In the postintervention interview, Questions 7 and 8 were asked to gain insight into any changes that may have been implemented by the NIC to improve the fidelity of the Tier 1 phonics program. However, the responses did not provide any new information. The questions asked were not specifically focused on improvements in the fidelity of program implementation and thus did not shed any new light on the matter. Therefore, while these questions were important to ask, they did not result in any new information related to the fidelity of implementation of the Tier 1 phonics program.

Question 9

The ninth question of the postintervention interview asked participants, “Are there any problems associated with implementing the new phonics program with fidelity? If so, please explain.” In the postintervention interview responses, many of the participants stated that they did not have any significant problems associated with implementing the new Tier 1 phonics program with fidelity. One participant mentioned that there were plenty of online resources available to support implementation and that she had not seen any problems. Another participant

stated, “No problems, at first it was tough to get them engaged, but once we had a modeled lesson and implemented those techniques, the kids have become engaged.”

Several participants stated that they did not encounter any issues with implementing the program. One participant simply stated, “I don’t think so,” while another mentioned, “I have not run into any problems.” One participant mentioned some technical issues related to the presentation tool and the lack of information about assessments in the text. This participant stated, “Some error in the presentation tool. One day some tech issues. But in regard to implementation, I will say after getting into the program, I found the assessments. In the text, there is nothing telling you about them.” Another participant mentioned that she could have benefited from additional training at the very beginning of the implementation process.

The postintervention interview responses showed that there were few significant problems associated with implementing the new Tier 1 phonics program with fidelity. Some participants mentioned technical issues or a lack of information, while others noted the importance of modeling and training.

Compared to the preintervention interview responses, the postintervention interview responses showed fewer concerns or problems associated with implementing the program with fidelity. The postintervention interview responses demonstrated a greater sense of confidence and familiarity with the program among the participants. In contrast, the preintervention interview responses showed some uncertainty and requests for additional resources or support to ensure the fidelity of implementation.

Question 10

The tenth question of the postintervention interview asked participants if there was anything else that the participants would like to add regarding the fidelity of implementing the

new phonics program. In the postintervention interview responses to Question 10, several participants mentioned challenges related to student engagement, passage difficulty, and time management. One participant noted that student engagement had always been tough when dealing with different levels of readers in the classroom. Another participant mentioned that the passages were hard at first but have since become easier.

A few participants noted that time was a challenge in the beginning, but it became easier once they established a routine and figured out the procedure. One participant stated, “Figuring out the procedure, and giving clear expectations once we had that it was smooth sailing.” Another participant emphasized the ongoing challenge of time management, stating, “Time is always an issue we need to keep it. Can’t get rid of anything, it’s a daily juggling act.”

The postintervention interview responses to the tenth question showed that challenges related to student engagement, passage difficulty, and time management continued to be a concern for some participants, even after several months of implementing the new phonics program. However, several participants also noted that they had established a routine and were better equipped to manage these challenges.

The postintervention interview responses differed from the preintervention interview responses for the tenth question in that they provided more specific examples of challenges related to the fidelity of implementing the phonics program. In particular, the postintervention interview responses highlighted ongoing concerns related to student engagement and time management, which were not mentioned as frequently in the preintervention interview responses. The postintervention interview responses also showed a greater level of familiarity and routine with the program, which was not as evident in the preintervention interview responses.

Question 11

In the postintervention interview, participants were asked an eleventh question. The question asked what they believed would best support the implementation of the phonics program. Several participants mentioned the value of watching model lessons and observing other teachers. One participant noted that observing kindergarten and first grade classes had been the most helpful.

Others emphasized the importance of ongoing training and support, such as more detailed training at the beginning of the year for teachers, more onsite training, and more in-service opportunities. One participant noted that as she became more familiar with the program, implementation became easier and more manageable. Another mentioned the value of using timers and working with reading buddies to support implementation.

One participant suggested that seeing all the data points over the year would be helpful and even proposed the idea of providing incentives for participation. The postintervention interview responses to the eleventh question suggested that ongoing training, support, and opportunities for observation and collaboration would be most beneficial in supporting the implementation of the phonics program.

Question 12

In the twelfth question of the postintervention interview, participants were asked if they had participated in peer observations and, if so, whether they found them helpful. Overall, the responses were positive, with many participants indicating that the observations had been helpful in providing new strategies and techniques for implementation.

One participant stated “I was able to watch another grade-level teacher teach a lesson. This was very helpful for me to see and I want to bring that into my classroom.” Another

participant stated, “Participating in the peer observations have been helpful and many different strategies have been shared.”

However, not all participants had a positive experience with the observations. One participant mentioned feeling like a failure after seeing another teacher’s successful lesson; another noted that while the observations were helpful, she would benefit from more onsite training and practice. Despite these challenges, many participants found the observations to be a confidence builder and a valuable opportunity for collaboration and conversation about the phonics program.

Question 13

The final question of the postintervention interview asked how the knowledge of being monitored affected the implementation of the Tier 1 phonics program. One participant shared that “monitoring has had a positive impact as I am making more of a point to follow the lesson exactly as it is described.” Another participant expressed that the monitoring did not affect her personally, as she believed in the program and had already seen it work with their students: “Monitoring has not affected me, however, I believe in the program so I would use it regardless. I have seen this program work with my students.” Others shared that the monitoring helped keep them on track and facilitated cohesion among grade levels: “The monitoring keeps us on track, the grade levels stay cohesive, and can talk about the lessons because we are staying together.” One participant did express a desire to change the timing of implementation: “I would like to do it at a different time. I think we may be overloading. I would like to see it at 8:30.” Overall, some participants felt that the monitoring helped them maintain fidelity to the program, but others did not feel it made a significant impact on their implementation.

The postintervention interview data indicated that many of the themes captured by each question had changed. Table 9 provides a side-by-side comparison of the themes captured by each question in both the pre- and postintervention interviews.

Table 9

Comparison of Pre- and Postintervention Interview Themes

Question	Interview theme	
	Preintervention	Postintervention
1	The participants were new to the Tier 1 phonics program or had a basic understanding of the program and needed additional training.	Teachers were confident and comfortable with the Tier 1 phonics program.
2	The program is designed to supplement an existing English language arts program. The program focuses on phonological awareness, phonics, and print concepts, using an “I do, we do, you do” progression.	The program focuses on phonological awareness, phonics, and print concepts with a systematic approach to improving early literacy skills.
3	Participants use the Tier 1 phonics program four to five times weekly.	Participants use the Tier 1 phonics program four to five times weekly.
4	Participants have variability in resource utilization and a potential lack of understanding of available resources.	Participants felt there was a system of support for the Tier 1 phonics program and access to resources and collaboration opportunities.
5	Participants need clearer communication or training on available support systems.	Participants had a clear understanding of the support and resources available, including collaboration with colleagues, observing other teachers, and an assigned go-to teacher they could get support from.
6	School leaders do not clearly communicate how progress is shared with participants.	Participants had more clarity on how progress is shared with school leaders.
7	Participants requested additional support, including peer observations and check-ins by the administration.	Participants requested additional support, including peer observations and check-ins by the administration.

Question	Interview theme	
	Preintervention	Postintervention
8	Participants requested modification of the length of lesson passages and an increased focus on sight work.	Participants requested modification of the length of lesson passages and an increased focus on sight work.
9	Participants suggested no overall implementation problems; however, more follow-up support would be appreciated.	Participants suggested no overall implementation problems.
10	Participants had no additional comments regarding implementing the Tier 1 phonics program.	Participants showed a greater level of familiarity and routine with the Tier 1 phonics program.
11	—	Participants placed value on peer observation and ongoing training for the Tier 1 phonics program.
12	—	Peer observations were perceived as helpful.
13	—	Monitoring had a mixed impact on the participants' perception of the Tier 1 phonics program.

Note. Questions 11–13 were not asked in the preintervention interview.

Chapter 3: Discussion of Findings

The study assessed the fidelity of the Tier 1 phonics program by examining five factors: adherence, exposure, quality of delivery, differentiation, and participant responsiveness. Adherence to the Tier 1 phonics program was a central focus of the study, with participants' levels of knowledge and experience with the program measured through pre- and postintervention interview themes. Before the intervention, participants had a limited understanding of the program and requested additional training and resources. However, after the implementation of change ideas by the NIC, teachers reported feeling more confident and comfortable with the program. This improvement in teachers' knowledge and experience with the program likely contributed to increased adherence, in line with Dane and Schneider's (1998) conceptual framework that identified adherence as one of the five factors that affect fidelity in program implementation. Specifically, the postintervention interview themes revealed that participants used the Tier 1 phonics program four to five times weekly and felt there was a system of support and access to resources for the program. In addition, ongoing support and feedback, such as peer observations and check-ins by the administration, were requested by the teachers to maintain high levels of adherence to the program.

Exposure to the program was measured by asking teachers about the frequency and duration of program use with their students. The postintervention interview data showed that the majority of teachers who reported using the program did so daily or almost daily for 30 min or less. The findings suggest that the teachers became more familiar with the program over time, as they requested modifications and had a clear understanding of available resources and support, including collaboration with colleagues and an assigned go-to teacher.

Quality of delivery was assessed by examining teachers' understanding of the program model of instruction. The postintervention interview data showed that teachers' understanding of the program model improved following the intervention, which contributed to a higher quality of delivery. The program was described as being teacher led and scripted, with a focus on engaging students and breaking down phonics skills systematically. Teachers' ability to deliver the program effectively was likely enhanced through additional training and support provided by the NIC. Ongoing support and feedback, such as peer observations and check-ins, were requested by teachers to maintain high levels of quality of delivery.

To support differentiation, the study provided teachers with a range of resources, such as manuals, presentation tools, manipulatives, and online resources. The postintervention interview data showed that teachers who used these resources reported an increase in usefulness and greater collaboration and peer support, leading to greater satisfaction with the program and more effective implementation. Teachers were able to tailor instruction to meet the needs of individuals or groups of learners using manipulatives or online resources, and collaboration and observation facilitated differentiation.

Participant responsiveness was not explicitly measured in the study, but some teachers reported feeling more comfortable with collaborating with colleagues to improve their teaching. This suggests that participant responsiveness may have improved, as teachers were more willing to engage in peer review and collaboration to improve their teaching practice.

Overall, the study's findings suggest that the implementation of change ideas by the NIC had a positive impact on teachers' adherence, exposure, quality of delivery, and participant responsiveness with the Tier 1 phonics program. However, ongoing support and feedback may be necessary to improve differentiation and support teachers in becoming even more proficient

and confident in using the program effectively. The findings of this study are in line with Dane and Schneider's (1998) conceptual framework.

Implications and Recommendations for Practice

The findings of this study have important practical implications for educators, policymakers, and other relevant stakeholders involved in the implementation of literacy programs. In particular, the study highlights the importance of ongoing support and feedback, as well as the need for program modifications to improve adherence, exposure, and quality of delivery.

For educators, the study suggests the importance of ongoing professional development and training to ensure that they have a clear understanding of the program model and feel confident and comfortable in implementing it with fidelity. Teachers should be provided with access to resources and support, such as peer observations, check-ins by the administration, and collaboration opportunities with other teachers. Additionally, program modifications such as shorter lesson passages and an increased focus on sight work may be necessary to make the program more engaging and accessible for teachers and students.

Education leaders must recognize the significance of offering continuous support and feedback to teachers and acknowledge the necessity for program adjustments to meet the needs of both students and teachers. This could involve allocating funds for persistent professional development and training, as well as resources for program alterations, like creating shorter lesson passages or supplementary resources for sight work. Furthermore, leaders should take into account the value of teamwork and peer support among teachers, and the importance of establishing transparent communication and support systems, ensuring teachers can access the required resources for effective program implementation

Based on the study's findings, specific recommendations for improving practice include the following:

1. Provide ongoing professional development and training for teachers to ensure that they have a clear understanding of the program model and feel confident and comfortable in implementing it with fidelity.
2. Provide resources and support for teachers, such as peer observations, check-ins by the administration, and collaboration opportunities with other teachers.
3. Implement program modifications such as schedules, collaboration time, and access to all resources to make the program more engaging and accessible for teachers and students.
4. Encourage collaboration and peer support among teachers to facilitate differentiation and meet the unique needs of students.
5. Ensure clear communication and support systems to ensure that teachers have access to the resources they need to implement the program effectively.

Although the findings of this study have important practical implications, there are also some limitations and challenges to implementing the recommendations. One limitation is that the study was conducted in a specific context and may not be generalizable to other settings.

Additionally, implementing program modifications and providing ongoing support and feedback may require additional resources, such as funding and time, which may be a challenge for some schools and districts. Finally, collaboration and peer support among teachers may be difficult to implement in schools with high teacher turnover or limited opportunities for collaboration.

Despite these limitations and challenges, the findings of this study highlight the importance of ongoing support and feedback for teachers and the need for program modifications

to improve adherence, exposure, and quality of delivery. Educators and other relevant stakeholders should take note of these findings and work to implement the recommendations to improve the implementation and effectiveness of literacy programs. By doing so, they can help ensure that all students have access to high-quality literacy instruction and the support they need to succeed in school and beyond.

Implications and Recommendations for Future Research

The findings of this study have significant implications for the field of education and offer a number of recommendations for future research. The study highlights the importance of fidelity in the implementation of EBIs and the need for ongoing support for teachers to ensure high levels of fidelity. In addition, the study points to the importance of monitoring and providing feedback to teachers to improve the quality of program delivery and increase participant responsiveness. These implications are discussed in further detail below.

Theoretical Implications

The findings of this study have important theoretical implications for the field of education. Specifically, the study's focus on fidelity and the five factors that affect fidelity (adherence, exposure, quality of delivery, differentiation, and participant responsiveness) provides a useful framework for evaluating the implementation of EBIs. The study's findings highlight the importance of adherence and the need for ongoing support and feedback to ensure high levels of fidelity.

In addition, the study's findings on the importance of differentiation suggest that future research should focus on developing and evaluating strategies for tailoring interventions to meet the needs of individual learners or groups of learners. Furthermore, the study's findings on the importance of participant responsiveness suggest that future research should focus on developing

and evaluating strategies for engaging teachers in the implementation of EBIs and improving their teaching practice.

Unanswered Questions and Areas for Future Research

Although this study provides valuable insights into the fidelity of a Tier 1 phonics program, there are several unanswered questions and areas for future research. For example, the study found that ongoing support and feedback were important for maintaining high levels of fidelity, but it did not examine the specific types of support and feedback that were most effective. Future research could explore different types of support and feedback and evaluate their impact on fidelity.

In addition, the study did not examine the impact of student outcomes, such as reading achievement, on fidelity. Future research could examine the relationship between fidelity and student outcomes and explore the impact of different levels of fidelity on student outcomes.

Finally, the study did not examine the impact of individual teacher characteristics, such as experience and training, on fidelity. Future research could explore the relationship between teacher characteristics and fidelity and examine how different types of training and support can help teachers improve their fidelity.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the findings of this study, several specific recommendations can be made for future research. First, future research should explore different types of support and feedback and evaluate their impact on fidelity. The exploring of support could include different types of professional development, mentoring, coaching, and peer support.

Second, future research should examine the relationship between fidelity and student outcomes and explore the impact of different levels of fidelity on student outcomes. The

examination of fidelity and student outcomes could include evaluating the impact of different types of interventions, as well as different levels of fidelity within the same intervention.

Third, future research should explore the impact of individual teacher characteristics on fidelity and examine how different types of training and support can help teachers improve their fidelity. The exploration of teacher characteristics could include examining the impact of experience, training, and other factors on fidelity and evaluating the impact of different types of support and feedback.

Limitations and Challenges

There are several limitations and challenges to implementing the recommendations for future research this study suggests. One major limitation is the potential for selection bias in the sample. This study relied on a convenience sample of teachers who volunteered to participate, which may not represent all teachers or schools.

In addition, there may be challenges to implementing some of the recommended strategies for improving fidelity. For example, providing ongoing support and feedback to teachers can be time-consuming and expensive and may require significant resources. Similarly, tailoring interventions to meet the needs of individual learners or groups of learners can be challenging, particularly in classrooms with a wide range of skill levels and needs.

Conclusion

The study evaluated the fidelity of a Tier 1 phonics program, assessing five factors: adherence, exposure, quality of delivery, differentiation, and participant responsiveness. The study found that the implementation of change ideas by the NIC had a positive impact on teachers' adherence, exposure, quality of delivery, and participant responsiveness with the Tier 1 phonics program. However, ongoing support and feedback may be necessary to improve

differentiation and support teachers in becoming even more proficient and confident in using the program effectively.

The study found that teachers had limited knowledge of the program before the intervention but felt more confident and comfortable with the program after the implementation of change ideas. The improvement in teachers' knowledge and experience likely contributed to increased adherence to the program, in line with Dane and Schneider's (1998) conceptual framework that identifies adherence as one of the five factors that affect fidelity in program implementation. Ongoing support and feedback, such as peer observations and check-ins by the administration, were requested by teachers to maintain high levels of adherence to the program.

Exposure to the program was measured by asking teachers about the frequency and duration of program use with their students. The postintervention interview data showed that the majority of teachers who reported using the program did so daily or almost daily for 30 min or less. The study found that the teachers became more familiar with the program over time, as they requested modifications and had a clear understanding of available resources and support, including collaboration with colleagues and an assigned go-to teacher.

The study found that the quality of delivery was improved by the additional training and support provided by the NIC. Teachers' understanding of the program model improved, and they were able to deliver the program more effectively, as the program was described as being teacher led and scripted, with a focus on engaging students and breaking down phonics skills systematically. Ongoing support and feedback, such as peer observations and check-ins, were requested by teachers to maintain high levels of quality of delivery.

The study provided teachers with a range of resources to support differentiation, such as manuals, presentation tools, manipulatives, and online resources. The postintervention interview

data showed that teachers who used these resources reported an increase in usefulness and greater collaboration and peer support, leading to greater satisfaction with the program and more effective implementation. Collaboration and observation facilitated differentiation, and teachers were able to tailor instruction to meet the needs of individuals or groups of learners using manipulatives or online resources.

Although the findings of this study have important practical implications, there are also some limitations and challenges to implementing the recommendations. For example, the study was conducted in a specific context and may not be generalizable to other settings. Additionally, implementing program modifications and providing ongoing support and feedback may require additional resources, such as funding and time, which may be challenging for some schools and districts.

The study's findings have important theoretical implications for the field of education, particularly in the area of fidelity and the five factors that affect fidelity. The study points to the importance of ongoing support and feedback to ensure high levels of fidelity, the importance of differentiation in tailoring interventions to meet the needs of individual learners or groups of learners, and the importance of participant responsiveness in engaging teachers in the implementation of EBIs and improving their teaching practice.

Future research could explore different types of support and feedback and evaluate their impact on fidelity, as well as examine the relationship between fidelity and student outcomes and explore the impact of different levels of fidelity on student outcomes. Additionally, future research could explore the impact of individual teacher characteristics on fidelity and examine how different types of training and support can help teachers improve their fidelity.

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Appendix A: George Fox University Institutional Review Board Approval

2221001

Title: Improving Fidelity of Implementation for Student Achievement

Principal Researcher(s): David Mack

Date application completed: 8/1/2022

(The researcher needs to complete the information above on this page.)

COMMITTEE FINDING:

✓ (1) The proposed research makes adequate provision for safeguarding the health and dignity of the subjects and is therefore approved.

_____ (2) Due to the assessment of risk being questionable or being subject to change, the research must be periodically reviewed by the HSRC on a _____ basis throughout the course of the research or until otherwise notified. This requires resubmission of this form, with updated information, for each periodic review.

_____ (3) The proposed research evidences some unnecessary risk to participants and therefore must be revised to remedy the following specific area(s) on non-compliance:

_____ (4) The proposed research contains serious and potentially damaging risks to subjects and is therefore not approved.



Chair or designated member



Date

Appendix B: Preintervention Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol for Kindergarten-3rd Grade Elementary Teachers and Administrators

Date of Interview _____ Started: _____

Ended: _____

Interviewed by _____

Demographic Information

- What is your current position?
- How many years have you been in your position?
- What is your educational background (i.e., degrees, content areas, special certifications)?
- How many years of experience have you had with the Phonics Program?

Interview Questions

1. What is your level of knowledge and/or experience with implementing the phonics program?
2. Explain the Tier 1 phonics program model of instruction.
3. How frequently do you utilize the phonics program with your students?
4. What resources are available to you that assist you in implementing the phonics program?
5. Is there a system for support for teachers if they need assistance in implementing the phonics program?
6. How is progress shared with school leaders to determine if the program is implemented as intended?
7. What resources or supports do you feel you need to implement the Phonics program with fidelity?
8. What aspects of the implementation do you feel need to be modified?
9. Are there any problems associated with implementing the new phonics program with fidelity? If so, please explain.
10. Is there anything else that you would like to add regarding the fidelity of implementing the new phonics program?

Appendix C: Weekly Check-In

Weekly Check In

Check in to attain the frequency and duration of the New Phonics Program

* Required

1. What Grade Level do you teach? You may choose more than one if you are a combo class.

Check all that apply.

- ☐ Kindergarten
- ☐ 1st Grade
- ☐ 2nd Grade
- ☐ 3rd Grade

2. How many days this week did you utilize the new Core Phonics Program *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ 1 Day
- ☐ 2 Days
- ☐ 3 Days
- ☐ 4 Days
- ☐ 5 Days

3. What was your duration of your lesson this week *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Less than 15 minutes
- ☐ 15-30 minutes
- ☐ 30 to 45 minutes
- ☐ More than 45 minutes

Appendix D: Preintervention Interview Question Responses

Question	Response
1	All new to me
1	Basic, I'm learning as I go
1	I am Somewhat knowledgeable
1	Basic level
1	Just the beginning of the year training.
1	We had a PD day at the beginning of the year.
1	There are some parts I have down and others that I am getting used to. The areas I am working on is the presentation tool.
1	Low, first time teaching with it.
1	Moderate level of knowledge, not a beginner but I have not mastered it.
1	We have training in August, it was on zoom though.
2	My understanding is it is designed to fill the gaps and supplement the ELA program
2	They are learning their basic phonics as far as their closed syllables and diagraphs to help them break apart their words as they are going
2	Its working on first sounds, letter names, spelling CVC words and reading CVC words.
2	The Tier 1 phonics program is a we do, I do, you do model. Students have various activities covering phonics.
2	It is a I do, we do, you do lesson. Tons of vocal exercises the Presentation tool is great and we are focusing on CVC words right now.
2	It is a I do, we do, you do lesson. Various phonics lessons, basic syllable type patterns, and phonograms.
2	We start with some phoneme manipulation, we then move to whole group with gestures and reading, Every lesson has some sound-spelling mapping.
2	It touches on multi-syllabic routines

Question	Response
2	It is whole-group instruction utilizing an I do, we do, you do progression. Starts with phonological awareness, lots of print concepts, and jumps right into phonics, letter sounds, manipulation, handwriting, Creating new words, and manipulation of beginning and ending sounds.
2	This program introduces students to phonics, working with onset and rhyme. We move into focus letters and incorporate them into breaking down CVC words. Very interactive in the sense that they have to listen to the words, but there is a writing component, so they recognize them in print. It is an I do; We do, You do model.
3	It is used 4 times a week, we try 5 but library and stem time can get in the way.
3	About three days, I am trying to do five but I have to get everything else in
3	We do it five times a week.
3	Try and do five days but the truth is four days.
3	Five times a week following the plan.
3	Daily, I try and do five days but can't always make it.
3	I try to do it daily, there are weeks that I missed a lesson. We need to keep it up
3	Honestly maybe three times a week.
3	Four to five times a week
3	Five days a week unless we have a holiday.
4	We have the TEs, I think there may be some online tools.
4	The website and teachers' Manuals. We had a zoom training before school started.
4	The website and presentation tool are great. We also have the TE and the training the beginning of the year.
4	We have some online tools I know I can use it for help but I haven't had to.
4	Presentation tool, TE' there is so many tips in the T on how to do the lessons.
4	There is an online presentation tool that is fabulous, students get chip kits and books to help demonstrate their work.

Question	Response
4	The presentation tool is huge, chip kits are nifty too.
4	The TE, that's it.
4	We have the presentation tool available that is easy to help the students be engaged. I like to utilize the flashcards with my students.
4	The presentation tool is great.
5	I think it may be a me thing because I don't know who to go to. The Grade Level is awesome
5	If I needed help I could go the reading specialist.
5	Just the reading specialist.
5	I'm not sure who.
5	I know you can reach out to the reading specialist.
5	We can always go to our wonderful reading specialist.
5	We talk amongst are [our] grade level
5	I guess we could ask the reading specialist
5	I think I could be a form of assistance, however, I would also reach out to my principal or even the Assistant Superintendent
5	I'm not too aware of any
6	Not Sure
6	Not sure, I don't think it was ever disclosed to us.
6	We share during weekly collaboration amongst our grade level. Nothing reported
6	I'm not sure, it's in our lesson plans.
6	Every week we do progress monitoring with our spelling tests. We give that information to the Principal.
6	We have not come to that. I know we will track growth, most likely quarterly.
6	Only twice a year.
6	No clue

Question	Response
6	Every Monday, we have collaboration so we can discuss how the program is going. We look at the progress students have made toward mastering their letter sounds.
6	So we are aligning homework to the Tier 1 phonics program, so I talked to our Principal about that.
7	Not sure, maybe watching someone present a lesson would be beneficial
7	Maybe an actually lesson being taught so we can see what it should look like. I feel I don't finish the whole day in thirty minutes it takes me closer to an hour.
7	Maybe an assessment at the end of the week.
7	We need a thirty minute longer day.
7	If I had to say one thing, it would be to shorten the weekly stories, they are a bit lengthy, wordy and not on grade level.
7	I think we are good. Getting to observe other teachers
7	Currently, I am very happy with the program. I have to keep working at it. Seeing a lesson by a pro would be helpful
7	Better internet would help
7	I think we have what I need. Seeing it done would be great
7	Maybe more frequent check-ins with our team and with other teachers. I would love to see others trying it out.
8	It is a lot for Kinder we are trying to chunk it to keep my kids on topic.
8	The length of the daily lessons needs to be modified to a shorter length of time
8	The passages are too long.
8	I am not really sure if we should modify them.
8	Just the stories need to be more grade-level friendly.
8	I think it is going ok. The biggest issue I [have is] the time constraints, it takes longer than they say it should. I feel it is worth the extra time. I see improvement with my students, especially the nonreaders.
8	I don't think we should change anything. We just need to see it more.

Question	Response
8	Most of the students do not need it.
8	I think the program pushes the sight words too quickly when students don't have their letter sounds down yet.
8	The passages are a bit too long. The level is on grade level however, the length of the passage is time-consuming.
9	I have not had a specific issue
9	I don't think so.
9	No problem implementing
9	Need more time
9	I have not come across any.
9	No.
9	No at this time
9	No
9	Not sure, sometimes we need to put a daily schedule together
9	Follow-ups, we need follow-up
10	Nothing Specifically.
10	Not at this time
10	None at this time.
10	Not really, just a longer day.
10	May be a phonics worksheet.
10	Maybe seeing it.
10	I have seen a change already in my students. The better I get the more improvement we will see.
10	No its fine. Some more training would be nice
10	I would like to try and implement this during rug time. Most importantly, we need everyone to have a positive attitude about it.
10	The more training, the better.
