

## **Ramp-Up to Literacy: A Case Study of Implementation in Three Schools**

### **Executive Summary**

The goal of Ramp-Up to Literacy (RU) is to bring students who are reading one to two years below grade level up to grade level and, after one or two years, place them in regular English courses. To accomplish this task, the National Center for Education and the Economy (NCEE) developed two English courses (RUI and RUII) with their own curriculum and approach to instruction. These courses are intended to be taught by selected teachers to a specific group of students; RU is not designed as a whole school reform. In preparation to teach the RU courses, there is a series of formal professional development opportunities for the selected teachers, and the RU courses include curriculum and supporting materials. The focus of the professional development is on changing teachers' understanding of, and strategies for, addressing poor reading. Schools are required to purchase classroom libraries with leveled books (books categorized by reading ability) for every RU classroom, and the reform also calls for a number of organizational changes (e.g., scheduling) which address the needs of RU teachers and students.

This case study focuses on school-level perceptions about implementation of RU in three schools at different stages of the implementation process. The schools were selected for study by NCEE at the Consortium for Policy Research in Education's (CPRE) request, and had been working with RU for one year, two years, and five years, respectively, at the beginning of the study. Two of the schools were small high schools (200-500 students) while one was much larger (over 1,000 students). One was rural, while two were urban. All three study schools struggled with low student achievement and pressure to increase scores on state tests, largely due to No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation. Two of the schools had also adopted NCEE's whole school reform, America's Choice—one in the middle school attached to the high school, the other in the high school itself.

All three schools in this case study had trained RU teachers and were implementing the RU program during the study period, albeit with modifications. Adaptations broke into several types:

- 1) Size and resource-driven school level modifications to the structure of RU. For example, two schools included students more than two years behind grade level in RU classes because the schools lacked sufficient staff to teach this group separately.
- 2) School- or district-level adaptation to address alignment and instructional consistency issues. For example, one district modified the RU program to include state writing requirements.
- 3) Individual teacher adaptations of the reform prompted either by preferences and professional judgment or by outside accountability pressures. For example, some teachers decided to drop the RU curriculum and instead focus on test preparation for several weeks prior to state testing.

Up-front adaptations for alignment appeared to make teacher adoption of the program easier. We found that the smaller schools had more difficulties implementing several of the structural aspects of the RU design.

Both of the earlier implementing schools showed increased levels of implementation and increased integration of RU into school communication networks over the two-year study period. We also found some spread of ideas to non-RU teachers in all three schools despite the fact that RU is not designed as a schoolwide reform. Almost all RU teachers reported a change in instructional practices and a strong positive effect on student and teacher motivation that they attributed to RU. There was variation, however, in the reported frequency with which teachers used various RU techniques, and reports from supervisors indicated that some teachers were doing a better job at implementing the reform as designed than others. Interviewees also had doubts about the sustainability of the reform in two of the schools, due to a combination of leadership and teacher turnover, lack of resources, the pursuit of new funding sources, and accountability pressures.

Four factors appeared especially important to understanding our implementation findings. First, the RU design itself determined many aspects of the implementation experience. Second, school leadership played a critical role in the interpretation, use, and spread of the reform ideas. Third, the district role in providing (or failing to provide) support both in terms of financial resources and instructional guidance influenced implementation. Lastly, teacher and school administrators' impressions of the reform appeared to be highly influenced by the existence of feedback loops between teacher use and student engagement; teachers who were convinced that RU "worked" for students became advocates for its use.

Although we caution against generalizing findings from a case study of three schools, the findings suggest a number of questions, issues, and potential lessons for both consumers and external school reform designers. One of these is the potential value of early attention to explicitly defining the problem or problems that a reform is meant to address. For example, in the school where RU appeared most firmly entrenched, the principal and instructional staff had spent considerable time prior to the introduction of RU convincing the entire school staff that ensuring high school students were literate was everyone's problem. A second issue is a reform's design "fit" for the school. The structural requirements of RU are particularly challenging for smaller schools, raising questions for the reform organization about adapting reform designs to differing circumstances, and for schools and districts about total reform costs and requirements. Other potential lessons include the importance of considering issues of alignment with district mandates and reform sustainability early on, including establishing school- and district-level support systems. This case study also suggests that although reform-driven instructional change at the high school level may be possible, it is greatly enhanced by supervision and support.

## **I. Introduction**

With the passage of the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2001, schools are under increasing pressure to demonstrate improved student learning and outcomes, defined in the legislation as Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Each year, more high schools are identified as underperforming due to failure to make AYP (Education Week, 2006). To raise achievement, new performance expectations require teachers, schools, and districts to move beyond aligning curriculum, reallocating time, and other conventional approaches. In response, they increasingly rely on external school reform organizations. However, the challenge of making improvements in schools, and in high schools in particular, is well documented (e.g., Siskin, 2003).

To better understand this challenge, researchers at the Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE) have examined the interactions between five reforms and 15 high schools over a two-year period. This project is particularly important because it makes the organizations and their reform's influences on schools simultaneous objects of investigation. Reforms in this CPRE research project include High Schools That Work, First Things First, Ramp-Up to Literacy, the Penn Literacy Network, and SchoolNet. These organizations were selected as representative of the types of external assistance found in high schools during previous CPRE research (Gross & Goertz, 2005).

One way in which we are sharing our research is through the development of case studies that examine the progress of each reform in a sample of schools at different points of implementation.<sup>1</sup> The case study presented here focuses on three schools implementing Ramp-Up to Literacy (RU). RU is a reform geared towards middle and high school students who are reading below grade level. The reform was developed by the National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE), an organization established in 1987. NCEE has been involved with several standards-based reform initiatives, including America's Choice (AC), a whole school reform from which RU evolved. NCEE chose to "unbundle" RU from the AC design because districts and schools were attracted to the accelerated literacy component, but could not afford or for other reasons were not interested in the entire reform model.<sup>2</sup>

**Methods and study schools.** This case study draws from interview and survey data collected in three high schools and districts across the country, and from provider<sup>3</sup> staff during the 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 school years. At our request, RU staff identified three schools with which they had collaborated for one to five years. Two of the schools were in their first (RU1<sup>4</sup>) or second (RU2) year of implementation at the time of our first visit. A third "mature" school (RU3) had worked with the reform for five years.

All three schools had a history of struggling with low student achievement and poor performance on state tests. The district also played a role in introducing RU to each of the three schools, although district roles differed considerably in other respects. Finally in all three schools, our results were muddied by the presence of other reforms. Two of the schools (RU1 and RU3) were implementing AC in the school (one school at the connected junior high, and the other at the high school),<sup>5</sup> while the third (RU2) introduced some aspects of another reform in the final year of our study. Additional information about the three schools can be found in Table 1.

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<sup>1</sup> Case studies for each of the other four reforms can be found by visiting [www.cpre.org](http://www.cpre.org).

<sup>2</sup> The full AC reform model involves some adjustments to the school leadership structure, as well as the appointment of full-time literacy and math coaches who are trained to help teachers improve, vary, and differentiate their instruction using a number of habits and techniques. AC includes Ramp-Up to Literacy and Ramp-Up Mathematics, which are courses with their own curricula designed to bring ninth and tenth graders who lag behind their peers up to grade level in these areas.

<sup>3</sup> We use the term "provider" to refer to the external school reform organizations that offer reforms to schools and districts, such as RU.

<sup>4</sup> The high schools in this study range from early implementers to mature schools. After the provider abbreviation, the number 1 denotes a school that was in its first year of implementation, the number 2 a school that was in its second year of implementation, and the number 3 a school that was implementing for 3-5 years.

<sup>5</sup> Because AC and RU share some techniques and structural components, it was often hard for interviewees to distinguish one from the other.

**Table 1. School and Data Collection Background.**

	<b>RU1</b>	<b>RU2</b>	<b>RU3</b>
Student enrollment	Under 500	Over 1,000	Under 500
School location	Rural	Urban	Urban
AYP Status	Did not make AYP in 2003 or 2004; made AYP in 2005	Did not make AYP in 2005	Did not make AYP in 2005
Ethnicity	77% African American, 20% White	50% African American, 2% Hispanic, 41% White	71% African American, 25% Hispanic, 13% White
Students eligible for federal free or reduced-price lunch	99%	41%	82%
Years of RU implementation at time of first CPRE visit	One year; AC in attached middle school	Two years	Five years; AC in high school
Size of RU program	Approximately 1/3 of incoming ninth graders placed in RU; one RU teacher in middle school and one in high school	Approximately 1/2 -2/3 of incoming ninth graders placed in RU; seven RU teachers in 2004-05; five in 2005-06	Almost all incoming ninth graders placed in RU; five formal RU teachers
CPRE Visits	Three times: fall 2004, spring 2005, spring 2006	Three times: fall 2004, spring 2005, spring 2006	Once: spring 2005
Survey administered to school staff	Twice: spring 2005 and spring 2006	Twice: spring 2005, and spring 2006	Once: spring 2005

RU1 and RU2 were visited three times (at the beginning and end of the 2004-2005 school year and at the end of the 2005-2006 school year), while RU3, as the mature school, was visited only once. In choosing the mature school, we asked RU staff to nominate a school that had worked with the reform for more than three years, and one in which the developer felt the reform was well realized. Our purposes in visiting the mature school were: (a) to see what the provider considered a successful implementation of the reform, (b) to gain a point of reference with regard to where the earlier implementing schools might be heading, and (c) to help us ascertain what changes might have occurred to the reform itself over time. Our main focus, however, was on the introduction, use, and interpretation of the reform in the earlier implementing schools during the study period.

During each visit, interviews were conducted with teaching and administrative staff at each school. Protocols for interviews were developed for each round of data collection, but the same protocols were administered to all schools within each round. Staff members with both central and peripheral involvement with the reform were targeted. In addition, we interviewed district staff members in each of the school districts and RU staff. In total, our findings are based on approximately 99 semi-structured interviews lasting between 30 and 60 minutes each.

In addition, at all three schools a survey was conducted with all teaching staff in the 2004-2005 school year. The survey provides data about both the enactment of reform components and communication among staff in each of the schools. In the two schools in the earlier stages of reform implementation, the survey was administered a second time, at the end of the 2005-2006 school year, this time to all professional staff members. Our findings in this case study are based on 127 surveys from spring 2005 and 100 surveys from spring 2006, with school response rates ranging between 68-83%.

This case study uses a mixed-method design. Qualitative data were analyzed iteratively using a set of codes derived from existing research literature, as well as our previous and ongoing data collection and analysis.

Simultaneously, survey data were analyzed in order to provide schoolwide measures of reform use, teacher familiarity and comfort with the reform, perceptions of school change, and communication patterns among high school faculties. Using both the qualitative and quantitative data, case studies were developed for each school. The findings from these school-level case studies are brought together here, with analysis focused on factors explaining patterns and/or variation in implementation both within, and to some extent among, the schools.

**Limitations.** The findings presented here are bounded by several limitations of the research design. First, given the small number of schools and the fact that they were hand-picked by the provider, it is not possible to generalize these results to other schools and districts. Second, the findings do not represent a summative evaluation of either the schools or RU more generally. Such evaluations require very different measures, samples, and methods. In contrast, this research used sampling and data collection methods designed to illuminate a deep understanding of teacher and administrator experience with the reform and their sense of the reform's progress in the three schools. The study does report the evaluative judgments of our interviewees, or CPRE researchers' evaluations of what happened to the reform in the study schools. Third, because the focus of our study is on the process of implementation, this study did not examine changes in student achievement. As a result, references to "change" or work related to the reform are based not on external measures, such as classroom observations or student achievement, but instead reflect the perceptions of school, district, and provider staff as expressed through interview and survey data. Finally, our findings heavily emphasize the experience of those schools that are relatively early in their implementation processes.

**Overview.** This case study is divided into seven sections. Following this introduction, the second section offers a brief overview of the reform being studied as it was designed. The third section describes the ways in which the reform was interpreted and used at the school level. The fourth section documents individual and organizational outcomes that were attributed by school and district staff to the use of the reform. The fifth section summarizes the main cross-school findings. The sixth section identifies several factors at the reform, school, and district levels that help to explain patterns or variation in reform use across schools. Though findings are drawn from a small, non-random sample, it is our hope that the factors we identify will provide the reader with useful insights into the practitioners' perspective when considering implementation of reforms in other contexts. The final section concludes the discussion of our findings.

## II. Reform Overview

The goal of Ramp-Up to Literacy (RU) is to bring students who are reading one to two years below grade level up to grade level and, after one or two years, place them in regular English courses. To accomplish this task, the provider, the National Center for Education and the Economy (NCEE), developed two English courses (RUI and RUII) with their own curriculum and approach to instruction. These courses are intended to be taught by selected teachers to a specific group of students; RU is not designed as a whole school reform. In preparation to teach the RU courses, there is a series of formal professional development opportunities for the selected teachers, and the RU courses include curriculum and supporting materials. The focus of the professional development is on changing teachers' understanding of, and strategies for, addressing poor reading. Schools are required to purchase classroom libraries with leveled books (books categorized by reading ability) for every RU classroom, and teachers must use these leveled texts to guide students in their independent reading. RU students are also to spend time reading to and tutoring componentary students (cross-age tutoring). Additionally, the reform calls for a number of organizational changes (particularly in scheduling). RU requires a 90-minute time block and a maximum class size of 20 students. Students are to be evaluated before being placed in RUI (targeting) and then evaluated again after their first year. If need be, they are to continue in RU for a second year (RUII) with the same teacher (looping). Involvement in RU training by instructional coaches and others in supervisory positions is not required by the reform, but is recommended by NCEE. The cost of such training is not included in the basic costs of the reform.

RU's design rests upon a "scaffolding" model of learning whereby new student learning builds from existing individual student knowledge and ability. The underlying assumption is that optimal learning conditions occur when the student tackles material that is new enough to be interesting and challenging, but not so difficult as to be frustrating. The RU scaffolding model of instruction follows a sequence of steps in which the teacher first models a task, then performs the task with student assistance. Next, students perform the task while the teacher helps. Finally, the student performs the task as the teacher observes. This model presupposes that teachers have an accurate grasp of individual skill levels, as well as the ability to work with students individually and in small groups.

RU is a fairly prescriptive, although it is not a scripted reform. The reform follows a workshop model of instruction built around a prescribed set of routines (e.g., independent reading, read-aloud/think-aloud/talk-aloud, work period, closing) and rituals (e.g., consistent ways of entering the classroom, transitioning from one routine to the next, selecting books from the classroom library for independent reading, writing book logs). The reform identifies how much time should be spent on the various routines. RU uses tools ("artifacts") to support these rituals and routines that include a reader's notebook, writer's sourcebook, student assessment notebook, charts, and student work exhibits. The written curriculum and materials also cue teachers with regard to when and how to use tools, techniques, and routines.

The RU design recognizes the critical issue of student motivation to learn. Providing classrooms with their own libraries is an essential component of RU in part because NCEE believes students will be more motivated to read if they have an opportunity to make choices about what they read. Cross-age tutoring is another strategy to motivate and to help students learn. The provider writes:

Students who struggle in the secondary grades with literacy frequently demonstrate a lack of interest in academic work. This can be attributed to any number of factors in their lives, but two are students' difficulty with rudimentary literate behaviors and the complete absence of authenticity in their schoolwork. Cross-age tutoring solves both of these dilemmas [by giving] students the opportunity to return to children's books where they can learn the basics of comprehension strategies and develop fluency without fear of ridicule. Second, it provides authenticity to their work through the tutor/tutee relationship. (National Center on Education and the Economy, 2004, p. 10)

As discussed later in this case study, the RU design has also evolved over time. Although the overall philosophy and many components of the reform have remained the same, experience with the reform has prompted NCEE to make alterations. None of the schools we studied as part of this case study was using the most current official version of RU, which includes both changes to some of the literature selections and more emphasis on writing than was true of previous versions. However, several of the schools made their own alterations to the reform or pioneered such adaptations with NCEE along similar lines.

### **III. Enactment**

#### **A. Awareness**

RU is a targeted reform, and spreading RU is not a major objective of the reform's design, despite NCEE recommendations that basic information about RU be made available schoolwide. We found that the level of exposure to and awareness of RU within the three schools and associated districts varied, from being a relatively unknown reform to an initiative with high school and district-wide awareness. Awareness also grew with maturity: at RU1, the early implementing school, 33% of teachers had never heard of RU in the first survey administration. By the second, only 13% had never heard of it (see Table 2). This increase in awareness was limited to the school, however. At the district level, the model had not generated much attention in the district office beyond the associate superintendent and the business manager. Most

communication regarding both AC and RU occurred between NCEE and RU1, rather than the district. In contrast, knowledge and awareness of RU was much higher at the two other schools, both at the school and district levels. At RU2, only 1% of survey respondents had never heard of the program, while 3% had never heard of it at RU3 (see Table 2). District personnel in both schools were also well informed about the reform and were supporting RU implementation in more schools than just those in our case study.

## **B. Participation**

All three schools had trained RU teachers at the time of our visits, but, as Table 1 shows, the RU programs were bigger at two schools in terms of the number of teachers and students involved. At RU1, only two teachers formally taught RU; at RU2 there were seven teachers in our first year of data collection and five the second; at RU3 there were five. All three schools also had at least one staff person involved in coaching RU teachers. The number of students involved in or affected by RU also varied between the schools. About one third of incoming ninth graders were placed in RU at RU1, about half to two thirds at RU2, and virtually all at RU3. As mentioned before, there was also more district participation at RU2 and RU3 than at RU1. In addition, involvement or participation in RU also went beyond trained RU teachers and was much more extensive than intended by the reform, particularly at RU2 and RU3. For example, 11% of non-RU teachers at RU1 described themselves as “somewhat” or “very” involved in RU. In contrast, the percentages were 40% at RU2 and 36% at RU3.<sup>6</sup>

## **C. Professional Development**

According to the RU design, teachers selected to teach RU receive off-site training over a two-year period from NCEE staff. The formal training begins with a summer institute (generally five days) and follows up with two or more workshops during the academic year. The training is situated in the real work of the teacher-learner and covers the material and pedagogies that teachers will use in class over time. Schools implementing unbundled RU are under no obligation to assign and train instructional or literacy coaches, although it is recommended. Supervisory staff members receive one day of training, and school leaders receive a detailed handbook with suggestions for monitoring and supporting the work of RU teachers.

With the exception of several RU2 teachers, all RU teachers and instructional coaches received the full RU training through NCEE.<sup>7</sup> For the RU2 district, NCEE provided training for the first two years, and by the 2005-2006 school year the district took over. By spring 2006, new RU teachers were trained by the district with supplementary internal training provided by the school-based instructional coach and literacy lead.

A proportion of non-RU survey respondents at all three schools also reported either participating in RU training or receiving some training in components of RU, either from NCEE or internal coaching efforts supported by the school and/or district.<sup>8</sup> RU2 stood out in this regard. Whereas by the second survey administration 22% of non-RU respondents at RU1 said they had been at least exposed to components of RU; at RU2, 49% of non-RU respondents had at least some training in components of RU (22% said they had been trained to teach RU, and an additional 27% said they had training in components of RU).<sup>9</sup> This very broad

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<sup>6</sup> Percentages are based on second survey results for RU1 and RU2, and the single survey results for RU3. All RU teachers across the three schools described themselves as “very involved.”

<sup>7</sup> Two teachers at RU2 in 2004 were hired late and were therefore unable to attend the NCEE summer training. They were instead given a three-day make-up training by district personnel. The district’s relationship with NCEE ended in 2005; therefore several new teachers received summer training through the district.

<sup>8</sup> Although teachers at RU1 were exposed to components common to AC and RU through the efforts of the assistant principal, they tended to identify these components as AC rather than RU.

<sup>9</sup> Percentages are from second survey administration. Note that some respondents may have taught RU in the past, but were not teaching RU that year.

exposure to training was accomplished by sending teachers to NCEE- and district-run RU training as well as providing opportunities for teachers to learn about the reform through school-based professional development run by the literacy lead and instructional coach. At RU3, 17% of non-RU survey respondents said they had been trained in RU, including all but one member of the English department. The RU3 district provided some content area teacher training in conjunction with NCEE, as well as RU training through NCEE certified trainers (of whom the RU3 literacy coach was one). Several content area teachers at RU3 had been sent to AC content area training, and virtually all teachers (with the exception of math, where there was another NCEE-trained coach) also received some internal professional development through the literacy coach.

Teacher and coach perceptions of NCEE training were overwhelmingly positive across the three schools. Several respondents reported initial skepticism about the reform but were convinced by the training to at least give it a try. The majority of RU teachers felt that the combination of NCEE training and materials gave them a solid foundation to begin implementing the reform in their classrooms, although most also found they had questions about parts of the reform as they started using it. Perceptions regarding training by internal coaches were also almost universally positive, but perceptions regarding district training (RU2) were mixed. Even district administrators responsible for the training admitted that the district-run training had been initially disorganized. The quality of the presentations and activities were not as good as they could have been and the time devoted to training was in some cases insufficient. RU2 district administrators were working on improvements in this regard.

**Table 2. Survey Results on Awareness, Participation, and Professional Development.**

	RU1 Time 1	RU1 Time 2	RU2 Time 1	RU2 Time 2	RU3 Time 1
<b>Awareness:</b> Percent of respondents who had NOT heard of RU	33%	13%	1%	1%	3%
<b>Participation:</b> Percent of respondents who were NOT formal RU teachers reporting that they were “somewhat” or “very” involved in RU <sup>10</sup>	12%	11%	32%	40%	36%
<b>Professional Development:</b> Percent of respondents who were NOT formal RU teachers claiming to have had at least some training in components of RU <sup>11</sup>	4%	22%	17%	49%	17%

## D. Components

Although many RU components were present at all three schools, a combination of school and district adaptations, school-level structural modifications, and differences in teachers’ instructional practices led to slightly different enactment at each of the three schools, and even within classrooms at the same school. Issues of fidelity and adaptation are discussed further in Section III-G.

<sup>10</sup> All teachers currently teaching RU classes across all three schools reported themselves as “very involved” in RU. The drop from Time 1 to Time 2 for RU1 is most likely attributable to the wider administration of the survey to all school staff (as opposed to just teaching staff in the first survey). The percentage for RU3 should be viewed with caution, as some teachers were trained in RU math, and the survey did not make the distinction clear.

<sup>11</sup> Note that the question regarding training changed slightly between the two survey administrations, which may account for some of increase noted.



**Curriculum.** All three schools were using the NCEE-developed RU curriculum and materials for RU classes, although we noted some district-, school-, and individual-level adaptations.

**Staffing.** The RU design does not make specific recommendations with regard to characteristics or background of teachers who should teach RU courses. RU teachers at the three schools had a range of experience and tended to be young, energetic, and relatively unseasoned teachers, but were perceived by supervisors and colleagues as particularly adept at and committed to RU. Although the formal titles varied, all three schools also had a person or persons acting in the role of literacy coach in support of RU teachers and the reform. These coaches had attended the NCEE RU training.<sup>12</sup> There was no turnover at RU1 among RU teachers during the course of the study period, but there was some turnover at RU2. Turnover was due to promotion, transfers, and administrative decisions regarding distribution of the teaching load.

**Targeting.** RUI is targeted to incoming ninth grade students who are approximately two levels below grade in reading. At all three schools, ensuring that the reform was properly targeted was a problem, and had implications for teachers' ability to implement the reform as designed. The problem was particularly acute at the two smaller schools (RU1 and RU3), which lacked both a reliable method to test students for placement and the staff resources to meet the demands of multiple levels. At RU1, the lowest performing one third of the incoming ninth grade class was placed in RU, while at RU3, the solution was to place almost all incoming ninth graders in RU. At both schools, there were students in RU classes well below the recommended two grade levels, but there were no other options for those students at the two schools. At RU2, in contrast, the problem with targeting was lack of a consistent, district-wide method for identifying students for RU. While the district and school struggled with this problem early on, by the 2005-2006 school year, the district was using its own testing system to ensure proper placement, and targeting improved. In addition to RU classes, non-readers or very low readers at this school were pulled into a separate class that used some RU strategies, while at grade level readers went to regular English classes.

**Class size.** The RU design also calls for a maximum class size of 20 students, but maintaining that class size was a problem at all three of our schools. The problem also seemed to worsen over time. At RU3, for example, interviewees said that RU classes had only been held to the recommended size in the first few years of implementation; after that, the larger district class size guidelines prevailed, despite the distinct nature of RU classes. Class size did not appear to be a problem during our early interviews at RU1 and RU2, but by the final round of interviews, several teachers at both schools mentioned that they had more than the recommended number of students in their RU classes. At all three schools, larger than recommended class size appeared to be a problem of planning and/or resources.

**Looping and graduating.** According to the RU design, after completing ninth grade RU (RUI) students are assessed and those who are able move into a regular grade level class. Students who are still not at grade level proceed to the second year of RU (RUII) in tenth grade and retain the same teacher—this practice is known as looping. According to NCEE, looping is a frequently encountered implementation difficulty. At only one of the three schools (RU2) were these aspects of RU being implemented almost completely as designed. At RU1, there was no looping; the second year of RU (RUII) was simply not offered at all, and all RU students were shifted back into regular classes regardless of their reading levels. At RU2, the reform was operating basically as designed, with some students moving into regular classes at the end of the first year of RU but others moving into a second year of RU. On the whole, RU students were able to stay with the same teacher, although in some cases the reduced number of sophomore RU students meant a couple of classes had to be condensed. At RU3, where almost all ninth grade students were in RU, all of these students then moved into

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<sup>12</sup> At RU1, the principal had some of these responsibilities, supported by a part-time literacy coach and full-time lead teacher. At RU2, this role was played by the full-time instructional coach and also by the full-time literacy lead. At RU3, this role was played by the full-time literacy coach.

tenth grade RU (RUII). Students looped with their ninth grade teacher, but there were no regular tenth grade classes into which RU students could graduate.

**Block scheduling.** The RU design also requires a 90-minute instructional block which, according to NCEE, is also frequently difficult for schools to maintain. Both RU1 and RU2 were on a block schedule, and this requirement did not seem to present major difficulties. For RU3, where scheduling was complicated by sharing a building and small school size, the 90-minute block had been cut back to just over 60 minutes. Interviewees reported that in a faculty discussion regarding the schedule, RU teachers united in advocating for a longer block of time for RU classes.

**Classroom libraries and resources.** Classroom libraries with leveled books are a required piece of the RU design. At all three schools, RU teachers had classroom libraries. At RU2, the school also allotted resources for the other ninth grade content area teachers (i.e., social studies, math, and science) implementing modified versions of RU to purchase leveled content area reading materials for their students.

**Cross-age tutoring.** According to the RU design, ninth grade RU students are also supposed to regularly tutor younger students as a means of validly exercising reading skills. At RU1, cross-age tutoring had not been put into place in 2004-2005 (the first year of implementation). At RU2, cross-age tutoring happened at least a few times during the 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 school years. At RU3, although cross-age tutoring took place the first couple of years, the reduction in class time and difficulties scheduling the class trips led to dropping this component.<sup>13</sup>

**RU techniques and practices.** The use of RU techniques and practices in the classroom is at the core of the RU design, and represents a more complex order of change than some of the structural aspects of the reform described previously. Nonetheless, the ability to employ certain RU techniques is dependent upon having the enabling structural conditions to do so. The issue of change in instructional practice is further explored in Section IV-C. This section is focused on the reported use of RU techniques and practices. Given the prescriptive nature of the RU program, one might expect to see considerable similarity across different schools and classrooms. In fact, RU teacher responses to survey questions regarding the frequency with which they used particular RU techniques indicated that while they were using most of these techniques, the frequency varied.<sup>14</sup> Much of this variation appeared to be individual, rather than related to school factors. However, decreased variation in answers from the second survey for both RU1 and RU2 may indicate some school-level intervention. Survey data also suggest that teachers more frequently used strategies that required little change to their instruction (e.g., independent reading, guided reading) than strategies that further diverged from their current practice (e.g., conducting reading conferences with small groups of students). For example, all RU teachers reported having their students do independent reading every day, whereas they held reading conferences much less frequently, or not at all.

In interviews, several RU teachers across different schools talked about having trouble doing group work in their classrooms, particularly with first year RU students unused to the structure and with a larger than ideal class size. One RU teacher said: “And with the design, we just need space, and you need to be able to work in groups. And it gets a little hard when you’ve got 27 in there.” Several teachers also had initial difficulties using the “read-aloud, think-aloud” technique, in which the teacher models out loud the thinking and analysis taking place during reading, correctly.

The most common RU feature to spread beyond RU teachers was the structure of the class period, beginning with a start-up activity to get student attention, a short period of teacher instruction, student work time (both

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<sup>13</sup> In addition to the cutback in actual class time for RU, several of the ninth grade RU classes ended up being scheduled in the afternoon, a time which was difficult for the partnering school.

<sup>14</sup> This finding is consistent with many studies of program implementation (e.g., Berends, Bodilly, & Kirby, 2002).

individually and in groups) and a closing activity, often student-centered. Discrete techniques and ideas such as “read-aloud, think-aloud,” word walls, guided reading, independent reading, and use of rubrics were also being disseminated beyond RU teachers, but mostly as a menu of options and not in the sequence specified in the RU curriculum. Of those non-RU survey respondents who had some professional development on the components of RU, most also said that they used many of these techniques. According to self-reported survey data, however, the frequency with which the techniques were being used varied more among this group than among the RU teachers. This finding is not surprising, given the specific nature of the RU curriculum and accompanying teacher guidance materials.

## **E. Technical Assistance and Support**

Districts, schools, and teachers obtained technical assistance and support for implementing the RU program from a range of sources, including NCEE, the district, school-level supervisors, instructional or literacy coaches, and colleagues. In all three schools, there was at least one strong source of support for the reform at the school level. Not surprisingly, teachers appeared to value and turn most often to sources of support closest at hand, including coaches and colleagues.

**NCEE support.** Technical assistance and support from NCEE is included in the AC design, but at the time of this study was offered only as an additional option to the unbundled RU for a cost. The two schools that were also implementing AC (RU1 and RU3) received some support and technical assistance from NCEE for this reason. RU2, in contrast, had no formal technical assistance from NCEE after the two-year RU professional development program. It is worth noting, however, that the RU2 district benefited from NCEE assistance in adapting the RU curriculum, and continued to rely on the local NCEE provider liaison<sup>15</sup> for informal advice. The RU3 district also had a longstanding relationship with NCEE that went beyond the specific technical assistance to RU3, to include training of district staff and support to other schools.

In the two schools which had formal NCEE technical assistance (RU1 and RU3), the support was viewed as helpful, but diminished over time. Support in both cases included regular supervisory visits to the school, guidance to coaches and administrators, modeling of techniques for teachers, and advocacy at the district level. While a decrease in technical assistance might seem logical with greater maturity, school level interviewees did not feel that their need for this assistance had diminished. Instead, several interviewees expressed a feeling of abandonment by the provider as the level of technical assistance dropped.

**District support.** All three districts provided some financial support for RU implementation at the schools in our study, although it was not necessarily sufficient. Districts provided funds to purchase the necessary materials for an RU class from NCEE, including teachers’ books, students’ books and supplies, and leveled classroom libraries. District support and/or resources were not sufficient in the case of RU1 to fund the additional staff needed to implement both years of RU. The RU2 district purchased the stand-alone RU package for two years, but did not have sufficient funds either to purchase additional technical assistance and monitoring during this time or to continue the training contract after the two-year period expired. Funding was not sufficient at RU3 to allow for the additional staffing to ensure proper targeting of the program.

Two districts in our study (RU2 and RU3) offered instructional support to schools regarding the RU program. Every school in the RU3 district and many in the RU2 district had a literacy specialist and/or instructional coach, and some schools in both districts used “model classrooms,” where teachers could observe RU in practice (in the RU2 district this was supplemented by a district-sponsored cross-school visitation program). All high school instructional coaches in the RU2 district had training in RU if they were attached to a school

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<sup>15</sup> We use the term “provider liaison” to refer to the NCEE staff person who managed the partnership. These individuals coordinated and supplied professional development, technical assistance, and general implementation support.

that had RU. The district ran regular “support” sessions for RU teachers district-wide and, by 2005-2006, had taken over the RU training. The RU3 district paid for four RU teachers to be trained as NCEE “certified trainers,” one of whom was the resident literacy coach at RU3. Our research revealed a disconnect between the extent of involvement in RU described by the RU3 district interviewee, and that perceived by school-based interviewees. One possible contribution to this contrast in perception is that school-based interviewees tended to think of the literacy coach as a colleague and did not identify this support as necessarily coming from the district. Because it provided the funding for the full-time literacy coach at RU3, however, the district may have viewed this assistance as district support.

**School-level support.** At all three schools, there was also a strong internal advocate(s) for the reform, although support was structured differently at each school. At RU1, the assistant principal played a central role, although more for AC than for RU per se. The assistant principal’s role in this school was additionally important given a change in principals and the departure of the part-time literacy coach during the 2005-2006 school year. At RU2, the district, principal, instructional coach, and literacy lead were all perceived to be strongly supportive of RU, with the literacy lead and instructional coach being the primary go-to people for teachers seeking instructional support. At RU3, the literacy coach was viewed by teachers as having primary responsibility for providing RU support. Well respected by the faculty, the coach’s instructional advice was sought out and/or thought helpful by both content area and RU teachers. Faculty gave credit to the principal for understanding the reform and working to expand RU and AC ideas schoolwide (e.g., sending content area teachers for NCEE’s AC training). Several respondents, however, worried that the principal’s pursuit of new funding sources constituted an abandonment of AC/RU, and pointed to a chipping away of the block schedule needed for RU as further evidence of waning support from the administration.

Our findings also highlighted the importance of collegial support at the school level. This finding was particularly salient at RU2. In the words of one teacher:

*I’m convinced that the teachers [who] are teaching this program are some of the best teachers in the nation...I just feel very comfortable with my colleagues. We’re supported when we make good decisions; we’re supported when we don’t make good decisions. We work together to make things better. It helps the program. You have to have that support. Because it takes a good semester to get it going the way you want it to be, so things aren’t always going to go perfect.*

Collegial support was facilitated at RU2 by scheduling that permitted most RU teachers to meet as a group. Collegial support also appeared important at RU3, where RU teachers banded together to defend the RU block from scheduling changes. With only two RU teachers teaching different grade levels (one each in the seventh and ninth grades), RU teachers at RU1 initially worked in isolation. By our final visit, however, the ninth grade RU teacher had begun to attend literacy meetings in part to share information and experiences with the other RU teacher.

## **F. Monitoring**

Provider influence over implementation through monitoring appeared low in the three schools we studied. As with technical assistance, NCEE monitored implementation only for those schools participating in AC in addition to RU. At RU1, staff reported regular visits by NCEE liaisons, but few staff interviewed at either school talked much about their role and contribution. At RU3, NCEE monitoring was described as intensive and helpful over the first couple of years, but was perceived to have been deemphasized along with technical assistance in more recent years. Of the three schools, support for and participation in RU was broadest and deepest at RU2, a school which had no NCEE monitoring at all.

The district played a role in monitoring RU at two schools (RU2 and RU3). The RU2 district was monitoring and evaluating RU through a number of strategies, including classroom observations, interviews, and surveys

of both RU teachers and students. RU3 district staff also mentioned periodic drop-in visits by administrators, specialists, and the director of curriculum and instruction. These visits, however, were not mentioned by teachers or administrators at the school. Instead, the resident literacy coach (a district-funded and certified RU trainer) was seen by teachers as relaying all relevant information to the district.

All three schools also had mechanisms in place for the internal monitoring of RU. At RU1, both the assistant principal and lead teacher did regular and frequent observations of teachers in the classroom, including the two RU teachers. At RU2, monitoring was done mostly by the literacy lead and instructional coach, who reported visiting classrooms for observations on a regular basis. Teachers also reported that the instructional coach had modeled RU and worked with first year RU teachers and ninth grade content area teachers implementing a modified version of RU. At RU3, the literacy coach was viewed by teachers as having primary responsibility for monitoring and visited classrooms on a fairly regular basis.

## **G. Fidelity and Adaptation**

The RU design itself has not been static; rather, it has evolved over time. Data from schools as well as the provider liaisons indicate that there was fairly substantial modification of the design by the provider. In the case of RU3, a veteran RU teacher essentially helped pilot the reform, and he and his colleagues at the time gave suggestions and feedback to the provider, some of which were subsequently incorporated. In comparing training for RU, at least one RU3 teacher noted that the training and materials that she received this year bore little resemblance to the RU training a co-teacher had the year before. Another teacher mentioned that NCEE was aware that they need to “tweak” their literature selections and were in the process of doing so. The most recent version of the RU design also incorporates more writing, a weakness of the previous version noted by teachers and administrators at two of the study schools.

As noted in Section III-D, there were also significant modifications to or adaptations of the RU design at all three schools. These fell across two different axes: (1) those that were intentional versus those that were driven more by circumstance or resources, and (2) those that were condoned or done with the knowledge of the provider versus those that were not.

Intentional modifications to the reform occurred at the district, school, and classroom levels. One example was the RU2 district’s up-front efforts to include more writing and formal test preparation in the RU design. Another example was efforts by the RU2 and RU3 districts and schools to adapt RU structures and ideas to other purposes; for example, creating new RU-influenced curricula or class structure guidelines. At the individual level, several teachers expressed that even with a prescriptive program like RU they needed to have the room to adapt to students and situations as they saw fit. In some cases the adaptation seemed completely in line with the underlying goals of the reform (e.g., a teacher reported allowing excited students to assume parts in a book they were reading, dispensing with the teacher read-aloud that day), but in other cases the decision seemed to reflect particular teaching preferences (e.g., the decision by another teacher to include *Romeo and Juliet* in the RU curriculum).

We found unintended or circumstantial adaptation mostly at the school and classroom level, although district and state accountability pressures as well funding levels and school size contributed to the modifications. Examples of these types of modifications were found largely at RU1 and RU3, and included the previously mentioned deviations from the reform in terms of scheduling, targeting, class sizes, and looping, as well as teacher abandonment of the RU curriculum in favor of test preparation and more limited use of some techniques in the face of larger than recommended class sizes. Some teachers across all three schools also clearly engaged in unintended modifications that were prompted less by circumstance and more by a limited understanding of the reform. Despite the overwhelmingly positive reactions of teachers to the reform, several teachers were perceived by supervisors and/or NCEE liaisons as not really able to adhere to the RU program with any degree of success.

Of the adaptations noted, only the modification of the RU curriculum by the RU2 district was explicitly condoned by NCEE. They clearly knew, however, about the RU2 and RU3 districts' efforts to adapt some of the RU ideas and structures to other purposes, and provider liaisons were reasonably well informed with regard to some of the modifications and fidelity issues at the school and classroom levels.<sup>16</sup> Where NCEE had a formal monitoring role (RU1 and RU3), there was some evidence that provider liaisons tried to increase fidelity to the RU design—for example, talking with teachers about testing and the curriculum or, in one case, advocating with the district to lower class size. The up-front collaborative effort by NCEE and the RU2 district to align RU with state writing and testing guidelines appeared to make use of the reform easier for teachers. Unlike teachers at RU3, RU2 teachers did not feel that the reform was weak on writing, nor did they have to make individual decisions on whether, when, or how to prepare students for testing.

**Table 3. Enactment Summary.**

<b>Enactment</b>	<b>RU1</b>	<b>RU2</b>	<b>RU3</b>
Trained RU teachers teaching RU courses	Yes, two; one in middle school and one in high school; no turnover during study period	Yes, seven in 2004-05 and five in 2005-06; some turnover during study period due to promotion, transfer, and administrative decisions	Yes, five in 2004-05
Other teachers trained in RU components (2005-06 survey results) (not formally part of RU design)	Yes, 22% of non RU teachers reported receiving some training on RU	Yes, 49% of non RU teachers reported receiving some training on RU	Yes, 17% of non RU teachers reported receiving some training on RU (AC may be confounding factor here)
RU curriculum used	Yes, although teachers departed from curriculum to do test prep	Yes, but with modifications worked out with NCEE including different literature selections, a test prep unit, and accommodations to include state writing requirements	Yes, although teachers were re-examining literature selections—school consensus was that curriculum needed to include more writing. NCEE liaison reported some departures from curriculum in order to do test prep.
Targeting of RU students	Imperfect targeting – lower performing 1/3 of students sent to RU with a range of reading levels	Targeting problems initially, but largely resolved by 2005-06	Almost no targeting—basically all ninth and 10 <sup>th</sup> grade students sent to RU, with range of reading levels
Class size	Class size initially not mentioned as problem, but exceeded recommended size by 2005-06	Class size initially not mentioned as problem, but exceeded recommended size by 2005-06	Larger than recommended class sizes cited as problem

<sup>16</sup> Also, given the lack of a formal monitoring/technical assistance role for NCEE at RU2, the provider liaison did not have detailed school-level information.

Looping and graduation	No looping, no 10 <sup>th</sup> grade RU class as recommended in design; RU students sent back to “regular” classes in 10 <sup>th</sup> grade regardless of reading levels	Both looping and graduation, ninth grade RU students who had recovered grade level sent to regular classes, rest continued with same teacher for 10 <sup>th</sup> grade RU	Looping, but no graduation, all ninth grade students continued with 10 <sup>th</sup> grade RU
Block scheduling	Yes	Yes	Time block for RU was shorter than recommended
Classroom libraries	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cross-age tutoring	No, never instituted	Yes	In place for first few years but discontinued due to scheduling problems
Use of RU techniques and practices (RU teacher self-reports)	All RU teachers used most RU techniques asked about, but frequency varied; less variation reported in second survey administration	All RU teachers used most RU techniques asked about, but frequency varied; less variation reported in second survey administration	All RU teachers used most RU techniques asked about, but frequency varied
Technical assistance and support from NCEE	Yes, although diminishing over time	No technical assistance to school; some to district	Yes, although diminishing over time
Technical assistance and support from district	Some financial support, but insufficient to fund second year of RU	Both financial and instructional support	Both financial and instructional support
School-level support for RU implementation	Yes, concentrated in one or two individuals (vice-principal and literacy coach)	Yes, including principal, instructional coach, literacy lead, and substantial collegial support among RU teachers	Yes, particularly from literacy coach and among RU teachers; principal supportive, but seen as unable to ensure structural pre-conditions for RU program
Monitoring	Yes, from both NCEE and internal to school by vice principal, literacy coach and lead teacher	Yes, from district as well as internally by instructional coaches	Yes, primarily internally by literacy coach (who was also district employee); NCEE contract had ended

## IV. Outcomes

The discussion of RU implementation outcomes in the three study schools is once again bounded by the limitations of the study design. For the most part, the study design does not allow us to draw a causal link between outcomes and the RU program, even within individual schools. The design is also not well suited to detecting certain aspects of change, such as deep level changes in teacher beliefs. Bearing these limitations in

mind, we present our findings on outcomes, recognizing that the changes noted are mostly those perceived by teachers and other school staff. Where there appears to be an interesting and potentially causal link, particularly one suggested by our interviewees, we also note that, in the hope that other studies may go further in establishing causality.

## **A. Level of Understanding**

RU teachers across the three schools for the most part understood the goals of RU in a manner consistent with the NCEE literature: as a reform designed to motivate students to read and to bring struggling readers up to grade level. This finding is not surprising, given that all but one RU teacher had specific training in RU from NCEE trainers and the goals of the reform remained consistent over the study period. Several RU teachers also stated that they were able to understand the reform at a deeper level with a year or more experience teaching it.

School instructional coaches and literacy leads/lead teachers also generally had a good understanding of the reform. Several could discuss in a specific and nuanced way the underlying philosophy of RU, the strengths and weaknesses of the reform, and the RU teachers with whom they were working. Unsurprisingly, in the districts more closely involved with the reform (RU2 and RU3), understanding of the reform as conveyed by district staff was also much greater than at RU1, where the district had only a peripheral role. RU2 and RU3 district staff members that were interviewed were able to describe the theory and components of the reform in detail.

Most non-RU teachers received their information secondhand (from administrators or other teachers), and their understanding of the reform's goals and specifics varied. This variation may have been due to the character of the reform and the dissemination strategy within the school, as well as reform's maturity to a limited degree. Since we were not able to interview all school staff, we relied on survey data to provide an idea of the level of understanding schoolwide. At RU1, where RU was a limited, targeted program, schoolwide knowledge and understanding of the reform was lowest, although it improved over time. Knowledge of the reform was much higher at RU3, and highest at RU2. For example, when asked if they agreed with the statement "I understand the purpose of Ramp-Up," 43% of RU1 respondents agreed, while at RU3 the comparable percentage was 76%, and at RU2 it was 94% (see Table 4). When asked if they agreed that "RU has a detailed plan for improving instruction," 36% of RU1 respondents agreed, while the comparable percentages were 74% at RU3 and 90% at RU2.<sup>17</sup> Interview data generally confirmed the survey results in regard to non-RU teacher understanding of the reform.

Crucial to thorough understanding of a reform as well as any assessment of value is an understanding of the issue or problem that it is meant to solve. A question asked only in the second survey administration sheds some additional light on how school staff understood the problem RU is designed to address. Staff members at RU1 and RU2 were asked if they agreed with the statement: "I believe that teaching literacy is the responsibility of high school teachers." At RU1, both RU teachers and other staff were split on this question: one RU teacher strongly agreed, while the other strongly disagreed. Overall, 30% of all staff members agreed, 40% disagreed, and 23% weren't sure. At RU2, on the other hand, all RU teachers strongly agreed, as did 77% of the staff overall. These results are interesting, given that there was a conscious strategy undertaken by the school administration and the literacy lead at RU2 to convince teachers that literacy was everyone's responsibility. There was a shared understanding that the problem was literacy and that everyone needed to pay attention to it. This shared understanding may have paved the way for support for RU on a much wider scale than at the other two schools.

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<sup>17</sup> Percentages based on spring 2006 survey results for RU1 and RU2, and spring 2005 survey results for RU3.



## B. Perceived Value of the Reform

Overwhelmingly, RU teachers and school administrators across the three schools thought RU had value. Moreover, value was most often linked with perceived effects on students (discussed in Section IV-F) and changes in teacher practice (discussed in Section IV-C). In survey responses, RU teachers across the three schools agreed that the reform had “provided useful ideas and resources for changing my classroom practice.” There was near universal agreement among RU teachers (as well as school administrators) that the RU structure was helpful with classroom management, particularly for less experienced teachers. It was also valued as a model for how to use block scheduling effectively. Several teachers, school administrators, and district staff across all three schools described the reform as an organized way to incorporate “best practice.” Both school and district level staff also valued the comprehensive materials and professional development that accompanied the reform. Said one principal:

*So we started with the RU program and what I learned is that the structures are really powerful. I mean, all the daily rituals and routines. It’s also made some people a lot better teachers too. It really did. It’s been just as powerful for the teachers as it has been for the kids.*

Among non-RU teachers interviewed, those at RU2 were the most positive about the reform overall. Here, value was also linked to results and perceptions that the reform was meeting an identified need. As one RU2 teacher reported:

*I’ve had feedback from science teachers who have used the RU structure, who love it, who just completely changed their number of referrals to the office...really changed the atmosphere in their rooms, gave them a tool to maintain discipline.*

At RU3, content area teachers gave considerable deference to pro-RU colleagues in the English department. Several content area teachers and at least one RU teacher, however, expressed some misgivings as to whether RU was adequately preparing kids either to write at the expected levels and/or to read content area texts. At RU1, there was still considerable resistance on the part of some teachers to the introduction of the AC class structure; many teachers, however, simply did not know enough about AC/RU to have formed an opinion about it.

**Table 4. Summary of Survey Data on Program Understanding, Value, and Expectations.**

<b>Respondents Agreeing with Statement</b>	<b>RU1 Time 1</b>	<b>RU1 Time 2</b>	<b>RU2 Time 1</b>	<b>RU2 Time 2</b>	<b>RU3 Time 1</b>
“I understand the purpose of RU”	RU teachers: 100%; non-RU teachers: 24%	RU teachers: 100%; non-RU teachers: 39%	RU teachers: 86%; non-RU teachers: 87%	RU teachers: 100%; non-RU teachers: 94%	RU teachers: 100%; non-RU teachers: 73%
“RU has a detailed plan for improving instruction”	RU teachers: 100%; non-RU teachers: 12%	RU teachers: 100%; non-RU teachers: 32%	RU teachers: 86%; non-RU teachers: 88%	RU teachers: 100%; non-RU teachers: 89%	RU teachers: 100%; non-RU teachers: 70%
“I believe that teaching literacy is the responsibility of high school teachers”	Not asked	RU teachers: 50%; non-RU teachers: 29%	Not asked	RU teachers: 100%; non-RU teachers: 76%	Not asked

“RU provided me with useful ideas and resources for changing my classroom practice”	RU teachers: 100%; non-RU teachers: 0%	RU teachers 100%; non-RU teachers: 11%	RU teachers 86%; non-RU teachers: 68%	RU teachers 100%; non-RU teachers: 57%	RU teachers 100%; non-RU teachers: 33%
“RU requires me to make major changes in my classroom practice”	RU teachers: 50%; non-RU teachers: 0%	RU teachers 50%; non-RU teachers: 18%	RU teachers: 86%; non-RU teachers: 32%	RU teachers 100%; non-RU teachers: 32%	RU teachers 50%; non-RU teachers: 27%
“The changes called for by RU are helping or will help my students reach higher levels of achievement”	RU teachers: 100%; non-RU teachers: 4%	RU teachers 50%; non-RU teachers: 22%	RU teachers: 86%; non-RU teachers: 75%	RU teachers 100%; non-RU teachers: 79%	RU teachers 75%; non-RU teachers: 47%

Note: The second survey administration (Time 2) included all professional staff members, including non-teaching staff, which may account for drops.

### C. Changes in Teacher Behavior and Practice

There were changes reported in teacher behavior at all three schools. These changes fell into three main categories: (1) changes in communication patterns within the school (discussed in Section III-E), (2) participation in professional development, and (3) changes in classroom practice. Notable at RU3 and particularly at RU2 was the large number of teachers who participated in some form of RU training. At both schools, there were clearly strong if informal incentives for participation. In a number of instances, changes in teacher behavior also hinted at underlying changes in teacher beliefs, although this study was not designed to capture this phenomenon.

With regard to changes in classroom practice, virtually all interviewees agreed that the reform was sufficiently prescriptive that it inevitably led to some changes in instruction. One teacher said: “Well, because Ramp-Up is so structured, there’s a sequence which you follow. And I think that any teacher would have to in some way alter something that they are teaching to fit that.”

How much actual alteration occurred is difficult to judge from self-reported data, but some RU teachers suggested that the program required a lot of changes, while others reported that the program merely rearranged many things that they had been doing already, although generally in ways that made sense.<sup>18</sup> As mentioned before, survey responses suggest that RU teachers still tended to use more familiar techniques more frequently; both district and provider liaison interviews suggest that teachers had difficulties mastering more clinical techniques (diagnosis, prescription, and treatment) as well as effectively differentiating instruction. Nonetheless, supervisors at RU2 and RU3 in particular spoke about seeing a change in practice in teachers who had been exposed to RU.

Changes in instruction also reportedly spilled over into other classes. At all three schools, RU teachers who taught other classes mentioned employing many of the structures, strategies, and techniques of RU in those other classes. Across all three schools, the primary export to non-RU teachers was the lesson structure and the importance of rituals and routines. In addition, certain other techniques (e.g., read-aloud, think-aloud) were also used and promoted as “best practice,” particularly at RU2 and RU3.

<sup>18</sup> There are, of course, issues of fidelity here, some of which were discussed in two earlier sections: Section III-D and Section III-G.

Although the study was not designed to register this sort of change, we found some suggestions of an underlying change in teacher beliefs, at least for some teachers. At RU2, for example, receiving RU training and teaching struggling students were increasingly seen as an honor and opportunity for career advancement, a reversal of the more traditional high school situation in which teachers usually aspire to teach high-level classes (e.g., honors, AP). RU2 and RU3 district staff reported that the reform required teachers to alter not only their practice but their beliefs about struggling high school students. Staff in both districts credited RU with altering the prevailing instructional model whereby teaching reading in high school is relegated to reading and/or English teachers.

#### **D. Changes in Other Staff Behavior and Practice**

Most evidence of reported change in non-teaching staff behavior and practice came from the district level, particularly the RU2 and RU3 districts. RU was perceived to have had “a huge influence” in the RU2 district, as evidenced by the expansion of RU structures and techniques into other content areas such as math, science, and social studies. The district worked with department chairs to embed reading strategies in these content areas. RU2 district staff also noted that school-level supervisory staff visited classrooms more frequently than in the past, and communicated the value of the high student engagement they observed in RU classrooms to other departments. RU also appeared to give teachers an opportunity to carry expertise to the district level, as experienced RU teachers were called upon to train and to pilot new RU-influenced adaptations to curriculum. At the school level, it is worth noting that involvement with RU also became tightly tied with professional promotion at RU2.

The RU3 district’s instructional delivery program was also reportedly influenced by RU and the workshop model. The district created standards for all schools and a school improvement process that reflected many components of RU. According to district interviewees, as a district-wide initiative with a large claim on resource allocation, RU helped change the district’s perception of what curriculum and instruction should look like. The RU3 district planned to take RU “best practice” techniques such as read-alouds and add them into the other content areas. Professional development was altered to the extent that the effective reading strategies the school-based literacy specialists taught were strategies they learned from RU.

Although RU does not mandate the creation of any specific staff positions, all three schools had a person or persons engaged in the role of literacy coach who had received specific RU training from NCEE. School-level coaches and administrators at all three schools reported using practices recommended by RU, including regular observation of RU classrooms, modeling of techniques, and facilitation of meetings with teachers to discuss difficulties and successes with the reform. The presence of AC at two schools, however, makes attribution of these behaviors to RU alone difficult. At the third school (RU2), although the principal and coaches spoke extensively about RU-influenced changes in teachers and students, there was less evidence of how RU might have influenced administrative and coaching practices themselves. The principal clearly saw RU as an important tool for improving instruction in the school, consciously exposed as many teachers to RU training as possible, and gave teachers the support and time necessary to experiment with adapting the reform across content areas. These actions, however, went well beyond any specific RU recommendations and reflect more individual leadership style.

#### **E. Changes in Communication Networks and Staff Relationships**

As revealed in both interview and survey data, communication networks and staff relationships also changed within the three schools over the period of RU implementation. In the first survey administration (spring 2005), teacher communication patterns at all three schools, regardless of the length of time working with RU, were very similar across the communication domains of course content and pacing, classroom management, and assisting low-performing students. Teacher communication in these areas was largely driven by teachers’ informal social contacts. Teachers also turned to administrators at relatively high rates (though to a lesser

degree at RU3) across each of the communication domains. As has been seen in other schools and as is presumed given the historical importance of departments in teachers' professional lives, teachers in the RU schools also turned to their departmental colleagues for course content and pacing matters.

However, as of the second survey administration (spring 2006), there was an overall increase in the amount of requests for help with RU-centered activities at RU1 and RU2.<sup>19</sup> At RU1, there was also an increase in the number of requests for help with respect to issues of course content and pacing and assisting low performing students. Furthermore, in both schools there was an increase in the proportion of individuals in the school who were involved in communication regarding RU, indicating greater spread of the reform. In RU2, there was also an increase in the proportion of individuals in the school who were involved in communication about classroom management. The reform appeared to have become more entrenched in the two schools over time, as individuals tended to request advice from the same people about the provider and about other instructional issues. In RU1, individuals increasingly spoke about RU with their "friends" over time. In both RU1 and RU2, there was also more of an overlap in conversations around RU issues with conversations about: (a) course content and pacing, (b) classroom management, and (c) assisting low performing students.

Survey findings were corroborated by interview data. Teachers at all three schools credited RU with prompting or facilitating more conversations about instruction. In 2004-2005, the two RU teachers at RU1 were isolated, but by the second year of implementation (2005-2006) both reported collaborating to some extent during literacy meetings. At RU2, cross-content area conversations about instruction led to an effort to adapt the RU structure and methods to other content areas. Several teachers at RU3 also credited RU/AC with creating an atmosphere where there was more conversation about instruction. Some of this conversation also used a common AC/RU vocabulary which had diffused throughout the school through both internal and external professional development. At both RU2 and RU3, the fact that there was a core of teachers who valued the reform was an important factor in motivating colleagues to learn more about it and experiment with some RU strategies in their classrooms.

## **F. Perceived Effects on Students**

Across all three schools, interviewees agreed that RU had an effect on students. As mentioned earlier, the value teachers attribute to the reform was closely tied to these perceived effects. All interviewees agreed that RU got students engaged and helped motivate them to read. Teachers at RU2 (both RU and non-RU teachers) went further, and spoke about a "culture shift" in the school whereby it became acceptable to read. One RU2 teacher said: "It's the culture of the school. Students are carrying around books and they're reading. They're reading walking down the hall; they don't want to put their books away. So I think that's pretty cool."

RU2 also stood out in that the effects on classroom management attributed to RU were a huge selling point to the rest of the school—several non-RU teachers described being surprised and impressed when walking by classrooms where students were orderly and engaged in their work.<sup>20</sup> This observation at RU2 contrasted with experience at RU3, where student discipline both inside and outside of the classroom remained a problem. Several teachers at both RU2 and RU3 also talked about how RU helped improve student self-confidence.

There was less agreement both within and between schools with regard to whether RU would ultimately improve student test scores or whether the provider goal of catching up RU students to grade level within two years could be met. Asked if they agreed that "the changes called for by Ramp-Up are helping or will help my students reach higher levels of achievement," 23% of the staff at RU1 agreed, but the majority was unsure. In contrast, 50% of staff at RU3 and 81% at RU2 agreed.<sup>21</sup> At least two RU teachers saw the reform as helpful,

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<sup>19</sup> Note that the survey was given only once (spring 2005) at RU3.

<sup>20</sup> This reaction may say more about the rest of the school than RU, of course.

<sup>21</sup> These percentages are drawn from the second survey administration and include both RU and non-RU staff.

but cautioned that some of their students were considerably more behind than the specified two grade levels, and so were unlikely to be able to reach grade level within the RU program timeframe. At RU1, moreover, students received only one year of RU before being tracked back into regular English class, instead of having the option of another year of RU if needed. Also, the issue of graduating students back into regular classes did not come up at RU3 since RU was not targeted and all students spent two years in the program. However, the division between the lower and upper grades (9-10 and 11-12) was perceived by other teachers as having widened, and students were not generally perceived as sufficiently prepared, particularly for the writing portion of the state test. At RU2, in contrast, the RU program was targeted and there were RU “graduates”—students who moved into a regular English class after ninth grade RU—as well as those who moved after a second year of RU in the tenth grade. School interviewees at RU2 cited the jump in reading scores on the state test as evidence that RU was making a difference despite the fact that RU students’ scores were not disaggregated and such attribution is not actually possible from a scientific standpoint.

## **G. Perceived Sustainability**

Despite a high degree of individual commitment to RU and the different implementation stages, teachers expressed doubt with regard to the sustainability of RU at two of the schools (RU1 and RU3). Perceived threats to sustainability included insufficient resources, staff and leadership turnover, the adoption of other initiatives, and accountability pressures. At RU1, the district believed the reform would continue as long as there were RU-trained teachers. It was not clear, however, if the district would be willing and able to pay for training of additional or replacement teachers, particularly given the fact that there had not been sufficient funding to implement the full two-year RU cycle. The planned departure of the assistant principal at RU1 also cast substantial doubt on the sustainability of RU at the school given her central role in monitoring, support, and advocacy for the reform.

At RU3, most agreed that RU was not doing enough with regard to writing, and if it was to be sustained it would need to be adapted to strengthen that part of the RU program. There was a cadre of RU teachers who embraced the reform and stated that they would continue to use the adapted RU structures and techniques no matter what. The continued presence of the RU-trained literacy coach in the school and the district’s involvement in and support for RU also increased the perceived prospects for sustainability. Several interviewees, however, saw the school’s commitment to maintaining the pre-conditions for implementing RU as having been in doubt for some time. The principal’s pursuit of an independent foundation grant only confirmed this group’s perception that RU, as designed, had been abandoned for the next new thing. The alternate view, expressed by the principal, was that there was really no conflict between AC/RU and the foundation grant.

At RU2, all respondents saw RU as a success and foresaw no immediate threats to its sustainability over the long term. When NCEE’s two-year training program concluded, the district assumed the effort of training teachers in RU principles and strategies. Several strong RU advocates were promoted both within the school and the district, and the endorsement of RU structures and techniques both within the school and by the district appeared to have grown. Although components of another reform were introduced at RU2 in 2006, no one (i.e., the provider liaison, district staff, principal, or school staff) anticipated serious inconsistency with or abandonment of RU. The jump in RU2 state test scores in 2005-2006 further solidified the perception among school staff was that RU was “working,” despite the fact that RU student scores had not been disaggregated and such attribution was probably premature. The frequently noted collegial support at RU2 also appeared to be important to perceptions of sustainability. Despite some teacher turnover at the school, new RU teachers expressed confidence that they could go to more experienced RU teachers, the literacy lead, and instructional coach for support. Table 5 summarizes perceptions of sustainability and factors linked to those perceptions for all three schools.

**Table 5. Perceptions Regarding Sustainability and Contributing Factors.**

<b>Contributing Factors</b>	<b>RU1: Outlook for sustainability perceived as weak</b>	<b>RU2: Outlook for sustainability perceived as strong</b>	<b>RU3: Outlook for sustainability perceived as moderate</b>
District commitment and support	Low, suggested and funded RU program, but otherwise no real involvement; history of program and policy churn within district cited by school interviewees	High degree of involvement and support, including taking over training; high visibility	Moderate to high degree of involvement and support; district-funded literacy coach, and had a long-standing relationship with NCEE; not high visibility as reported by school, however.
Staff and leadership turnover	Literacy coach left and was not replaced; vice principal (perceived as point-person for RU/AC efforts schoolwide) was leaving; no district commitment to pay training of new RU teachers should any leave	Strong and sustained principal support; promotion of RU teachers and coaches; collegial support, district training, and internal coaching managed to minimize impact of staff turnover	Earlier turnover of literacy coach cited as set-back to program; current coach seen as bulwark for program; current principal seen as supportive, but concern that no other school administrators had solid understanding of the program
Size of RU program and teacher support	RU program affected 1/3 of incoming freshmen, but only one year offered; only two RU teachers (one at high school level); program not well entrenched	Program affected 1/2 of incoming freshmen and 1/4 to 1/3 of sophomores; supportive core of RU teachers helped export ideas to others; schoolwide knowledge and support of program	Program affected virtually all incoming freshmen and sophomores; core of RU teachers defended program in face of structural difficulties with scheduling and targeting; schoolwide knowledge of program (partly through participation in AC)
Resources for program	Insufficient for proper targeting or second year of RU as designed	Adequate; pursuit of separate grant seen as complementary rather than threat to RU program	Insufficient for proper targeting; erosion of block schedule; principal pursuit of separate grant seen as threat to program
Accountability pressures	Teachers not uniformly convinced that RU as implemented would raise scores	School staff cited increases in test scores as “evidence” that program was working; program had been adjusted up front with NCEE to accommodate state writing requirements	Concern that reading scores had not jumped, and particular concern regarding writing; school consensus that RU program needed to incorporate more writing for students to succeed on high stakes tests

## V. Summary of Cross-School Findings

- All three schools were implementing a version of the RU program, albeit with modifications. Given the specificity of the reform and its requirements, however, it is more prone to adaptation than less-specified reform. By the same token, adaptations are easier to identify as such.

- Adaptations broke into several types: (a) size and resource-driven school-level structural modifications (e.g., lack of targeting, large class sizes, erosion of the block at RU3, or the nonexistence of year two Ramp Up at RU1, no cross-peer tutoring); (b) school- or district-level adaptation to address alignment and instructional consistency issues (mostly at RU2); and (c) individual teacher-level adaptations, either prompted by preferences and professional judgment or by outside accountability pressures.
- Both of the earlier implementing schools showed increased levels of implementation and increased integration of RU into school communication networks over the two-year study period.
- Almost all RU teachers reported an impact of the reform on instructional practices (despite variation) and a strong positive effect on teacher motivation. As a reform program, RU appeared to generate considerable “buy-in.”
- Almost all teachers, administrators, and district staff interviewed saw RU as valuable and as improving student engagement and motivation to read.
- We found some spread of ideas to non-RU teachers in all three schools, despite the fact that RU is not designed as a schoolwide reform. There was considerable variation in this regard, however. In two schools this spread was confounded by the existence of AC. The school that saw the most spread, however, was RU2, a free-standing RU school.
- We found a disconnect between the perceived sustainability of RU at the individual and school level in two schools (RU1 and RU3). Many RU teachers talked about continuing to “teach RU” or use components of the reform regardless of its formal continuation. Threats to reform sustainability at the school level included leadership and teacher turnover, lack of resources, the pursuit of new funding sources, and accountability pressures.

## VI. Explanatory Variables

Four main variables stand out as critical to understanding the findings described in the previous sections: (a) the design itself, (b) school leadership, (c) the role of the districts, and (d) the existence of feedback loops. While other variables such as school resources, external conditions, communication networks, provider action, and the existence of a sense of urgency around reform played a role, they were often filtered or determined by these four variables.

### A. Design Factors

It is not surprising that we found reported changes in instructional practice in the RU case study schools given that this is the central focus of the reform. Moreover, the specificity or prescriptiveness of the RU design and the character of the NCEE training appear to have contributed to a change in practice. Teachers trained in the reform generally felt proficient in it because the RU design provided them with grounded, specific guidance and actual curriculum for the classroom rather than (only) broad principles which they had to elaborate or figure out how to put into immediate use. Training was also sustained over a period of time, following best practice literature on professional development (e.g., Birman, Desimone, Garet, & Porter, 2000; Cohen & Hill, 1991; Little, 1993), and was supported with extensive documentation and reference materials.

Nevertheless, instructional tasks like classroom assessments or group work proved more challenging than implementing the structural components. Despite teachers’ belief that they were “doing” RU, some teachers were perceived by supervisors as struggling with the reform. Our research does not give us enough data about how the personal characteristics of teachers interacted with reform use, but the perceived variation we found

in practice, across both the relatively straightforward and the more conceptually-challenging aspects of the reform suggests that this may be an important area for further study (see also Spillane, 1999).

Several other RU design aspects help explain the observed spread of reform components within the schools, despite the fact that spread is not a goal of the reform itself. RU has some features, such as classroom libraries and time structures, that can be easy (at least at an unsophisticated level) to adapt in some subjects (e.g., social studies) though more difficult in others (e.g., math or science). Teachers and administrators reported that the classroom structures developed by the reform also helped resolve another problem common in high schools: how to use time well, especially in block schedules, and particularly how to use time to develop more student-centered practices. As noted in Phase I of the CPRE Study of High School Strategies for Instructional Improvement (Goertz & Gross 2005), the issue of how to motivate typically unmotivated students is a key problem in high schools. The fact that teachers perceived RU as “working” in terms of motivating students was of enormous importance both for individual teacher buy-in and spread overall. This issue is further discussed in the section on feedback loops which follows.

Finally, some of the observed adaptations can be linked either to a poor fit of school type with the RU design or perceived weaknesses in the design. As noted earlier, it was much more difficult for the two smaller schools in our study to meet the structural requirements of the reform. With regard to perceived weaknesses, insufficient attention to writing stood out. NCEE has learned from experience in this regard, and the latest version of RU incorporates more writing. Similarly, the accountability realities facing many schools led NCEE to develop a test-prep unit, which was made available to the RU2 district.

## **B. School Leadership**

Across all our schools, school leadership was crucial in creating the conditions for reform, and enabling or facilitating implementation. While the instructional changes noted would probably not have happened without the RU design and training, both formal and informal school leadership were instrumental in the spread and perceived sustainability of the reform. With regard to spread, formal leaders at all three schools recognized benefits of the reform for RU teachers as well as for others. They supported RU teachers by providing instructional guidance (either directly or through literacy or instructional coaches), creating an atmosphere in which it was acceptable to experiment and make mistakes, and giving RU teachers opportunities to shine amongst their colleagues. This support gave legitimacy to teachers who used the reform, enabling them to become go-to people knowledge networks and informal leaders despite being novice practitioners in many cases. It also gave some value to the work of teaching low-level classes. Formal leaders also influenced teacher attitudes toward the reform. At RU2, for example, school leaders consciously delivered a consistent message that literacy was a problem and that it was everyone’s responsibility to deal with it. Leadership helped translate a sense of urgency sometimes created by external circumstances (e.g., accountability pressures) into concrete action.

While formal leaders at all three schools promoted AC/RU ideas, they had quite different leadership styles and strengths, and this had implications for sustainability. At RU1, the assistant principal was doing it all almost single-handedly. With her departure, the sustainability of the reform was in doubt, particularly given a lack of active district involvement in or support of the reform. By contrast, the RU2 principal was more hands off, delegating authority to the instructional coach and literacy lead, and using promotions and the incentive of training to increase exposure to and sustainability of the reform schoolwide. RU2 teachers or those adapting RU to other areas were increasingly perceived as leaders within the school and district. RU3 represented something of a middle ground. The principal delegated authority to the instructional coach and was supportive of RU teachers and ideas, yet seemed unable to guarantee the basic structural requirements of the reform.



Managing resources for and maintaining focus on RU was another area in which school leadership played an important role. As noted earlier, both RU1 and RU3 were small schools in which meeting the structural requirements of RU was inherently more difficult. RU2 was both bigger and better funded. Nonetheless, all three schools either had or were seeking to bring in additional reforms within the school, in part for the resources attached to them. We found an interesting contrast in the reaction of RU2 staff to the introduction of another reform versus that of RU3 staff to the principal's pursuit of a new foundation grant. At RU2, the principal was very clear that he was using only parts of this second reform; RU was viewed by both principal and staff as the main instructional reform in the school. At RU3, despite the principal's statement that there was no conflict between AC/RU and the new grant, staff were not sure and saw the grant as evidence of an abandonment of RU.

### **C. District Role**

The RU design does not define a role for the district in implementing and sustaining the reform in schools. However, NCEE's brief, off-site training creates an implicit need for on-school, on-going assistance to initiate and sustain reform practices that must be met by some entity, whether the school, the district, NCEE (at an additional cost), or some combination. In this study, there was an interesting interaction between district involvement and school leadership with the district role becoming increasingly important to the reform's viability as support from school leaders declined. At RU1, the reform's implementation and continued presence relied almost entirely on school leaders (i.e., the assistant principal) who prioritized the reform. With turnover in this position, and no press or incentives from the district to sustain interest, many did not expect RU to survive. On the other hand when school leaders were committed to RU, district support enhanced the school's capacity to realize the reform's potential by lending both technical assistance and press that fostered greater use. Evidence of this type of supportive role was strong at RU3 and strongest at RU2.

Previous research identifies several key district characteristics or conditions that support reform implementation that were notably present (or absent) in the three districts. These factors include the central placement of the reform effort among district priorities, a coherent focus on teaching and learning, a systemic approach to reform, aligned assessments, and leveraging available resources (Bodilly, 1998; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003). The RU2 district was heavily involved in the RU initiative. Literacy was viewed as a system-wide priority. Support in the central office was multi-departmental and evident from the superintendent on down. RU2 district efforts for implementing the reform were multi-faceted, including support (e.g., time, staff, training, materials, and other incentives), monitoring, and championing the reform. In sharp contrast, these key district characteristics or conditions were notably absent in the RU1 district. In this case, the district described minimal involvement in or commitment to the reform. The district did not provide supplemental assistance or closely monitor use. The mature school (RU3) in our study suggests the district role in reform as changing over time—a dimension that demands more attention particularly to sustain a reform initiative. While RU3 district efforts had been extensive in the past (e.g., training staff, a systemic push for AC/RU, spreading RU ideas to other teachers, and monitoring), the district efforts now seemed to lack some of the enthusiasm in evidence among the RU2 district interviewees. RU3 school staff perceived district support had waned somewhat, rendering the reform vulnerable to competing priorities.

### **D. Feedback Loops**

The existence of feedback loops appeared to explain a good deal about our findings with regard to teachers' use and perceived value of RU. We noted a very strong feedback loop for RU between teacher and student motivation: teachers' evaluation of and incentive to use the reform were consistently linked to seeing positive results in the classroom. One RU2 teacher described her reactions to the reform as follows:

*When I first saw the curriculum, I thought it was too prescriptive, and I was concerned about the writing. Of course, the adaptations helped me deal with all of that. And I thought it was just redundant. I was like, “A lot of this stuff I already do in my class. I don’t really need this program.” But, once I went through the training, I was like, “Well, wait a minute, this is like what I do but it’s better”....Then, once I taught it, at first I was kind of like, “Oh that’s too structured for our kids. They’re rebelling against it.” But then as the year went on, it was so clear that it was just what they needed. So I’m glad that I trusted the program and we did it because it’s a perfect fit.*

At RU2, the attribution by staff of improvements in student behavior to RU was also a huge selling point to the principal and other staff. (This was less true at RU3). At RU2, many non-RU teachers spoke about a culture change around reading at the school, which had sparked their own interest in and support for the reform.

There also appeared to be a feedback loop between leadership and changes in communication networks, particularly earlier in implementation. As RU teachers gained knowledge and experience they tended to become both advocates and sources of information for the reform. Formal leadership accorded a space for RU teachers to talk with their colleagues about their success with the reform. As more colleagues turned to RU teachers for information, RU teachers took on the role of informal leaders. One teacher stated:

*Even individuals...like Mrs. [X] who hasn’t had the RU training, comes to RU teachers to request books or guidance or consultation. So I think the RU teachers are seen as leaders....because they’re doing so much and they’re having success.*

In the case of RU2, this new role for RU teachers as informal leaders was further consolidated by the promotion of several RU teachers to more formal leadership positions.

## **VII. Summary**

In considering the findings and explanatory factors discussed in this case study, it is important to bear in mind that they are findings resulting from the introduction of RU in the three study schools. In no way should they be interpreted as a summative evaluation of RU, NCEE, or the schools themselves, which would have required an entirely different study design. This said, the case study raises some questions, issues, and potential lessons that may be pertinent to reform providers as well as education practitioners. These include: (a) problem definition, (b) design “fit” for the school, (c) adaptation and alignment, (d) support and capacity building, (e) sustainability, and (f) prospects for achieving instructional change.

The first step to solving any perceived problem is the definition of the problem. Moreover, when action is required of an organization, there must be a shared understanding of the problem. The case study offers an interesting example of attending to this often-neglected aspect of change. At RU2, the district decided that its main problem was the literacy level of its high school student population. This message was conveyed consistently to schools. At RU2, there was a deliberate campaign by the principal and instructional coaches to convince teachers that literacy was, in fact, a high-priority problem that everyone had to attend to. This persistent focus on problem definition prepared the way for a reform that focused on literacy, and may have been reflected in the high degree of support RU enjoyed at the school.

A second issue raised by the case study is the issue of design “fit” for schools. Although RU is not an especially costly reform, the inherent resource requirements in the design (e.g., sufficient staff to allow for proper targeting and looping) are much more difficult to meet for small schools. While both the smaller schools in the case study felt that they had benefited from RU, the extensive structural modifications raised the question whether they were really “doing” the reform as designed. These adaptations are significant

because the RU curriculum and the instructional techniques it requires are predicated upon certain structural conditions being in place. This finding raises questions for both providers and practitioners. For providers, are there ways to reconfigure the reform's design for different settings that will still lead to fidelity when implementing reform components? For practitioners, in considering different reform options, have schools and districts really calculated the costs, or are they purchasing the reform without considering what is necessary to maintain it over time?

A third potential lesson pertains to adaptation and alignment. While RU is a complete product, NCEE recognized the need for some flexibility in the RU program in order to meet the specific needs of districts and schools. It was district interest in the RU portion of AC that in fact led to its "unbundling" from the full AC design. In the case of RU2, NCEE worked with district staff to accommodate changes in literature selections as well as include state writing and testing guidelines before the reform was introduced to schools. This up-front adaptation and alignment appeared to facilitate teacher use of the reform. While collaborative adaptation may be beneficial as a process for tailoring the reform's design while maintaining its integrity, other forms of adaptation may threaten that integrity. Unilateral adaptation may mean that providers risk losing control over the quality and reputation of their product, particularly in instances where schools and districts decide against purchasing additional implementation monitoring (which was in fact the case at RU2). Moreover, schools and districts need to recognize that the various pieces of RU are designed to work together; selective adaptation of separate components can threaten the potential overall benefit of the reform.

In all three study schools, teachers' comfort level with and commitment to RU were greatly influenced by the support they received. Support came from various places, including NCEE, the district and principals, and coaches and colleagues. Collegial, coach, and district support was particularly important when support from NCEE either waned or was terminated, and provided a bulwark against turnover and other threats to sustainability. Principals and districts undertaking reform should consider the extent to which this kind of support is built into the reform's design (e.g., RU suggests that there should be a minimum of two RU teachers at a school undertaking the reform and recommends the involvement of instructional coaches), and how to build in additional support as needed.

With regard to sustainability, because RU depends on intensive training of individual teachers, it is particularly vulnerable to teacher turnover. A school or district must either rely on NCEE training indefinitely (a possible but costly solution), or find ways to duplicate NCEE training and support. In this case study, two districts (RU2 and RU3) did just that—one by putting ongoing RU training in the hands of RU-trained personnel, and the other through NCEE certification of district RU trainers. This case study suggests that district involvement and capacity building from the outset may both encourage reform use and improve prospects for sustainability. It also suggests the obvious but often ignored lesson that sustainability needs to enter into the consideration of any reform.

Finally, the case study throws some interesting light on the prospects for instructional change in high schools, the holy grail of many reforms. RU's tightly-coupled training, curriculum, classroom rituals, and instructional techniques appealed to the majority of teachers and reportedly did produce changes in instruction. Nonetheless, variation between teachers with regard to use of RU techniques as well as supervisor reports suggest that even among RU enthusiasts, some teachers were not using the reform effectively and needed either additional help or to be moved out of the program. Although change appeared possible, it was once again maximized through supervision and support.

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