

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CLUB RIF PILOT PROGRAM

INTRODUCTION

In the fall of 2002, Reading is Fundamental (RIF) contracted with Goodman Research Group, Inc. (GRG) to conduct a summative evaluation of the pilot program, Club RIF. Club RIF, which was developed by RIF with funding from the Best Buy Children's Foundation, was piloted during the second half of the 2002-2003 school year in two locations: Newark, New Jersey and St. Paul, Minnesota.

The specific goals of the Club RIF program were to:

- Increase the amount of time spent reading and engaging in fun, literacy-related activities,
- Promote mentoring and relationships between teens and children,
- Increase confidence and self-esteem of teens as readers and mentors,
- Encourage teens to develop managerial and communication skills, while using technology as a resource,
- Make reading a highly visible activity in schools and communities, and
- Promote partnership opportunities among teachers at various levels.

The Club RIF program is a reading program that paired high school students (called Club Members) with small groups of elementary school students (called young children). Each group met on a regular basis to participate in paired reading sessions which included reading together and completing literacy-based activities. The program provided each group of young children with a Lending Library which consisted of a selection of children's books that could be used during paired readings or throughout the school day. All participants also received three new books throughout the program during Distribution Events. Club Members in the program were encouraged to take on many of the responsibilities of managing their Club RIF program, including planning paired reading sessions and Distribution Events, and were expected to reflect on their Club RIF experiences on a regular basis by completing reflection activities that combined reading, writing, and sharing their perceptions.

EVALUATION GOALS AND METHODS

The purpose of the evaluation was to describe the implementation of the pilot program and assess changes in the reading behavior and attitudes of the Club Members and young children participants. In addition, the evaluation assessed whether the program provided Club Members the opportunity to participate in and learn about areas of business management. GRG used a mixed method evaluation design to collect data at various points during the outreach process:

- A pre-post design was used to assess change in Club Members' and young children's reading behavior and attitudes before and after the program (n= 50 and 116, respectively)
- Pre-post interview data from the young children participants to learn about their reading habits at home and school collected by Club Members (n= 49)
- Lending Library Ledgers were used to track the use of the Lending Library at participating schools (n= 5)
- Observations were conducted of Distribution Events (n=6) and paired reading sessions (n=6)
- Phone interviews were conducted with Club RIF volunteers at each site (n=10 total)
- In-person interviews were conducted with Club Members (n=11)

KEY FINDINGS – CLUB RIF IMPLEMENTATION

The implementation and quality of the paired readings varied. Regardless, both the young child and Club Member participants enjoyed this program component.

- ❑ Paired readings at some sites occurred on a weekly basis, while paired readings at other sites occurred once every one to two months.
- ❑ The quality of the paired reading sessions varied based on the Club Member who was leading the session; some Club Members were well prepared and understood how to read to children, while others needed more training.
- ❑ The Advisors and Supervisors interviewed unanimously agreed that their students enjoyed the paired reading sessions.
- ❑ The majority of Club Members (65%) listed the paired reading sessions as their favorite thing about the program.
- ❑ The young children observed during paired reading sessions were engaged in listening to the book and completing paired reading activities.

The Lending Library Ledgers demonstrated different types of Lending Library use, with more frequent use occurring in classroom-based Lending Libraries.

- ❑ Lending Libraries in St. Paul were used at the class level for group readings. Lending Libraries in Newark were housed in classroom or common areas, and were typically used by individual students.
- ❑ The frequency with which Lending Library books were used depended on the location of the Lending Library. Books located in the classroom were used more frequently than books located in a central area, such as the library.

Young Children's Distribution Events were more consistent with Club RIF guidelines than were Club Member Distribution Events.

- ❑ Distribution Events for young children did not always include motivational events early in the program, however, motivational events were used more consistently as the program progressed.
- ❑ Books were distributed consistently at both the young children and Club Member Events; books were displayed on a table and small groups of participants were allowed to choose the book they wanted.
- ❑ Club Member Distribution Events did not consistently include a motivational activity.

Once implemented, the schedule for reflection activities often mirrored the schedule for paired readings.

- ❑ In St. Paul, reflection activities were completed three times throughout the program, after each paired reading session. In Newark, reflection activities were completed on a weekly basis in two out of the three sites. Each of these sites participated in paired readings on a weekly basis.

KEY FINDINGS – STUDENT OUTCOMES

Club RIF participants enjoyed being involved in the program.

- ❑ The Supervisors and Advisors interviewed agreed that their students enjoyed participating in the Club RIF program.
- ❑ 93% of the Club Members reported that they would like to be involved in the program again next year if given the opportunity
- ❑ Club Members reported liking the program because they enjoyed interacting with the young children and felt like they were making a difference

Newark Club Members showed modest increases in their attitudes about and confidence in reading.

- ❑ Newark Club Members reported being more confident in their reading after participating in the program, although this difference was not statistically significant
- ❑ All Club Members had positive attitudes about reading before the program began; attitudes remained positive after participating in the program. Newark Club Members had significantly more positive attitudes about the importance of reading with children than did St. Paul Club Members.
- ❑ Newark Advisors also noted other school-based attitude changes that were not measured by the instruments used, including a heightened level of respect for the school and for schoolwork in general.

The Club RIF program provides Club Members with exposure to areas of business management that they do not experience in other school activities.

- ❑ The majority of the Club Members at both sites reported having a little or some experience with each of the business skills targeted by Club RIF prior to participating in the program; students had the most experience using the Web and the least experience with planning a budget, sticking to a budget and planning weekly meetings prior to participating in the program.

Newark Club Members were more involved in the management of their program than were Club Members in St. Paul.

- ❑ Newark Advisors reported more involvement by their Club Members than St. Paul Advisors reported for their Club Members. For both groups the highest level of involvement was in planning Distribution Events.
- ❑ Club Members also reported being more involved in managing their program at the Newark site than Club Members at the St. Paul site.

Newark Club Members showed an increase in their experience with business management skills after participating in the Club RIF program.

- ❑ Newark Club Members had significantly less experience with business management skills than did St. Paul Club Members prior to the Club RIF program. After the program, Newark Club Members demonstrated a significant increase in their experience. By the conclusion of the program, the sites did not differ in their business management experience.
- ❑ Newark Club Members showed significant gains in three of the nine skills assessed, including fundraising, planning a budget, and using a budget.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Club RIF pilot program was a successful first attempt at implementing the program components designed to be part of a nationwide initiative. This research demonstrates the strengths of the program as well as areas in which the program components can be tightened to ensure more consistent large-scale implementation. Based on the results of this research, GRG makes the following recommendations:

We recommend that the Club RIF program continue to include a high level of student involvement in managing Club RIF Clubs. Club RIF provided students with experiences that are not offered in other school-based contexts. As such, the program provides a unique opportunity for students to gain experience with business management skills in a fun, rewarding atmosphere.

We recommend that the paired reading component remain the centerpiece of the Club RIF program. During interviews and informal conversations with both Advisors and Club Members, paired reading was consistently described as an extremely valuable component of the program.

We recommend that early Club meetings include more extensive training for Club Members. To promote standard implementation of the program, it is important that all Club Members complete paired reading training before beginning paired readings with the young children. We

also recommend that Club RIF Advisors monitor paired reading sessions to praise those doing well and guide those who are struggling.

We recommend that future print materials provide more guidance about how to successfully conduct motivational activities. Because the age ranges for the target audiences are so varied, guidelines for conducting motivational activities for Club Members and young children should be presented separately. Examples of motivational activities that have been successful for each age group should be provided so that Advisors and Club Members can use those ideas early in the program. Later, once the program has become more established, Advisors and Club Members can use the examples provided as a model to create their own motivational activities for each type of Distribution Event.

We recommend that Lending Library books be kept in the classroom where children can access them during their free time. The Lending Library books should be a resource available to the young children throughout the day when they have free time.

We recommend that future participation in the Club RIF program be voluntary at the program site and Club Member levels. It is important for future program sites and participants to understand what the Club RIF program entails, and that sites and participants be invested in making the program happen. We recommend that future sites be selected through Requests for Proposals (RFP) in which the site describes how they would implement the program. Similarly, we recommend that Club Members be voluntary participants in the program. Voluntary participation would ensure that Club Members are interested in what the program has to offer, and thus, likely to be more invested in both the program and the young children participants.

We recommend that future research focus on evaluating a year-long implementation of the Club RIF program, and that future efforts focus on assessing a number of attitudinal changes rather than focusing primarily on attitudes about reading. The results of this initial evaluation suggest that the Club RIF program does influence students, however, the extent of that influence is still unclear. We recommend that future research evaluate Club Members and young children during a year-long Club RIF program with a focus on both general and reading-based outcomes. Given the outcomes found for the current half-year evaluation, we might find an increase in the influence of the program if implemented for the full year, as designed.