

The Sandra Dunagan Deal Center for Early Language and Literacy



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**Results of District Survey on Progress toward Implementation of *The Georgia Early
Literacy Act (HB 538)***

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Executive Summary

In 2023, the Georgia Legislature passed the Georgia Early Literacy Act (HB 538), which represents a sweeping reform effort to improve the quality of early reading instruction in the state. HB 538 requires that the Georgia State Board of Education (SBOE) approve universal reading screeners which can: 1) provide relevant information to target instruction, 2) measure foundational literacy skills, 3) identify students who are struggling to acquire reading skills, and 4) be used to monitor progress.

The Sandra Dunagan Deal Center for Early Language and Literacy (Deal Center) partnered with the Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA), Georgia Council on Literacy, and Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) to create a district inventory to assess progress toward implementation of HB 538. This report provides baseline information on district implementation of HB 538 to inform statewide literacy initiatives and resource allocation.

A comprehensive inventory was designed to include key elements of HB 538 including: 1) universal reading screeners, 2) high quality instructional materials (HQIM), 3) tiered interventions, and 4) professional learning. Out of 221 districts invited to participate, 113 survey responses were received—translating to a 51% response rate.

Universal Reading Screeners

- 88.5% of districts have selected a screener from the approved list. 26.5% selected MAP Reading Fluency, 21.2% selected the i-Ready Assessment for Reading, 15% selected Acadience Reading K-6, and 8% selected Star Assessments. All other approved screeners were selected by less than 5% of districts.
- Universal reading screeners are a new undertaking for just 5% of the districts in our sample, yet 61% of districts noted experiencing barriers in full implementation of reading

screeners. The most common barriers noted were the amount of time to administer screeners and time spent training teachers and administrators.

High Quality Instructional Materials

- 45.1% of districts reported that they had not selected their HQIM. 27.4% districts reported bundling their own supplemental programs to create a core reading program. When broken down by district size, differences in bundling appeared, whereby most medium districts (75%) reported bundling their supplemental programs, followed by small districts (52%) and then large districts (25%).
- 80% of districts reported facing at least one barrier to selecting and implementing an approved core reading program. 29% reported funding as a barrier, 25% reported training as a barrier, and 20% reported that time was a barrier. 3% reported adaptability as a barrier, and 3% reported other barriers.

Tiered Interventions

- Districts reported that several data sources are used to select students for interventions. Universal reading screener results are the most frequently used data source for selecting the students who receive reading interventions (76%, $n = 85$). This same trend is observed across all district sizes. On average, districts were using two data sources to select students for intervention.
- 75% of districts reported that they already had an intervention plan. 20.5% reported that they were still in the process of creating an intervention plan, while 4.5% reported that they did not have a plan and had not started one.
- When asked who oversees intervention services, nearly half (47%) of the districts responding indicated their Response to Intervention (RTI) or Multi-Tiered System of

Supports (MTSS) Coordinator. 13% reported that their instructional coaches oversaw interventions. 10% of districts reported that their assistant principal oversaw interventions, and 9% reported that the principal oversaw interventions. 21% indicated that their intervention services were overseen by other roles or by a combination of roles.

Professional Learning

- 43 districts (38.4%) indicated that all administrators had received structured literacy training and 20 districts (17.9%) reported that all teachers received the same training. In 18.8% of districts, no teachers had received any structured literacy training, and in 23.2% of districts no administrators had received any training.
- Large districts reported the highest number of reading/literacy coaches at 0.64 per school on average compared to medium districts reporting with 0.48 coaches per school and small districts reporting 0.56 coaches per school. 67.2% of districts with a dedicated reading/literacy coach reported that each coach had been trained in structured literacy. 7% of districts reported having coaches who had been trained in structured literacy but were not dedicated reading/literacy coaches.
- Districts were asked to describe the barriers they have faced when trying to deploy reading/literacy coaches. 70% of districts reported that funding is a barrier to deploying dedicated reading/literacy coaches in their schools, while 20% of districts reported that staffing was a barrier.

Results Summary

The results obtained through the Deal Center's district inventory provide a comprehensive overview of districts' baseline implementation status of HB 538, along with practices and characteristics regarding universal reading screeners, HQIM, tiered interventions, and professional learning.

It is clear that in our sample of more than half of the districts in our state, the most used screeners are the i-Ready Assessment for Reading, Acadience Reading K-6, and MAP Reading Fluency. Nearly half (45%) of the districts in our sample had not selected a core reading program, and 27.4% chose to bundle supplemental programs to create their reading program. In 20% of districts, no teachers or administrators had been trained in structured literacy. On each of the elements of HB 538, the barriers to successful implementation were funding and adequate time for training and implementation. These observations are vital to inform statewide literacy initiatives and allocation of resources.

Introduction

In 2023, the Georgia Legislature passed the Georgia Early Literacy Act (HB 538), which represents a sweeping reform effort to improve the quality of early reading instruction in the state. HB 538 requires that the Georgia State Board of Education (SBOE) approve universal reading screeners which can: 1) provide relevant information to target instruction, 2) measure foundational literacy skills, 3) identify students who are struggling to acquire reading skills, and 4) be used to monitor progress. Relatedly, schools are required to screen children in kindergarten through third grade three times each school year. The bill requires tiered reading intervention plans for students with significant reading deficiencies. HB 538 also requires that the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) develop or procure training for educators from kindergarten to third grade (K-3) on the science of reading, structured literacy, and foundational literacy skills. All public-school educators from kindergarten through third grade will be required to complete the training. Finally, local boards of education are required to approve high quality instructional materials (HQIM) for these grades.

The Sandra Dunagan Deal Center for Early Language and Literacy (Deal Center) partnered with the Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA), Georgia Council on Literacy, and Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) to create a district inventory to assess progress toward implementation of HB 538. This inventory enables analysis of the implementation progress and can inform resource allocation to support districts in meeting the requirements of HB 538. It is important to note that this is not an accountability survey; it is not the expectation that every district will have met the requirements of HB 538 at the time of inventory completion. As such, this report only contains baseline information on district

implementation of HB 538 that is vital to inform statewide literacy initiatives and resource allocation.

Method

Representatives from the Deal Center, GOSA, and GaDOE designed a comprehensive inventory to evaluate district progress toward implementation of key elements of HB 538. Four major components of HB 538 were selected for analysis, including: 1) universal reading screeners, 2) HQIM, 3) tiered interventions, and 4) professional learning. The purpose of this report is to provide Georgia stakeholders (including state agencies), the General Assembly, the SBOE, and the Georgia Council on Literacy with a baseline summary and overall context to inform further decision-making.

Survey Design

Universal Reading Screeners

The first section of the inventory was designed to gather information about screener selection, whether screening was a new undertaking for each district, and grades screened in the past. It also gathered information on whether screener administration training is provided by each district, whether that training is mandatory for teachers and for administrators, and what proportion of teachers and administrators have already been trained.

High Quality Instructional Materials

The second survey section was designed to gather information on progress toward selection of HQIM. Details on whether training in the use of instructional materials is mandatory, how many teachers and administrators had been trained, how training was provided, and whether supplemental programs were being bundled to create a core reading program were collected in this section.

Tiered Interventions

The third section of the survey determined whether districts had a tiered reading intervention plan, whether those plans were tied to the core reading program, and the type of interventions used. Additionally, the roles of those overseeing intervention were collected. Information about the mode and context for intervention delivery was also reported.

Professional Learning

The last section of the survey was designed to gather information on the number of administrators and teachers trained in structured literacy, what training programs were being used, and whether programs are approved by the International Dyslexia Association (IDA). Other information gathered in this section includes the number of district literacy coaches, the number of coaches trained in structured literacy, and plans to train coaches in structured literacy.

Procedure

A survey link was sent from GaDOE to school superintendents, and superintendents were asked to designate a curriculum leader in their district to complete the survey. Districts had from January 31, 2024, to March 1, 2024, to complete the inventory. Superintendents were informed that each district submitting a response to the survey would be entered into a random drawing for a chance to win one of ten \$3,000 grant awards to supplement their HB 538 implementation efforts.

Data Analysis

The inventory included both multiple-choice and short-answer responses. Multiple-choice questions served as the primary source of information for quantitative analysis, whereby individual question frequencies were converted into proportions (percentages). The authors

calculated proportions by dividing the frequency by the total number of districts responding to the question.

Short answer responses provided contextual information on barriers to implementation and served as the primary source of data for qualitative analysis. In order to discern underlying themes within responses, a structured method was utilized by two of the authors. Initially, an inductive method was employed wherein the authors independently examined responses to identify emergent themes without predisposition. Once the preliminary themes were established, the authors applied a deductive method. This approach enabled the authors to reevaluate the responses to identify the preliminary themes within all applicable responses. Following this individualized process, the authors engaged in collaborative deliberations to reconcile findings, aligning on themes that surfaced ensuring a rigorous and nuanced thematic analysis. To further ensure themes presented were agreed upon by both researchers, inter-rater reliability analyses were conducted; for inter-rater reliability data, please review Table 1. For all qualitative questions, the authors were in agreement on themes (e.g., fair, moderate, or almost perfect). As a result, the authors designated that one author's frequencies would be presented for the results.

Table 1

Cohen's Kappa for Inter-Rater Reliability (IRR)

Questions Producing Themes	Kappa (κ)	Strength of Agreement
Barriers to Universal Reading Screeners	0.404	Fair
Barriers to HQIM implementation	0.837	Almost perfect
Selection for Tiered Intervention	0.473	Moderate
Barriers to Deploying Reading/Literacy Coaches	0.915	Almost perfect
Support to Deploy Reading/Literacy Coaches	0.763	Moderate

Results

Out of 221 districts invited to participate, 113 survey responses were received— translating to a 51% response rate. For a comprehensive list of survey questions, including the proportion of respondents, please see Appendix A.

Demographics

Of the 113 inventory responses, 78 districts were categorized as small, 24 were medium, and 11 were large districts. District size was defined as follows: 1) small = 1-3 schools; medium 4 -15 schools; and 3) large = 16 or more schools.

Table 2

Number of Schools by District Size

District Size	Frequency	
	<i>n</i>	%
Small Districts	<i>N</i> = 78	
1 School	39	50
2 Schools	27	34.6
3 Schools	12	15.4
Medium Districts	<i>N</i> = 24	
4 Schools	4	16.7
5 Schools	2	8.3
6 Schools	7	29.2
7 Schools	3	12.5
8 Schools	3	12.5
9 Schools	2	8.3
10 Schools	2	8.3
14 Schools	1	4.2
Large Districts	<i>N</i> = 11	
17 Schools	1	9.1
19 Schools	1	9.1
20 Schools	2	18.2
23 Schools	1	9.1
25 Schools	1	9.1
30 Schools	1	9.1
32 Schools	2	18.2
60 Schools	1	9.1
84 Schools	1	9.1

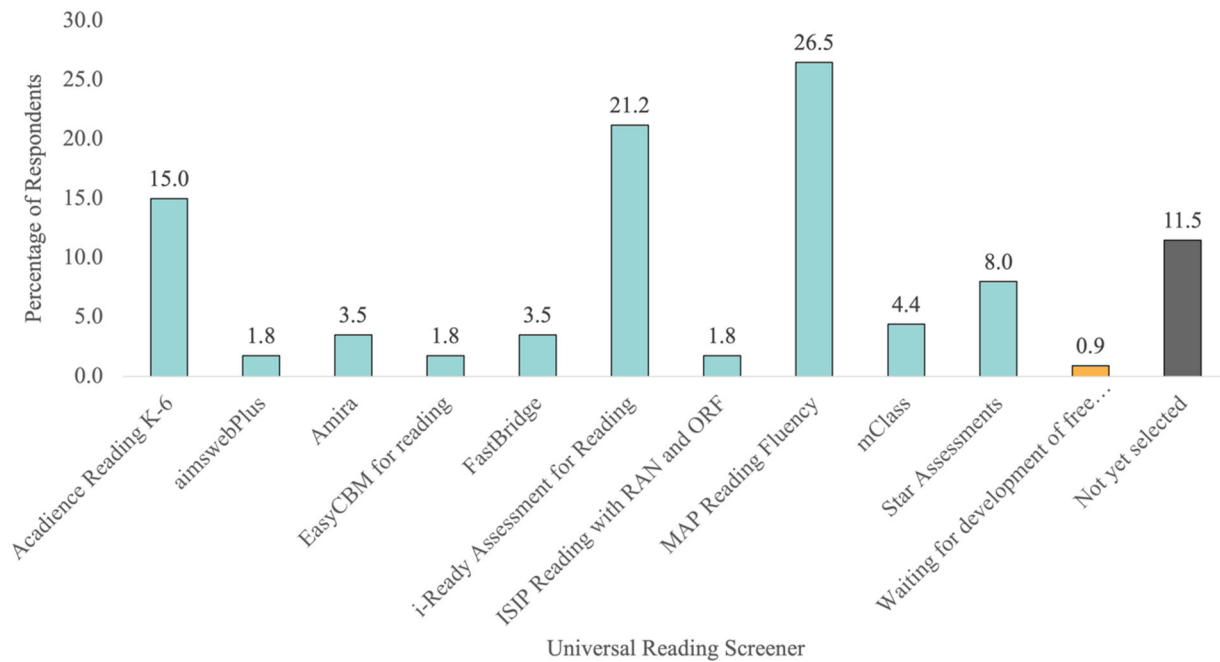
The majority of respondents (69%) represented small districts, followed by medium districts and large districts (21% and 10% respectively). Conversely, 55% of schools represented

in our responses are in large districts, 25% in medium districts, and 20% in small districts. Regarding K-3 teachers in the districts, large districts were the most represented (63.4%) followed by medium districts and small districts (19.5% and 17.1% respectively).

Universal Reading Screeners

Beginning August 1, 2024, public and local school systems in Georgia will be required to administer a universal reading screener three times each school year to all K-3 students. This follows the requirement that the SBOE approve a list of universal reading screeners for use by public schools and local school districts. The SBOE published an approved [list of Universal Reading Screener Providers](#) on July 19, 2023, which was [updated](#) on February 22, 2024.

Of all districts responding, 87.6% ($n = 100$) reported that they had already selected a screener; 0.9% of districts ($n = 1$) reported waiting for the development of a free screener, and 11.5% of districts ($n = 13$) reported that they had not yet selected a universal reading screener (see Figure 1). MAP Reading Fluency ($n = 30$), i-Ready ($n = 24$), and Acadience ($n = 17$) were the screeners reported to be in most frequent use. Districts that reported they had not selected a screener yet mostly identified time and funding as the barriers preventing them from selecting a screener.

Figure 1*Universal Reading Screener Selection*

Overall, 89% of districts ($n = 99$) indicated that administration of universal reading screeners was not a new undertaking for their district, with at least 94.9% of districts ($n = 94$) reporting that screeners were utilized for grades K-3. However, prior to the implementation of HB 538, 12.8% of small districts ($n = 10$), 16.7% of medium districts ($n = 4$), and 9.1% of large districts ($n = 1$) reported not implementing and/or utilizing a universal reading screener.

Although universal reading screeners are not a new undertaking for nearly 95% of the districts in our sample, most districts are still facing at least one barrier to full implementation of these screeners in K-3; 61% of districts noted experiencing barriers in full implementation of reading screeners, whereas around 39% noted experiencing no barriers.

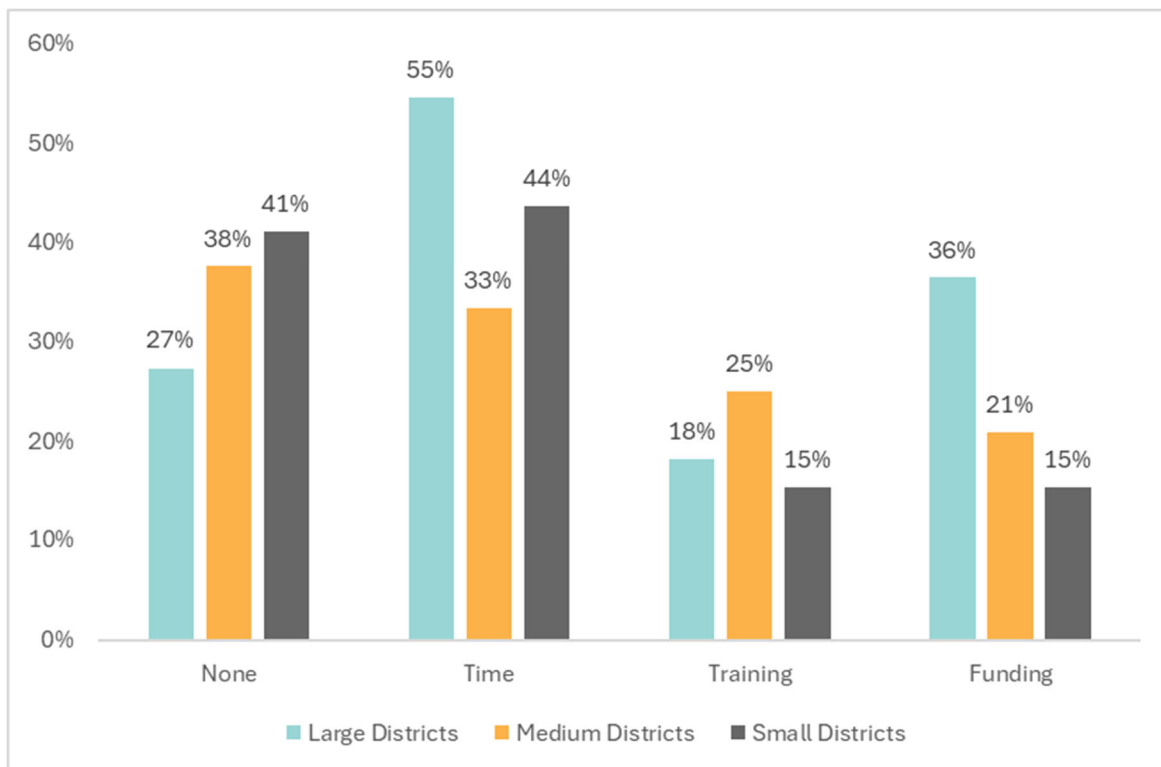
When analyzing responses to the question about barriers to screener implementation, three major themes were found: time, training, and funding. The most common barrier noted was the amount of time to administer screeners; however, time spent training teachers and

administrators on screeners was also a commonly reported barrier for districts. When accounting for district size, similar trends appeared (see Figure 2). One respondent wrote:

Scheduling time for the training involves either pulling teachers out of class and away from students, or training has to be done after school and/or during the summer break.

Figure 2

Percentage of Districts Reporting Barriers to Screener Implementation by District Size



Some districts reported successfully training their staff by offering paid professional development days over the summer. Other districts reported issues with staff turnover related to training. On top of this, many districts reported difficulty finding funds to afford training along with purchase of the screener itself. Many districts reported that they had been relying on grant funding for screeners in previous years; one district stated:

The cost of reading screeners is a concern. The previous screener was funded through a grant.

A common trend for the districts reporting no barriers to screener implementation was the presence of an assessment team. For a comprehensive view of themes over barriers to screener implementation, including exemplar quotes, see Table 3.

Table 3

Themes over Barriers to Implementing Universal Reading Screeners

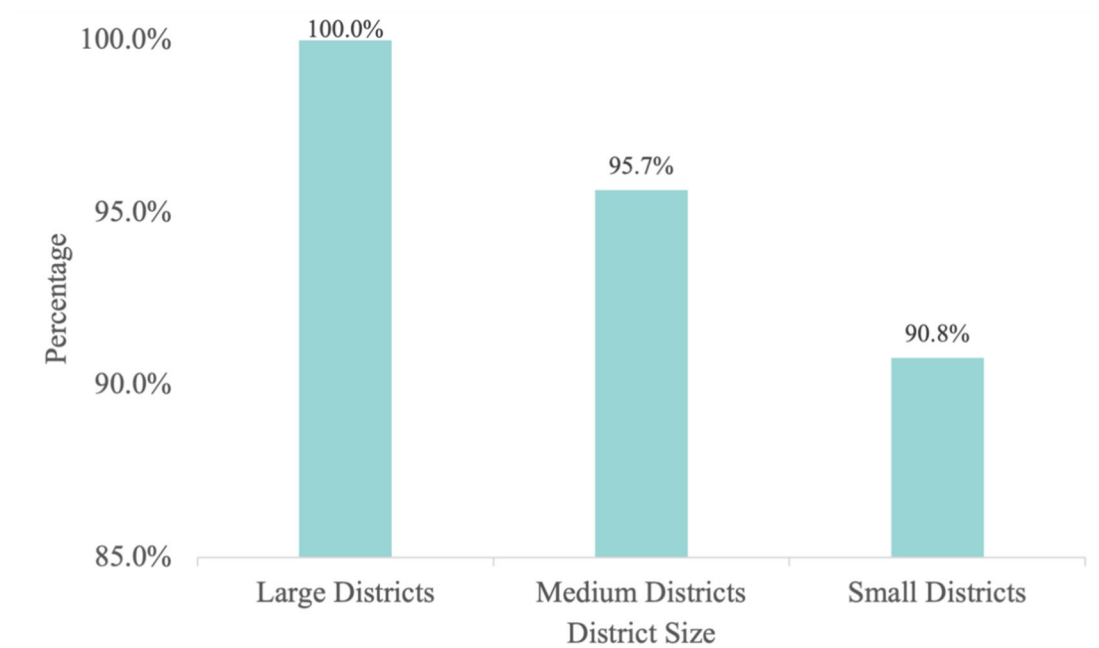
Themes	Example quote
Time	“Time is the most significant barrier. Screeners require lots of time and skilled individuals to administer them. We currently administer the screeners through a trained team of educators.”
Training/Professional Learning	“We have not provided training to all teachers at this time. We have provided teachers who are currently piloting the screener. We plan to expand our pilot to more teachers during the last 9 weeks. This will allow us to prepare for additional barriers. At this time, we feel that many of our teachers will express concern about the amount of time that it may take. However, we do feel that the information is extremely valuable and that as teachers become more familiar with the data, they will see that the time it takes to complete the screener will be beneficial for classroom instruction.”
Funding	“Continuing to cover the cost for the screener as well as professional learning.”
No Barriers	“There are no barriers to implementation in our district. The I-Ready screener can actually be administered with very little training. It is assigned at the district level and pushed out. Teachers create a conducive testing environment and provide students 2-3 20–30-minute sessions to complete the screener. It just requires monitoring from the teachers.”

Note. Multiple themes may be present in one answer.

Regarding screener administration training, 92.9% of districts ($n = 105$) reported that training is provided on the administration of the chosen universal reading screener. When explored by district size, Figure 3 indicates that 90.8% of small districts ($n = 71$), 95.7% of medium districts ($n = 23$), and 100% of large districts ($n = 11$) provide training.

Figure 3

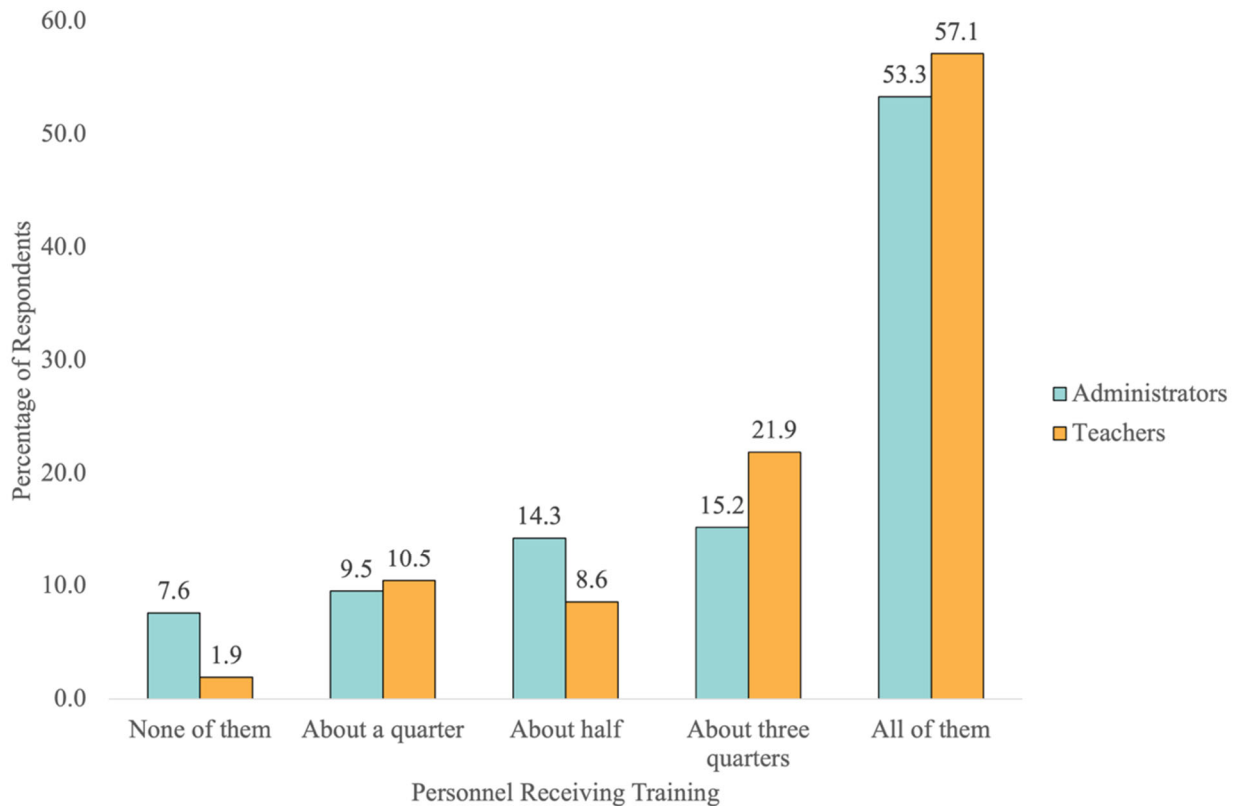
Percentage of Districts with Training on Screeners by District Size



Examination of training for administrators versus teachers reveals group differences. Specifically, out of 105 respondents, 87.6% of districts ($n = 92$) reported mandatory training for teachers, but only 61.0% of districts ($n = 64$) reported mandatory training for administrators (see Figure 4). This trend was maintained when data were analyzed by district size.

Figure 4*Mandatory Screener Training for Teachers and Administrators*

In examining the training status of personnel, similarities can be observed in reporting. When queried about the proportion of personnel in their districts who have undergone screener training, 56 out of the 105 responding districts (53.3%) indicated that administrators were already fully trained, while 60 districts (57.1%) reported completion of training for teachers (see Figure 5); a similar trend was observed when data were analyzed by district size. Nearly half of the districts in our sample had not trained all of their teachers or administrators on their selected screener.

Figure 5*Proportion of Personnel Receiving Screener Training***High Quality Instructional Materials**

HB 538 required the SBOE to approve HQIM to be used for teaching K-3 students. The SBOE evaluated a list of core reading programs by eight components of foundational literacy skills and structured literacy to create [this list](#) of eight approved core reading programs.

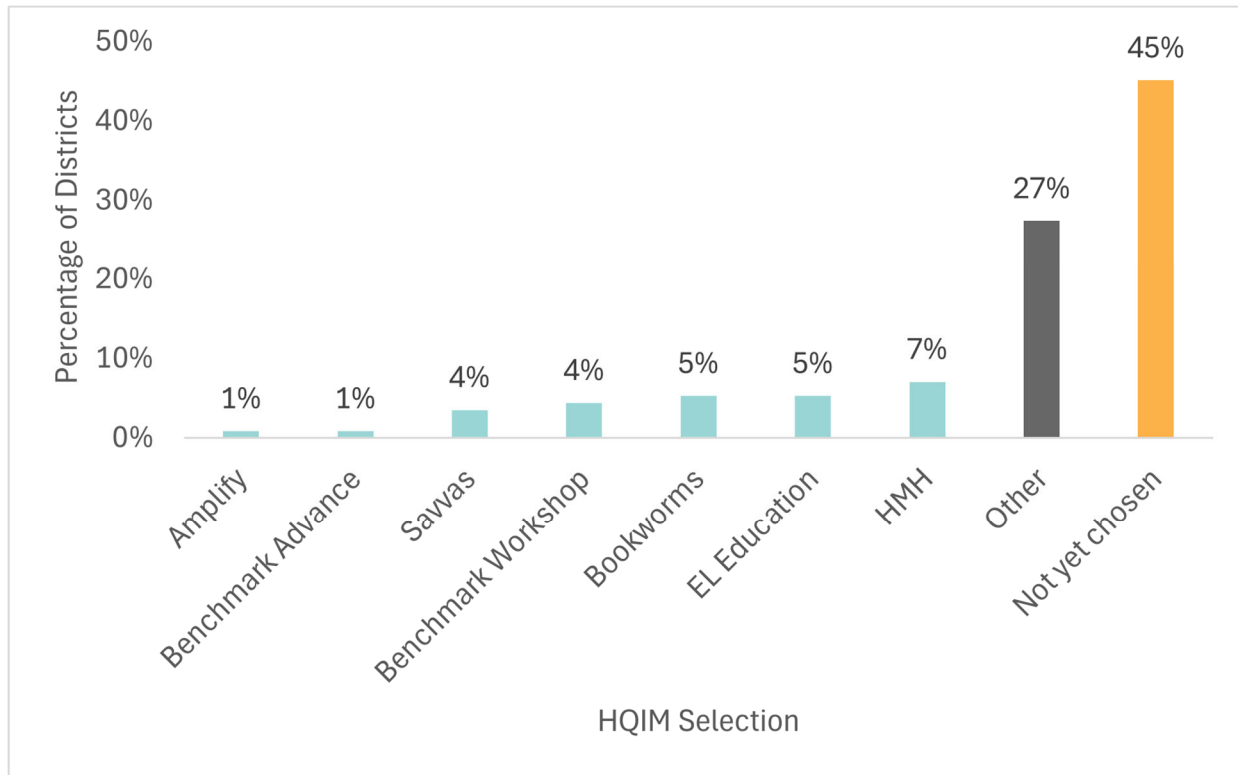
Additionally, it requires that by December 1, 2024, local boards of education and governing bodies approve HQIM, and each year thereafter by August 1st, certify to GaDOE that its locally approved instructional materials and content constitute HQIM.

Out of 113 respondents, 27% of districts ($n = 31$) reported selecting a specific HQIM. 27.4% of districts ($n = 31$) selected “other” and indicated that they bundle supplemental programs; however, 45.1% of districts ($n = 51$) reported not yet choosing HQIM (see Figure 6).

Only one of the SBOE approved core reading programs, *Collaborative Classrooms: Being a Reader*, was not selected by any district in our sample.

Figure 6

HQIM Selection

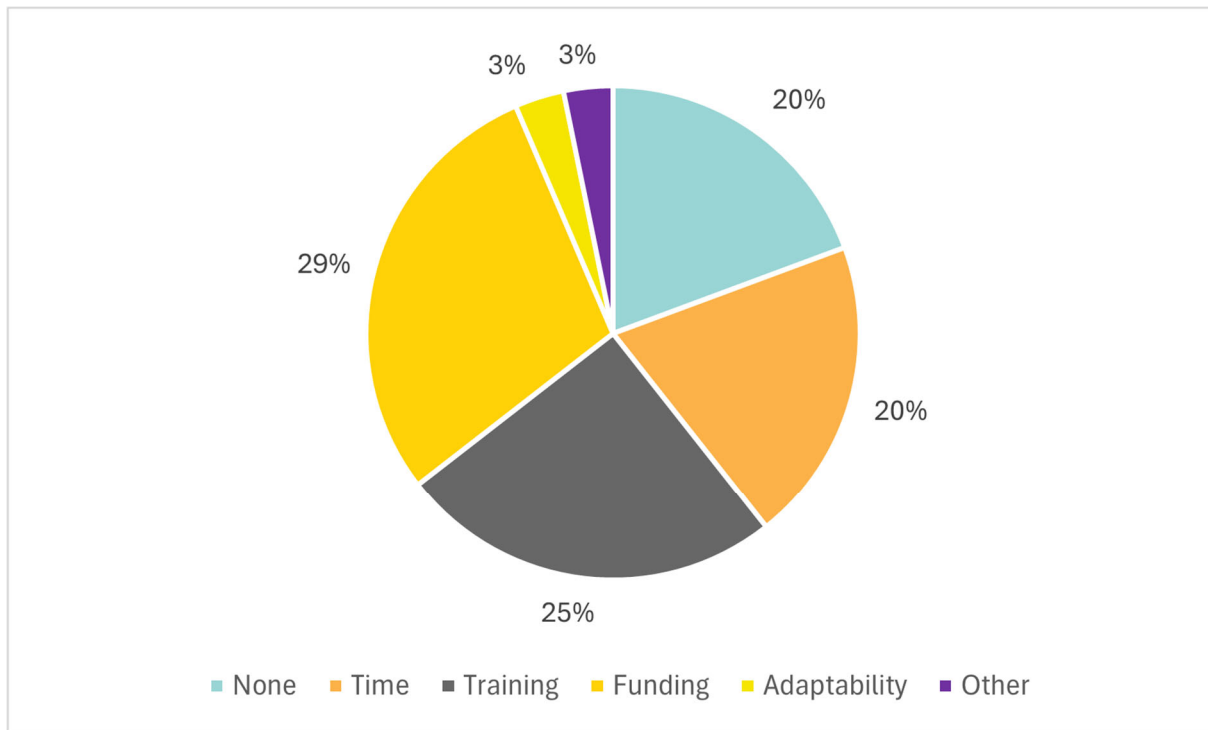


In connection to districts’ selection of HQIM, each district was asked about barriers they face when implementing a core reading program. While 27% of respondents reported that they currently have no barriers to implementing a core reading program, a substantial proportion of districts reported barriers including funding, training, time, and adaptability (see Figure 7). Specifically, 41% of respondents indicated that funding was a major barrier to implementing a core reading program in their district’s schools. One rural district noted the following with regards to funding as a barrier:

Our biggest barrier is funding ... If we decide to purchase a new core program, I am not sure how we will afford it. If we don't purchase a new program, we just have to replace damaged books and provide professional learning. The cost will be minimal compared to purchasing brand new.

Figure 7

Percentage of Districts Reporting Barriers to Selecting and Implementing HQIM



Many districts also reported concerns about changing their core reading program on top of other HB 538 related changes and did not believe they would be able to sufficiently train their staff in the amount of time provided. Seven districts reported concerns about changing their current program for reasons other than retraining or funding; these districts believe a change to their HQIM would frustrate staff and harm teacher morale. For more quotes regarding these themes, please review Table 4.

Table 4*HQIM Themes*

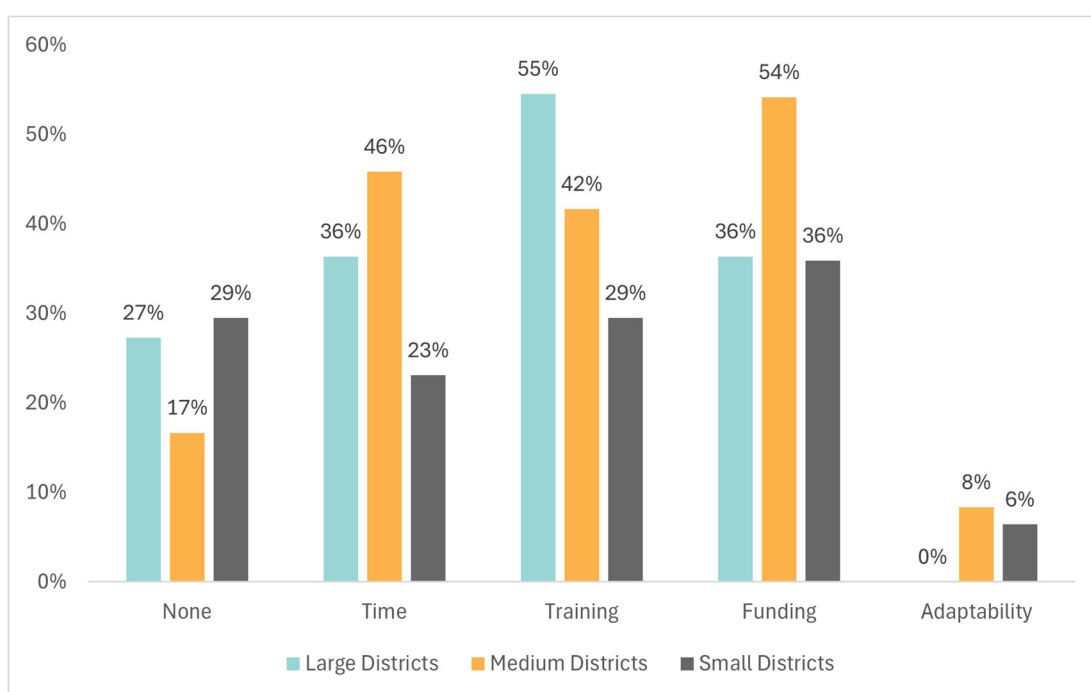
Themes	Example quote
Funding	“The primary barrier is cost. Our tiny district was quoted over \$105,000 for HMH Into Reading (for one year, grades K-5) and over \$127,000 for Amplify CKLA (for one year, grades K-5). While our district could budget to incur the initial year's costs, the ongoing year-to-year costs are very high (since most core comprehensive programs now require yearly digital subscriptions for teachers, administrators, and students as well as yearly student consumable orders). We do have one final year of L4GA grant funds, but that would be supplanting.”
Training/Professional Learning	“Core curriculum requires extensive training and coaching. A barrier is our limited staff. Our district/school does not currently have academic coaches or a designated literacy specialist. The school admin team is heavily supporting the full implementation of the core reading program. Ongoing vendor training on the EL curriculum can be cost prohibitive for a new district.”
Time	“Time to train new teachers. creating a schedule to implement each area of balanced literacy and getting teachers to be able to see the ELA standards, Literacy act and EIP should all fit together.”
Adaptability	“We have invested MUCH time, money, and training into [our programs]. We actually gave teachers workdays during the summer and throughout the year to work on [them], since it is a wonderful, but daunting curriculum. It will be honestly frustrating to have to start all over, especially since we have purchased all of the core texts for each grade level.”
Other	“Barriers for [district] to implement a core reading program includes not having a clear and concise shared instructional vision that is articulated, acknowledged and accepted by all District leadership and all stakeholders.”
No Barriers	“We have functioned for so long without a core program, we feel that beefing up and supplementing our current practices will build on the work we've already done.”

Note. Multiple themes may be present in one answer.

Figure 8 depicts how the barriers differed based on district size. Based on the district size, there seem to be differences between the most common barrier to selecting and implementing HQIM (see Figure 8). Specifically, most medium districts and small districts reported funding as their greatest barrier, but large districts reported lack of training or professional learning as their greatest barrier.

Figure 8

Percentage of Districts Reporting Barriers to Selecting and Implementing HQIM by District Size



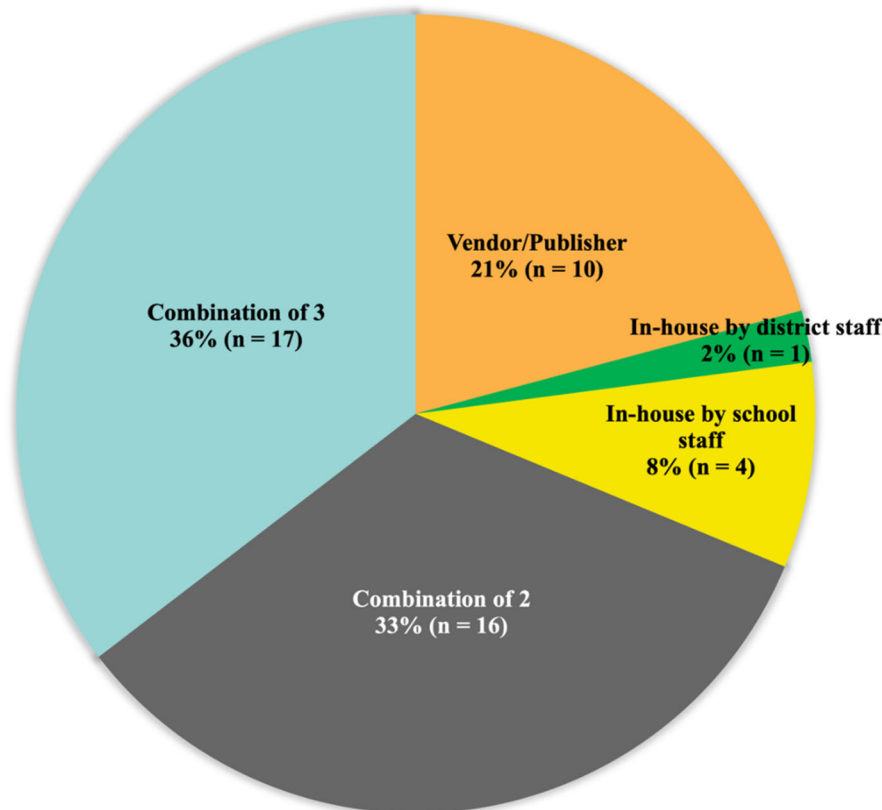
Mandatory training of the district's core reading program was reported as a requirement by a majority ($n = 60$, 96.8%) of the respondents who had selected a core reading program ($n = 62$). When accounting for district size, similar trends appeared, with smaller districts reporting more mandatory training requirements compared to medium or large districts.

Out of 62 districts that had selected HQIM, 43 districts (69.4%) indicated that administrators received training, while 48 districts (77.4%) reported teachers received training. When district size was examined, these trends were maintained. Figure 9 showcases whether

training was delivered through the vendor/publisher, in-house by district staff, in-house by school staff, or a combination of these.

Figure 9

HQIM Training Delivery Method



Out of 52 responding districts, 53.2% of districts ($n = 33$) reported bundling their own supplemental programs to create a core reading program, whereas 46.8% of districts ($n = 29$) did not report bundling. When broken down by district size, differences in bundling appeared, whereby most medium districts (75%) reported bundling their supplemental programs, followed by small districts (52%) and then large districts (25%).

Tiered Interventions

HB 538 requires, beginning August 1, 2024, public schools and local school systems shall implement tiered reading intervention plans for public school students in K-3 who at any

time during the school year exhibit a significant reading deficiency, as measured by performance on the universal reading screener approved by the SBOE.

Out of 112 respondents, 75% of districts ($n = 84$) reported having an existing tiered reading intervention program, with only 4.5% reporting not having one ($n = 5$) and 20.5% of districts ($n = 23$) reported being in the process of creating a tiered reading intervention plan. Further, 58% of districts ($n = 65$) reported that their reading interventions were tied directly to their core reading program; 42% of districts reported reading interventions not being tied to their core reading program. When accounting for district size, large districts reported tying reading interventions to core reading programs much less (36% of large districts) than medium or small districts (61% of each).

Figure 10 showcases personnel who oversee reading intervention services, most commonly being Response to Intervention (RTI) / Multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) Coordinator (47%), or an instructional coach (14%). Some districts (21%) reported “other,” which included various personnel such as administrative staff ($n = 2$) and specialists ($n = 5$); this also included combinations of personnel, such as administrative personnel and specialists ($n = 10$) or personnel originally noted in the quantitative question ($n = 2$).

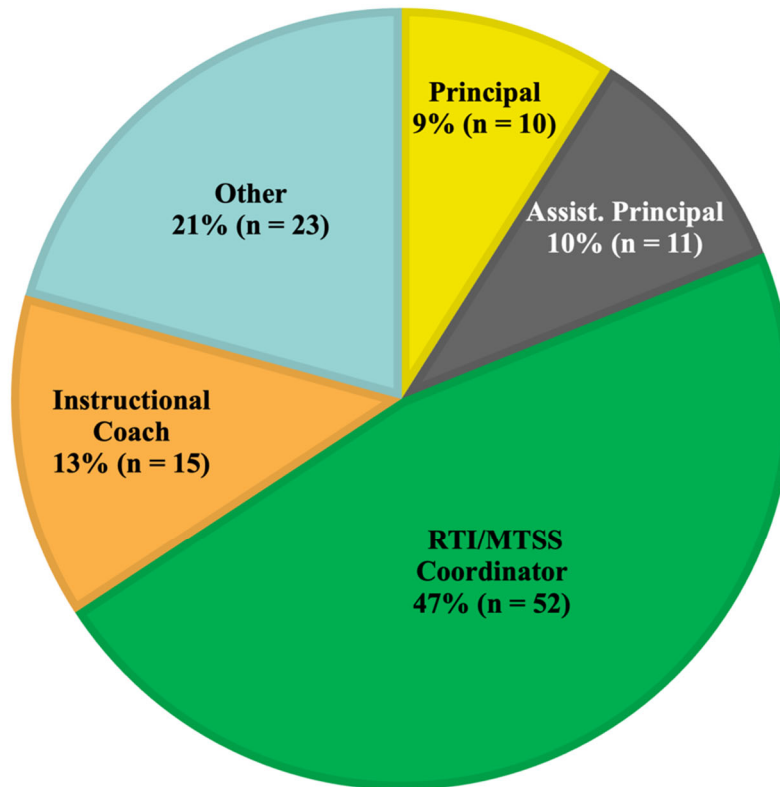
Figure 10*Personnel Overseeing Reading Intervention Services*

Figure 11 highlights modes for delivery of reading interventions to students. Most districts reported using multiple methods including computer-based ($n = 71$), direct instruction ($n = 92$), pull out or push in ($n = 92$), and small group instruction during general education classes ($n = 89$). 48% of districts reported that they utilize all four of the aforementioned methods and 23% of districts reported that they utilize three.

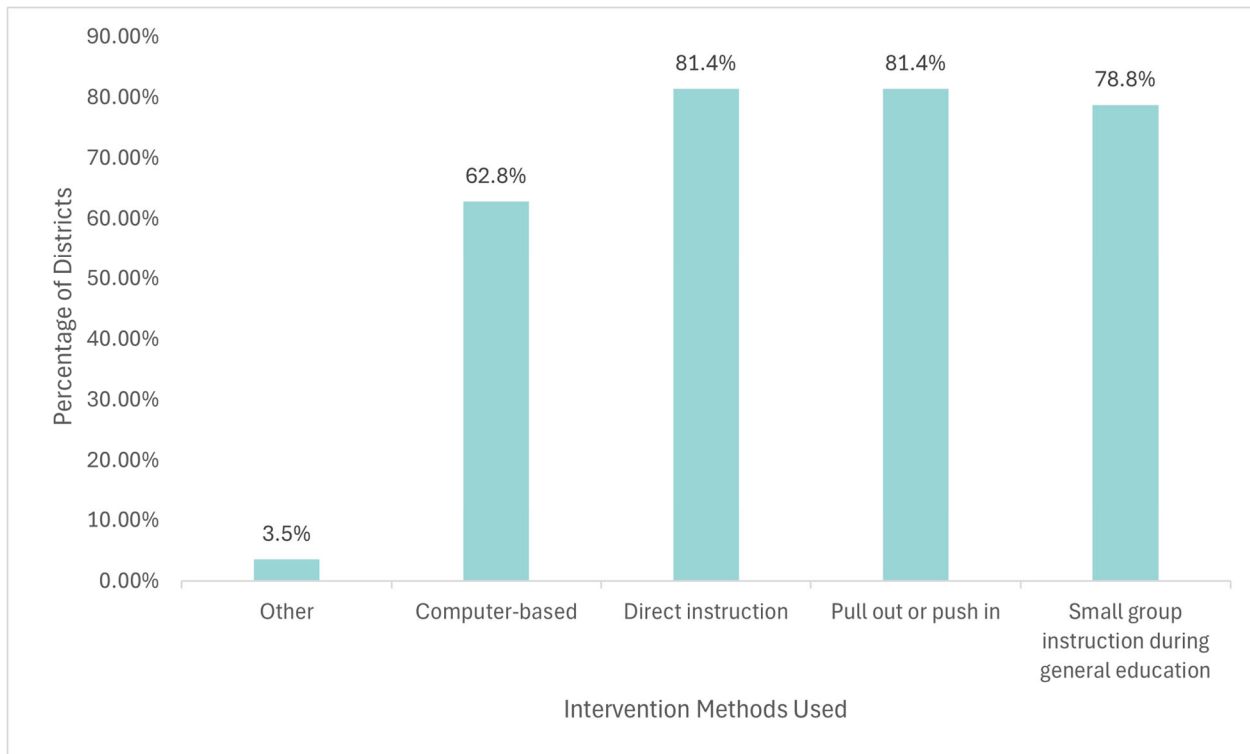
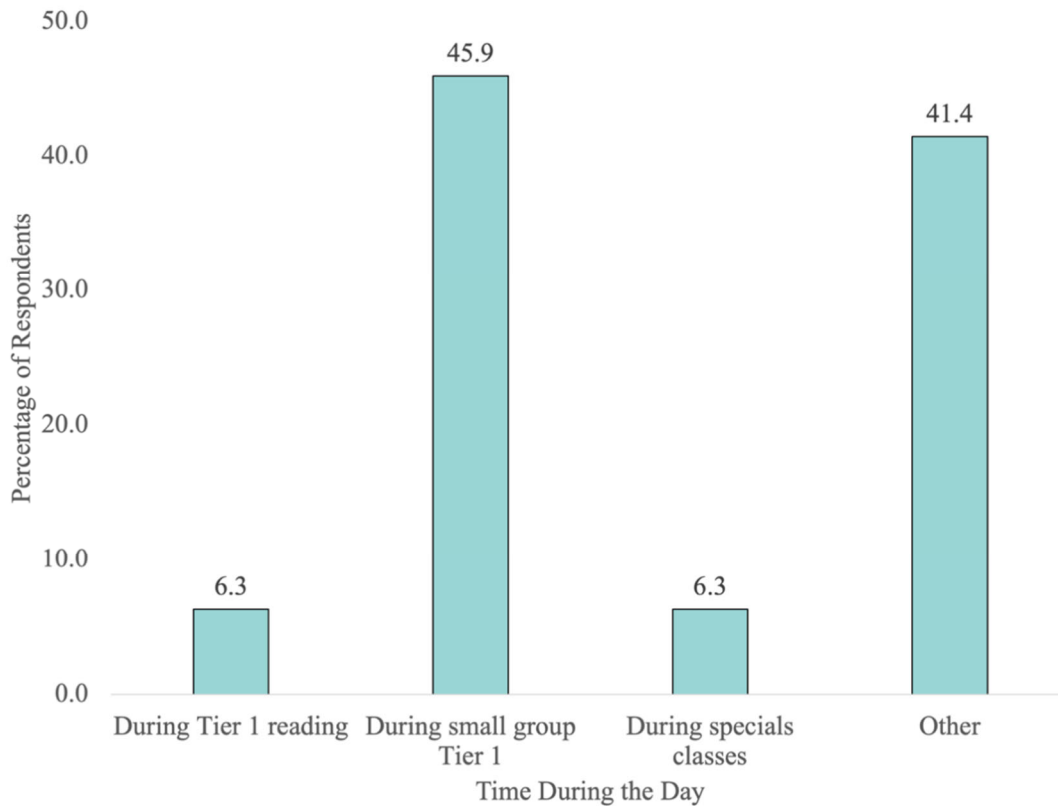
Figure 11*Mode of Reading Intervention Delivery*

Figure 12 indicates the context that students receive reading intervention. The most frequently reported context for intervention was during small group Tier 1 (45.9%, $n = 51$). Few districts reported using Tier 1 reading time or specials classes as the intervention time. When analyzing the “other” responses, the most common answer was district-designated intervention time blocks (22.1%, $n = 25$). Some districts (6.2%, $n = 7$) reported that they allowed flexible schedules for interventions. Not all districts that selected “other” indicated in what context their students receive interventions.

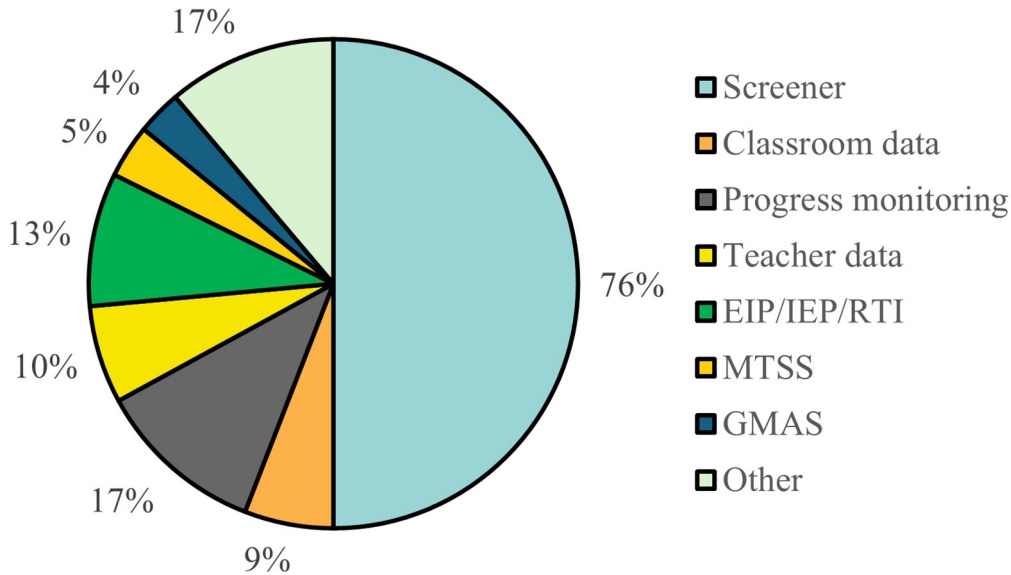
Figure 12*Context of Reading Intervention Delivery*

Several data sources are used to select students for interventions as shown in Figure 13.

Districts reported that universal reading screener results are the most frequently used data source for selecting the students who receive reading interventions (76%, $n = 85$). This same trend is observed across all district sizes. Although multiple districts reported that they utilized and triangulated numerous data sources, many did not specify what that source was. Hence, approximately 17% of respondents were categorized as using “other” data sources. On average, districts were using two data sources to select students for intervention. To better understand the responses regarding how students were selected to receive reading interventions, please refer to Table 5.

Figure 13

Data Sources Used When Selecting Students for Reading Intervention



Note. Districts could indicate that they utilize multiple data sources to select students for intervention, hence the percentages do not add up to 100%.

EIP: Early Intervention Programs

IEP: Individualized Education Program

RTI: Response to Intervention

MTSS: Multi-Tiered System of Supports

GMAS: Georgia Milestones Assessment System

Table 5*How Students are Selected for Tiered Intervention Themes*

Themes	Example quote
Universal Reading Screener Data	“Based on universal screener scores and teacher recommendation.”
Progress/Performance Monitoring	“Based on progress monitoring throughout the year”
EIP/IEP/RTI	“Individual schools determine the students who score in the bottom 30th percentile on the reading screener. From there, a look is given for students who receive IEP support and EL support. A second data point is considered for all students before being placed in a reading intervention.”
Teacher Data	“Students are identified through beginning-of-the-year screeners and through teacher recommendations.”
Classroom data	“Utilizing benchmark and classroom data students are selected for support intervention.”
MTSS	“Students are selected through the MTSS process with the use of data from multiple elements, including teacher observation.”
GMAS	“Screeners such as MAP; teacher recommendation/observation; GMAS scores in appropriate grades”
Other	“We have an extensive handbook that outlines the criteria. There are several data points that are looked at throughout the year.”

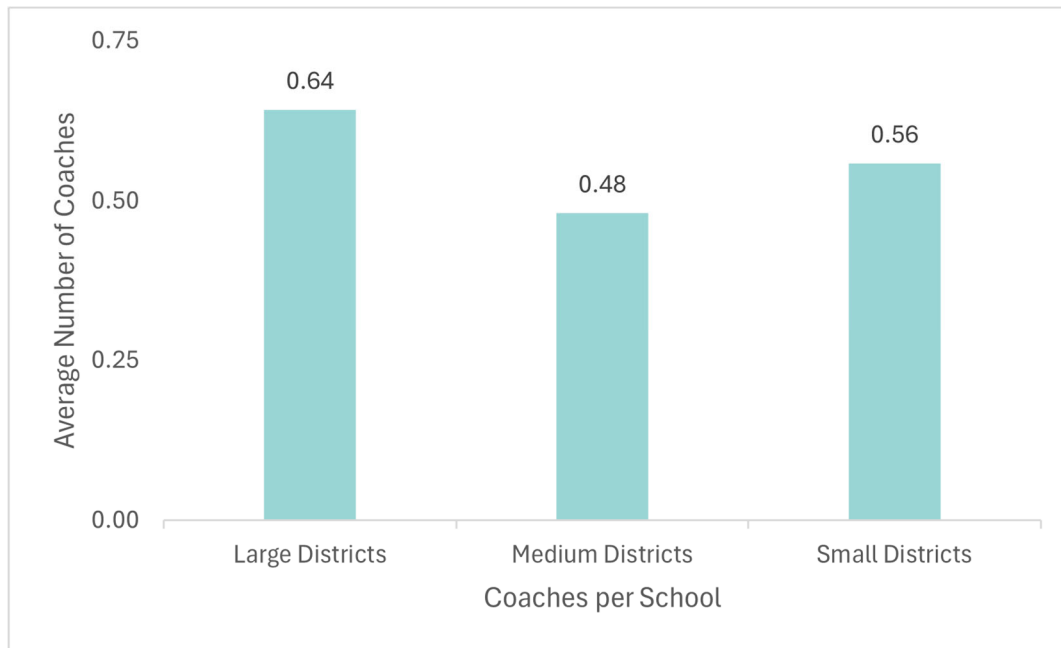
Note. Multiple themes may be present in one answer.

Professional Learning

HB 538 requires by July 1, 2025, all K-3 teachers shall complete training in the science of reading, structured literacy, and foundational literacy skills that enable students to develop reading skills required to meet state standards in literacy. Out of 112 responding districts, 43 districts (38.4%) indicated that all administrators had received structured literacy training and 20 districts (17.9%) reported that all teachers received the same training. In 18.8% of districts, no teachers had received any structured literacy training, and in 23.2% of districts no administrators had received any training. 38.3% of districts reported that some, but not all, of their administrators had received structured literacy training, while 63.4% of districts reported some of their teachers had received structured literacy.

Among the 112 respondents, 57.8% of districts ($n = 63$) reported that their district had a dedicated reading/literacy coach, whereas 42.2% of districts ($n = 46$) reported not having a dedicated reading/literacy coach. Reporting ranged from 0 to 89 dedicated reading/literacy coaches per district. When separated by district size, 18% of large districts reported having no coaches, but small and medium districts reported that 43% and 46% of their districts respectively had no coaches.

For districts having literacy coaches, Figure 14 illustrates the average number of dedicated reading/literacy coaches per school. Large districts reported the highest number of coaches at 0.64 per school on average. Medium districts reported having 0.48 coaches per school on average and small districts reported 0.56 coaches per school.

Figure 14*Mean Number of Reading/Literacy Coaches per School by District Size*

Respondents were asked to describe the barriers they have faced when trying to deploy reading/literacy coaches to all schools serving K-3 students in their district. Reported barriers included issues with funding, staffing, and coaches having multiple roles. The most common barrier reported, regardless of district size, was that of funding (see Figure 15). Many districts tied the issue of funding to the issues of training and staffing. One district wrote the following with regards to funding:

Funding for additional staff positions beyond what we already have is difficult. Finding qualified staff is a barrier. We have several intervention teachers who are part-time only and we have to train them in the Science of Reading and Structured Literacy to ensure they are not employing outdated literacy practices.

Many districts reported facing location-based constraints when attempting to fill coaching positions, exemplified by one district's response:

The barrier to providing a literacy coach in every school would be a combination of funding and availability of individuals in our area with this expertise.

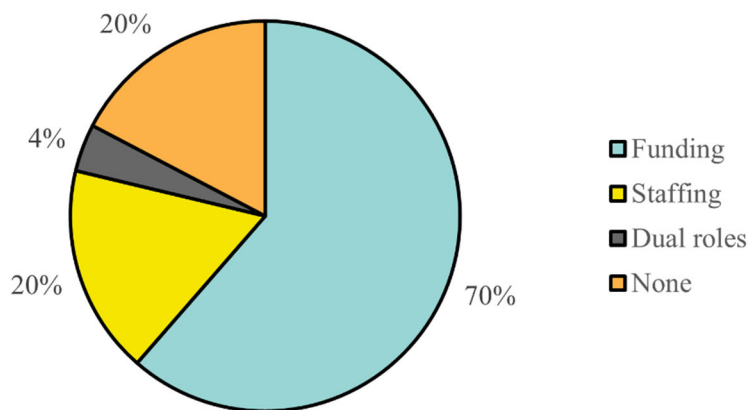
Coaches serving multiple purposes was a barrier exclusive to small and medium districts. Many responded similarly to this district:

Our budget does not allow for a coach specific to literacy. Literacy is a component of the support [our coach] provides.

These districts reported having a coach in each school, but that the coach works with teachers in every grade on every subject. In turn, these coaches are less likely to have specialized training in the Science of Reading, Structured Literacy, and other components of HB 538. Additionally, some districts reported employing coaches and interventionists as part-time positions to reduce financial constraints, but as a result—their quality of applicants dropped, and the amount of training needed increased. To gain a thorough understanding of barriers to deploying reading/literacy coaches, along with illustrative quotes, see Table 6.

Figure 15

Barriers to Deploying Reading/Literacy Coaches in All Schools Serving K-3



Note. Districts could indicate more than one barrier in their response; percentages indicate the proportion of districts reporting each labeled barrier.

Table 6*Themes over Barriers to Deploying Reading/Literacy Coaches*

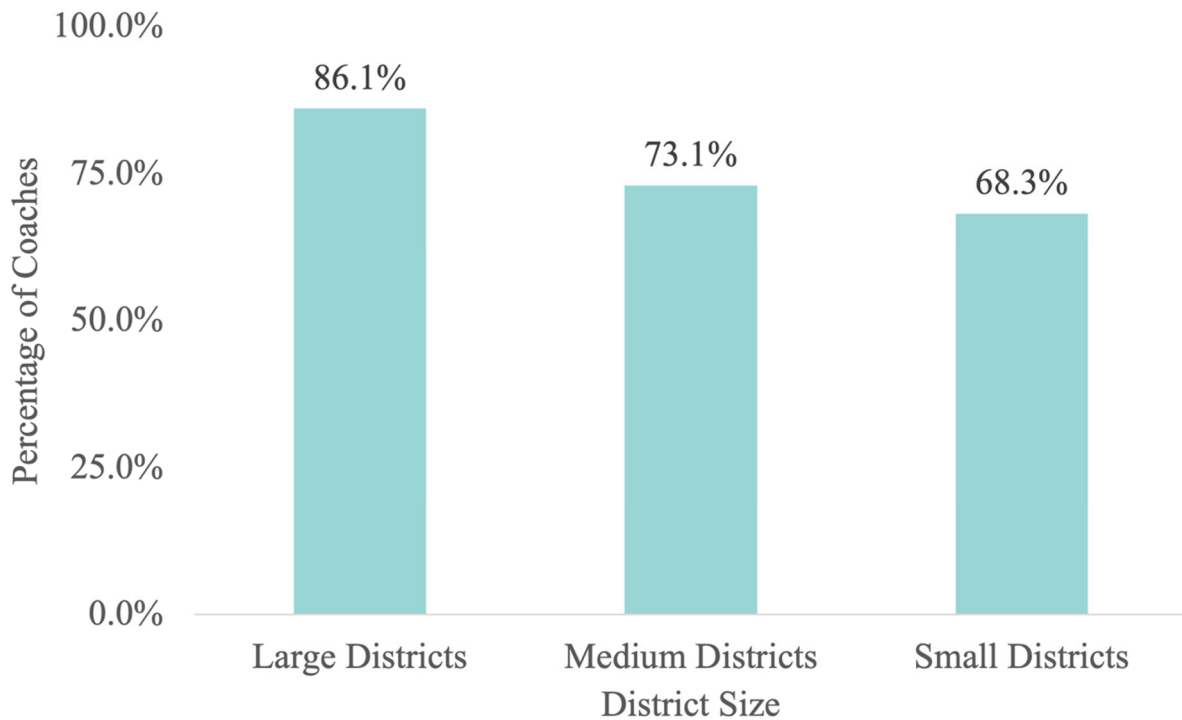
Themes	Example quote
Funding	“Funding is needed to provide for these positions. Additionally, while teachers often want to move into coaching positions, this creates teaching vacancies that are also difficult to fill. Perhaps it would be advantageous to offer an additional state-funded supplement for those teachers who hold a reading endorsement, as is offered using state funds for elementary teachers with math and science endorsements.”
Staffing	“Most literacy coaches are not solely focused on literacy. We need more coaches hired in the district that can implement literacy, train teachers and time for admin to receive the training.”
Dual Roles	“We have instructional coaches in the building however they are not just dedicated to literacy. They have to focus on other content areas as well.”
No Barriers	“We do not have any barriers in deploying reading/literacy coaches in all schools in our district.”

Note. Multiple themes may be present in one answer.

Although only 65 respondents addressed how many dedicated reading/literacy coaches had been trained in structured literacy, the majority of these districts (67.2%, $n = 45$) reported that all their coaches had been trained. Eight districts, about 7% of the sample, reported that although they have coaches who are trained in structured literacy, these coaches are not dedicated to reading/literacy and must also coach other subjects. Figure 16 shows what percentage of reading coaches are trained in structured literacy. A trend appeared in our sample whereby the coaches in smaller districts were less likely to be trained in structured literacy.

Figure 16

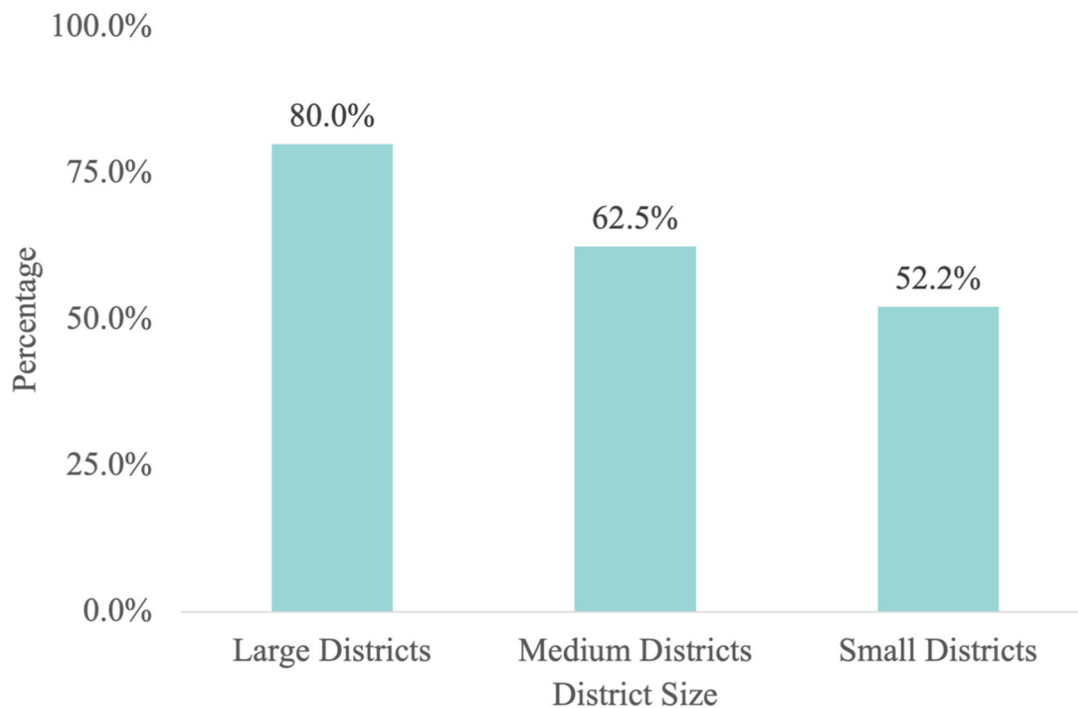
Percentage of Active, Dedicated Reading/Literacy Coaches Trained in Structured Literacy



Out of 67 districts in which not all coaches are currently trained on structured literacy, a majority (56.7%, $n = 38$) reported that there was a plan in place to train all reading/literacy coaches on structured literacy in the next year, whereas 43.3% of districts ($n = 29$) reported having no plan in place. By district size, a higher proportion of large districts (80%, $n = 4$) reported having plans to train reading/literacy coaches compared to medium districts (64.7%, $n = 11$) or small districts (52.2%, $n = 24$) as indicated in Figure 17.

Figure 17

Percentage of Districts with Plans to Train all Reading/Literacy Coaches in Structured Literacy

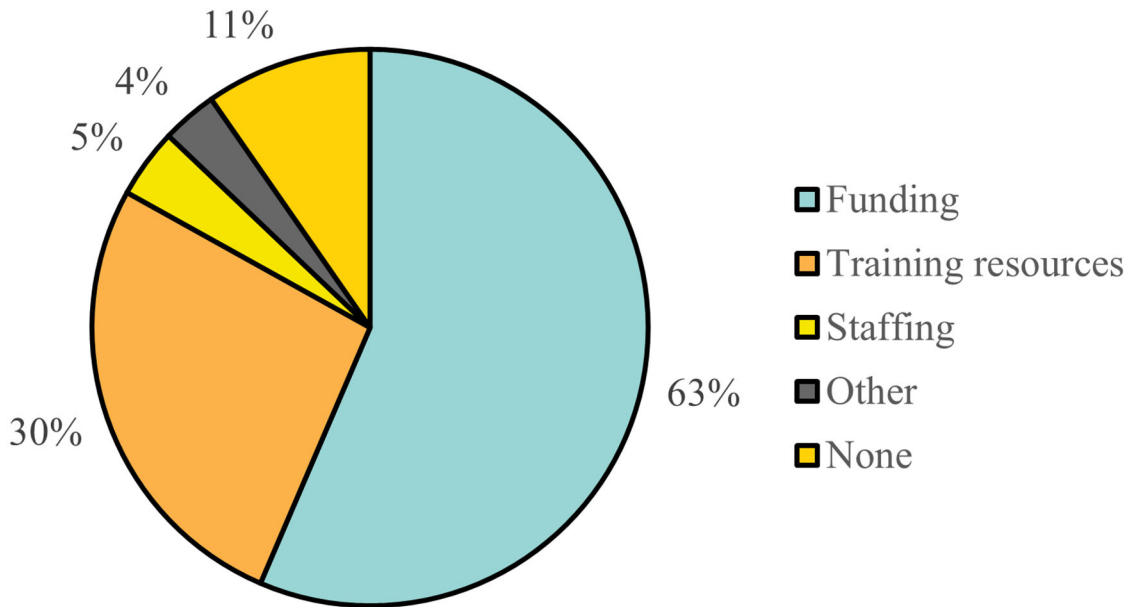


Multiple themes emerged from asking districts about what support they need including funding, training resources, and staffing assistance. See Figure 18. For example, 63% of districts reported that they need additional funding to sustain dedicated reading/literacy coaches in their schools. Similar themes emerged across district size. Many of these districts reported that they have only been able to support coaches when receiving grant funds. Another common request for support is for training resources for administrators and coaches, separate from what is provided to teachers as this district requests:

Specific training for the reading/literacy coach, beyond that provided to teachers, would be helpful. Moreover, training for central office and school administrators in best practices for using these individuals to support reading achievement would be appreciated.

Figure 18

Supports Needed to Effectively Deploy Reading/Literacy Coaches According to Districts



Another theme was staffing concerns, with many districts reporting that their applicant pool for coaching positions lacks candidates who have already been trained in structured literacy and the science of reading. On average, most of these same districts report not being able to afford to pay for new training packages on top of new positions. One district covered the concerns of many stating,

Funding for these positions and additional recruitment of qualified staff. We do not want to have to take effective teachers out of our buildings (who are difficult to find in the first place) to make them literacy coaches as having a qualified, experienced, and dedicated teacher in front of students comes first. We have a large cadre of Academic Coaches, but they are tasked with more than just literacy given the heavy lift in all of our schools for supporting new/inexperienced teachers, dealing with classroom management/behavior issues, supporting multiple content areas including math, science, and social studies,

PBIS, and the MTSS process. Having a dedicated literacy coach in all of our elementary schools would be wonderful, but we do not have the financial or human resources to be able to do so at this time.

For a detailed examination of themes presented when asked about support needed to effectively deploy reading/literacy coaches, accompanied by illustrative quotes, see Table 7.

Table 7

Themes over Support Needed to Deploy Reading/Literacy Coaches

Themes	Example quote
Funding	“Currently [our district] does not have dedicated reading literacy coaches with no plans of pursuing due to budget planning.”
Training/Professional Learning	“Specific training for the reading/literacy coach, beyond that provided to teachers, would be helpful. Moreover, training for central office and school administrators in best practices for using these individuals to support reading achievement would be appreciated.”
Staffing	“In order to support our school district in effectively deploying a reading/literacy coach(es) in our district is funding. Also, it is very important to hire those who are qualified or provide districts funding for those who desire to become reading or dyslexia endorsed.”
Other	“Support for our reading/literacy coach from GADOE or RESA would be extremely helpful. The district participated in the train-the-trainer model offered in the Reading First grant. A model similar to this would be helpful to ensure our coaches are moving teachers in the right direction and provide needed support for teachers.”
No Support Needed	“We do not currently need any additional supports.”

Note. Multiple themes may be present in one answer.

Discussion

Considering the number of districts in Georgia, it important to note a 51% response rate to this inventory— signifying the active participation of 113 districts, including 19 charter schools. Most districts represented were small, followed by medium districts then large districts;

however, this changed slightly when accounting for representation based the total amount of K-3 teachers. Large districts represented the highest number of teachers ($n = 10778$) in our sample, followed by medium districts ($n = 3308$) and then small districts ($n = 2913$).

While most districts reported selection of universal reading screeners, some still had not finalized their selection at the time of the survey. When it came to training, differences existed between whether training was mandatory for administrators or teachers. Specifically, 87.6% of districts reported mandatory training on their selected screener for teachers compared to 61.0% for administrators.

Regarding barriers to screener implementation, around 84% of districts faced obstacles, with time constraints being the most prevalent barrier. This challenge was highlighted across districts of varying sizes, with scheduling conflicts and training costs being key concerns. However, some districts reported overcoming these barriers through various strategies—such as offering paid professional development over the summer or establishing assessment teams.

Most districts had not yet reached a decision in selecting HQIM. Some districts specified a particular HQIM, and several districts selected the “other” category. A majority of districts indicated that training for their core reading program was mandatory; similar rates of reporting were also noted for administrators and teachers that received the training, suggesting that regardless of role, personnel are likely to meet training requirements. Further, a portion of districts reported facing barriers when implementing a core reading program, with 41% noting that funding was a barrier. Small and medium districts reported funding as the largest barrier. Additionally, 35% of districts reported concerns about training and 27% reported concerns about timeframes.

Most districts reported having an established tiered intervention program, with at least half of respondents directly integrating interventions with the core reading program. The responsibility of intervention oversight mainly fell to RTI/MTSS Coordinators. These findings highlight the oversight of reading interventions by trained specialists. Based on the qualitative findings, universal reading screener results are the most common data source for selecting how students receive reading interventions across all district sizes.

Differences in provision of professional learning were apparent with the percentage of districts that reported structured literacy training for administrators compared to training for teachers; this is the first notable difference regarding training between administrators and teachers. There is likely a need for more structured literacy training among all personnel. Further, only 50% of district respondents indicated the presence of a dedicated reading/literacy coach, with notable variations in coach numbers. These results suggest clear differences in the capacity that districts have to address their specific needs and may further highlight why there are differences in structured literacy training.

Funding was the most reported barrier to deploying reading/literacy coaches by the districts. This trend was seen across district size as well, indicating that it was important regardless of size. This could also be due to funding limitations leading to training and staffing issues. Another barrier that appeared for small and medium districts was dual roles and the use of the reading/literacy coaches. Specifically, these districts reported having a coach in each school, but that their coach(es) work with teachers in every grade and across subjects. In turn, these coaches are less likely to have specialized training in the Science of Reading, Structured Literacy, and other components of HB 538. Regarding support needed to effectively deploy reading/literacy coaches, the most common theme was funding; this was observed all district

sizes. Staffing concerns and training resources were also noted as vital support that could aid districts.

Conclusion

The results obtained through the Deal Center's district inventory provide a comprehensive overview of districts' baseline implementation status of HB 538, along with practices and characteristics regarding universal reading screeners, HQIM, tiered interventions, and professional learning. These observations are vital to inform statewide literacy initiatives and allocation of resources.

Appendix A

Table 8

District Inventory Survey Questions

District Size	Frequency	
	<i>n</i>	%
Size of District	<i>N</i> = 113	
Small district	78	69
Medium district	24	21.2
Large district	11	9.7
Universal Reading Screeners	<i>N</i> = 113	
Acadience Reading K-6	17	15
aimswEBPlus	2	1.8
Amira	4	3.5
EasyCBM for Reading	2	1.8
FastBridge	4	3.5
i-Ready Assessment for Reading	24	21.2
ISIP Reading with RAN and ORF	2	1.8
MAP Reading Fluency	30	26.5
mClass	5	4.4
Star Assessments	9	8
Not yet selected	13	11.5
Waiting for development of free universal screener	1	0.9
Is Implementation of Universal Screener New Undertaking?	<i>N</i> = 111	
No	99	89.2
Yes	12	10.8
Grades (K-3) for Universal Reading Screeners	<i>N</i> = 99	
No grades	1	0.9
Only 3 grades	4	3.5
All 4 grades	94	82.5
Is Training on Universal Reading Screener Provided?	<i>N</i> = 113	
No	8	7.1
Yes	105	92.9
Is Training Mandatory for Administrators?	<i>N</i> = 105	
No	41	39
Yes	64	61
Is Training Mandatory for Teachers?	<i>N</i> = 105	
No	13	12.4
Yes	92	87.6

Approx. What Proportion of Administrations Have Received Training?		<i>N</i> = 105
None of them	8	7.6
About a quarter of them	10	9.5
About half of them	15	14.3
About three quarters of them	16	15.2
All of them	56	53.3
Approx. What Proportion of Administrations Have Received Training?		<i>N</i> = 105
None of them	2	1.9
About a quarter of them	11	10.5
About half of them	9	8.6
About three quarters of them	23	21.9
All of them	60	57.1
Which HQIM has your District Chosen?		<i>N</i> = 113
Amplify	1	0.9
Benchmark Advance	1	0.9
Benchmark workshop	5	4.4
Bookworms	5	4.4
EL Education	5	4.4
HMH	8	7.1
Savvas	4	3.5
Not yet chosen	51	45.1
Other	33	29.2
Is Training Mandatory for K-3 Personnel?		<i>N</i> = 62
No	2	3.2
Yes	60	96.8
Have Administrators Received Selected Core Reading Training?		<i>N</i> = 52
No	19	30.7
Yes	43	69.4
Have Teachers Received Selected Core Reading Training?		<i>N</i> = 52
No	14	22.6
Yes	48	77.4
How is Selected Core Reading Training Delivered?		<i>N</i> = 48
Vendor/Publisher	10	20.8
In-house by district staff	1	2.1
In-house by school staff	4	8.3
Combination of 2	16	33.3
Combination of 3	17	35.4

Are Supplemental Programs Bundled?		<i>N</i> = 62	
No	29		46.8
Yes	33		53.2
Is there an Existing Tiered Reading Intervention Plan?		<i>N</i> = 112	
No	5		4.5
Yes	84		75
We are in the process of creating one	23		20.5
Are Reading Interventions Tied to Core Reading Program?		<i>N</i> = 112	
No	47		42
Yes	65		58
Are Supplemental Programs Bundled?		<i>N</i> = 111	
Principal	10		9
Assistant Principal	11		10
RTI/MTSS Coordinator	52		47
Instructional Coach	15		14
Other	23		21
What Method is Used to Deliver Reading Interventions?		<i>N</i> = 111	
Computer-based	1		0.9
Direct instruction	6		5.4
Pull out or push in	5		4.5
Small group	3		2.7
Combination of 2	14		12.6
Combination of 3	26		23.4
Combination of 4	54		48.6
All 5 combinations	2		1.8
What Time do Students Receive Reading Intervention?		<i>N</i> = 111	
During Tier 1	7		6.3
During small group Tier 1	51		45.9
During specials	7		6.3
Other	46		41.4
What Proportion of Administrators Received Structured Literacy Training?		<i>N</i> = 112	
None of them	26		23.2
About a quarter of them	35		31.3
About three quarters of them	8		7.1
All of them	43		38.4
What Proportion of Teachers Received Structured Literacy Training?		<i>N</i> = 112	
None of them	21		18.8
About a quarter of them	47		42
About three quarters of them	24		21.4

All of them	20	17.9
<hr/>		
Does District have Dedicated Literacy Coaches?		<i>N</i> = 109
No	46	42.2
Yes	63	57.8
<hr/>		
How Many Coaches are Training in Structured Literacy?		<i>N</i> = 109
0	46	42.2
1	31	28.4
2	10	9.2
3	3	2.8
4	3	2.8
5	1	0.9
6	5	4.6
7	1	0.9
8	1	0.9
9	1	0.9
12	1	0.9
15	1	0.9
19	1	0.9
20	1	0.9
45	1	0.9
71	1	0.9
89	1	0.9
<hr/>		
How Many Coaches are Training in Structured Literacy?		<i>N</i> = 67
None of them	11	16.4
About a quarter of them	5	7.5
About half of them	3	4.5
About three quarters of them	3	4.5
All of them	45	67.2
<hr/>		
Is there Plan to Train all Coaches in Structured Literacy?		<i>N</i> = 67
No	29	43.3
Yes	38	56.7
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Appendix B

Table 10

Themes over Barriers to Implementing Universal Reading Screeners

Themes	Example quote
Time	“Time is the most significant barrier. Screeners requires lots of time and skilled individuals to administer them. We currently administer the screeners through a trained team of educators.”
Training/Professional Learning	“We have not provided training to all teachers at this time. We have provided teachers who are currently piloting the screener. We plan to expand our pilot to more teachers during the last 9 weeks. This will allow us to prepare for additional barriers. At this time, we feel that many of our teachers will express a concern with the amount of time that it may take. However, we do feel that the information is extremely valuable and that as teachers become more familiar with the data they will see that the time it takes to complete the screener will be beneficial for classroom instruction.”
Funding	“Continuing to cover the cost for the screener as well as professional learning.”
No Barriers	“There are no barriers to implementation in our district. The I-Ready screener can actually be administered with very little training. It is assigned at the district level and pushed out. Teachers create a conducive testing environment and provide students 2-3 20–30-minute sessions to complete the screener. It just requires monitoring from the teachers.”

Note. Multiple themes may be present in one answer.

Appendix C

Table 11

Notable Comments

Location	Theme	Example quote
HQIM	Barriers – Adaptability	<p>“We discovered the need for a core reading program in our district before Covid, because our teachers were using a mixture of resources (and many had resorted to tpt resources). We carefully selected Wit and Wisdom, because it aligns with our EL model. We had been using Foundations for phonics, but we switched to "From Phonics to Reading" two years ago. If we aren't allowed to bundle, we will switch to the EL curriculum. However, we have invested MUCH time, money, and training into the Wit and Wisdom program and the phonics program. We actually gave teachers workdays during the summer and throughout the year to work on Wit and Wisdom, since it is a wonderful, but daunting curriculum. It will be honestly be frustrating to have to start all over, especially since we have purchased all of the core texts for each grade level.”</p>

HQIM

Barriers – No Barriers

“We are very pleased with our implementation of HMH Into Reading as well as our partnership with the Rollins Center for Language and Literacy. Training teachers and school leadership has been a long process, and we continue to work with new teachers as we onboard them, but we believe we have a good system in place. Shifting the mindset of veteran teachers away from outdated practices to an approach based on the Science of Reading, Structured Literacy, and explicit instruction in the Big Five areas of literacy has taken some time, and we are still in the process. We are also finding that teacher candidates coming from colleges and universities are not well prepared in their teacher prep programs for teaching literacy, so this has been a barrier. Fortunately, we have the resources and the expertise in our district to be able to support our teachers and leaders.”

Professional Learning	Barriers – Funding	<p>“Funding is a huge concern. Again, due to rising cost in the employer's portion of health care, TRS, funding HQIM materials, and other rising costs. We are a school district that may seem "rich" but we are not. Local tax revenue continues to decrease as more individuals qualify for tax exemptions across our county.</p> <p>Our current literacy coaches have worked extremely hard to build relationships with teachers and to do their own professional learning based on information they have learned through LETRS training to our teachers. However, we feel we are now moving backwards in this area since we may not be able to continue their employment for next year. This information has been presented to our board but the final budget for FY25 has not been submitted to them. We are currently in the process of developing it.”</p>
Professional Learning	Support – Other	<p>“We need relief from so many initiatives at one time: literacy legislation requirements, new ELA standards, new math standards, Artificial Intelligence, etc., etc. All of it is good work, but it is too much all at once. We are a small system and our support/admin staff are limited in number.”</p>
Professional Learning	Barriers – Funding	<p>“At this point, this is an unfunded mandate. It is simply a matter of having the resources to hire these coaches and sustain the expense of their positions over time.”</p>

Note. Multiple themes may be present in one answer.

