



Evaluation Brief

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Administrators' and Specialists' Experiences with Supporting Implementation of the Monitoring Instructional Reading Levels Strategy 2015–2016

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Executive Summary

This brief, the second in a series of reports from the Monitoring Instructional Reading Levels (MIRL) evaluation study, describes findings from spring 2016 surveys of elementary school administrators and specialists (staff development teachers and reading specialists). The purpose of the surveys was to get input from administrators and specialists on their experiences with supporting the implementation of MIRL at their schools in 2015–2016 and to identify areas needing improvement.

Key Findings

Overall, survey responses from 130 administrators and 219 specialists showed encouraging news following the implementation of MIRL in 2015–2016. The following experiences and changes were reported:

- processes and structures to increase familiarity and consistent implementation of reading instruction and MIRL were in place in majority of the schools.
- increases in monitoring (observation and documentation) of instructional reading levels during guided reading.
- high emphasis across schools on collaborative planning, implementation of guided reading instruction, and use of the monthly Reading Data Collection tool.
- greater focus on meeting student needs in reading comprehension and writing in response to reading and as a result, an increase in students' critical thinking skills.
- changes in instructional practices: an increase in teachers' awareness of students' strengths and needs, more small group instruction, consistent use of Common Core State Standards (CCSS) indicators and increased use of monthly reading data to guide instruction.
- changes in student performance: more visible changes in instructional reading levels, faster progress, and steady growth in reading proficiency levels.

- analysis of monitoring data uncovered many instructional needs particularly in the areas of: writing in response to reading, comprehension, vocabulary, fluency, accuracy, and learning English.
- the implementation of MIRL was augmented by professional development (PD) opportunities provided at district and school levels, support from reading specialists and staff development teachers, the purposive and collaborative planning at school and grade-levels, aligning MIRL to school improvement goals, and the work of the classroom teachers.

The surveys also highlighted the following concerns:

- Uneven implementation of some components of MIRL: systems for using formative assessment data and monitoring the fidelity of implementation of MIRL were only partially implemented in most of the schools.
- Optimal implementation of MIRL was hindered by the widespread perception of MIRL as the event of monthly collecting and documenting of reading data, limited time, insufficient instructional resources for guided reading instruction, and teachers' varying experience with analyzing and using formative assessment data to adjust instruction.

Recommendations

- Increase consistency in the understanding of the MIRL strategy by teachers and school leaders; clarify its rationale, and its relationship to formative assessment and the Early Literacy plan.
- Continue to dispel the widespread perception that MIRL is an event by explaining the strong connection of MIRL and MCPS's *Priorities for 2016-2017: Focus on Learning, Results, and Accountability*. Specifically, the expectation to intensify focus on district-wide data-driven monitoring and analysis of student performance in order to increase opportunities for students to learn

and to reduce variability in outcomes across schools and classrooms within schools.

- Increase implementation of the MIRL practices that were implemented at low levels. For majority of schools, the processes for monthly review of formative assessment data with staff and assessing fidelity of implementation of MIRL were partially in place.
- Share best practices related to MIRL within and across schools: efficient and systematic ways to monitor the reading data, use of the notes column feature on the monitoring tool, data analysis, and meaningfully integrating the reading data into planning instruction.
- Intensify PD support to classroom teachers in the areas of students' greatest instructional needs in reading: writing in response to reading, comprehension, vocabulary, fluency, accuracy, and learning English.
- Continue to offer a variety of ongoing PD sessions related to reading instruction, assessment as learning (formative assessment), and use of data to guide instruction.
- Update and increase the supply of instructional resources for guided reading instruction.
- Increase clarity and understanding of the similarities, differences, as well as the functions of the various formative and local reading assessments data: MIRL, MCPS AP-PR /mClass data; and MAP-R, and provide examples of how each can be used to guide instruction.

Background

Monitoring Instructional Reading Levels (MIRL) is a district-wide strategy being implemented in MCPS to improve reading instruction and increase reading performance for K–5 students. The objective of the MIRL strategy is to increase systematic implementation of high quality guided reading, monthly documentation of students' instructional reading levels, analysis and use of monthly reading data for instructional planning (Appendix A). Starting in the fall of 2015, all elementary schools were expected to implement MIRL strategy.

The theory of change of MIRL is that through emphasis on high quality guided reading and data collection during guided reading, and analyses of formative reading data, teachers can: a) diagnose a student's immediate need and b) then use the information to adjust instruction (MCPS, 2015a).

While many of the practices of the MIRL strategy have been part of the MCPS elementary school curriculum for many years, the district-wide implementation of MIRL in 2015–2016 was necessitated by several factors: reading performance for K–5 students had declined from 2012 to

2014; MCPS had recently instituted a variety of curriculum changes and initiatives; and it was unclear to what extent all schools kept up with consistent monitoring to support student learning at all grade levels across the district (MCPS, 2015b). Thus, in 2015–2016, the Monthly Reading Data Collection Tool was introduced as a key component of the MIRL strategy, making it possible for teachers to use a common monitoring tool to obtain the data necessary to support instruction and make immediate adjustments to improve reading instruction.

Evaluation Questions

Analyses of survey data was guided by the following evaluation questions:

1. To what extent did schools establish processes and structures to support the planning, coordination, and implementation of MIRL?
2. What are changes in a) reading instruction and b) students' reading proficiency reported by school administrators and specialists?
3. What factors facilitated or hindered the implementation of MIRL?
4. What are the areas of instructional needs in reading identified by administrators and specialists?
5. What changes would administrators make to strengthen the implementation of MIRL?
6. What are the professional development needs identified for specialists and teachers?

Methodology

Data collection. Two web-based surveys—one each for administrators and specialists were conducted between April 30 and May 10, 2016 using *NoviSurvey Tools*. The survey was developed by the Office of Shared Accountability, in collaboration with staff from the Elementary Integrated Reading Curriculum (EIC), in the Office of Curriculum and Instructional Programs (OCIP) to gather data regarding the implementation of MIRL practices at the school level.

An email containing the survey link to the online surveys was sent to all elementary school principals, requesting that they distribute the link to the staff development teachers (n=133) and reading specialists (n=133) at their schools. At the same time, an online link to the administrator survey was distributed by OCIP staff at the May 5, 2016 Elementary Principals Curriculum Update meeting, inviting principals to participate in the administrator survey.

Response rate. Nearly all administrators completed the survey for a response rate of 98% (130 of 133). The

response rate for the specialist survey was 82% (219 of 266). As intended, the respondents included principals, assistant principals, reading specialists and staff development teachers. Information on characteristics of respondents is available in Appendix B. Response rates approximating 60% for most research should be the goal of researchers; for survey research intended to represent a setting adequately, a response rate of $\geq 80\%$ is expected (Fowler, 2002; Nulty, 2008). These high response rates give assurance that the samples of respondents are highly representative of the administrators and specialists in MCPS elementary schools.

Data analyses procedures. Descriptive summary statistics were computed for the structured items on surveys. Information from the open-ended responses was reviewed, analyzed, and coded to summarize similar comments into themes.

Results

The findings are organized by evaluation question; findings from the administrator’s survey are reported first followed by findings from the specialist survey.

Q1. To what Extent Did Schools Establish Processes and Structures to Support the Planning, Coordination, and Implementation of MIRL?

Professional Development

Total hours PD for administrators. The majority of administrators reported that they received a total of 10–25 (52%) or more hours (25%) of professional development (including summer) related to reading instruction during the 2015–2016 school year (Figure 1).

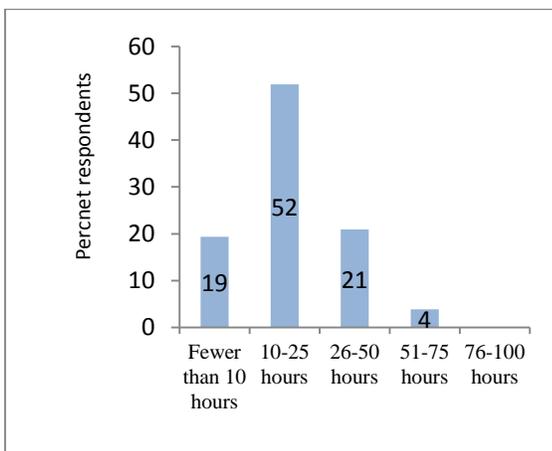


Figure 1. Total hours of professional development reported by administrators (N=128).

The professional development plans for teachers and school leaders are detailed Appendix C.

Total hours PD for specialists. The majority of specialists received a total of 10–25 hours (43%) or more than 25 hours (42%) of professional development (including summer) related to reading instruction during the 2015–2016 school year (Figure 2).

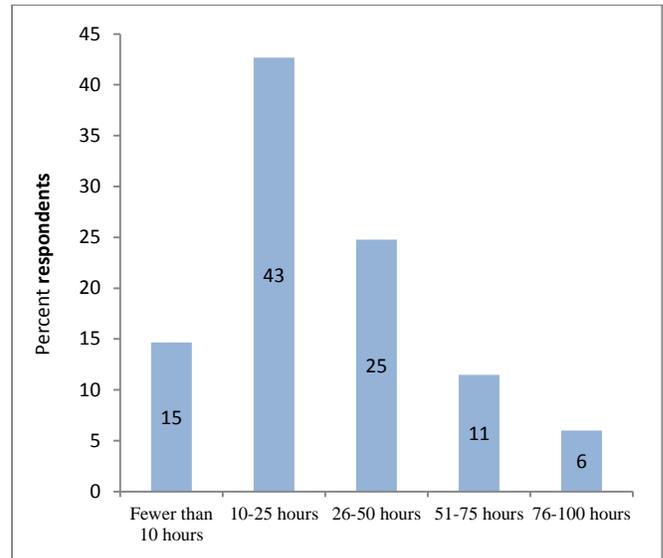


Figure 2. Total hours of professional development reported by specialists. (N=218)

Professional development attended and facilitated by specialists. More than three quarters of the specialists who provided responses reported they had attended three of the four county-wide PD sessions related to reading instruction; (Table 1a). In addition, the majority of specialists (94%) reported they had facilitated the training on *Monitoring Instructional Reading Levels K–5* (Table 1b).

Table 1a
Number and Percent of Specialists Reporting Specified Professional Development Sessions Attended (N=209)

Session	Attended	
	n	%
Monitoring Instructional Reading Levels K–2	185	88.5
Small Group Reading Instruction Grades 3-5 Tier 1 Summer Training (2014)	171	81.8
Monitoring Instructional Reading Levels K–5	162	77.5
Reflecting on Results and Next Steps Module 3	52	24.9

Table 1b
Number and Percent of Specialists Reporting Specified Professional Development Sessions Facilitated (N=143)

Session	Facilitated	
	N	%
Monitoring Instructional Reading Levels K–2	33	23.2
Small Group Reading Instruction Grades 3–5 Tier 1 Summer Training (2014)	24	16.9
Monitoring Instructional Reading Levels K–5	134	94.4
Reflecting on Results and Next Steps Module 3	42	29.6

Note. The percentage of responses may exceed 100% because respondents provided more than one response.

Status of Implementation of MIRL

Stage of implementation of MIRL reported by administrators. One survey item asked principals to indicate the stage of implementation (in place, initiated or partially in place, not yet initiated) of specified activities and processes for planning, coordinating, and assessing progress of MIRL at the school level. By spring 2016, the majority of administrators reported that they had put in place most of the specified processes related to collaborative planning and professional development (85–89%) and processes for clarifying the vision and expectations for reading instruction (69–79%) (Table 2)

The greatest variation in implementation was reported for the processes related to monitoring and use of data for instructional planning. More than 60% of the principals indicated they had put in place: a) systems for measuring and reporting reading outcomes (66%) and b) process for reviewing reading performance data with teachers (62%); however, the remaining 32% and 35% respectively indicated that these two processes were partially in place. Less than one half reported that they had put in place: a process for a) monthly review of formative assessment data with staff (48%) and b) assessing fidelity of implementation of MIRL (46%); 38% and 50% respectively reported these structures were partially in place (Table 2).

Table 2
Number and Percent of Administrators Reporting Status of Implementation of MIRL

Processes/structures	In Place		Partially in Place		Not Yet Initiated	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Collaborative Planning/professional development						
Learning progression plan for professional development (N=108)	96	88.9	10	9.3	2	1.9
Structures for on-going collaborative curriculum study and planning within the week (N=109)	95	87.2	13	11.9	1	0.9
Master schedules to allow teacher leaders and specialist to participate in collaborative planning (N=108)	92	85.2	12	11.1	4	3.7
Clarifying vision and expectation for reading instruction						
Communication plans to inform staff of formative assessment vision, curriculum updates, expectations (N=106)	84	79.2	21	19.8	1	0.9
Written expectations for instructional program in reading (N=108)	78	72.2	24	22.2	6	5.6
Written expectations for weekly planning (N=108)	75	69.4	25	23.1	8	7.4
Monitoring and use of data for instructional planning						
Systems for measuring and reporting reading outcomes (N=109)	71	65.7	35	32.4	2	1.9
Process for reviewing reading performance data with teachers (N=110)	67	62.0	38	35.2	5	4.7
Process for monthly review of formative assessment data with staff (N=108)	52	48.1	41	38.0	15	13.9
Systems for assessing fidelity of implementation of Monitoring Instructional Reading Levels at school level (N=107)	49	45.8	53	49.5	5	4.7

Level of emphasis of specified structures and processes across schools reported by specialists. The specialists were asked to rate the level of emphasis given to specified processes and activities across their school.

Table 3
Number and Percent of Specialists Reporting Level of Emphasis of Specified Processes and Structures

Specified Activities	To a Great Extent		To a Moderate Extent		To a Small Extent	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Using Common Core State Standards as basis for instructional planning for all students (<i>N</i> =190) ^d	122	64.0	54	28.4	11	5.8
Differentiating instruction to meet needs of varied learners (<i>N</i> =188) ^a	120	63.8	56	29.8	11	5.9
Aligning reading instruction with CCSS indicators to ensure rigor for all students (<i>N</i> =189) ^b	120	63.5	52	27.5	15	7.9
Implementing expectations for balanced literacy schedule (<i>N</i> =188) ^b	118	62.6	55	29.3	13	6.9
Emphasizing reading comprehension strategies (<i>N</i> =189)	117	61.9	60	31.7	12	6.3
Building capacity for successful collaborative content study and planning (<i>N</i> =188) ^d	105	55.9	66	35.1	13	6.9
Using consistent processes and tools to document evidence of student learning (<i>N</i> =188) ^b	102	54.3	71	37.8	13	6.9
Use of before, during, and after structure of guided reading structure instruction (<i>N</i> =186) ^b	97	52.2	72	38.7	15	8.1
Articulating the formative assessment vision for the school (<i>N</i> =186) ^f	86	46.2	59	31.7	32	17.2
Interpreting formative assessment information (<i>N</i> =185) ^c	73	38.8	85	45.2	27	14.4
Selecting guided reading texts (<i>N</i> =188) ^e	64	35.2	69	37.9	49	26.9

Note. The response Not at all is not shown in the table. Responses for Not at all are indicated on each item as follows:

^a *n*=3; ^b *n*=2; ^c *n*=4; ^d *n*=1; ^e *n*=6; ^f *n*=9.

The majority of specialists who provided responses indicated that their school placed high emphasis in the following areas (Table 3):

- Using Common Core State Standards (CCSS) as basis for instructional planning for all students (64%)
- Differentiating instruction to meet needs of varied learners (64%)
- Aligning reading instruction with CCSS indicators to ensure rigor for all students (64%)
- Implementing expectations for balanced literacy schedule (63%)
- Emphasizing reading comprehension strategies (62%)
- Building capacity for successful collaborative content study and planning (56%)
- Using consistent processes and tools to document evidence of student learning. (54%)
- Use of before, during, and after structure of guided reading structure instruction (52%)

Less than half of the specialists reported a high emphasis on: a) articulating the formative assessment vision for the school (46%) b) interpreting formative assessment information (38%), and c) selecting guided reading texts (35%). Further, 17–26% reported low emphasis of these activities.

Change in implementation of MIRL processes from 2014–2015 as reported by specialists. When asked to indicate the extent to which they engaged in specified activities to support the implementation of MIRL compared to the year before, the majority of the respondents indicated increases during 2015–2016 in (Table 4):

- Monitoring students' monthly reading level targets over time (78%)
- Working with school staff to define reading instructional goals (70%)
- Ensuring consistent implementation of reading instruction across grade levels (64%)
- Examining formative assessment reading data (63%)
- Sharing and reviewing reading assessment data with teachers (60%)
- Coaching teachers on a range of instructional strategies related to reading (56%)
- Leading grade level team planning groups/meetings (51%)

For three of the specified activities, the proportion of specialists reporting increases in their involvement in 2015–2016 was comparable to those who reported no change: gathering resource materials for reading instruction (48% vs. 47%), providing ongoing follow-up and feedback to teachers (48% vs. 45%), and collaborating with team leaders to provide job-embedded

professional development opportunities for teachers (48% vs. 46%).

Table 4
Number and Percent of Specialists Indicating Change in Level of Engagement in Specified Activities from 2014–2015

Activity	Great extent		About the same		Less Extent	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Monitoring students' monthly reading level targets over time (<i>N</i> =179)	140	78.2	32	17.9	7	3.9
Working with school staff to define reading instructional goals (<i>N</i> =179)	126	70.4	48	26.8	5	2.8
Ensuring consistent implementation of reading instruction across grade levels (<i>N</i> =176)	112	63.6	55	31.3	9	5.1
Examining formative assessment reading data (<i>N</i> =179)	112	62.6	57	31.8	10	5.6
Sharing and reviewing reading assessment data with teachers (<i>N</i> =175)	105	60.0	62	35.4	8	4.6
Coaching teachers on a range of instructional strategies related to reading (<i>N</i> =176)	99	56.3	67	38.1	10	5.7
Leading grade level team planning groups/meetings (<i>N</i> =177)	91	51.4	72	40.7	14	7.9
Gathering resource materials for reading instruction (<i>N</i> =178)	86	48.3	84	47.2	8	4.5
Providing ongoing follow-up and feedback to teachers (<i>N</i> =174)	84	48.3	79	45.4	11	6.3
Collaborating with team leaders to provide job-embedded professional development opportunities for teachers (<i>N</i> =178)	85	47.8	79	44.4	14	7.9

Note. Valid *N* for each item varies because of missing responses;

Q2a. What are Changes in Reading Instruction as Reported by School Administrators and Specialists?

Changes in instructional practices reported by administrators. Through responses elicited from open-ended items, 84 administrators mentioned several school level changes they had observed in instructional practices at their schools following the 2015–2016 implementation of MIRL (Table 5). The most frequently cited changes were: 1) increased collection, ongoing examination, and use of monitoring data for instructional planning (*n*=29, 35%), 2) increased teachers' awareness of performance levels and progress (*n*=24, 29%), 3) consistent collaborative planning for guided reading instruction during grade-level planning meetings (*n*=19, 23%), 4) increased emphasis and implementation of guided reading instruction (*n*=18, 21%), and 5) increased school-wide monitoring of student progress in reading and accountability for student learning within grade-levels and across the school (*n*=17, 20%).

Table 5
Most Frequently Mentioned Changes in Instructional Practices Reported by Administrators (*N*=84)

Changes in instructional practices	<i>n</i>	%
Increased collection, examining and use of monitoring data	29	34.5
Increased teachers' awareness student performance levels	24	28.6
Consistent and thorough collaborative planning for guided reading instruction during grade-level planning meetings	19	22.6
Increased emphasis and implementation of quality guided reading	18	21.4
Increased monitoring and accountability for student learning and achievement in reading	17	20.2

Note. The percentage of responses may exceed 100% because respondents provided more than one response.

Changes in instructional practices reported by specialists. The top changes in reading instruction following the 2015–2016 implementation of MIRL mentioned by the 160 specialists who provided responses that were similar to those reported by administrators: 1) increased teachers' awareness of monthly reading targets and their students' growth over time (*n*=74, 47%) and, 2) more consistent collection of reading data and use of running records for instructional decision making (*n*=71, 45%). In addition, the specialists reported instructional changes that were more specific to teacher's use of the monitoring data: a) increased matching of instruction to student needs (*n*=61, 39%), b) more focused planning with use of indicators (*n*=37, 24%), c) increased small group instruction (20%), and d) increased emphasis on reading instruction, particularly reading comprehension strategies (*n*=31, 20%) (Table 6).

Table 6

Most Frequently Mentioned Changes in Instructional Practices in 2015–2016 Reported by Specialists ($N=160$)

Changes	<i>n</i>	%
Teachers are more aware of reading targets and students' growth over time	74	47.1
More consistent data collection/more teachers taking running records during instruction/more use of data running records in decision making	71	45.2
Instruction more targeted to needs of student because teachers are more awareness of student's strengths and needs	61	38.9
More focus planning; use of indicators, and increase in collaborative planning	37	23.6
Increase in small groups instruction	32	20.4
Increased emphasis on schoolwide focus on reading instruction; compression strategies and increasing consistency	31	19.7

Note. The percentage of responses may exceed 100% because respondents provided more than one response.

Q2b. What are the Changes in Student Reading Proficiency Reported by School Administrators and Specialists?

Changes in student performance reported by administrators. In response to an open-ended item, administrators mentioned many changes they had observed in students' instructional levels and performance in reading following the implementation of MIRL. By spring 2016, the majority of the 73 administrators who provided responses mentioned that they had observed positive changes in: students' academic growth ($n=39$, 53%). The reported positive changes included statements like improved scores, increased comprehension, and faster pace in achieving proficiency. About a third of the respondents were cautious and stated that it was too soon to tell if the implementation of MIRL could be associated with any significant change in student performance ($n=22$, 30%). Lastly, some respondents also reported that the monthly data collection and monitoring of reading data had uncovered student needs in the areas of fluency and comprehension and that their teachers were increasingly adjusting instruction to target these needs ($n=8$, 11%)

Changes in student performance reported by specialists. More than 40% of the specialists who provided responses mentioned that the monitoring data showed more students' movement and progress in reading instructional levels, and that some students had accelerated their progress in 2015–2016 compared to previous years. Specifically, by spring 2016, the most frequent changes mentioned by the 124 specialists who provided responses were:

- They had observed greater gains in student fluency and reading comprehension, and that because students

were being challenged more, they had grown in their areas of need ($n=55$, 44%).

- They were not sure or they had observed no changes that could be attributed to MIRL ($n=52$, 42%).
- Students' instructional reading levels documented on the MIRL tool were more accurate and more "fluid" than in previous years ($n=26$, 21%).

Q3a. What factors Facilitated the Implementation of MIRL?

Factors that facilitated the implementation of MIRL as reported by administrators. In response to an open-ended item, the administrators reported that the success of MIRL at their school was brought about primarily by the diligence of the specialists; particularly the staff development teachers and reading specialists ($n=32$, 37%) who supported teachers and ensured that MIRL practices were implemented with fidelity (Table 7).

Table 7
Factors that Supported Implementation of MIRL Reported by Administrators ($N=89$)

Factors	<i>n</i>	%
Specified staff members-reading specialist and Staff Development Teachers/some administrative staff at school and central office	32	36.8
Purposive planning and aligning MIRL to SIP/matching the planning to needs of students	30	34.5
Requirement to monitor MIRL/monthly deadlines/requirement to assess	29	33.3
Professional development (in-school and MIRL countywide professional development)	25	28.7
Teachers of reading –for effective implementation of components of MIRL	8	9.2

Note. The percentage of responses may exceed 100% because respondents provided more than one response.

Also noted as instrumental to the implementation of MIRL were: the purposive planning and aligning of MIRL to their school improvement plans (SIPs) and matching instruction to needs of students ($n=30$, 35%), adherence to the deadlines and requirements to assess students and to enter data monthly ($n=29$, 33%), in-school as well as county wide PD sessions ($n=25$, 29%), and the work of the classroom teachers ($n=8$, 9%).

Factors that facilitated the implementation of MIRL as reported by specialists. The summer PD sessions, ongoing support at the school level by reading specialists and staff development teachers, regular collaborative planning sessions, a variety of instructional resources such as training modules and videos, and the strong emphasis on reading in their school improvement goals strengthened the implementation of MIRL. Among these factors, more than one half of the specialists who provided responses ($N=139$), mentioned the districtwide PD summer training and school-level PD facilitated by

reading specialists at their schools ($n=71, 51\%$). More than one third of the respondents mentioned that the regular collaborative planning meetings ($n=60, 43\%$) and the ongoing support and encouragement from the reading specialists were very helpful ($n=42, 30\%$) (Table 8).

Additionally, at least one fifth of the respondents mentioned that the classroom teachers' follow through with implementation of MIRL practices ($n=38, 27\%$), having a variety of instructional resources ($n=32, 23\%$), data chats and using data for planning instruction ($n=29, 21\%$) strengthened the implementation of MIRL.

Table 8

Factors	<i>n</i>	%
Training provided by reading specialist in school training and summer training	71	51.1
Collaborative planning—regular opportunities for collaborating	60	43.2
Ongoing support from reading specialists	42	30.2
Teachers-implementation of reading instruction	38	27.3
Instructional and other resources (e.g., modules, substitutes for specialists to allow time for planning and training),	32	23.0
Using data for planning/data chats	29	20.9
Consistent messages regarding expectations for reading from Instructional Core teams and others	27	19.4
Strong emphasis on reading and guided reading in SIP goals	24	17.3

Note. The percentage of responses may exceed 100% because respondents provided more than one response

Q3b. What Factors Hindered the Implementation of MIRL?

Factors that hindered implementation of MIRL as reported by administrators. When asked whether they encountered any challenges, limited time was cited as a major challenge by the 87 administrators who provided responses (Table 9). As with any new initiative, balancing time for MIRL and other instructional demands in the master schedule was the most frequently cited challenge for the administrators ($n=41, 48\%$). Also, many administrators mentioned the teachers' perception of MIRL as primarily an event of data collection and monthly monitoring ($n=30, 35\%$), which had caused push back from teachers; teachers did not readily see the value of MIRL to students or their instruction. The responding administrators also pointed to the challenge of varying levels of teachers' experience with implementing some MIRL practices, particularly in the areas of data analysis ($n=29, 34\%$). The respondents conveyed that analysis of MIRL data and using these data to provide more focused instruction based on student needs was different from using just MAP_R or mClass data. Some of the

administrators also mentioned that having insufficient instructional resources for guided reading ($n=19, 22\%$) was a problem. Finally, 15% ($n=13$) reported having that limited time and resources to adequately address the needs of English language learners (ELLs) and students receiving special education services (SPED) was a challenge.

Table 9
Factors that Hindered Optimal Implementation of MIRL Reported by Administrators ($N=87$)

Factors	<i>n</i>	%
Sufficient time managing MIRL instructional focus alongside other instructional demand setting priorities/time	41	47.7
Perception that MIRL is an event/teacher resistance/limited picture of MIRL	30	34.9
Varying experiences and competency of Teachers; Implementation exposed gaps in capacity/capability to implement components (e.g., data analysis highlighting great need for PD)	29	33.7
Insufficient resources—especially leveled books and funds for substitutes to release teachers and specialists for PD	19	22.1
Addressing needs of ELLs and SPED with limited resources and time	13	15.1

Note. The percentage of responses may exceed 100% because respondents provided more than one response.

Factors that hindered optimal implementation of MIRL as reported by specialists. For the specialists, the most frequently mentioned barriers to optimal implementation of MIRL in 2015–2016 were finding time to plan and complete training modules ($n=126, 79\%$) and the teachers' negative perception of MIRL resistance to the monthly collection and motoring of reading data ($n=121, 76\%$). The specialists pointed out that some teachers felt that “MIRL”(monthly data collection and entry on the monthly data collection tool) was an add-on event and that they did not need MIRL to provide effective instruction in reading (Table 10).

Aside from limited time to plan and teacher resistance, specialists also mentioned that time to analyze, interpret and use the reading data for instructional planning was very limited or insufficient ($n=75, 47\%$). Because of other professional responsibilities required of their positions, many specialists expressed the need for release and substitute time to cover their other duties while they attended to MIRL or facilitated training for MIRL. Additional issues mentioned by about a third of the respondents included: insufficient resources for guided reading ($n=58, 36\%$) and the need to address a variety of student needs (the most pressing being working in large classes), and the difficulty of data collection during

guided reading in upper grades ($n=35$, 22%). The specialists indicated that some teachers found conducting running reading records very time consuming, especially for students in Grades 3–5 (Table 10).

Table 10
Factors that Hindered Optimal Implementation of MIRL
Reported by Specialists ($N=160$)

Factors	<i>n</i>	%
Finding time to plan and complete training modules—time for PD	126	78.8
Teachers perceived MIRL as the event of data collection—as an add on and -not needed	121	75.6
Time to use data; analyze and interpret data and monitoring data input	75	46.9
Insufficient resources—instructional modules and substitute time	58	36.3
Students with many and varying needs of students/working in large classes, MIRL data collection in upper grades	35	21.9

Note. The percentage of responses may exceed 100% because respondents provided more than one response

Q4. What are the Areas of Instructional Needs Identified by Administrators and Specialists?

Areas of instructional needs reported by administrators.

When asked to choose the most critical areas of instructional needs of students in reading, the administrators identified: writing in response to reading ($n=82$, 78%), comprehension ($n=75$, 72%), learning English ($n=60$, 58%), vocabulary ($n=50$, 48%), fluency ($n=25$, 24%), and accuracy ($n=21$, 20%) (Table 11).

Table 11
Number and Percent of Administrators Identifying Areas of Instructional Needs in Reading ($N=104$)

Areas of need	<i>n</i>	%
Writing in response to reading	82	78.8
Comprehension	75	72.1
Learning English language	60	57.7
Vocabulary	50	48.1
Fluency (reading accurately with rate and expression)	25	24.0
Accuracy (decoding words and identifying words)	21	20.2

Note. The percentage of responses may exceed 100% because respondents provided more than one response.

Areas of instructional needs reported by specialists.

When data were disaggregated by reading specialists and staff development teachers, similar proportions of staff development teachers and reading specialists (85%) identified writing in response to reading as the greatest need (Figure 3).

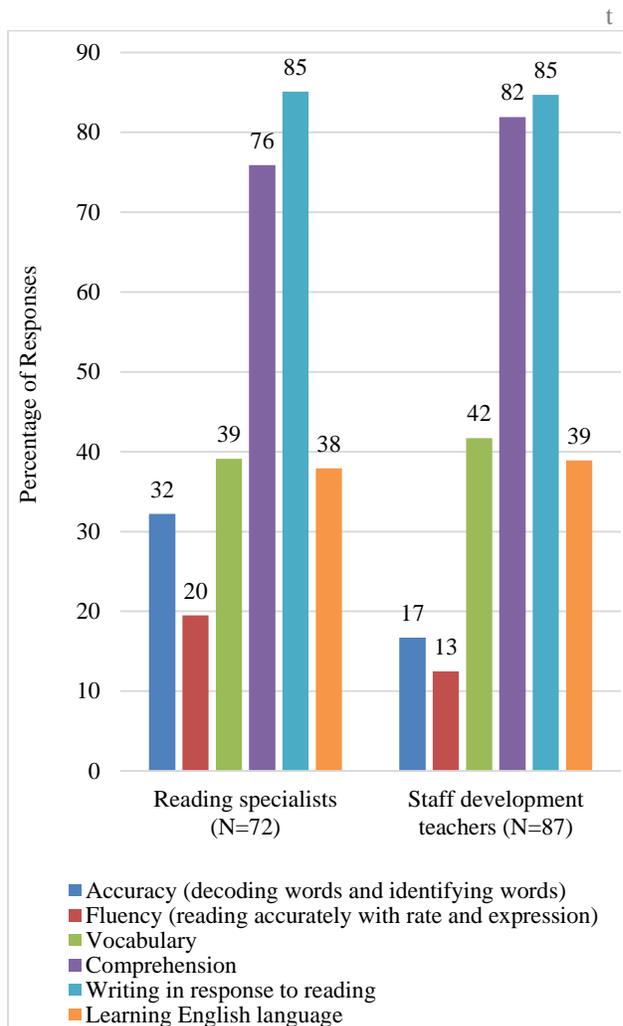


Figure 3. Areas of student needs in reading identified by specialists

Despite the slight difference; more than three quarters of the staff development teachers (82%) and reading specialists (76%) identified comprehension as an area of need. Compared to reading specialists, lower proportion of staff development teachers identified accuracy (32% vs. 17%) and fluency (20% vs. 13%) as critical needs for students.

Q5a. What Changes Would Administrators Make to Strengthen the Implementation of MIRL?

Suggestions from administrators for strengthening the implementation of MIRL. At the conclusion of the survey, administrators were asked for suggestions to strengthen the implementation of MIRL and for making the elementary reading program more effective. Close to one half of the administrators who provided responses suggested focusing PD training around effective practices for MIRL ($n=35$, 48%). In that regard, many mentioned that sharing best practices would build on the

improvements from 2015–2016 and also enable schools to continue making progress toward full implementation (Table 12). The administrators also mentioned that communicating consistent messages about the vision of MIRL and expectations for reading instruction, including dispelling the incomplete perception that MIRL as an event ($n=23$, 32%); providing ongoing PD training, particularly for new teachers and increasing understanding of strategies for working with ELLs and students reading below grade-level ($n=23$, 32%); as well as ensuring schools have sufficient instructional resources for guided reading instruction for all grade levels, ($n=9$, 12%) would strengthen the implementation of MIRL.

Table 12
Suggestions for Strengthening Implementation of MIRL
Reported by Administrators ($N=73$)

Suggestions for strengthening MIRL	<i>n</i>	%
Focus on training around effective practices to make MIRL an established practice/share best practices	35	47.9
Continue consistent communication of expectations for staff/ Continue to articulate vision of MIRL and clarify expectations for reading instruction	23	31.5
Continue ongoing PD and practice for teachers—new teachers, guided reading instruction and data collection, comprehension strategies for ELLs and struggling readers	23	31.5
Provide additional/sufficient resources (funds for substitute time and instructional resources for guided reading)	9	12.3

Note. The percentage of responses may exceed 100% because respondents provided more than one response.

Suggestions for making the elementary reading program more effective provided by administrators. When asked what changes they would make to the elementary reading program to make it more effective, nearly all the suggestions ($N=46$) for strengthening the elementary reading program were similar to the suggestions for strengthening MIRL.

They included—

- provide ongoing professional development ($n=20$, 44%),
- clarify the scope and purpose of MIRL ($n=15$, 33%), and
- provide additional, updated, and sufficient instructional resources ($n=14$, 30%).

An additional suggestion brought up as a means of making the reading program more effective was to increase the focus on writing ($n=6$, 12%).

Suggestions from administrators for future professional development sessions and support for school staff. Further, in their responses to ways to strengthen MIRL and the elementary reading program, the administrators also recommended several topics and activities for future PD sessions:

- Professional development sessions for classroom teachers
 - instruction on writing in response to text
 - vocabulary strategies particularly for ESOL students
 - more focus on data and specifically how to use the data for effective instruction
 - how to analyze running reading records; with guidance or follow-up instructional strategies for interpreting and using the data
 - how to meaningfully integrate MIRL data into planning instruction
- Institute ways for sharing of positive experiences with other schools regarding how to analyze and react to the formative assessment data. One suggestion was to have cluster summits for teachers to meet and look at information with teachers from other nearby schools and with central office experts to delve deeply into ways to apply the data.
- Clarifying issues surrounding data collection with a focus on best practices for a) monitoring the reading data and b) intended use of the instructional notes column feature on the monitoring tool.
- Increasing consistency in the reading data collected within and across schools. Many administrators suggested providing a bank of comprehension questions that teachers could use.

Q6. What are the Professional Development Needs Identified for Specialists and Teachers?

Recommendation for Future PD sessions from Specialists. Through an open-ended survey item, the specialists were asked for suggestions for future PD for specialists and teachers. More than one half of the specialists who provided responses suggested that any future PD training: a) be offered to all specialists, including the media specialists and b) that it be similar or aligned with PD for teachers ($n=40$, 55%). Additional suggestions were: strategies for specialists to support teachers and keep teachers motivated ($n=31$, 43%) and strategies for differentiating instruction by matching instruction to specific strengths and needs of their student ($n=14$, 19%) (Table 13).

Table 13
Suggestions for Future Professional Development for Specialists ($N=73$)

Suggestions for future PD	<i>n</i>	%
Align PD for specialists with PD for teachers	40	54.8
Ways for specialists to support teachers and keep them motivated; coaching; strategies for specific grade-levels, instructional resources	31	42.5
Differentiating instruction with specific focus on individual student needs identified through MIRL and other data	14	19.2

Note. The percentage of responses may exceed 100% because respondents provided more than one response.

Through an open-ended survey item, 106 specialists provided many suggestions for PD activities, topics, and resources for classroom teachers. These suggestions were categorized into four general areas (Table 14):

Table 14
Ideas for Future Professional Development for Classroom Teachers ($N=106$)

Suggestions for future PD	<i>n</i>	%
Focus on reading comprehension strategies	83	78.0
Problem solving/differentiating instruction	39	37.0
More and variety of instructional resources	19	18.0
Training on analysis, interpretation, and use of reading data	17	16.0

Note. The percentage of responses may exceed 100% because

Suggestions for PD on reading comprehension strategies included the following:

- In-depth understanding of comprehension strategies themselves and their use; including guided writing as a follow up to guided reading.
- Deeper understanding of the CCSS indicators: more models of planning for small group instruction using the indicators in planning meetings. Previously, the focus for reading instruction has been whole group planning and now teachers are struggling to flip to small group.
- Writing in response to reading and a deeper understanding of strategies for integrating reading/writing/speaking/listening.

For the category of problem solving and differentiating instruction ($n=39$, 37%). The following were recommended:

- Strategies for using data to match instruction to needs of various learners—strong readers, ELLS, SPED, struggling readers; addressing unique needs and strengths of their students.
- Managing various readers in the class (e.g., ESOL and students with disabilities); more analysis of

language-related reading problems, and how to scaffold instruction for these learners.

With regard to more and variety of instructional resources ($n=19$, 18%), specialists recommended the following:

- Providing teachers with a supply of common formative assessments in reading for K–5.
- Making available a sample guided reading lesson templates, resources illustrating use of comprehension strategies to get to indicators and showing how MIRL data collection was embedded in a lesson; and more videos of what it looks like to collect data during regular guided reading group instruction.
- Modeling how the data collected in MIRL influences teachers' decision making for a variety of student needs.

The last category included training on analysis, interpretation, and use of reading data ($n=17$, 16%).

- How to interpret running reading records.
- More PD on the "now what"—and how to use MIRL data at each level—individually, as a team, and school wide or school leadership.
- A better understanding of how to take anecdotal instructional notes and how to use instructional notes to plan for instruction.

Discussion

Overall, the responses from the administrator and specialist surveys showed that schools made progress in the implementation of most of the practices of the MIRL strategy in the 2015–2016 school year. The data revealed that most processes for clarifying the expectations for reading instruction were in place. The data from administrators also revealed low or uneven implementation of systems to review formative data and systems for monitoring the fidelity of implementation of MIRL at the school level. Uneven or low implementation was also reported by specialists' in the areas of providing ongoing follow-up and feedback to teachers and collaborating with team leaders to provide ongoing job embedded PD.

The responses to open-ended items indicated that school administrators and specialists had observed many positive changes in instructional practices and in student performance. At the same time, administrators as well as specialists reported the widespread perception among teachers that MIRL was an event for collecting monthly reading data. This perception and limited time to complete PD or to analyze and use reading data were reported as key challenges to the optimal implementation of MIRL.

The data revealed that less than one half of the administrators reported they had established systems for review of MIRL data with leadership teams or with school staff in a systematic fashion. Also conveyed through open-ended responses was that the reading instructional levels from MIRL data and mClass levels didn't match or align; indicating a need to clarify the purposes and uses of the various formative and local reading assessments. Because one of the major goals of MIRL to increase use of these data of formative assessment, these findings point to the need to increase understanding of formative assessment as learning and increased use of formative assessment data as intended by the teachers.

As such, having the monitoring data coupled with efforts to increase understanding of formative assessment will increase changes in instructional practices as intended through MIRL. Researchers suggest that PD, with 30 to 100 contact hours dedicated to formative assessments is needed to significantly impact a) consistent of use of formative assessments and b) student learning (Darling-Hammond et al, 2009; Wylie & Long, 2009).

Finally, it is worth noting that the results from the administrator and specialist surveys fully corroborated the findings from the classroom teacher survey (Maina & Wolanin, 2016). As such, the two sources reliably portray the experience of stakeholders with implementation of MIRL during the 2015–2016 school year; and provide evidence of early impacts of MIRL on instructional practices and student performance in reading.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on administrators and specialists' survey responses:

- Increase consistency in the understanding of the MIRL strategy by teachers and school leaders; clarify its rationale, and its relationship to formative assessment and the Early Literacy plan.
- Continue to dispel the widespread perception that MIRL is an event by explaining the strong connection of MIRL and MCPS's *Priorities for 2016-2017: Focus on Learning, Results, and Accountability*. Specifically, the expectation to intensify focus on district-wide data-driven monitoring and analysis of student performance in order to increase opportunities for students to learn and to reduce variability in outcomes across schools and classrooms within schools.
- Increase implementation of the MIRL practices that were implemented at low levels. For majority of

schools, the processes a) monthly review of formative assessment data with staff and b) assessing fidelity of implementation of MIRL were partially in place.

- Share best practices related to MIRL within and across schools: :efficient and systematic ways to monitor the reading data, use of the notes column feature on the monitoring tool, analysis, interpretation, and use of reading data for planning instruction.
- Intensify PD support to classroom teachers in the areas of students' greatest instructional needs in reading: writing in response to reading, comprehension, vocabulary, fluency, accuracy, and learning English.
- Continue to offer a variety of ongoing PD sessions related to reading instruction, assessment as learning (formative assessment), and use of data to guide instruction.
- Update and increase the supply of instructional resources for guided reading instruction
- Increase clarity and understanding of the similarities, differences, as well as the functions of the various formative and local reading assessments data: MIRL, MCPS AP-PR /mClass data; and MAP-R, and provide examples of how each can be used to guide instruction.

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Appendix A
MIRL: Activities, Expected Results, and Anticipated Outcomes for 2015–2016

Needs and Issues (Rationale for MIRL)	Inputs	Outputs/Results		Outcomes	
	(Resources and Structures Instituted)	Activities	Participation Metrics	Expected Short Term Changes	Expected Lasting Changes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decreasing performance in reading (K–5) as measured by MCPS AP-PR 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Professional development (PD) sessions 2015–2016 MCPS Elementary Literacy Plan Online Monthly reading data collection tool (OCTO) School level common team planning structures Monthly principal curriculum updates Elementary Literacy Instructional Core Team (ICT) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clarify and articulate Elementary Literacy Plan and vision for reading instruction at school level Facilitate ongoing PD to school staff reflecting on results and best practices Regularly assess and document reading levels during guided reading Introduction of Monthly Reading Data Collection Tool Discuss reading data at regular intervals (monthly collaborative teams and principal curriculum updates) Ongoing strategic use of formative reading data to adjust instruction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PD sessions and Modules /Topics covered during PD for teachers Number and frequency of PD sessions for school leaders % Teachers attending PD % Administrators attending PD Types of structures and processes in place at school level and who is involved Extent of use of Monthly reading data collection tool/ periodic online reports Frequency and structure of school level team meetings related to use of formative reading data to plan instruction Frequency and attendance at principal’s curriculum update meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased familiarity of teachers and school leaders with literacy plan, data collection tools, and monitoring of reading performance Initiating and formalizing processes and structures for collecting, entering, and using reading data Increased monitoring (observation and documentation) of instructional levels during guided reading Consistent use of Monthly Reading Data Collection Tool to document instructional reading levels Ongoing coordinated analyses and use of reading data to inform instructional practices and support student learning Increased use of monitoring data to adjust instruction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Established use of monitoring of instructional levels during guided reading levels for all K–5 students Improved reading performance for all K–5 students Progress toward reducing achievement gaps.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited observation, documentation, analysis, and use of formative data monitoring) of reading performance/of reading levels at specified intervals throughout the year 					

Figure 1. Logic Model for MIRL 2015–2016

Appendix B

Table B1
Characteristics of Survey Respondents

Survey audience	<i>n</i>	%
Administrator survey (N=130)		
Principal	92	71.3
Assistant Principal	29	22.5
Other	9	6.9
Specialist survey (N=219)		
Reading Specialist	96	44.0
Staff Development Teacher	83	38.1
Other	36	16.5
Not specified	4	1.4

Table B2
Administrators and Specialists Total Years' Experience

Total years of experiences	Administrators				Specialists			
	<i>N</i>	Mean	SD	Median	<i>N</i>	Mean	SD	Median
Teaching	117	15.2	9.8	14	214	18.4	9.1	17.0
MCPS	123	18.6	9.2	17	214	16.5	8.2	15.0
In current position at current school	122	5.5	4.6	4	214	8.2	6.4	7.0

Table B3
Number and Percent of Respondent Describing School Settings

School Information	Administrators (N=130)		Specialists (N=219)	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
K-2	7	5.5	12	5.5
K-5	53	41.4	108	49.5
Pre-K-5	61	47.7	87	39.9
Grades 3 to 5	5	3.9	8	3.7
Grades 3 to 6	2	1.6	2	0.9

Note. The percentage of responses may exceed 100% because respondents provided: more than one

Appendix C: Professional Development for Teachers and School Leaders

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING FOR TEACHERS

Implementing, Assessing, and Monitoring Guided Reading

Monitoring Instructional Reading Level, Grades K–5 2015–2016 is a series of professional learning opportunities to engage participants in professional development to support the implementation, assessment, and monitoring of instructional reading level during guided reading. This professional learning is for all teachers of reading for students in Grades K–5. In addition, all teacher leader groups including principals, assistant principals, staff development teachers, reading specialists, ESOL teachers, and pre-kindergarten teachers will receive professional learning aligned to the MCPS Elementary Literacy Plan.

Topic	Time Frame	Audience	Facilitation	Materials	Coverage Compensation
Monitoring Instructional Reading Level Reading Module 1 K–5	August – October 1 – 1.5 hours Dates: TBD scheduled by school	Classroom teachers ESOL, Special Education, Staff Development, Reading Initiative, Reading Focus, Principals, Assistant Principals	Principal Assistant Principal Reading Specialist Staff Development Teacher Team Leaders	District-developed multimedia presentation, training plan, and digital copies of handouts, consultation	None
Analyzing Data and Instructional Practices Reading Module 2 3–5	September – November 3 – 3.5 hours Dates: TBD scheduled by school	Classroom teachers, ESOL, Special Education, Staff Development, Reading Initiative, Reading Focus, Principals, Assistant Principals	Principal Assistant Principal Reading Specialist Staff Development Teacher Team Leaders	District-developed multimedia presentation, training plan, and digital copies of handouts, consultation	Half-day substitute coverage provided through OCIP funds
Analyzing Data and Instructional Practices Reading Module 2 K–2	November – February 3 – 3.5 hours Dates: TBD scheduled by school	Classroom teachers, ESOL, Special Education, Staff Development, Reading Initiative, Reading Focus, Principals, Assistant Principals	Principal Assistant Principal Reading Specialist Staff Development Teacher Team Leaders	District-developed multimedia presentation, training plan, and digital copies of handouts, consultation	Half-day substitute coverage provided through OCIP funds
Reflecting on Results and Next Steps Reading Module 3 K–5	April – May 1–1.5 hours Dates: TBD scheduled by school	Classroom Teachers, ESOL, Special Education, Staff Development, Reading Initiative, Reading Focus, Principals, Assistant Principals	Principal Assistant Principal Reading Specialist Staff Development Teacher Team Leaders	District-developed multimedia presentation, training plan, and digital copies of handouts, consultation	None

Source. MCPS (2015a). *2015–2016 MCPS Early Literacy Plan*. Rockville, MD. Montgomery County Public Schools.

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING FOR SCHOOL LEADERS

Professional learning for school leaders (except those around mathematics) will be aligned and focus on building content knowledge and leadership capacity to support teachers in planning, teaching, and assessing students in literacy.

Group	Aug/Sept Topics	October Topics	November Topics	December Topics	January Topics	February Topics	March/April Topics	May/June Topics
Elementary Principals' Curriculum Update Meeting	No meeting	2014–15 Data – KRA, MCPSAP-PR, & MAP MIRL – Getting started; training Grades 3–5; reports	Math	Using Data to plan/support literacy development in special populations; ELLs and students with disabilities	No meeting	Using data to plan/support literacy development in special populations; highly able students	Math/No meeting	Math
Reading Specialists Meeting	Cluster meetings; 2015–16 Priorities Support for Module 1 & 2A; mClass, coaching conversations; developing trust	Support for Module 2B; Supporting implementation of monitoring, coaching conversations, facilitating collaboration	No meeting	Cluster Meetings (continue into January), Supporting analyses of monthly instructional reading level data, supporting special populations	Cluster Meetings (from Dec)	Coaching conversations; Diagnosis and Instructional Practice; supporting special populations, Questioning	Coaching; supporting special populations Questioning	Planning for Year 2 of Implementation of MIRL, literacy plan
ESOL Teacher Meetings	No meeting	Collaborative Approach to MIRL/DIRL	No meeting	Collaborative Approach to MIRL/DIRL	No meeting	No meeting		No meeting
Early Childhood Teacher Meetings	Balanced Literacy Schedule Rigorous ways to build Letter Knowledge	Balanced Literacy	Balanced Literacy and cultural proficiency	Balanced Literacy and cultural proficiency	Balanced Literacy and cultural proficiency		Balanced Literacy and cultural proficiency	
Staff Development Teacher Meetings		Supporting implementation of monitoring, facilitating collaboration	SDT Meeting	Supporting Monitoring Instructional Reading Levels with Reading Specialists	SDT Meeting	Attend PCU	SDT Meeting Attend PCU on Math	Attend PCU on Math
Special Education		Literacy overview-collaboration with EIC Team		Curriculum and Instruction		Curriculum and Instruction	Curriculum and Instruction	

Source. MCPS (2015a). *2015–2016 MCPS Early Literacy Plan*. Rockville, MD. Montgomery County Public Schools.