

2023/24

# Responding to Readers

## A Brief Report



# MESSAGE FROM SURREY SCHOOLS

The Surrey School District respectfully acknowledges that our schools reside on the ancestral and unceded territories of the Coast Salish peoples – including the Katzie, Kwantlen, and Semiahmoo First Nations. We honour their enduring connection to this land and express deep gratitude and respect for their stewardship and the opportunity to learn from their wisdom.

Surrey Schools proudly serves the City of Surrey and the City of White Rock. We are the largest school district in British Columbia and the second-largest employer in Surrey, as well as recipients of the BC Top Employers Award and Canada's Greenest Employer Award. Our educational canvas spans 328 square kilometers, encompassing a diverse multicultural city.

In excess of 12,500 staff serve over 83,000 students across 131 school sites, including 104 elementary schools, 21 secondary schools, 4 learning centers, and a variety of satellite programs, including online distributed learning. Dedicated to removing barriers and creating inclusive environments that empower all students and staff to thrive, our commitment extends from the early years to adult education.

The Surrey School district is committed to continuous improvement and success of all students through implementation of evidence-informed practices that enhance student learning, inclusivity and equity of outcomes. We welcome and honour diversity while supporting students' holistic growth –mind, body and heart—a commitment captured in our welcome video.



Click to watch our welcome video: [Éy swayel – Bienvenue – Welcome to Surrey Schools](#)





# Literacy Learning in Surrey Schools



Literacy involves exploring and creating written, oral, and visual texts to expand and deepen an understanding of both real and imagined worlds in order to gain insight into our own identity, the lives of others, and surrounding communities.

Central to many literacy initiatives and activities across the Surrey school district is the exploration of how we can help our learners become readers, writers, and thinkers who do so much more than decode, recall, summarize, and answer questions accurately. Today's complex world requires that our students learn to think creatively, critically, collaboratively, and compassionately. They need to be able to question and challenge the status quo, engage in deep thinking, see situations from multiple perspectives, develop habits of mind that go beneath surface meaning, and recognize that in most cases, there is not one correct answer, but rather multiple answers that need to be weighed and evaluated.

To support our teachers in helping students develop broad literacy skills, the district provides professional learning opportunities aimed at supporting students across all grades and subject areas with how to read with curiosity, how to grapple with ideas, and how to “make meaning” and sense of information through hands-on learning experiences.



[SurreySchoolsONE](#)

**ONE PLACE**  
For All Your Resources

Our extensive digital library, [SurreySchoolsOne](#), houses an expanding selection of evidence-based literacy resources to support staff, students, and involve families in their children's literacy development.

During the 2023/24 school year, Helping Teachers facilitated school-based and virtual literacy-focused sessions district-wide. District staff collaborated with school-based staff to explore evidence-based literacy instruction and assessment practices in a variety of ways.



# Overview of Responding to Readers



The Responding to Readers (RtR) initiative provided an opportunity for cohorts of teachers to look closely at their readers and engage with Literacy Helping Teachers, educational professionals who are licensed teachers and provide leadership in the provision of resources and supports across our district. Literacy Helping Teachers collaborate with classroom teachers to explore quality classroom-based reading assessment practices and responsive instruction — with the goal of better supporting the needs of diverse learners.

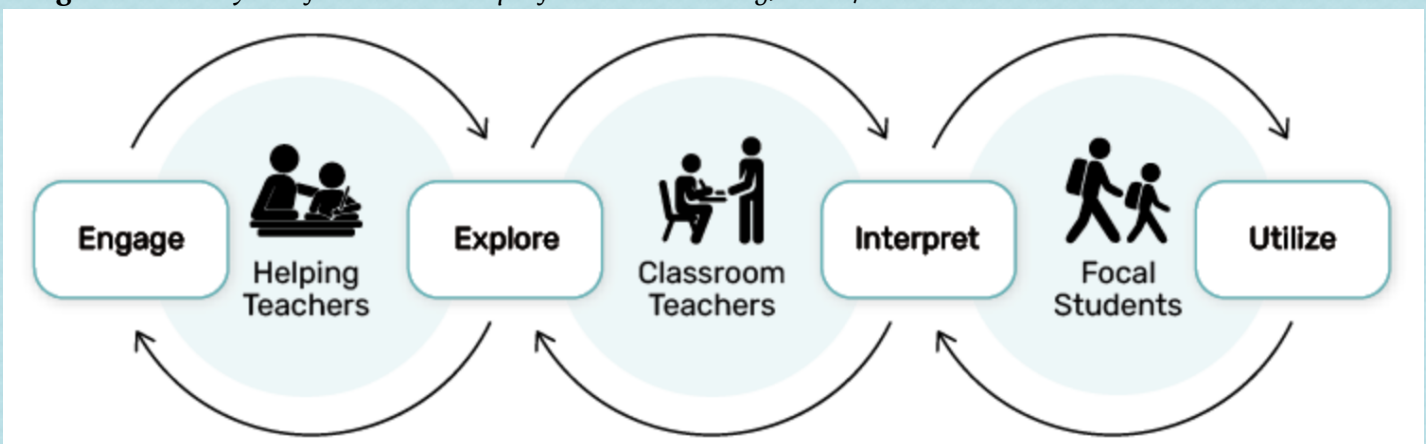
In the 2023-2024 school year, seven Literacy Helping Teachers worked with over 100 new and returning primary and intermediate teachers who participated in the initiative. With district support, participating teachers gathered evidence and explored new evidence-based pedagogical directions. Teachers worked closely with their students within their classroom with the intention of furthering their relationships with readers, spending time on reflection, and telling the story of their student's reading journey — in focused and manageable ways.

Insights gained from the RtR initiative informed teachers' instructional practices for the whole class— influencing over 2,000 students across 34 schools, including nearly 100 **Indigenous Students** and over 200 **Students with Designations**.

At the heart of this inquiry were **four objectives**, which included primary and intermediate teachers: (1) **engaging** in collaborative professional learning to deepen their understanding of how children learn to read; (2) **exploring** various tools and processes to uncover readers' proficiency; (3) **interpreting** evidence of student learning to guide instruction; and, (4) **utilizing** evidence-informed instructional practices and resources to meet the diverse needs of the readers.

The overarching questions guiding the RtR initiative asked, (1) *How are our readers doing?* and (2) *How do we know this?* To help answer these questions, the district collected stories and reflections from **Literacy Helping Teachers**, **classroom teachers**, and 1 to 2 **focal students** selected by participating teachers.

**Figure 1.** RtR cycle of collaborative professional learning, 2023/24





The Research and Evaluation Department supported our district Helping Teachers in developing *reflectionnaires*, allowing teachers to reflect on their student’s reading journeys over the span of the academic year, while reflecting on their own teaching practices, and how to support students’ reading development along the way. A key element in the evaluation research process was the active participation of the district’s Literacy Helping Teachers who ensured appropriate tools and systems were in place, that reflection time and space were offered to classroom teachers, the needs of the evaluation project were identified and addressed, and key considerations for future action were established to support a pathway for future RtR initiative activities.

Teachers completed reflectionnaires over the school year, thoughtfully considering their instructional practices and their focus students. Towards this reflective documentation, teachers had access to release time to work closely with readers in their classrooms, to reflect on their strengths and stretches, consider supports and activities, and plan for instruction. Teachers were guided to gather evidence of student learning for their focal students through one-on-one interactions and in small groups. Using the information and stories they learned from these meetings as a foundation and the resources they explored through the initiative, the participating teachers inquired about new evidence-based ways of improving their teaching practices to better support these students, and, as a result, all other students in the class as well.

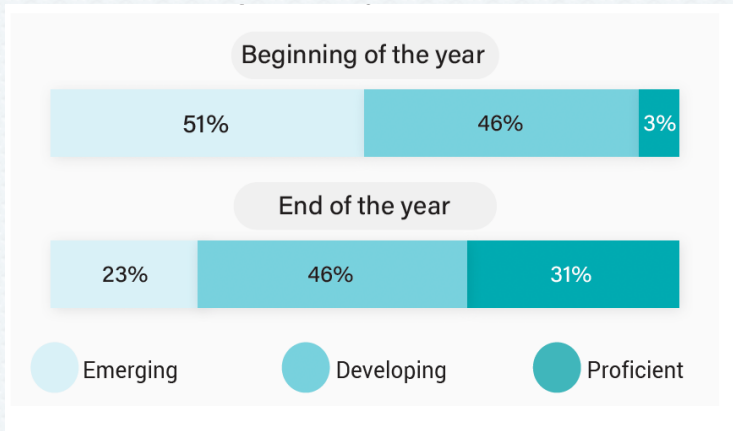
To better understand the impact of RtR, RESE conducted school site visits and interviewed some teachers. Additionally, teachers engaged in brief conversations with a few invited students to understand the initiative’s impact on their literacy development. Helping Teachers were also invited to share their stories about the initiative’s impact and to suggest pathways for future RtR initiatives.

“ I already knew that teachers are dedicated and passionate about teaching and learning, however I was inspired by RtR teachers’ commitment to learning new ways to reach all learners. Each school year seems to present additional challenges to educators, such as teacher shortages, less embedded professional learning, and prep time disruptions, however the teachers we worked with creatively collaborated with their school groups to improve their practice. I also observed their interest in the lending library of quality resources and noted how removing barriers to resources moved both teacher and student learning forward. Moving RtR forward, we would continue to support ongoing touch-points with school teams, grow the lending library of resources, and offer access to professional learning embedded within their work day. ”

- Literacy Helping Teacher

A common thread connecting the primary and intermediate cohorts was an interest in learning about resources, skills, strategies that could support their students and pedagogical practice – and that is where this year’s RtR made a difference. Based on teacher responses, a significant number of students progressed in their reading proficiency skills, many moving from emerging to developing stages, and from developing to proficient stages (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2.** Teachers’ assessment of their students’ reading proficiency levels



# Impacts of the Responding to Readers



**Six impacts**, key to this year's initiative, emerged from the thematic analysis of teachers' end-of-year reflections.

## IMPACT 1

### Increased Teacher Reflection and Shifting Teacher Practices

RtR encouraged teachers to reflect on and shift their teaching practices to better meet the needs of their students. They leveraged new resources, strategies, and tools for instruction and assessment, leading to more effective and responsive teaching practices.

*“Both years I have been grateful for the support and inspiration to be reflective and encouraged to change my practices to meet the needs of my students. I feel this has made me a better teacher.”*

- Elementary Teacher

*“I believe my reading program is much richer now, covering a greater breadth and depth of skills and strategies. In the past I focused mostly on comprehension strategies, assuming students at my grade level had decoding skills. This project has helped me realize how important the fluency and decoding aspects, along with explicit vocabulary study, are in laying the foundation for students to be able to engage meaningfully in comprehension strategies and metacognitive awareness while and after reading.”*

- Intermediate Teacher

## IMPACT 2

### Broader Classroom Impact

Teachers emphasized that the initiative not only benefited their focus students but also had a positive impact on the entire class. It shows that the strategies and tools they implemented had a broader effect, enhancing the learning environment for all students.

*“By pulling my focus readers, it gives me more information on how to use the strategies I use with them with all of my students at large. Pulling a small group is like a lens into the needs of the classroom on any given skill or topic.”*

- Intermediate Teacher

*“From my observations, teachers were able to positively impact student literacy learning (particularly reading) because of the ongoing conversations this year about focus children. Tuning the focus to individual children allowed teachers to be more responsive and plan instruction in ways that were targeted and intentional, beyond planning what ‘should’ be taught that grade, or what some of the children were responding to in the classroom. They incorporated more oral language opportunities, differentiated phonics practice, and found routines that addressed the literacy needs of all learners.”*

- Literacy Helping Teacher



## IMPACT 3

### Accessing Supportive Resources Towards New Directions

Teachers greatly appreciated resources and supports they received (including release time, lending library, collaborative conversations with Helping Teachers, sprint model, ongoing check-ins, coming together for professional learning). These resources supported their professional growth and encouraged them to explore new instructional approaches.

*“The lending library was huge to provide students access to decodables that aligned with new literacy teaching. Shared conversations with colleagues and RtR workshops [and] facilitators helped as well...I feel like [all of the above resources] had benefits in different ways. I feel like conversations with [the Helping Teacher] were so kind, helpful and inspiring. Ongoing check ins held me accountable and suggested things I hadn’t considered.”*

- Elementary Teacher

## IMPACT 4

### Enhanced Students’ Engagement and Confidence

Shifting teacher practices, combined with specific resources, led to intentional instructional strategies that offered readers much scope for improvement and increased their confidence and engagement. Students demonstrated increased confidence in both reading and writing.

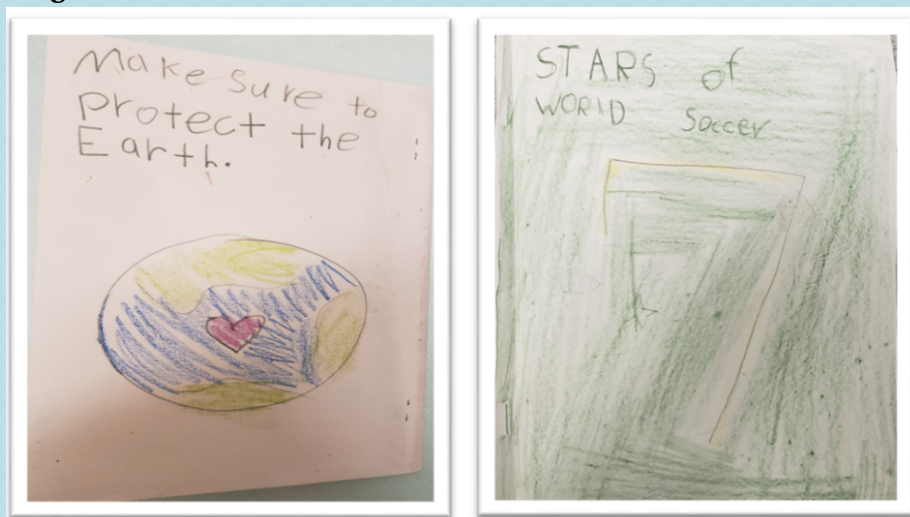
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- Literacy Helping Teacher

**Figure 3.** Grade 1 student-authored books



An elementary student who authored her own books shared that writing books made her feel happy. When the teacher asked why, she shared, “because I get to decide my own books... to design it however I like.”



## IMPACT 5

### Improved Reading Proficiency

As a result of the targeted and reflective practices, many students showed significant improvements in their reading proficiency. The differentiated instruction allowed students to progress at their own pace, leading to better reading outcomes.

*“[The student] has had huge growth in her reading. She has gained confidence and independence in her reading work. Her vocabulary has increased and she is using higher tiered words all the time.”*

*- Elementary Teacher*

*“The RtR project broadened teachers’ understanding of their students’ literacy learning. They were more curious to learn about other strategies to impact student learning and were eager to try and reflect.”*

*-Literacy Helping Teacher*

## IMPACT 6

### Professional Growth and Collaborative Learning

The initiative fostered a culture of professional growth, with teachers collaborating and sharing insights. Teachers found spaces of professional learning in conversations with students and collaborative conversations with other RtR participants and Helping Teachers. This collaborative environment led to the adoption of best practices across classrooms, benefiting both teachers and students.

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*- Elementary Teacher*

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*-Literacy Helping Teacher*





## 2023/24 Responding to Readers: A Brief Report

Report Authors: Research and Evaluation Department (Asma Afreen, Senior Research Analyst;  
Matthew Waugh, Senior Manager)

Report Designer: Asma Afreen, Senior Research Analyst, Research and Evaluation Department

### Acknowledgements:

Kathy Puharich, Director of Instruction, Priority Practices  
&

RtR 2023/24 Literacy Helping Teachers, Priority Practices

Ginny Tambre, Kerri Hutchinson, Stacey Joyce, Celine Feazel, Anne Hickling, Jayashree Ramaswami,  
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&

RtR Teachers and Students

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For any queries about this report, please contact:

Research and Evaluation Department  
Email: RESE-Office@surreyschools.ca  
14033 92nd Ave., Surrey, BC V3V 0B7  
Surrey Schools

