

Best Practices for Improving Early Intervention Software Programs (EISP) in Utah Schools

2016-2017 K-3 Qualitative Study Findings

Submitted to the Utah State Board of Education
October 2017



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Introduction

The Evaluation and Training Institute (ETI), a non-profit research and consulting organization, conducts an annual evaluation of the Early Intervention Software Program (EISP) for the Utah State Board of Education (USBE). The annual evaluation is designed to study fidelity of program use and the effect of the program on students' literacy achievement. Previous findings have shown that higher usage produces better literacy outcomes, however, schools experienced difficulty meeting minimum recommended levels of software use. These findings prompted the USBE to request this study of best practices in software implementation, which can serve as a guide for schools struggling to meet the recommended levels of software use.

We grounded our study in two conditions of program implementation that could help shed light on how to improve program delivery: schools that are meeting or exceeding program use expectations, and those that were unable to reach their usage goals. Using these contrasting implementation conditions allowed us to focus on what worked and what barriers need to be addressed. We conducted structured interviews with a stratified sample of teachers (N=23) and principals (N=10) at ten Utah schools¹ (six schools were characterized as high-fidelity implementers and four schools were identified as low fidelity implementers) in order to gather input from school staff and learn about their experience with the software programs. We interviewed teachers at different points throughout the school year to gather an in-depth perspective on their experiences. Using grounded theory qualitative methods, we created thematic codes to analyze the qualitative data and to develop recommendations schools could use to improve program implementation.

This report was created to guide stakeholders involved in implementing the software programs, including USBE program staff, school administrators, teachers, and software providers. In the following sections, we present the best practices and lessons learned from schools with high and low fidelity of use, all of which are intended to aid stakeholders in administering the program successfully. Finally, we summarize our key findings and present recommendations targeted to each stakeholder group (software providers, school administrators, and teachers) to help stakeholders hone in on the most important actionable steps for improving the program based on their specific role. A best practices checklist is also included at the end of this document as an additional tool for program implementers.

¹ We selected high-fidelity schools by reviewing past usage reports and asked vendors for recommendations as needed.

Best Practices & Lessons Learned from EISP Schools

The best practices generated from stakeholders' feedback naturally fell into two categories: recommendations involving steps that should be taken prior to the beginning of implementation and those that should occur throughout program implementation. The best practices and lessons learned discussed in the following section reflect these distinct categories. We begin each section by providing an overview of the most important information synthesized through stakeholder feedback followed by an in-depth summary with specific examples to contextualize our findings.

Before Program Implementation

There are four major areas that should be addressed before a school begins using an early intervention software program with students:

1. **Administrator Commitment & Support:** School administrators should be fully on board and invested in using the program and making successful implementation a priority. They should take the lead in putting in place effective communication among all parties involved, designating who will be responsible for monitoring implementation, and ensuring the program is used as intended.
2. **Technology & Infrastructure:** Vendors should work with schools to ensure the necessary technology and infrastructure is in place so students have uninterrupted access to software programs. This includes testing the software on the school's computers and seeing that students will be able to logon.
3. **Scheduling Time for Program Use:** School administrators and teachers need to determine how to fit the program into teachers' classroom schedules on a weekly basis and set aside time to regularly review student progress. Schedules should be set before school starts or as early as possible so teachers do not struggle to find ways to meet the usage requirements every week.
4. **Training on Program Use:** Teachers, principals, and other key stakeholders should participate in quality training from the vendor to establish clear expectations for using the program, help implementers understand the key features of the program, such as student reporting features, and how to leverage these features so students receive the most benefit from the software.

Administrator Commitment and Support

School administrators should make implementation a priority, reinforce the expectations for program use and establish open lines of communication for all involved

School administrators were often the leaders of the implementation process for their individual schools. **Highly invested administrators established communication procedures between all parties involved (i.e., teachers, vendors, etc.) and coordinated implementation procedures.** Effective communication procedures helped serve the needs of the students and staff, while at the same time allowed the implementation to run in an organized and unified manner. Principals also supported implementation by assigning responsibility for the various aspects of implementation. For example, one principal from a high-fidelity school had this to say: *“you need to have one person that’s over it or one or two or three people...I’ve got my reading coach, my parent, and myself and we meet often and we communicate through email...”* The following quotes highlight the various ways in which principals established a culture for successful implementation:

- *“I also think the relationship between the lab assistant and the teachers, and the assistant and the principal need to be cohesive so they can implement this program. It’s not a me against you mentality. It’s not the lab assistant is the enemy. We should all be working together. I think that’s probably key of making sure everybody’s on the same page.”* (Principal – high fidelity school)
- *“I would just suggest listening to teachers, give them the time that they need when training so they make sure that teachers are there. Make sure that you have the substitutes available so that those teachers can have the appropriate training so that they can be successful.”*
- *“I think more than anything it was making sure teachers understood how they log in, and see what lessons students needed, and how to download -- then you had a download that’s just seeing what’s available and how to access the certificates. How to monitor their progress, and make sure they’re getting their minutes, that kind of thing”.* (Principal – high fidelity school)

Feedback from both teachers and administrators revealed that those administrators committed to the program tended to be more successful. By prioritizing program implementation, teachers received the support they needed to run the programs. Below are examples of teacher feedback regarding the important role of administrators:

- *They [administrators] need to make sure that we have an hour set aside for our [software] program, and that [it] is a priority...That block of time is difficult to come up with sometimes. Our principal made that a priority* (Teacher – high fidelity school)
- *“Then, if the administrators make it as a priority and give that directive to their teachers make it a priority. (Teacher – low fidelity school)*
- *So, you’ve got to have the resources, technology wise and keep them current and in good working order or it doesn’t work for you. So, you need that support from them [administrators].* (Teacher – high fidelity school)

- *“He [Principal] comes in and he talks to the students and explains what actually they're going to need to do. And if we have any questions, he can help students ... he came and gave us a lot of good information.”* (Teacher – high fidelity school)

Technology & Infrastructure

Vendors should work with the school to ensure the necessary technology and infrastructure is in place before school starts or as early as possible

One of the most important steps to encourage successful program use is for vendors and schools to have the technology infrastructure in place to run the programs. The majority of teacher responses agreed that consistent and reliable access to the technology is needed in order for uninterrupted and effective program implementation to occur, and made it clear that schools could not be successful if this did not happen:

“The availability of technology is the biggest limitation [to successful implementation].”

School administrators helped encourage computer access by ensuring teachers had iPad or chromebooks in the classroom to supplement computer lab time and scaled up as needed. Teachers and principals spoke not only of the need for computer access, but for all technological equipment to be in working order prior to implementation. In addition, teachers discussed the need for responsive technical support to be readily available to help teachers handle any technical difficulties that may arise (*“Make sure that you've got good machines, make sure that you've got a proficient tech person there that understands the program”*). While teachers stressed the importance of having appropriate technology infrastructure, it was also clear that the lack thereof was a major barrier for low-fidelity schools to use the programs as intended:

- *“That program would freeze, and they [students] would get kicked out. Oh, my gosh, it was a nightmare. To me really, just the technology side of it is what could cause problems. If people don't have access to a computer system that can handle it. I'm sure that's a problem.”* (Teacher – low fidelity school)
- *“We didn't get started for almost a month and a half because we couldn't get access to the program -- we called [the program vendor] and they were, ‘We're working on it, we're working on it.’ We could not get our students into the system, we could not even log in as admins.”* (Teacher – low fidelity school)
- *“Make sure that it's totally working correctly, because that put us off for almost two months. There for a while it wasn't working and so then everybody quit doing it, because it was a headache to try. Then you have to start sticking with it and making sure you know everything about the program and how it works.”* (Teacher – low fidelity school)
- *“I had a hard time getting the technology person in our school to update the iPads so that it would work on the iPads. That software update wasn't a big deal, it's they just didn't want to do it. And because I have the lower achieving kids, it's harder for them to use the Chrome books to log in to the computers and everything. It's easier on the iPads. It took us a while to get it started because we were waiting for that software update.”* (Teacher – low fidelity school)

Vendors can prevent some of these issues by sharing information on the technology specifications needed to effectively run their programs with Local Education Agencies (LEAs) and work with designated school staff members to make sure everything is working appropriately prior to school starting. This might include providing school staff with information before they select a software program to use with their students, and meeting with school staff such as the school administrator and technology specialists to make sure the technology is updated and working appropriately. By being upfront with the requirements and helping new schools test their software, schools will be able to begin using the software on time and will experience fewer interruptions due to technology challenges throughout program implementation.

Vendors and school staff should help streamline the log-in process by testing for technical difficulties and ensuring students who need assistance logging-in are supported

Some respondents noted that the log-in process was problematic due to technical difficulties as well as for certain groups of students, such as kindergarten student's due to their young age. These interviewees commented on the fact that young children did not have the computer skills to login by themselves, and a lot of time was being wasted getting these students into the program. For example, one principal described the struggle his kindergarten teacher was experiencing:

"Kindergarten students are not ready for [the software program] at the beginning of the year. They don't have the computer skills, they don't have the attention span or the ability to login, it takes them almost their whole time-- they have a short block...and it takes almost 15 minutes to get them in the lab and logged-in."

For others, technical difficulties prohibited them from logging in successfully to use the software, which resulted in frustration and wasted time. A teacher from a low-fidelity school commented on the technical difficulties associated with the login process (*"It kept dropping them and kicking them out, so changes had to be made to the software before we'd get started to become successful."*) Teachers with kindergarten students from high-fidelity schools tended to have additional support in the classroom to help with the login process:

- *"I think as far as implementing it, the ideal situation would be to have another adult in the classroom that can monitor the students and assist them for logging on or assist them with computer glitches or get them through a difficult assignment - that they will at least get on to the next one."*
- *"Well, from a kindergarten perspective, I would tell them to be patient and take it a step at a time and not expect the kids to go too fast. Like, let's wait for them to just turn the computer on, and they have to learn how to move the mouse and how to log on. Just logging on is a whole process of itself. Do not just expect the kids to get on and take off. They probably have to learn the process first."*

To streamline the login process, vendors can test the login process and address any technical difficulties early. In addition, vendors may work with school staff to identify options for making the login process easier, which might include shorter ID's or suggesting that kindergarten teachers have additional classroom support

to assist with the login process. Having a streamlined process in place prior to school starting will help prevent frustration from teachers' due to wasted time, while also amplifying the time students spend learning.

Scheduling Time for Program Use

Prior to the start of school, create a plan for weekly software use around vendors use recommendations and the availability of technology for running the software programs.

Teachers and principals recommended that time for consistent program usage should be set *prior to implementation*. Teachers and administrators who scheduled routine program usage times prior to implementation were more effective and better able to meet the usage requirements, whereas the teachers who were inconsistent and struggled to find the time for program use each week were less successful. The following quotes were typical responses on this subject:

- *"We need to start out thinking where are they going to fit in their 20 minutes of [software] every day. So, it could be during reading when the kids just rotate, or it could be finding a time once a week or twice a week in a lab setting or something that has to be worked out and part of the schedule, not something that they're struggling for every week. It should be part of the schedule. (Principal – high fidelity school)*
- *"My expectation was consistency. I wanted the schedule to be provided or built where they can give it four days a week and so that's what we've done. We are doing it Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. Then the teachers would know that its important and then hopefully they would be able to see the strides that the students would make as they-- most of the programs see the successes and then that would encourage the teacher that, "Hey this is a good program," kind of like a buy-in. This is important for our kids." (Principal - high fidelity school)*
- *"I think it's just about managing your day and making this part of the management, so you organize your guided reading time, or some other time. Checking out a lab, so that you have it built into your schedule. It needs to be part of your schedule from the beginning." (Teacher – high fidelity school)*

Teachers and school administrators should work together to identify the most effective or appropriate schedule based on their unique circumstances and available resources. Teachers and principals from high-fidelity schools considered the availability of resources, such as the ratio of computers to students, when creating their schedules. When one-to-one computer access was not available, successful schools created a system that worked for their unique situation. For example, schools that used computer labs had set schedules for using the computer lab each week and students in different grade levels rotated based on the time of day or day of the week. These schedules were often designed around the vendors weekly use recommendations. Some schools without one-one one computer access also used centers to rotate children through their computer time in small groups. The following quotes provide examples of the different ways in which schools integrated the software into their weekly schedules:

- *“During an hour of our class time, half of our students go to the computer lab and they do [the software]. The teacher works with the other half in the classroom with reading and then we switch”.*
- *“I happen to be the first-grade team leader, and it was my idea that we implement it into our center time because it was very hard to find time otherwise. That was a huge realization for us, to make that part of center time in trying this instead of having busy work...and you have the time when you're doing small groups to keep the other students occupied. That was huge. I would say incorporate it into your guided reading groups, center time schedule. (Teacher – high fidelity school)*
- *“The teacher, usually during reading, would have a group of five or six kids at her table and then she'd have four or five centers around the room, and then every 15 minutes just ring a bell and they rotate and one of the centers that they go to would be the [software program], and they could get on for 15 minutes a day which would be 60 minutes in four days which is about how many days we do it.” (Principal – high fidelity school)*
- *“It's [program time] part of my guided reading center time, and we have an hour for that so I set the timer. Every fifteen minutes somebody is moving but then half the class is on the computers. On the half hour we do what we call the big switch. Students know that they log off and they move it to their buddy, student that they share the computer with. They give them the computer and headphones and then the ones who are getting off the computer come back to me for guided reading, and the other students that are going on the computer just start logging in and doing their work there. It's a lot of training and guidance at the beginning, but they pick up really, really fast. (Teacher – high fidelity school)*
- *“It's kind of a school wide schedule, every teacher -- every group of teachers has a rotation time and during that rotation time, computer lab is one of those activities. So, on Friday, the kindergarten kids rotate in the morning for their morning session, it's two hours. They rotate to a 30 minute, a 20-minute music, they do a 20-minute computer time, they do a 20 minute PE, and they do a 20-minute art or some other activity and they come back when they do their rotations on the computer lab...On the other days of the week, each grade has an hour of time that is a 30 or a 15-minute recess and then a 45-minute rotation time...” (Teacher – high fidelity school)*

In certain instances, the principal was directly involved in creating the weekly schedule and in coordinating the availability of technology:

- *“She [principal] gave me the time. She set up times. In our school it's really difficult to get our computer lab available so she set up a time for every grade...” (Teacher – high fidelity school)*
- *In our school it's really difficult to get our computer lab available so she [the principal] set up a time for every grade that does [software program] to have that time in the lab.” (Teacher – high fidelity school)*

Training on Program Use

All adults involved in the program implementation process should receive quality training and obtain a strong knowledge of the program prior to implementation

Teachers need to effectively implement the reading program with their students for it to produce its intended benefits on students learning. To do this, teachers need to be able to help students learn to use the program and answer students' questions. Overall responses from teachers recommend that all adults involved with the program implementation process receive quality training and obtain a strong knowledge of the program prior to implementation. **Program knowledge and training should include an understanding of program reports to ensure that program usage, student needs, and student progress can all be properly monitored.** In addition, teachers suggest that vendors provide a more accommodating training for teachers that will take into account teacher's wide range of technology experience and knowledge. Comments from teachers also suggest that vendors would be wise to initially provide early intense training, but also provide follow-up training and responsive support after teachers have spent some time using the program to help them receive a full knowledge of the program.

- *"Learning about how to read the reports, and all the elements of the program...we had a refresher on all the elements of the program, and that's really helped us know some of those things and say, 'Okay, now let's make it work better.'" (Teacher – low fidelity school)*
- *"We have had a rep come out, and teach us how to run our own reports, which is nice because then I can go on and look when I have time, to see how my lower students are doing and if they are reaching the 70%/80%/90% for that strategy. Then, I can also reinforce that here in class." (Teacher – high fidelity school)*
- *"[Regarding training from vendors] it would be nice to come in and say, 'this is the basics; this is how you get on. This is where you go. We're going to come back in another week after you've had a chance to see how it works and what you're doing. And then we'll get questions and go from there.'" (Teacher – low fidelity school)*
- *"I think the challenges were that the training was not the best. I don't know if that was the company's fault or just scheduling problems. I don't know if they tried. You know what I mean? I don't want to blame them. It just worked out that they never could come until this week. But that was probably the biggest challenge." (Teacher – low fidelity school)*
- *She [trainer/vendor] came and did the in service at our school one morning. She went through it. That's when she was telling us things to look for and there were symbols to look for and see my kids if they are meeting their targets, if they're not understanding. It really was the intervention that [the trainer/vendor] did with our school that helped us understand as teachers that hadn't done it like this with our class before." (High Fidelity teacher)*

During Program Implementation

While setting up the program is vital to encouraging successful implementation, actions must be taken during implementation to encourage continued use of the program. There are three major areas of focus during program implementation:

1. **Monitor Student Engagement and Time on Task:** All involved with program implementation should consistently monitor student usage by way of direct observation of student program use.
2. **Monitor Students Usage and Progress:** All adults involved in the implementation process should indirectly observe program use by way of reviewing program reports.
3. **Provide Encouragement and Support:** In addition to initial high investment in the implementation process, administration and vendors should continue to provide support throughout the implementation process by ensuring that teachers receive needed technology access, consistent computer time, quality training, and continued program support. School leaders should also encourage teachers' and students' use of the program software. Supported teachers tend to encourage and motivate their students.

Monitor Student Engagement and Time on Task

Students should be consistently observed while using the program to make sure they are on task and using it appropriately

Monitoring students typically occurs with teachers (or some type of adult classroom aide) physically walking around and observing and or helping students as they use the program. Numerous interviews emphasized the importance of observational monitoring to ensure that students are on task and receiving the help they need to progress through the program. Teacher feedback indicated that without in-person monitoring, students may not use the program properly (*"These kids need active monitoring, otherwise it's not going to work"*). Examples of misuse that were caught by teachers included: students who were sitting in front of computers without logging-in, students logging-in to different accounts, students wasting time in the software by clicking in and out of activities without progressing, and other behavioral issues that indicated a lack of focus on the learning activities. Examples of participant responses on the importance of direct observation are provided below:

- *"You've got to walk around and look and see what they're doing because some kids will sit there and they'll just, they can't remember their number and they don't tell you because they don't really want to do it or whatever their idea is. Or they'll log in to each other's numbers."* (Teacher – high fidelity school)
- *"I've noticed that there are some teachers who will just have the kids on computers, and the teacher will sit back at their desk and not be aware and I think you have to be up and moving and around and just because they're quiet, doesn't mean they're productive."* (Teacher – high fidelity school)

- *“It is really important that you are around the room, that you are seeing what they are doing, and that you understand what it is because a lot of times when we look at a program, the view we get as a teacher is not what the kids see. It’s important to know what it looks like to them and what they are doing and what’s happening at that level. It’s really important that [teachers] monitor and walk around the room during that time.”* (Teacher – low fidelity school)
- *“The computer lab assistant is in there with the teacher. The teacher can walk around, help students or she could pull a student back if they needed a little bit more; just giving them the time and the support to know that they can put the program and let the program work for it. I mean, let the program do what its supposed to do.”* (Principal – high fidelity school)

It should be noted that some teachers discussed the benefits of having some type of classroom help from an adult(s) (aides, coaches, lab assistants, etc.) to ensure adequate monitoring of students:

- *“Having that tech person is the best thing because in the classroom with so many things going on, it’s difficult to find time to stop and learn a new program. To have somebody there that already knows it that can be of assistance to the teachers I think is what makes the biggest difference.”* (Teacher – high fidelity school)
- *“I think as far as implementing it, the ideal situation would be to have another adult in the classroom that can monitor the students and assist them for logging on or assist them with computer glitches or get them through maybe a difficult assignment that they will at least get on to the next one.”* (Teacher – high fidelity school)

Monitor Students Usage and Progress through Program Reports

All adults responsible for monitoring should review program reports of usage and student progress on a weekly basis

Schools that were able to consistently review program reports as part of their monitoring practices were better informed and therefore more effective with program implementation and understanding student needs, than those schools that lacked an understanding of program reports and/or were not able to consistently review program reports. Program reports informed stakeholders of student’s progress, or lack of progress, through the program curriculum and alerted stakeholders of any implementation issues, including students who weren’t reaching their weekly minutes. Some teachers compared students’ progress in the software to the time they spent using the program to identify potential misuse, *“They were exiting out the wrong way and their minutes weren’t logged in.”* Similar issues were described by the following teachers:

- *“There is a really good report that updates every night, that just says instructional usage time, and so I get onto that a couple of times a week just to see who I need to watch...If I get on and I’m aware, ‘This person only has 13 minutes but we’ve been doing this for two days, okay what’s going on?’ That cues me in.”* (Teacher – high fidelity school)
- *“They’re meeting their goal, but they’re not progressing. Then that should be a red flag to the teacher that you’ve got to get in [and] sit right beside the kid, figure out what it is,*

why they're not progressing. Often times, every single time it's been for me, it's because they're closing out the activity, they're just wasting their time. They're spending 60 minutes but they're opening one activity, closing it out. Opening one activity, closing it out. Checking more minutes, so they're not ever completing anything. I think that's a big thing.” (Teacher – high fidelity school)

Principals can also provide support for adequate monitoring practices during implementation by understanding and viewing the program reports and helping teachers with monitoring efforts. For example, a principal from a low fidelity school had this to say: *“I think it's important to become involved to the point where you understand the software, you understand how to access reports of the software so that as an administrator you can see if it is actually being useful for the students.”* Another principal from a high-fidelity school described her process for monitoring teachers usage targets: *“[Name] will take it [program reports] and print them off under my direction. I've asked her and she puts it on my desk each Friday so I can kind of see-- are the teachers are high 90, 95, 100%? Or are they-- 20%?”*

Encouragement and Support

School administrators should provide encouragement and acknowledgement of teachers' implementation efforts

Feedback suggests that principal support throughout the implementation process encouraged teacher efforts and buy-in for the reading programs. Teachers reported that principals should support program efforts by ensuring that teachers are meeting vendors' usage targets. Teachers who receive sufficient administrative encouragement and support tended to be motivated to encourage and support their students in learning and using the program.

- *She's [school administrator] really good, in fact, she's really helped us out. She's cute, she'll make your little goal, and she'll put a report in our box. I didn't find it intimidating. She put a smiley face on it, "Good job, your class is improving," or make little comments that are positive about the [vendor] reports. Then this week they're having a contest and all the classes that reached 90% usage get cute, new set of pencils for their class. It's just little small things like that. It's motivating for us as teachers and the students.”* (Teacher – high fidelity school)
- *“For the first six weeks, every teacher on Thursday got a thing in their box that said their students' [vendor usage] ...then she dropped off from that, but by that time I was already checking it myself. It was actually what teachers do to students, it was that the principal did to the teachers that got me in that habit of looking at my [vendor usage] minutes.”* (Teacher – high fidelity school)

Comments from principals regarding what worked were congruent with teachers comments, as they spoke of the importance of providing encouragement to their teachers and supporting their implementation needs:

- *“Every Monday the program updates, and I know how much usage each teacher has. I print out their reports from my computer. If they get 90% or higher, I give them a reward of some sort, like a candy bar. Lately, I've bought some stuff like Dr. Seuss posters, or stickers. Pencils for the kids in the class, things like that...I just put a little note in the box*

with it saying thanks, you did a great job on minutes last week. Then if I have teachers that are not up there, I may just say, "hey, check with your teammates to see how you can get your minutes up a little higher, or something like that." I do that every week." (Principal – high fidelity school)

- *"I think that administrators have to be a little more hands-on. Be checking the reports a couple of times a week. Finding ways to motivate teachers who are more reluctant to get those minutes in. Make the teachers who are doing what they should be doing feel appreciated."* (Principal – high fidelity school)

Students should be encouraged to use the programs appropriately through incentives and acknowledgement of their learning accomplishments

Some interviewees also indicated a reward system helped encourage students to meet the usage requirements and stay on task. For example, a high fidelity teacher stated: *"If I encourage them and monitor their growth and give them incentives, I think that makes all the difference."* By way of incentives and rewards (i.e. certificates for levels passed, stickers on progress charts, encouraging comments, etc.) administrators and teachers can give student praise for their learning efforts and motivate them to achieve the program usage requirements.

- *"I think they need to really get the kids to buy into it, they need to hype them up about it and get them excited and you really have to take the time to train them what's your expectations of what they need to be doing while they're working on it. I do a reward system with my kids so that they feel like they're passing a lesson and that's valued."* (Teacher – high fidelity school)
- *"I think just trying to get the students to buy into it. The rewards are really big for them. They get really excited Monday morning to pull out their little [software program] reward chart that I made for them. Then, I go around, I give them the stickers. I would announce the top five highest minutes. They can do it at home, which is nice. I know a lot of parents will say that their kids will ask to get on and do [software program] at home. That's really good. The parents like seeing what they're doing. I think that encourages them, too."* (Teacher – high fidelity school)
- *"If they meet the time requirements, they get a sticker. At the end of a three-week period whoever did the most, the top three students who did the most will be rewarded with maybe a treat or another reward."* (Teacher – high fidelity school)

Summary and Recommendations

The most significant difference between high fidelity and low fidelity schools was consistency in implementation and support from school administrators and vendors. Interview comments reported from high fidelity school staff more commonly discussed the importance of having consistent access to technology and program use, adopting consistent monitoring practices, and establishing consistent support from vendors, technicians, and principals, whereas comments from low fidelity schools spoke more of their desire for more consistency with implementation efforts. For example, teachers' comments from high fidelity schools said this of successful implementation: *"You can't just do it once a week, or you can't just do it when you have time. You have to dedicate*

a time for it. It has to be a priority". In addition, stakeholders noted the importance of planning for implementation prior to the start of the school year, including incorporating weekly time into their schedules and participating in quality training to increase understanding of how to use the reports to monitor student progress and time on task. Monitoring students was particularly important as it allowed teachers to identify discrepancies between time in the software and students' learning progress.

A commonly mentioned implementation challenge reported by interviewees from both high fidelity and low fidelity schools was dealing with technological difficulties or program issues. Such issues caused frustration and delays for teachers. Scheduling difficulties were also reported to have made it difficult to meet the required minutes, although interviewees from high fidelity schools tended to have worked out a process for addressing these difficulties, which sometimes involved the school principal preparing a weekly schedule or expanding computer access. A common challenge described by teachers from low fidelity schools was lack of program knowledge and or lack of quality software training.

Specific recommendations for improving program implementation are listed by stakeholder group. These recommendations are a combination of specific recommendations and best practices emphasized through stakeholder interviews, as well as those we've generated in response to specific challenges described by school staff. We've also included a **best practices checklist** at the end of this document as a tool for program implementers to use in preparing for and coordinating program implementation.

Recommendations for Vendors

Software program vendors provide vital roles in ensuring schools are set up to succeed. Vendors can help ensure schools are set up with the appropriate technology to run the programs, are committed to using the program, understand expectations for program weekly use, the benefits of consistent program use, and how to use the reporting features to monitor student use and maximize the potential benefits to students. In addition, vendors should be available to support school staff if issues arise throughout the implementation process.

Prior to school starting, vendors should:

- ✓ Work with school administrators to arrange a trial run of the program prior to the start of school. This should include reviewing the technology specifications, running the programs on the computers, and testing the login process.
- ✓ Provide materials to all involved school staff that clearly communicates expectations for program use and tips for monitoring program use.
- ✓ Work with school administrators to schedule training with teachers, computer aids, literacy coaches and anyone involved in program implementation prior to or the beginning of the school year.

- ✓ Provide in-depth training that ensures strong program knowledge for all stakeholders involved with the implementation process. Training should focus on clarifying expectations regarding program use and a clear understanding of report features, etc.

During the school year, vendors should:

- ✓ Provide additional training after teachers have had the opportunity to become more familiar with the program, but early enough that students may benefit from teachers increased understanding.
- ✓ Be available for continued program support as needed throughout the implementation process.
- ✓ At the end of the school year, vendors should debrief with school staff on their program use and make a plan of improvement for the following year.

Recommendations for Principals

Successful schools often had supportive and invested school administrators who were involved throughout the implementation process. Invested administrators established direct lines of communication among all involved and worked closely with designated vendors and staff members to determine the most effective use of time and resources. This included determining the best approach for scheduling time for software use, designating responsibility for monitoring software use, and providing feedback to teachers on their progress toward meeting the usage goals. Some administrators also took an active role in providing encouragement and acknowledgement of teachers' implementation efforts, which, in turn, motivated teachers to meet the usage guidelines and encourage students' learning and engagement.

Prior to school starting, administrators should:

- ✓ Meet with the vendor and school technology support staff to review and update the technology used to run the programs and coordinate testing of the software to identify and address technology issues before launching the programs.
- ✓ Support teachers by working with the vendor to provide quality training and continued support that ensures strong program and student report knowledge.
- ✓ Establish an accommodating schedule that aids teachers in their efforts to schedule the time needed to implement the program effectively. This may involve creating a weekly schedule of computer lab time for software use, or requiring teachers to submit a plan. All schedules should be based on the weekly use recommendations, account for the availability of computers and the excess time needed to login to the software.
- ✓ Take the lead in coordinating all aspects of the implementation process and designate responsibilities and expectations of all parties involved in the implementation process. This may include:

- Designating an individual responsible for maintaining consistent and reliable access to the technology for all involved to avoid interruptions in students' program use.
- Designating an individual or individuals responsible for monitoring and tracking students' progress in meeting the weekly usage requirements.
- Meeting with teachers to clarify and reinforce the expectations for meeting the program usage requirements (weekly use and total weeks of use).
- ✓ Establish effective and efficient lines of communication to those responsible for technical support to provide immediate and continued access to technological support for all involved.

During the school year, administrators should:

- ✓ Stay informed on teachers' progress meeting the vendors usage recommendations. This may involve checking the usage reports weekly or reviewing reports provided by the individual responsible for monitoring students usage.
- ✓ Provide ongoing encouragement and appreciation of teachers' implementation efforts in order to motivate and recognize teachers who meet the usage requirements.
- ✓ Follow-up with teachers who are not meeting the usage requirements to problem solve any challenges and help the teacher meet his or her goals.

Recommendations for Teachers

Teachers are a critical piece to successful program implementation, as they are often directly involved in facilitating program use and their knowledge of the program ensures student needs are being met. Throughout the implementation process program knowledge also helped teachers to properly monitor students. Effective monitoring involved observing students use the program and reviewing their learning progress and usage through the software student reporting features. This process allowed teachers to identify students who were wasting time in the software and not using it appropriately (e.g. opening and closing activities vs. participating in the activities) and, in certain instances, provide additional curricular support to help students progress if they were stuck. Teachers can also motivate students' engagement in the program by providing encouragement and acknowledging student's efforts.

Prior to school starting, teachers should:

- ✓ Participate in high-quality training to obtain a strong knowledge of the program and how to use program reports prior to implementation.
- ✓ Coordinate with administration to develop accommodating program usage schedules to meet program requirements prior to implementation.

During the school year, teachers should:

- ✓ Review program reports weekly to ensure effective monitoring of student progress through the curriculum. If needed, provide additional support or make any needed adjustments if students are not progressing as expected.
- ✓ Schedule routine times (weekly) for effective monitoring practices, including student observation and program report reviewing and ensure required minutes are being met.
- ✓ Acknowledge student efforts and provide encouragement to students in their program learning efforts using rewards or incentives where possible (i.e. stickers on charts, certificates for moving up a level, etc.).

These recommendations were intended to help stakeholders make adjustments that will improve the effectiveness of program implementation. When considering changes to program implementation, it is important to recognize that each LEA is unique in its resources, support, and school culture. One schools plan for implementation may not be appropriate for another school due to limitations in funding, resources or staffing. The recommendations provided in this document may help stakeholders begin a dialogue on options for their unique situation. Having a kickoff off meeting with relevant parties and developing an implementation plan may be the first step in identifying an effective implementation approach for a school. Consistently reviewing how well the implementation plan is working along the way and at the end of the year will provide a feedback loop that encourages continual improvement.

Best Practices Checklist

Follow these guidelines to ensure your implementation of the EISP program goes as smoothly as possible.

Before school starts:

Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Meet with vendor and school technology staff to review and update any technology needed to run software programs. <input type="checkbox"/> Coordinate a trial run of the computer software and hardware to identify and address any technology issues before using the program with students. <input type="checkbox"/> Establish clear lines of communication to those responsible for technical support between the school and software vendor. <input type="checkbox"/> Designate an individual responsible for school technical support and maintaining consistent and reliable access to computer technology.
Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Work with the software vendor to provide teachers and anyone involved in program implementation with a training that covers software features and how to generate and interpret student reports. <input type="checkbox"/> Request materials from software vendor that review program use expectations and strategies for monitoring students.
Planning and Monitoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Use weekly software use recommendations and computer availability to establish a schedule that supports teachers in implementing the program. <input type="checkbox"/> Meet with teachers to clarify and reinforce expectations for meeting program usage requirements (weekly use and total weeks of use). <input type="checkbox"/> Designate an individual or individuals responsible for monitoring and tracking students' progress in meeting weekly usage requirements.

During the school year:

Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> If necessary, request additional training from software vendor after teachers and school staff have had some initial experience with the program.
Monitoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Schedule weekly times for effective monitoring practices such as reviewing program usage reports and observing students. <input type="checkbox"/> Provide ongoing encouragement and appreciation of teachers' implementation efforts to motivate and recognize teachers who meet the usage requirements. <input type="checkbox"/> Identify and follow-up with teachers who are not meeting the usage requirement goals to address any challenges