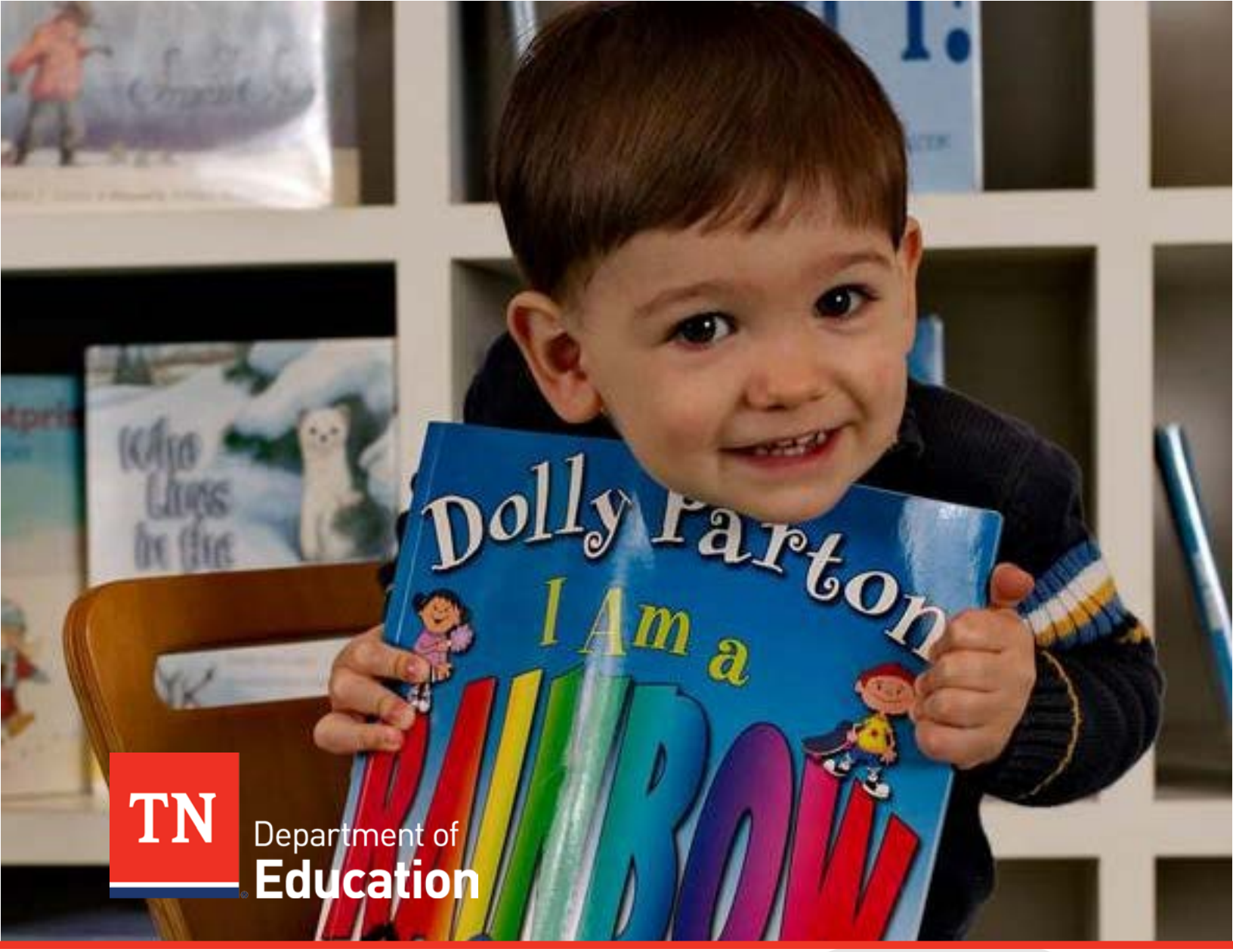


TN Department of Education

Early Literacy Matters

Improving early literacy practices

Tennessee Department of Education | August 2018

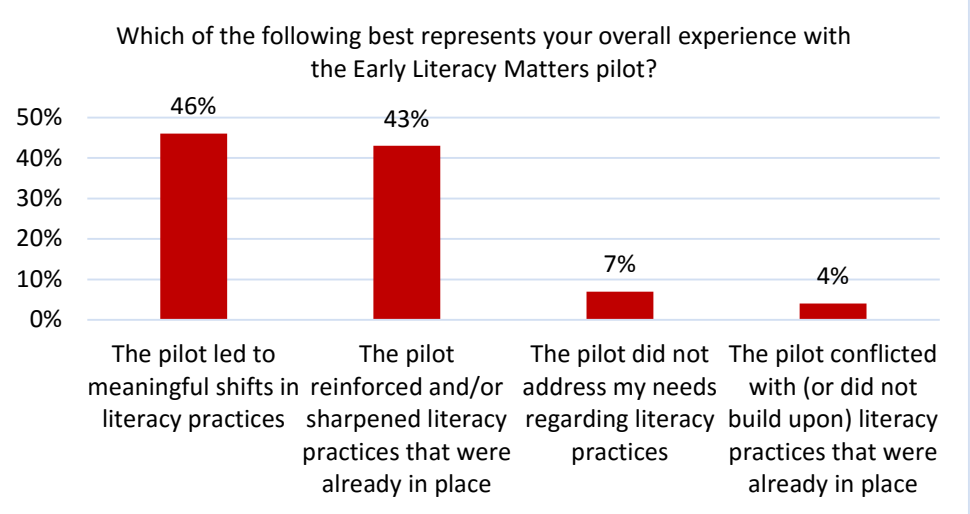
Early Literacy Matters

Background

The Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) and Department of Human Services (DHS) recruited programs serving children ages six weeks to four years old to participate in an "Early Literacy Matters" pilot designed to increase staff knowledge of early literacy concepts and improve early literacy practices. The 134 programs that completed the one-year pilot received class sets of books from the Governor's Books From Birth Foundation, and program staff earned their early literacy professional development hours by completing six training modules and submitting assignments. Eighty classrooms at 41 program sites also received 1:1 job-embedded coaching. This memo summarizes the overall findings from the pilot.

Staff Perceptions

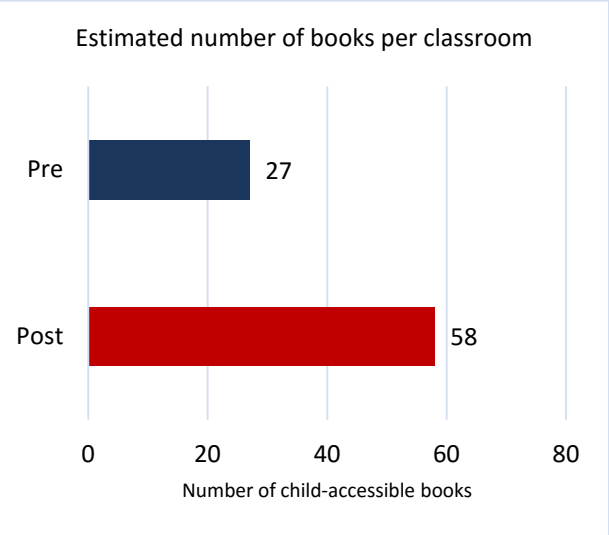
Program directors, teachers, and assistants responded to surveys regarding their participation in the pilot. In addition to overwhelmingly high satisfaction with the coach support, module content, books, and other resources, nine out of ten survey respondents reported that the pilot led to meaningful shifts in literacy practice or sharpened literacy practices. Directors also described a variety of ways they incorporated learnings from the training materials by gathering new instructional resources and engaging parents in reading to students. Respondents also commented that some of the module content and assignments were more challenging than they had expected.

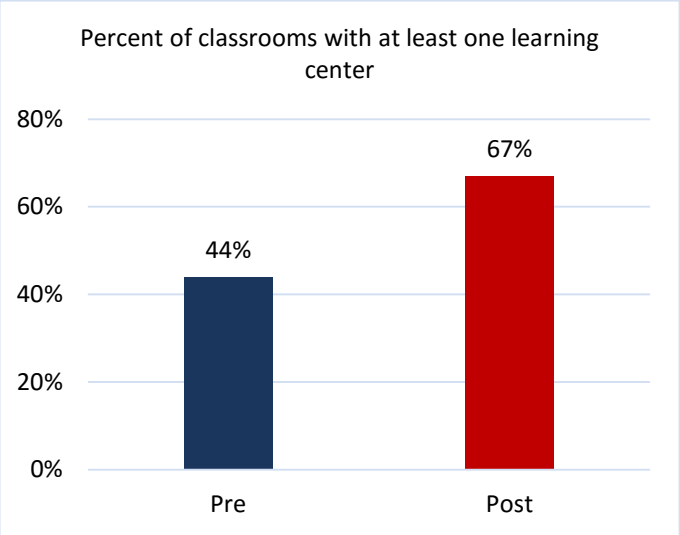


Nine out of ten survey respondents reported that the pilot led to meaningful shifts in their literacy practices or sharpened literacy practices that were already in place.

Instructional Practices

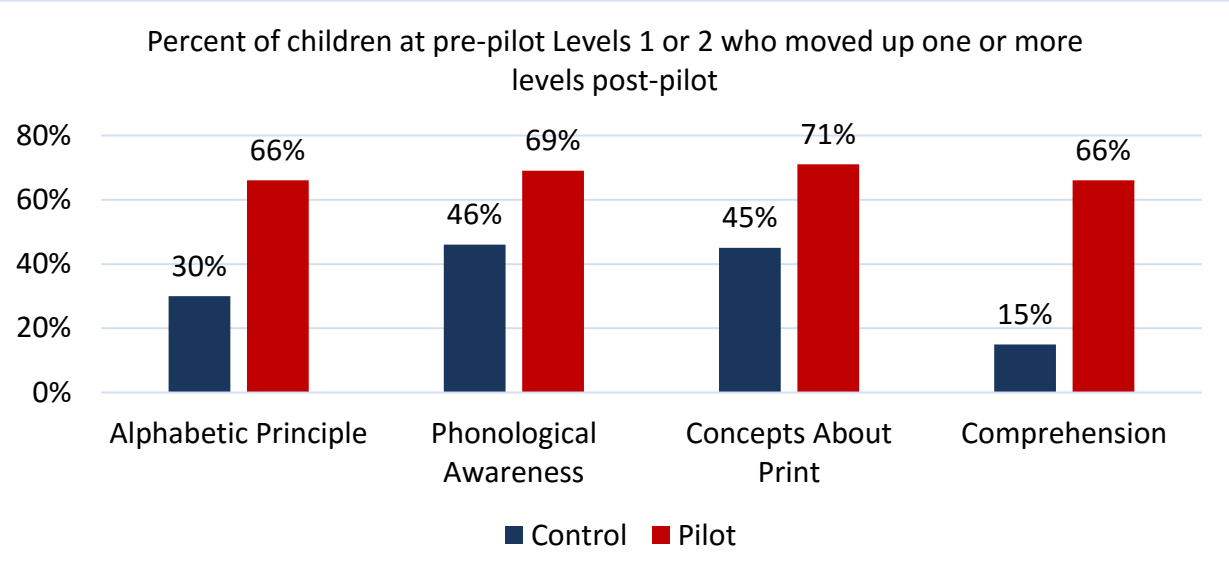
Pre and post classroom observations revealed substantial increases in the prevalence of child accessible books and intentionally designed learning centers in the classrooms. Accessibility and quality of pre-writing materials (such as blocks, clay, sand tables, etc.) also improved, particularly among classrooms that were randomly selected for one-on-one coaching.





Student Learning

An age-appropriate, individually administered assessment was administered to a sample of randomly selected children from programs receiving coaching through the pilot and from two control programs that did not participate in the pilot. Children from the pilot sites were more likely to move up one or more levels on the assessment by the end of the pilot, particularly in the comprehension domain.



Overview of Findings

- Almost all participants believe the pilot led to meaningful changes or improvements to their literacy practices.
- Participation at any level was associated with important changes to the classroom literacy environment, and coaching in particular was associated with important changes in literacy practices.
- Children in coached classes experienced greater growth in age-appropriate literacy skills.