



# **REALLY GREAT READING**

#### ESSA Level III Brief (2023-24)

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#### Key Findings

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Teachers' extent of use and total amount of time spent on RGR instruction (across all grades) was positively associated with students' literacy outcomes.

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Recognizing that 65% of students cannot read proficiently by 4th grade (McFarland et al., 2019), which is due in part to the enduring research-practice gap (Schneider, 2018), *Really Great Reading (RGR)* provides teachers with the tools to implement research-based, science of reading instruction to help students develop word-level reading skills using phonics, phonemic awareness, orthographic mapping, and deciphering word meaning.

*RGR* contracted with Instructure, a third-party education technology (edtech) research company, to examine the relationship between teachers' use of their instructional program and students' literacy outcomes. Using the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) standards as guidance in developing a study design, findings in this report align with ESSA Level III (Promising Evidence) (see Appendix A).

#### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

#### **Program Implementation Research Question**

- 1. How did Grade K–6 teachers use *RGR* during the first semester of the 2023-24 school year?
  - a. What was the extent of teachers' RGR use during reading instruction?

**Effectiveness Research Question** 

2. After controlling for students' prior reading levels, is the level of RGR instruction significantly associated with students' standardized reading assessment scores?

#### **STUDY DESIGN AND METHODS**

This study of 47 students enrolled in one school district in California public schools used a correlational design—aligned with ESSA Level III evidence standards—to examine student-level demographics and achievement data provided by the district and teacher-reported survey data about their use of *RGR*. To mitigate bias, the study included the following student-level controls: fall 2023 iReady scale scores (baseline measure of achievement).

In terms of demographics, the sample included students who identified as Hispanic (53%), Black/African-American (19%), Asian (13%), White (9%), and Multi-racial (6%). Forty-three percent of the sample were students classified as experiencing economic disadvantage and 6% were designated with special education status.

This study included the following measures to provide insights into *RGR* implementation and evidence about the potential impacts of the program on student outcomes.

*RGR Use.* Teachers completed brief surveys to provide self-reports of their level of RGR usage. The survey included items to assess the proportion of total reading instruction time that used *RGR* (scale: 0 - 100%), average daily minutes using *RGR* (scale: 0 - 120+ minutes), and a rating of level of RGR-implementation (five-point scale from very poor to excellent). These measures were used to examine whether increased use of *RGR* was significantly associated with greater end-of-year literacy outcomes. Student-level RGR use was inferred from their primary reading teacher's self-reported use, based on the assumption that instruction was mediated through the teacher.

In the implementation of foundational literacy programs across grade levels, different materials were used to align with students' developmental needs. Kindergarten classrooms used *Countdown* as their Tier 1 instructional program, while 1st grade implemented *Blast* and 2nd grade used *HD Word* at the Tier 1 level. Intervention services were provided through RSP (Resource Specialist Program), SDC (Special Day Class), and targeted small groups in grades 3–5. These intervention groups flexibly used *Countdown, Blast, and HD Word*, depending on the specific needs of the students served. In upper grades, specifically grade 6, only *HD Word* was used to support literacy instruction.

*Standardized Student Assessments.* Reading achievement was measured using i-Ready<sup>®</sup> scale scores, which allowed researchers to investigate patterns in *RGR* implementation and potential impacts of program use on students' literacy achievement. The i-Ready<sup>®</sup> scores are reported on a vertical scale that allows for comparing growth within and across years, so the analysis used the full sample of students across the seven grades.



## **IMPLEMENTATION FINDINGS**

Researchers examined the extent to which teachers reported using RGR resources for reading instruction during the pilot period (i.e., fall 2023). Detailed findings are included in Figure 1 and show that 39% of teachers reported using RGR for the majority (at least 61%) of reading instruction.



Figure 1. The percent of teachers' reading instruction that used *RGR* resources

In addition to examining extent of use, researchers explored teachers' perceptions of the ways that RGR helped them with reading instruction (see Figure 2). These results showed that the top three perceived benefits of using RGR were: (1) access to new resources; (2) easy-to-present lessons; and (3) greater understanding of Science of Reading. These findings were further confirmed by teachers' open-ended survey responses.



Figure 2. Teachers' feedback on RGR features



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For example, in terms of feedback regarding *RGR*'s influence on student engagement, teachers reported that:

*"From a teacher who felt like she never fully received proper teaching/instruction in how to teach phonics/PA, this program was amazing. My iReady scores reflected that. I felt more empowered as a teacher to teach foundational reading skills using this program."* 

In terms of feedback regarding *RGR's* influence on students' reading skills and abilities, teachers reported that: Feedback: *RGR* influences on

"The hands on items allowed my students to visually see the multisyllabic words in more than one way. The students loved the little white boards and also manipulating the tiles. I felt that for many of them it was the first time they were having fun reading or learning to read, in a long time."

*"It engaged my students tremendously. They loved the handmotions, the finger stretching, the letter tiles (on the chromebooks/virtual tiles), and through their participation and excitement, grew their reading foundation* 

#### **STUDENT OUTCOMES**

Teachers' extent of use and total amount of time spent (in minutes) on RGR (across all grades) was positively associated with students' literacy outcomes (r = 0.66, p < .001).

#### **LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

The current study offers promising results about the influence of *RGR* that should be explored and replicated with continued studies. Researchers could address current study limitations in future research efforts, as outlined below:

- Small sample size: This study included only students whose teachers responded to surveys measuring their implementation of RGR. Future studies should aim to include a larger and more diverse sample to enhance the generalizability of the findings.
- Lack of comparison group: Results from the current study indicate that the implementation of *RGR* was associated with improved student outcomes. However, researchers attempted to work with non-users, but the groups did not meet WWC baseline equivalence standards. Therefore, we recommend identifying comparison groups that are equivalent in terms of baseline achievement to strengthen the validity of the results.
- Short implementation period: Teachers implemented *RGR* over the course of a short pilot in the fall semester. A year-long implementation would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the long-term effects of RGR on student outcomes. Future research should consider extending the implementation period to capture more robust data.
- Observable usage data: The usage data in this study was collected using self-report surveys. For future research, we recommend RGR explore ways to collect observable usage metrics so there is less missing data and response bias.



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## **CONCLUSIONS**

Given the positive findings, this study provides results to satisfy ESSA evidence requirements for Level III (Promising Evidence).

- Correlational study
- Proper design and implementation
- Statistical controls through covariates
- At least one statistically significant, positive correlation with statistical controls for selection bias







## **APPENDIX A. THE EVERY STUDENT SUCCEEDS ACT**

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) provides schools and districts with a framework for determining which products are evidence-based and have been shown to improve student or other relevant outcomes. Following guidance from ESSA (<u>statute</u> and <u>non-regulatory guidance</u>), Education Department General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR), <u>Standards for Excellence in Education Research (SEER)</u> and <u>What Works Clearinghouse (WWC</u>), Instructure classifies the research of interventions into one of the four ESSA evidence levels. For more information regarding the evidence levels, please visit <u>https://www.instructure.com/resources/product-overviews/ensure-edtech-efficacy-essa-evidence</u>.

LEVEL COST 2025 ESSA Level IV Demonstrates Rationale	ESSA Level III Promising Evidence	ESSA Level II Moderate Evidence	ESSA Level I Strong Evidence
Research-based logic model (theory of change) for why this product should work Blueprint for implementation with fidelity, including appropriate usage metrics to track Represents a rationale – not empirical research – in an authentic education setting Limitations on federal funding eligibility	Correlational research study showing positive relationship between tool use and student outcomes Study did not include comparison groups, random assignment, or baseline equivalence Most meaningful for districts with similar context (student demographics, etc.) Establishes eligibility for all types of federal funding	Quasi-experimental research study showing students who used the product outperformed students who did not Includes demographically similar comparison group, but groups were not randomly assigned District context should be strongly considered when interpreting results Establishes eligibility for all types of federal	Experimental research study proving students who used the product outperformed students who did not Utilizes randomized comparison group for very strong, highly generalizable evidence Establishes eligibility for all types of federal funding





**RGR** 

REALLY GREAT READING

#### **APPENDIX B. REALLY GREAT READING LOGIC MODEL**

LOGIC MODEL

Problem Statement: Sixty-five percent of students are not able to read proficiently by 4th grade, which is due in part to the enduring research-practice gap. Really Great Reading (RGR) provides teachers with the tools to implement research-based science of reading instruction, which helps students develop word-level literacy using phonics, phonemic awareness, orthographic mapping, and deciphering word meaning.

Innuts	Particinants	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes What changes or benefits result		
What we invest:	Who we reach:	What we do:	Products of activities:	Short-term	Intermediate Long-term	
		Students practice using the Reading Playground games	Number and frequency of Reading Playgrounds online practice sessions	Students enjoy literacy activities more Students are more engaged in literacy activities	Students have increased confidence in reading Students have increased interest in reading	
Deally Coast Deading	PreK - Grade 12 Students	Students practice using workbooks and tile kits Students use vocabulary resources in the Reading Playgrounds and/or Infercabulary	(target: > 10 mins/day) Time spent on practice activities (i.e., workbooks, tile kits) Time spent using vocabulary	Students develop skills and knowledge to become orthographic mappers Students gain foundational iterativ	Students rave increased understand what they read and learn new information from texts	
Reading curriculum based on the science of reading <sup>1</sup>		Students complete RGR diagnostic assessments Students actively pay attention and respond to classroom instruction	Number of RGR diagnostic assessments completed	skills, demonstrated by growth on diagnostic assessments <sup>4</sup>	Students have increased performance on interim, end-6-grade, and/or state assessments <sup>5</sup>	
Lesson-aligned student materials: letter tile kits (digital and print), workbooks (print), Reading Playground				Students have increased vocabulary and ability to / derive meaning from context		
games (digital)				Taaahara uga		
Diagnostic assessments Data management system for monitoring student progress and grouping students		Educators complete PD webinars and workshops Educators use diagnostic assessments to identify instructional focus areas	Number of PD sessions attended and total time spent on PD Time spent reviewing student assessment data	embedded periodic professional learning to increase knowledge of foundational literacy skills Teachers implement	Teachers observe higher rates of literacy growth among their students	
Teacher guides On-demand professional development (PD) on the science of reading	PreK - Grade 12 Educators <sup>2</sup>	Educators use data management system to group students and personalize instruction according to their strengths and weaknesses	Usage of data management system for grouping students Number and frequency of lessons delivered (caract - 15 mine (dar))	literacy instruction aligned to the science of reading Teachers use student data to systematically group students and personalize literacy	Teachers have greater self-efficacy for literacy instruction	
provide: RGR subscriptions Internet-enabled devices		Educators use deliver lessons and assign practice activities aligned to students' needs	Number of correctly-leveled playbook activities completed	Teachers implement targeted literacy interventions aligned to students' needs		
Set-up student accounts and rosters on RGR						
platform	School and District Administrators <sup>3</sup>	Schedule time for teacher PD on the science of reading Schedule time for examining student data and identifying targeted interventions Set expectations for educator implementation of RGR that maintains fidelity Monitor educator usage of RGR and provide feedback and support for implementation	Number of PD sessions held and total time allocated for PD Number of meetings held to examine student data Documentation of expectations for RGR implementation feedback and support for educators' RGR implementation	Admins have greater awareness of best practices in the science of reading Admins see the value of science of reading instruction Admins advocate for use of science of reading	Admins better support the use of research-based literacy instruction through PD, curriculum, and assessment Admins proactively leverage assessment data to address inequites by identifying targeted literacy interventions	

<sup>1</sup> The science of reading is a set of research-based practices that support the development of reading by helping students to relate written text to spoken language by focusing on malleable factors that underpin reading ability, including phonics, phonemic awareness, and decoding (Petscher et al., 2020).
<sup>2</sup> Educators may include primary classroom teachers, interventionists, Title I coordinators, paraprofessionals, and special educators.
<sup>3</sup> School and District Administrators may include literacy/ELA instructional coaches, curriculm specialists, special education directors, district-level PD directors, principals.
<sup>4</sup> Foundational literacy skills for students in Pre-K - 2nd grade include phonemic awareness, alphabetic principals, and oral reading fluency; skills for students in 3rd grade or higher include decoding, word reading, and reading fluency.
<sup>5</sup> Examples of interim, end-of-grade, state assessments include DIBELS, iReady, NWEA, and MAP.