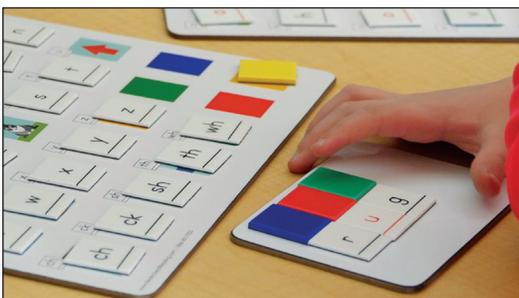


Improving Literacy Skills in a Small, Rural Elementary School

Successfully Implementing Really Great Reading

ABSTRACT

Pawhuska Elementary School is a small, rural elementary school in Oklahoma. About five years ago, half of all Pawhuska students were reading below grade level. Pawhuska implemented Really Great Reading's (RGR) Phonics Suite in Grades 3–6 to address the challenge. SEG Measurement studied reading skills growth in Pawhuska classrooms implementing Phonics Suite instruction during the 2017–2018 school year, comparing the beginning and end of school year DIBELS Next assessment results. Students showed statistically significant and educationally meaningful improvement in reading skills. Overall reading skills showed considerable improvement, with an average increase of nearly two standard deviations in Composite reading skills (Effect size = 1.95). Accuracy increased about three-quarters of a standard deviation (Effect size = .74) and students gained nearly a standard deviation and a half in Fluency (Effect size = 1.44). The success identified by the DIBELS scores was confirmed by the Pawhuska teachers and principal.



ABOUT REALLY GREAT READING

Really Great Reading (RGR) provides a comprehensive set of tools to help diagnose and teach reading to any type of reader, including dyslexic, adult and struggling readers at every skill level. RGR's Phonics Suite instruction can be used in a variety of settings including whole-group, small-group, and specialized settings.

Students practice what good readers do naturally, which is pay attention to every word, read with a high rate of accuracy, and use strategies for attacking unfamiliar and multisyllabic words.

RGR's research-based, multisensory programs, *Countdown*, *Blast Foundations*, *HD Word*, *Phonics Boost*, and *Phonics Blitz*, explicitly teach phonemic awareness, phonics concepts, and word attack skills. They also focus on reading accurately, which translates into better comprehension.

RGR offers diagnostic decoding assessments to help educators understand their students' decoding strengths and weaknesses, enabling students to be quickly grouped for instruction by skill level, or taught on an individual level, to get maximum benefits from the program.

RGR offers professional development that provides valuable insight into teaching with RGR's programs and provides teachers with a solid foundation to successfully diagnose, group, and teach struggling readers.

Really Great Reading provides educators with materials to be successful.

Pawhuska Elementary School is a small, Title I school located in rural northern Oklahoma on the Osage Nation Reservation, part of the Indian Territory established in 1872. Pawhuska has a population of about 3,500 residents, and Pawhuska Elementary School has an enrollment of 375 students in Grades 3–6. Over half (58%) of the students are American Indian, and a third (35%) are Caucasian. The remaining students are African American and Hispanic.

Pawhuska wrestles with poverty and high unemployment. Seventy-two percent of the students are from low-income families, and 78% of Pawhuska students qualify for free or reduced lunch. There is a statewide teacher shortage that is particularly severe in Pawhuska. All this challenges Pawhuska Elementary's commitment to delivering quality education to its students.

The Challenge: Improving Literacy

Pawhuska's Title I teacher, Sammie Frost, embraced the challenge: "We have to do something about the declining scores." The situation was particularly challenging due to the state requirement that all third graders must be able to read on a third-grade level in order to pass on to the fourth grade.

Pawhuska faced a significant uphill battle to improve literacy. According to Pawhuska's principal, Mr. Cowan, "About half of our students were below grade level." In fact, the teachers echoed that fifty percent of students were below grade level for reading when they arrived at Pawhuska in third grade and that some were two years below grade level.

Pawhuska has always prided itself on providing students with a sound, comprehensive education that enriches their lives and prepares them for their futures. However, they faced many obstacles while trying to deliver on this promise. Pawhuska teachers and administrators knew they had to get really serious about declining reading scores, and the teachers were open to a new solution.

"Even though we all have a lot of teaching experience, we are always looking for and willing to try new things," expressed one Pawhuska educator. Pawhuska started using Really Great Reading's (RGR) programs four years ago. At the start, the reading level for the third grade was disappointingly low; but with RGR, teachers had the tools to dramatically improve reading and met the challenge.

Results: Students Show Gains in Overall Reading Skills, Accuracy and Fluency

SEG Measurement, an independent research firm, evaluated the Grade 3 outcomes for the 2017–2018 school year. SEG analyzed the assessment data to determine the extent to which students using RGR's programs improved their reading skills. Pawhuska's teachers and administrators were surveyed, and the principal and several teachers were interviewed.

Pawhuska evaluates student reading skills using the DIBELS Next Assessment (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills), a widely used, third-party assessment of language skills. Students are assessed at the beginning and at the end of the school year, as well as periodically throughout the course of the year. The DIBELS Next results are used to track student performance over time and to gather information to guide instruction.

The DIBELS Composite Score along with the Accuracy and Fluency measures were examined for this study. Students were assessed at the beginning (August/September) and at the end of the school year (April/May) to determine the extent to which using RGR's programs improved their reading skills.

The Grade 3 DIBELS results show that students achieved overall reading skills, accuracy, and fluency gains during the school year that were both statistically significant ($p < .001$) and educationally meaningful (Figure 1).

The overall gains in reading skills as reflected in the DIBELS Composite Score was particularly large, with an average increase of more than 100 points (Composite Score gain = 105 score points). This is a gain of nearly two standard deviations in reading skills (Effect Size = 1.95), or a gain of about 47 percentile points. This is approximately double the amount of growth expected at this level based on DIBELS technical data.

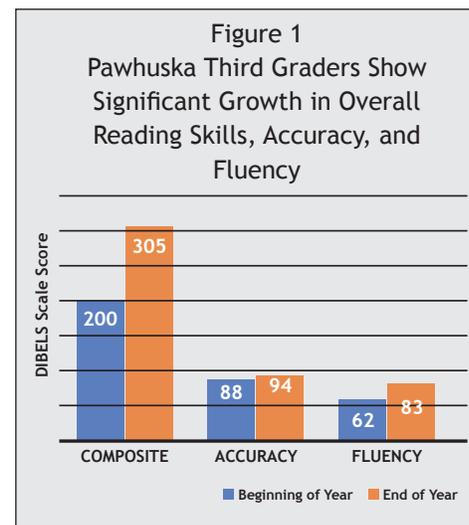
The Pawhuska third graders also showed substantial gains in Accuracy and Fluency on the DIBELS Assessment (Accuracy score gain = 6 score points). This is a gain of about three-quarters of a standard deviation in Accuracy and a gain of nearly a standard deviation and a half in Fluency (Accuracy Effect Size = .74; Fluency Effect Size = 1.44), or a gain of about 27 percentile points in Accuracy and 43 percentile points in Fluency.

Pawhuska's principal and teachers confirmed the high level of success seen on the DIBELS Next results. Last year, 51% of the third graders were reading below grade level, and 49% were reading at grade level. At the end of the year, after using RGR's programs, 73% were reading on grade level and 27% were below grade level. "I absolutely attribute that to RGR and the teachers at Pawhuska Elementary," according to a Pawhuska teacher. While many schools in the district are struggling, several teachers noted that Pawhuska Elementary School is doing extremely well relative to other schools.

Pawhuska's teachers clearly see RGR's programs playing a central role in improving the reading skills of Pawhuska's third graders. One Pawhuska third grade teacher shared, "The data indicates that Really Great Reading has been effective! Before we started using the [RGR] program, I felt frustrated. I knew my students had gaps in their reading skills."

Cowan is pleased with Pawhuska's success, noting that over the four years of use, "Reading scores have increased from the

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All of the teachers felt that Really Great Reading's programs were easy to use and were helpful in improving their teaching. Pawhuska teachers and administrators knew they had to get really serious about declining reading scores, and the teachers were open to a new solution.



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beginning to the end of year with RGR. Pawhuska made great gains almost immediately. Now, we use Really Great Reading with the 3rd and 4th grade classrooms and small groups in 5th and 6th grade.”

Pawhuska teachers are committed to RGR's programs. Teachers use Really Great Reading between three and seven and a half hours per week, and they review the students' scores on the RGR diagnostic assessments frequently. All of the teachers felt that RGR's programs were easy to use and were helpful in improving their teaching.

Cowan attributes part of their success to the professional development, delivered in cooperation with the Osage County Interlocal Cooperative, based on the most effective ways to teach reading. RGR provides educators with materials to be successful. “RGR has improved my overall teaching!” said one teacher.

Pawhuska has done really well in contrast with other schools in the district; the teachers believe that Pawhuska's success is the result of the use of Really Great Reading's programs. “The progress we see within our district is definitely attributed partly to RGR,” said one Pawhuska teacher.

“The RGR program showed us what skills the kids are missing and how they can address gaps identified by the RGR diagnostic assessments,” said another teacher. Teachers report that RGR's programs are particularly effective when they divide the students into smaller groups and drill down using RGR's tools to see what skills they are missing. “Diagnosing students' reading deficits using the RGR diagnostic assessment is important to teachers,” said a Pawhuska teacher. “We have a lot of veteran teachers at our school, no teacher turnover. They are vested in the RGR program and the community.”

The dramatic achievement of a fifth grader who entered Pawhuska Elementary in January illustrates the impact of RGR instruction. He had never been to school before. He received instruction using Really Great Reading's *Blast Foundations* program four days a week, and within two months has made considerable gains; he went from knowing the names of just four letters and none of the letter sounds to knowing all the letters. He can now read with minimal support. “We used RGR exclusively with him,” Cowan noted. The principal was pleasantly surprised when the student came into his office and read sentences to him.

The impact of sustained use of RGR's Phonics Suite instruction in Pawhuska was captured by a teacher who had used RGR for several years: “We have seen the results year after year. It has really worked well for us over the past three years. The teachers don't want to use anything else.”