



Improving Reading Skills in a Small, Rural Elementary School

Successfully Implementing Really Great Reading

ABSTRACT

Santaquin Elementary School is a small, rural elementary school in Santaquin, Utah. About five years ago, the Nebo School District recognized that many students in the district were reading below grade level.

They began a search to find a reading program that could effectively improve student reading skills and, after reviewing and completing a pilot program, they selected Really Great Reading's (RGR) programs to address the problem. SEG Measurement studied reading skills growth in Santaquin classrooms during the 2017–2018 school year, comparing the beginning and end of school year DIBELS assessment results.

Students showed statistically significant and educationally meaningful improvement in reading skills.

Overall reading skills showed considerable improvement, with a nearly one standard deviation improvement in Composite reading skills ($ES = .82$). Fluency increased by one and one quarter standard deviations ($ES = 1.25$). The success identified by DIBELS scores was confirmed by the Santaquin teachers and their principal, Chad Argyle.

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-class, 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.

Santaquin Elementary School is a small, rural elementary school near Provo, Utah. Santaquin has a population of about 11,000, and Santaquin Elementary School has an enrollment of 755 students in Grades K to 6. About 90% of the students are Caucasian and about 10% are Hispanic.

The Santaquin community struggles with low income. Nearly half (44%) of Santaquin's students come from low income homes and qualify for free or reduced lunch. Until recently, Santaquin Elementary was a Title 1 school. The principal, Chad Argyle, stated, "Now we have more students moving into the area that come from different backgrounds and expectations in education. This is unique to this area where for years there was little growth."

One particularly critical challenge is the high numbers of struggling readers. "At the beginning of the year, all but four of my students were below grade level in reading," reported one teacher.

The Challenge: Improving Reading Skills

Knowing that reading is essential to student success, Nebo School District recognized that they faced a significant uphill battle to improve reading skills in the district. They began a two-year search for an effective decoding program for their elementary school students. They reviewed 15 different reading and phonics programs — they did not want to purchase anything until they found exactly what they wanted to help their students.

In 2015, Nebo narrowed their search to two reading programs and conducted a pilot of three Really Great Reading programs and of another company's program in the district. Three weeks into the pilots, the teachers were convinced that RGR's programs were the best solution, so they were selected for the district.

During the 2016–2017 school year, Really Great Reading's programs were adopted by the entire school district for Kindergarten through third grade in their 30 elementary schools.

Santaquin Elementary, one of the district's larger elementary schools, embraced the challenge of striving to improve student reading skills. With RGR's programs, teachers had the tools they needed.

During the first year of implementation (2016–2017), for Grades K–3, RGR's *Countdown Pilot* and *Blast Foundations* and *HD Word* programs were used. Lessons were taught each day for a total of 15–20 minutes in a whole group setting, as mandated by the district.

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

SEG Measurement, an independent research firm, evaluated the first grade 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.

Santaquin’s administrator and first grade teacher team were interviewed.

Santaquin evaluates student reading skills using the DIBELS 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 year. The DIBELS results are used to track student performance over time and to gather information to guide instruction.

The DIBELS Composite Score and the Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) measure 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 students using RGR’s programs improved their reading skills.

The first grade DIBELS results show that students achieved overall reading skill, accuracy, and fluency gains across the school year that were both statistically significant and educationally meaningful.

To help evaluate the impact of RGR’s programs in this school, SEG compared the beginning and end of year DIBELS Scores for Santaquin first graders using paired sample t-tests. Both the overall (Composite Score) and Oral Reading Fluency scores were examined.

Table 1
T-Test Comparisons
Beginning and End of Year Student Test Scores

DIBELS Test	Beginning of Year	End of Year	SD	N	T	Sig	Effect Size
Composite	95	153	71	104	8.47	0.001	0.82
Fluency	3	18	12	126	14.23	0.001	1.25

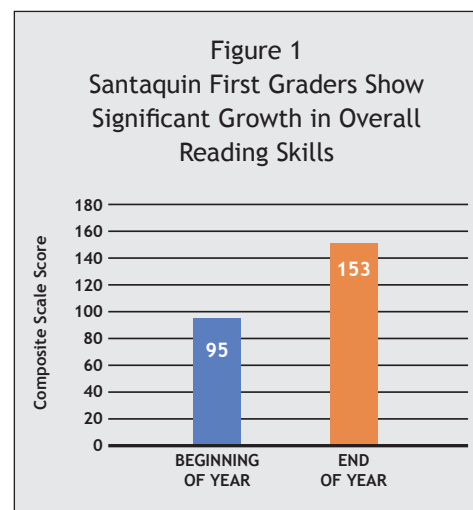
The average first grade DIBELS Composite reading score at the beginning of the year (Mean = 95) was compared to the average DIBELS Composite reading score at the end of the year (Mean = 153) using a paired sample t-test. Santaquin first graders showed statistically significant overall gains in reading skills ($t = 8.47$; $df = 104$; $p < .001$). This is a gain of more than three quarters of a standard deviation in overall reading skills (Effect Size = .82).

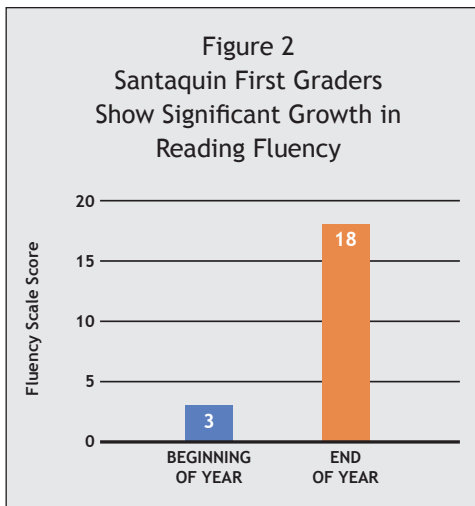
Reading fluency is critical to reading success. The average first grade reading fluency score at the beginning of the year (3) was compared to the average DIBELS reading fluency score at the end of the year (18) using a paired sample t-test. Santaquin first graders showed statistically significant gains in Fluency on the DIBELS Assessment ($t = 14.23$; $df = 126$; $p < .001$). This is a gain of about one and a quarter standard deviations in Fluency (Fluency Effect Size = 1.25).

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All of the teachers interviewed for the case study agreed that Really Great Reading’s programs have been effective, and all indicated that the delivery of Really Great Reading’s instruction is easy.

Almost all (83%) of the teachers felt that the programs have improved their teaching of reading.

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Reading’s programs is easy. “We are doing better this year. Last year, we were ranked at the bottom of 29 schools in reading according to our district data, and now we are ranked 10th.” “Do you think Really Great Reading has contributed to that?” “Absolutely...,” said one Santaquin Elementary School teacher.

One Santaquin teacher indicated that while nearly all his students were reading below grade level at the beginning of the year in his class of 22 students, “that has now flipped to having just three students below grade level.”

Almost all (83%) of the teachers felt that the programs have improved their teaching of reading. “There has been a focus in all grade levels that has strengthened the school relationships and brought teachers together with a common purpose. The understanding students have now as it relates to phonics has greatly enhanced their ability to read fluently with increased accuracy and comprehension,” said Argyle.

A teacher recounts the story of one particular student at Santaquin. “I have a student who came into first grade not knowing any of his letter sounds or sight words. By doing an intervention with *Countdown* for re-teach, then *Blast* in class, he was able to move from a pre level to level one! His confidence in himself has grown so much and he loves to tell people that he is a reader! He is doing awesome and I continue to see amazing growth from him. He is now on grade level reading and is so excited to come to the back table to read with his group...”

“I really struggled with the majority of my class not knowing their letter names and sounds. I even had one student that only knew three sounds and no letter names. The online review letters really helped my students to see the grapheme alone instead of part of a big thing called the alphabet. To see the progress they made in January, I was thrilled!” said a first-grade teacher at Santaquin Elementary School.

The impact on the community has been dramatic according to one Santaquin teacher. “We held a literacy night where we taught parents about the phonics program. They were impressed by the advanced vocabulary that their first graders were able to use. I have also had parents comment that they are amazed at their child’s reading and writing growth. They often say it just seems to click for her. I know that the program helps the English language click for my students.”