

CASE STUDY

Northwood Elementary Students Make Great Strides in Reading

Northwood Elementary School, Baltimore, Maryland



Background

Special Education teacher Carolyn Razon-Fernandez was looking for an intensive intervention program for some of the lowest-performing readers in her elementary classes. Some of her third-grade students were reading at a kindergarten level. The reading gap was significant, posing a particularly great challenge. For the past two years, Mrs. Razon-Fernandez used the intensive reading program SPIRE to build the groundwork for success in reading in her self-contained Classroom, developing early literacy concepts and building the foundation for reading effectively.

Results

Student progress was measured using a few different assessments, including the Woodcock Johnson IV and DIBELS assessments. Students made good progress on each testing measure used with these students.

For example, several third-grade students began with an average of 32 Words Per Minute on grade three level text. These students later scored an average of 57 WCPM on the DIBELS assessment using grade four level text. Several fourth-grade students averaged 12 Words Per Minute on grade four level text and later scored an average of 60 WCPM DIBELS assessment using grade five level text.

14

Students

3-5

Grades

CHALLENGE

Students were lacking basic phonics and decoding skills

SOLUTION

SPIRE intensive reading intervention was used for two years with focus students

RESULT

Students made great progress on DIBELS reading assessments 2.0 grade levels

Mrs. Razon-Fernandez shared that she was “extremely impressed with the improvement of accuracy rates. As we know, if the children are not reading the text accurately, then they will not be able to comprehend the text.” Further, she stated, “One of the students listed in the data was administered the Woodcock Johnson IV in March. She came to my class as a third grader reading at a 1.5 grade level. She is now a fifth grader and based on her WJIV score in letterword identification, she is now reading at a fourth grade level. She has made close to three years of progress in just over a year and a half timeframe!”

The SPIRE Difference

SPIRE training provided Mrs. Razon-Fernandez a unique perspective on reading instruction and prompted her to look at reading differently. “I realized if I was this excited about learning the SPIRE program, I could only imagine the excitement that this program, when implemented correctly, could provide my students. The SPIRE program provides multiple opportunities for students to interact with words and text, and it is comprehensive as it incorporates phonics, vocabulary, fiction and non-fiction comprehension, and writing.”

Classroom Implementation Model

Mrs. Razon-Fernandez teaches three SPIRE groups with an average of five students in each group. The students meet on a rotating basis and implement steps one through five on day one of the lesson, and steps six through ten on day two. She states, “I appreciate that SPIRE has added the progress checks as it allows me to more accurately determine if I need to continue with reinforcement lessons. The students especially like working with the magnet boards, and the color-coded magnets have supported the students in applying the learned spelling strategies in other areas of writing. Sometimes we meet at the Promethean board. The students enjoy doing the word search on the board and with the incredible vocabulary offered in the SPIRE texts as it allows us to look up words that even I had never heard before, such as whelk and whippet.”

Student Successes

She added, “My favorite part of SPIRE is how easily the strategies and skills taught can be applied in other areas. Often, when students are reading a different text, such as Time For Kids, and they are having difficulty decoding a word, all I have to say is SPIRE and they immediately break the word down and mark it as they are taught to in SPIRE. This is what I find so empowering about SPIRE. It provides each student with the tools necessary to read multi-syllable words that they may not be able to immediately decode by sight. This in turns builds their confidence and reading is not so scary to them anymore. I now have students that are buying books at the school book fair, and not just the cool pencils and erasers. I now have students coming in on Monday sharing books they checked out of the local library over the weekend. This year I had a student on the first day of school who asked to speak with me in the hallway, and she looked so upset and said, “I can’t read.” I told her not to worry, that she would be reading by the end of the year. In a matter of 5 months, she achieved her IEP decoding goal, and progressed two guided reading levels. She shared with me that she was reading at home to her mom and her mom cried because she never used to do that before. Recently, I also had a student reach SPIRE Level 5. When she was reading the second story about heat and molecules, many of the other students stopped what they were doing to listen to her read the story and were asking questions that I did not need to answer because she answered based on her reading of the text. These anecdotes encourage me as a teacher and provide many of those “light bulb” moments that teachers seek. I have had many students make up to two years of growth within one school year. Most importantly, the students are reading AND enjoying it!

I think the data is impressive and I couldn’t be more pleased with the results. SPIRE has impacted my classroom in such a positive way and has piqued the reading interests of my students. This is no small feat for this group, considering most have more often than not experienced failure in reading and were hesitant to attempt reading when they first came to my class.”

Mrs. Carolyn Razon-Fernandez is a Special Educator at Northwood Elementary, #242, Baltimore City Schools, MD.

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