



Three MindPlay Programs Make Learning to Read Easy

An Interview with John Walker, Principal; Universal Charter School, Philadelphia, PA
School Profile: 600 students; Grades Pre-K–8; 100% African American; 72% Disadvantaged; Title 1
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In the middle of last year we began using RAPS 360, My Reading Coach and FLRT – a fluent reading trainer. These three MindPlay computer programs proved to be user friendly for teachers, students and parents as well as very engaging. From assessment to fluency MindPlay made a significant contribution to our students learning to read.

Thirty students from our learning support group were the first students placed on RAPS 360, My Reading Coach and FLRT. Once we saw their progress, we quickly added students from other classes who were not showing significant growth in reading. This brought the total number to 375 first through eighth graders. Special education students as well as struggling and emergent readers benefited from this integrated approach.

Students worked on My Reading Coach or FLRT 15 to 20 minutes every day in the computer lab. (They also took frequent RAPS 360 assessments during this time.) We were getting the success we wanted, but we decided to increase their time on MRC and FLRT to get even better results. Initially, if they were not getting the lesson after one or two tries, we would take them off because they were not focusing. As their endurance increased, they were able to work for 45 minutes.

RAPS 360

We were using informal running records to assess our students reading progress at all times, particularly in the lower and middle grades. These assessments were very time consuming. Students can now take the RAPS 360 assessment in the morning, and we have the report in the afternoon. We have two computer labs in our school. In one period a class of 25 students can take RAPS 360 in 25 to 30 minutes. Our reading assessments now take one or two days rather than a whole month. We checked to see whether RAPS 360 calibrated with the other diagnostic tests we were using. It did calibrate, and it seems to be even more specific identifying the gaps in a student's reading skills.

The results from RAPS 360 allow our teachers to group the students according to skill levels. Teachers get a diagnostic breakdown along with the specific interventions needed for each student. They can decide how to proceed. Teachers find the remediation packets helpful; the packets allow students to fill the specific gaps in their reading skills. On the retest, teachers can see that the problems have been corrected.

RAPS 360 is very efficient, comprehensive and objective. When students take the assessment together instead of individually, the results are not affected by the time of day or classroom environment. RAPS 360 has revolutionized how we assess and record reading skills in our school.

My Reading Coach

My Reading Coach fills the gaps in specific reading skills and provides lessons for each student to progress at their own pace. I like that it is interactive. The program articulates the problem and gives students a plethora of activities and exercises to remedy the deficiency until they get it right. Students have their own reading coach showing them verbally, visually, and auditorily how to become a good reader. The program is comprehensive, including phonics, grammar and comprehension. We had students in first grade who had not been exposed to some basic phonics activities and interventions. Once we closed those gaps, they took off. My Reading Coach had a strong impact on our ability to reach our AYP last year.

FLRT – a fluent reading trainer

FLRT provides effective reading practice. It keeps the students' eyes moving to improve fluency while increasing their vocabulary. The paragraphs and vocabulary expand their knowledge as they became more fluent and dynamic readers. FLRT meets our objective: We do not want students to memorize the language; we want them to comprehend and use their skills on new material as well as develop a robust vocabulary.

Students enjoy reading the high interest paragraphs, and the points and scores motivate them. The students love the bells and whistles on FLRT, and they want more of them. They love getting the “ding ding ding” when they answer the questions correctly and see their names move to the top of the list for the day or week. They can see how they are doing across the entire grade as well as within their class. Students really enjoy this positive competitive piece.

Successful Results

Approximately 65% of our third through eighth grade students moved from a low basic or basic reading level to proficient in half the school year, according to the results of a state sponsored assessment test. (cont. page 2)

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Comprehension Reading Levels on MRC:

One sixth grader went from 2.0 to 7.0 (+5 levels) after 23 hours on the program and completing 31 lessons.

A seventh grader went from 2.5 to 6.5 (+4 levels) after 18 hours and completing 47 lessons.

RAPS 360 and FLRT Reading Levels

RAPS 360 placed one sixth grader at a 6th grade reading level. After three months and 104 stories on FLRT, she went from 233 wpm to 338 wpm, 8th grade reading level.

RAPS 360 placed another seventh grader at a 4th grade comprehension level. After reading 52 stories on FLRT, she was reading 272 wpm, 7th grade reading level.

Teachers Praise RAPS 360, MRC and FLRT

The teachers love the programs because they are objective, fast and give specific, accurate feedback. Teachers are free to spend more time teaching as opposed to assessing. They are impressed with how the three programs work together. In addition to the computer labs, we have a computer in every classroom and students are scheduled for 15 minute intervals. Some students work on My Reading Coach because they need to improve reading skills; some need to be assessed on RAPS 360; and some need to practice reading on FLRT. In our after school program, each student uses his/her own password and goes to the program s/he needs to work on that day. This approach allows students to use the MindPlay program that most benefits them.

Teachers and I monitor progress to see how much time students are working on the programs. We can correlate time on the program with outcomes. If a student is only spending one hour a week on the program and not getting the results s/he wants, we will know that. The reports give clear evidence to parents, the teacher and me about a student's reading activities and results.

MindPlay provides friendly customer service and prompt technical support. Our staff was trained and retrained; we had all of our questions answered. Our MindPlay technical advisor sat with me and helped me understand all of the different program menus and aspects. The attention I received helped me stay with this integrated approach.

RAPS 360, My Reading Coach and FLRT give students an opportunity to take ownership for their learning. Once we identify what is keeping them from being successful readers, we print out graphs and charts, and they can see it for themselves. Their self-esteem improves when they see how much they have done in a day or how much they have improved. We did ourselves a great service by exposing our students to RAPS 360, My Reading Coach and FLRT. We look forward to getting even more benefit from these MindPlay programs this year.

Reading Analysis and Prescription System – RAPS 360

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RAPS 360 is an interactive computer-based analysis and prescription system that provides teachers with a tool to easily test, isolate deficiencies and diagnose each student's specific reading abilities. These tests offer administrators and teachers a **360° view** of each student, a class, a grade, a school or district **in minutes**.

All schools gather data from a number of district assessments to determine grade level equivalency, measures of academic progress, number of objectives met, etc. RAPS 360 is a diagnostic tool; it will not replace district assessment. It pinpoints deficiencies and prescribes the intervention a teacher could use to help students reach their full reading potential.

RAPS 360 is quick! Two types of testing are administered:

- 1) The progress monitoring assessment takes only minutes; teachers can test quickly and often.
- 2) The full diagnostic assessment takes 15--30 minutes depending on a student's ability.

The reports generated from RAPS 360 show error patterns and enable proper student grouping for intervention. Frequent testing allows teachers to fine tune which intervention strategies are most effective. RAPS 360 even provides the teacher with targeted off-the-computer remediation packets to support student growth in phonemic awareness and phonics skills.

RAPS 360 is a revolutionary diagnostic assessment that automatically adapts to each individual student. A struggling fifth grader will not take the same assessments as an on-grade level fifth grade student. RAPS 360's goal is to minimize testing time by providing appropriate tests to match the student's abilities. It does this by administering a series of short screening tests, so each student gets the appropriate level of test.

The Comprehension Screening Assessment (CSA) is the first test given to all students and will quickly **sort** students to determine if more focused tests are needed. The CSA is a **cloze** task that automatically adjusts after each response. If a student does not know important words in the CSA item, then a critical part of the student's low comprehension performance might be vocabulary, decoding, or vision. RAPS 360 then assigns further diagnostic assessments for word meaning and recognition, decoding/encoding, and eye tracking. Results are immediately analyzed and errors are grouped to identify specific needs. If the student is proficient at grade level reading, then s/he will be assessed further on their ability to read fluently. Fluency is assessed at the student's "natural" level without assistance or at his "expected" fluency with assistance. A student's effective reading rate is adjusted and reported based on his reading comprehension.

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Tip to share in the newsletter? Want to brag about your students? Have a question about the program?

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