



Teacher Newsletter



Educational Solutions

September 2010

Standardized Tests Confirm Student Gains on My Reading Coach

An Interview with Katie O'Brien, Software Implementation Specialist

Zionsville Community School District; Zionsville, Indiana

District Profile: 5,360 students; Grades K – 12; 4% Economically Disadvantaged

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Within our seven district schools, we had 210 students working on My Reading Coach (MRC) from September, 2009, through May, 2010. First through eighth grade struggling readers were placed on My Reading Coach if they scored at the 25th percentile or below on any standardized testing. These **general education, ESL and special education students** all made impressive gains on My Reading Coach regardless of their area of weakness, disability and/or background information. In addition, their reading gains transferred to their standardized test scores.

Our students were on My Reading Coach four to five days a week for 30 to 60 minutes a day. Students were tested in September, 2009, and retested in the beginning of May, 2010, on the NorthWest Evaluation Association Reading assessment. Five grades demonstrated more than a 50% increase in their average grade level percentile scores between their Fall and Spring testing.

| Grade | Fall Avg. Percentile | Spring Avg. Percentile | % Increase |
|-------|----------------------|------------------------|------------|
| 1st | 31st | 47th | 51% |
| 2nd | 16th | 37th | 69% |
| 3rd | 26th | 40th | 88% |
| 6th | 23rd | 41st | 78% |
| 8th | 13th | 24th | 85% |

The average NWEA student reading score for grades one through eight fell in the 22nd percentile in the Fall of 2009; in the Spring of 2010, the average score increased to the 36th percentile (25th% - 75th% Norm. Avg.), which resulted in a 64% growth in eight months.

Student Accomplishments

A group of nine 8th grade students began MRC in November, 2009. The students are now demonstrating the application of skills at a 10th grade level with an overall average of 40% to 50% gains on their MRC final review tests.

One student identified with a moderate disability has made a 146% gain based on the MRC review of lessons 1-20. This is just phenomenal. The student improved from an original score of 35% (lesson 1-20) to an 86% (lesson 1-20) within MRC.

One 6th grade student, who is At-Risk for below grade level reading and language skills, came in before school to work on MRC. This student completed the program in 26 computer hours with an overall improved score of 39% for lessons 1-61 within MRC.

Another 6th grade student scored in the 22nd percentile in Reading on NWEA in the Fall, 2009. This Spring he tested in the 63rd percentile, which is considered average for his grade level. He went from 66% on the MRC placement test (lessons 1-61) to 91% on the review test (lessons 1-61). His overall reading skills improved 38% after 22 computer hours.

My Reading Coach Improves Reading Skills

Teachers believe in My Reading Coach because they see the noticeable gains their students are making on their AIMSweb and NWEA scores. Students are demonstrating greater confidence in themselves as readers, and their spelling skills have also improved. Younger students who are placed in reading groups are being promoted to the next level. Older students are performing better in their language arts classes, are more confident in their classrooms, and are able to read grade level text aloud with comfort.

My Reading Coach is successful with our students because it addresses the five reading components of learning. It specifically identifies and breaks down skill sets that are areas of weakness for each student. It offers repetition that a teacher cannot do in a school day. And, the program provides individualized data that is straightforward for parents, teachers, and students to understand.

Everyone in our district is supporting My Reading Coach. This includes our technology department, our teachers, administration, and the superintendent. People recognize that we are improving reading skills for our students and changing lives. **We are in the process of formalizing a district plan to use My Reading Coach with our struggling readers in grades 1 through 12.** Based on the success we have seen and the data we have collected, students, teachers, administrators, parents, and our superintendent are excited to continue using My Reading Coach as a reading intervention within our schools.

Adult Inmates at Two Minimum Security State Prisons Improve Their Reading Skills

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My Reading Coach was installed in my 14 Station Literacy Lab in January, 2009, for a six month trial period. I enrolled 24 of my students in this pilot program and gave them the choice to rotate back and forth between My Reading Coach and Open Book for English. Students were engaged and liked working on My Reading Coach.

The pilot program consisted of adult males, ages 20 to 65. All were struggling readers: Some were non-readers; many had learning disabilities; and some were ESL. Many of my students could not read well enough to take the Tests of Adult Basic Education (TABE) when they entered the program. After working on My Reading Coach, non-readers were able to take the TABE Level E test and score above the first and second grade reading levels.

Students worked on My Reading Coach at least six hours per week, and their results were surprisingly good. I pre- and post tested all of the students on the TABE assessment. I tracked their gains and losses during this trial period. At the end of the six months, I saw an average gain of 2.8 grade levels from the pre- to post test scores. I attributed most of that gain to my Hispanic students, but all of my students improved after using My Reading Coach.

We had one student who really liked the program and was able to devote 12+ hours each week at school. He improved five grade levels and began to write letters home. He gave My Reading Coach credit for that.

I can never tell until my students use a program what to expect from it. They loved My Reading Coach, and believe me, they are HARSH critics! They are embarrassed that they can't read, and they don't want anyone to know about it. So, when I force them to come to my class (state law and Department of Corrections policy), they are NOT happy. A program is a success when they are positive about it.

My Reading Coach has been effective with our students because they must master one skill before the program allows them to move on to the next lesson. It also forces the student to ask me for help (which they normally won't do). I can then work with them one-on-one until they master the skills that are giving them trouble. My Reading Coach made a difference to our students. It is much easier for them to learn when they also enjoy the program they are using.

Two adult non-readers who entered our program and used My Reading Coach (MRC) during a six month trial period made progress in their reading skills. They used the program in conjunction with the Laubach Way to Reading program.

Due to our high student turnover rate, I only had two students who entered as non-readers and were able to use the program for more than three months on a daily basis. Both made gains in reading on their quarterly Tests of Adult Basic Education (TABE).

- A 19 year old student who is extremely dyslexic worked on MRC and progressed two grade levels based on his TABE reading score. He had not made any significant gain using Laubach alone. He missed using the program when our trial period ended because his reading skills had been improving. Now that we have purchased MRC, he is thrilled to be back on the program.
- A 41 year old was basically a non-reader. He dropped out of school as soon as possible. His dyslexia was milder than the younger student, and he progressed 5 levels on his TABE reading test score after using MRC.

These two adult males were brave enough to read aloud with a peer tutor for an hour, but they needed the kind of tutor that is available in My Reading Coach. The Coach gives students constant feedback when they make errors within the privacy of their own computer. It is an active program, not a passive one. In a passive program a student follows along and listens to someone else read words, and low-level adult readers are not engaged. It simply frustrates them. Given a choice, the two students in our six-month trial chose to work on My Reading Coach because it was active and more helpful to them.

Adult non-readers need to use a combination of both sight words and phonetic skills because most of them also have auditory discrimination problems. They cannot be taught phonics alone because their processing deficits interfere with the actual sounds their brain "hears." They do not distinguish the individual phoneme sounds most people hear in a word. My Reading Coach provides both phonics and sight words. As an experienced special education teacher, I have been pleased with My Reading Coach. I believe it is the best program we have seen at NOCC to teach non-readers and low level readers to read.

Help Us Help You!

Tip to share in the newsletter? Want to brag about your students? Have a question about the program?
Send your comments and questions to mail@mindplay.com