

Reading Advantage

Research Base and Program Effectiveness



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READING ADVANTAGE PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Colorful, high-interest theme magazines and complete teaching support open a new world of reading to at-risk readers.

The advantages that lead to reading success!

- **Engaging theme magazines** to engage, inform, and inspire
- **Essential comprehension skills** to create understanding
- **Key reading strategies** to engage successfully with text
- Word study skills to **build vocabulary**
- **Phonics skills** to improve decoding capabilities
- A variety of **nonfiction to build experience and fluency**

Kit Resources:

Each *Reading Advantage* kit (Levels A-D) provides all the reading materials and teaching support required to help teachers address the needs of their most struggling readers:

- 24 beautifully-illustrated **theme magazine** (6 copies of four theme magazines)
- **Teacher's Edition**
- **Student Journal**
- **Word Study Manual**
- *Meeting the Needs of All Students: A Guide to Flexible Grouping* by Laura Robb
- **Assessment Book**
- **Placement Book**
- 12 **paperback books**
- **Sample of the Reading Advantage eZines CD-ROMs** (Actual CD-ROMs are available separately.)

READING ADVANTAGE RESEARCH BASE

Introduction

The No Child Left Behind Act has placed a national spotlight on the critical issue of reading proficiency. Educators across the nation face the challenge of helping their students read at or above grade level by the end of the third grade; however, many students continue to struggle with reading through high school. In fact, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (2003) only 33% of eighth graders and 36% of twelfth graders are reading at or above the proficient level. Teachers want to help these students improve their reading and writing ability; however, the task is daunting because of a lack of appropriate instructional materials to address the specific issues with which these students struggle.

Reading Advantage, designed by Laura Robb with a team of nationally known university educators and master classroom teachers, can help this adolescent population improve their reading and writing skills. The four kits address the needs of at-risk adolescents who are reading between a second and sixth grade reading level. The program focuses on critical areas where students need the most support: comprehension, word study and phonics, vocabulary and fluency building, and assessment, and includes enough reading materials to support each student's progress.

Motivating older struggling readers is a key component of effective reading instruction.

Students who struggle with reading often feel that it is something they just can't do; therefore, they avoid doing it, further perpetuating their difficulties with reading (O'Brien & Dillon, 2002; Rubin & Patterson, 2002). Students who believe that reading success is something over which they have control are more motivated. Students who read two or more years below grade level are routinely given text to read that are far too difficult for them, resulting in feelings of low self-esteem. When students are given engaging reading material, at their appropriate instructional level, and taught to apply reading strategies that help them gain control of text, they are more likely to feel successful and become motivated to read. Opportunity to read and choice in what students read is also critical for motivated, independent reading (Fuhler, 2003; Ivey & Broaddus, 2001; Turner & Paris, 1995; Worthy, 1998, 2000). Students' growth in reading ability is enhanced when they have access to books they actually can read (Allington, 2001); that is, materials at their independent or instructional reading levels (Betts, 1946). Therefore, providing reading materials accessible to struggling adolescent readers is critical, as is accommodating their varying reading tastes and interests (Hill, 1998; Manning & Manning, 1979; Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw, & Rycik, 1999; Moore, Alvermann, & Hinchman, 2000; Worthy, Moorman, & Turner, 1999). To address students' need for engaging text, *Reading Advantage* provides students with text at their instructional level and instruction in strategies that will help them become successful readers. Because extra reading is one of the keys to progress, *Reading Advantage* includes paperback books for independent reading at each level. In addition, book lists accompany each magazine. The *eZine* articles on CD-ROM build on and extend the themes and concepts of the magazines. Students have opportunities to read materials that are at their instructional level, that are engaging, and that look appropriate for middle and high school students.

When struggling readers are taught to read strategically, their comprehension improves.

Successful readers use a variety of strategies to understand text (Pearson, Roehler, Dole, & Duffy, 1992; National Reading Panel, 2000; U.S. Department of Education, 2001). Struggling readers either lack a knowledge of or ability to use these strategies, not knowing when or how to apply them (Vacca & Vacca, 2002). These students are not thinking about their own reading strategies, nor are they metacognitively aware of the strategies they can use to help them comprehend text (Bennett, 2003; Keene & Zimmerman, 1997). When struggling readers are taught to read strategically, their comprehension improves (e.g., National Reading Panel, 2000; Pressley, 2000). *Reading Advantage* includes extensive instruction in

comprehension strategies to give students the tools and strategies they need to improve their comprehension.

Reading Advantage teaches these strategies using an important three-part teaching sequence. First the teacher begins by explaining what each strategy is to the students and how to utilize each one. Then the teacher models the strategies for the students by doing a “Think Aloud” that further demonstrates the strategy. Modeling strategies is an important and successful method for teaching comprehension (Davey, 1983; Fuhler, 2003; Hill, 1998; Wallis, 1998). Finally, *Reading Advantage* provides many opportunities for students to practice the strategies and moves students towards independently utilizing each strategy. Strategy instruction is included in every lesson, with extra support provided for use with students as necessary. Model strategy lessons that can be used any time allow teachers to teach in response to students’ needs.

The key comprehension strategies in *Reading Advantage* include: monitoring understanding, understanding text structure, engaging with a text, summarizing, and reading critically. The more strategies students have for comprehending a text the better they will be able to understand and remember a text (Pressley, Johnson, Symons, McGoldrick, & Kurita, 1989; Wallis, 1998).

Monitoring understanding allows students to apply “fix-up” strategies as they read.

Good readers monitor their understanding to determine if comprehension is occurring. Students can be taught to monitor their own understanding through explicit instruction (Collins & Collins, 2001; Pressley et al., 1989; Zimmerman & Hutchins, 2003). They should also be able to take corrective action or engage in a “fix-up” strategy if they see a breakdown in comprehension (Baker & Brown, 1984; Keene & Zimmerman, 1997; Paris, Wasik, & Turner, 1991). *Reading Advantage* provides ways for students to become more aware of their own comprehension. The lessons include discussions for monitoring understanding and different “fix-up” strategies students can use such as rereading, visualizing, and looking for context clues.

Summarizing helps students identify and remember a writer’s main points.

Summarizing involves preparing an oral or written statement that includes the main points of a longer piece of text. It is an important strategy to help students retain the information they read. As students progress through middle and high school they are expected to learn much of their information from texts. Summarization is a challenging skill for students, and they need instruction in how to summarize (Brown & Day, 1983; Duke & Pearson, 2002; Feathers, 1998; Hahn & Garner, 1984; Hare & Bochart, 1984; National Reading Panel, 2000; Pressley et al., 1989). Students are given continual practice with summarizing both stories and informational texts in *Reading Advantage*. The initial lessons begin as guided practice with teacher support and as students progress through the program they are given opportunities to become more independent with this skill.

Understanding text structure enhances comprehension.

Text structure is the organization an author uses to write a selection. Research has shown that students can be taught text structures and that instruction in text structure improves comprehension (Armbruster, Anderson, & Ostertag, 1987; Fitzgerald & Spiegel, 1983; Gordon, 1989; McGee & Richgels, 1988). The ability to understand various text structures is especially important for middle and high school students because they are expected to read and learn from informational texts in their content area classes (Feathers, 1998) and take standardized tests where they are expected to comprehend informational texts (Carter & Abrahamson, 1998). *Reading Advantage* gives students experiences in working with various text structures and teaches students to use graphic organizers to represent text structures, which improve students’ understandings (Duke & Pearson, 2002; Griffin & Tulbert, 1995).

When students engage with a text they use their prior knowledge, self-question, make connections, and comprehend and appreciate what they read.

Reading Advantage includes instruction in how to be actively engaged with text. This means students activate their prior knowledge (Anderson & Pearson, 1984), predict (Hansen & Pearson, 1983), ask questions (Rosenshine, Meister, & Chapman, 1996), and make connections (Langer, 1995) while reading. Students should activate their prior knowledge of a topic before reading so they are better prepared to add new knowledge to their understanding (Feathers, 1998; Fuhler, 2003). Predicting, or making informed guesses, is another method for staying engaged with a text because it requires a reader to look for clues in a text to form a good prediction.

Asking questions while reading is another way for students to improve their understanding by clarifying ideas (Keene & Zimmerman, 1997; Zimmerman & Hutchins, 2003). It is important to encourage students to ask questions that lead to higher level thinking such as synthesizing and evaluating (Van Gorder, 2003).

Making connections with a text is another important component of active engagement with a text (Fuhler, 2003; Keene & Zimmerman, 1997; Zimmerman & Hutchins, 2003). These connections can be to a personal experience or another text. *Reading Advantage* encourages students to make connections with the text through discussions and written activities. These discussions contribute to students' understanding of the text by giving them a forum to respond to the text (Probst, 1998).

Critical reading involves a reader's ability to analyze an author's purpose, point of view, and use of language.

Critical reading occurs when students evaluate and analyze the information in a text determining why and how authors write and use ideas (Alvermann & Hagood, 2000; Carr, 1989; Ennis, 1987; Tierney, Sofer, O'Flavahan, & McGinley, 1989; Zintz & Maggart, 1984). Critical reading is the ability of a reader to analyze an author's purpose, point of view, and use of language. The ability to analyze these components can be taught (Barron & Sternberg, 1987; Commeyras, 1993; Nickerson, 1988) and enhance students' understanding of text. In *Reading Advantage* students are asked to think critically about the texts they read in the program and analyze the choices authors make.

Word study and phonics help students to decode what they read and become more fluent as readers.

Word study, based on phonics and word structure, allows students to examine the sounds, patterns and meanings that are represented in print and make generalizations from them rather than relying on memorization alone. Through the use of compare-contrast activities (sorting words), students are able to understand the similarities and differences between features in words. (Features include spelling patterns, prefixes, and suffixes.) The main vehicle for students to examine words is through word sorting, a process that involves physically moving word cards into categories while explaining their choices. Word study allows for repeated examination of words so that patterns and other phonetic features become automatic. This type of classification encourages students to think critically about words. This will eventually help students as they attempt to decode unfamiliar words encountered in print and increase their speed as they read.

Research shows that students follow a developmental continuum when learning to spell (Henderson, 1990; Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, & Johnston, 2003). Even learning-disabled children negotiate words in approximately the same sequence (Worthy & Invernizzi, 1989). The continuum ranges all the way from building a foundation of literacy (pretend reading, making the speech to print match, and experimenting with writing) to the highest level of literacy (using roots and affixes to unlock the meaning of unfamiliar words). Each stage is defined by particular characteristics and can be linked to an approximate reading level. Most of the students in *Reading Advantage* will fall in the Within Word Pattern and Syllable Junctures stages (see chart).

Characteristics of Developing Spellers	
Stage/Characteristics of Students	Reading Level
Letter Name Working toward a firm concept of word (Morris, 1981). Begins by spelling with the letter names (KK=cake).	1
Within Word Patterns Begin to look at patterns inside the word. Learn common representations of vowel sounds (e.g., train, play, made). Learn r-controlled vowels, ambiguous vowels (e.g., boil, crawl, tough), complex consonants (e.g., tch, scr, str), and homophones.	2-4
Syllable Juncture Apply knowledge of one-syllable words to multi-syllabic words, including compound words. Learn syllable stress and accent, syllable patterns, suffixes, affixes, and consonant doubling.	4-6
Derivational Constancy Begin to understand how word meaning affects spelling in silent and sounded consonants (sign/signal), consonant alternations (adop/adoption), and vowel alternations (volcano/volcanic). Learn the spelling issues around Latin-derived suffixes (ible, able) and assimilated prefixes (illegal, irreversible).	6+

A word study activity is provided for each of the lessons in the *Reading Advantage Teacher's Edition*. The activities proceed in a systematic fashion and assume that most students are in the Within Word Pattern or Syllable Juncture stages. Links are made from the activity to words in the magazine selection. The Word Study book is a teacher resource that will help teachers improve students' understanding of phonics, word patterns, and spelling.

Vocabulary development improves reading comprehension.

Students need to be taught strategies to help them become more skilled word learners, including using word parts to structurally analyze words, using phonics, and using context clues (Allen, 2003; Hill 1998; Johnson, 2001). *Reading Advantage* teaches students all of these strategies to handle unknown words. During their work with vocabulary, students are asked to use context clues, break words into their meaningful parts to derive meaning, link words by meaning and concepts, and classify words to examine their attributes. These activities support the student in learning the meanings and spellings of new words by requiring them to be actively involved with the words (Stahl, 1986).

Students also benefit from direct instruction in new vocabulary (Graves & Watts-Taffe, 2002; Johnson, 2001; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). This occurs when a child is taught specific words to read a story or during a unit of study. *Reading Advantage* provides the teacher with a list of important vocabulary words for each story. The lessons on the *eZine* CD-ROMs also allow students to click on words that they do not know to immediately get the definition and build their vocabulary.

Fluency is an essential aspect of reading.

Fluent reading is dependent on learning and being able to use a wide range of skills, including the ability to decode and recognize words automatically and accurately; to read quickly, smoothly, and with the right intonation and expression; and, most important, to comprehend what is read. Fluent reading goes beyond simply decoding words correctly. Fluency involves the reader's ability to read quickly, smoothly, and with the right intonation and expression. Reading researchers have found that repeated readings is an effective way of improving word recognition, speed, and phrasal reading, and that the benefits can transfer to new texts (Chomsky, 1978; National Reading Panel, 2000; Rasinski, 2003; Samuels, 1994).

Repeated reading can be accomplished in a number of ways, but all variations should include explanation of why fluent reading is important, expert models of reading so that students hear what fluent reading sounds like (this can be the teacher, a more skilled peer, or a tape recording), guidance and feedback during instruction and practice, independent practice, a focus on meaning or comprehension, and attention to students' interests. Fluency activities in *Reading Advantage* include partner reading, practice in reading orally with expression, and silent reading. In addition, each magazine includes one or more readers theater or radio reading scripts, which give students a meaningful and motivating context in which to practice fluent reading for an audience. Students are also able to hear the texts they read on the *eZine* CD-ROM, which provides them with an additional model of fluent reading and helps scaffold their understanding of the text as they simultaneously activate their listening and their reading comprehension.

Writing helps students connect with literature, provides insights into students' understanding of text, and improves overall literacy.

Reading and writing are closely connected components of language. It is important for students to see the connections between reading and writing (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). Writing is also an important tool used to improve reading that should not be underestimated because it provides insight into students' understanding of a text (Rief, 2003). Writing about text gives the students the opportunity to create more personal and complex responses to literature than a class discussion does (Probst, 1998). *Reading Advantage* provides many opportunities for students to respond to both fictional and informational text. The Student Journal gives the students support in creating the thoughtful and meaningful written responses that improve student understanding. Each lesson contains additional writing activities that promote literacy skills such as point of view, sequencing, making inferences, and responding to literature.

Technology offers flexible learning opportunities to meet the needs of struggling learners.

The support offered by the *Reading Advantage eZines* is grounded in a powerful approach to teaching and learning that meets students' individual learning needs. This approach is called the Universal Design for Learning Framework (Gordon, 2002). Unlike fixed print medium, digital media are flexible and customizable for different learning styles. Controls over text size and the available audio allow students to access information that might otherwise be out of reach. This key element of flexibility is an integral part of the *eZines*. It consists of multiple interactive articles based on concepts that extend from the print magazines to help create additional background knowledge of the subjects covered. Each CD-ROM enhances and develops students' understanding of the subject matter, provides additional vocabulary practice, and includes prompts to practice key reading strategies. Additional support built into the software provides instruction and assesses knowledge through the use of graphic organizers, comprehension strategy related embedded assessments, and decoding practice. Enhanced electronic text support benefits a wide variety of at-risk readers (Boone & Higgins, 2003; Mac Arthur & Haynes, 1995; Matthews, 2000). Students need to be self motivated and engaged in a text to increase the benefits of enhanced electronic text support (Mac Arthur, Ferretti, Okolo, & Cavalier, 2001; Reinking, 1988; Reinking & Schreiner, 1985). *Reading Advantage* encourages students to engage actively with the text through guided lessons and independent practice. This means students have the skills necessary to work with the *eZines* independently with maximum benefits to their reading abilities.

Assessment allows teachers to track student progress and ensures that students are taught at their appropriate instructional level.

Reading Advantage includes two types of assessment, placement assessment to help determine students' appropriate level of instruction, and progress assessment to track students' growth in each level. The assessment supports responsive teaching by giving teachers multiple assessments and observation checklists to use at different points to evaluate students' progress and adjust lessons. This responsive approach to assessment and instruction best supports student learning (Brenner & Pearson, 1998). The teacher is able to use the knowledge learned from the assessment to determine future reading lessons and materials. It is important that struggling readers are taught at their instructional level (Manning & Manning, 1979). Classroom observations and checklists can also help teachers monitor individual student needs and growth (McKenna & Stahl, 2003).

Teachers can use a Group Reading Inventory (GRI) and/or an Individual Reading Inventory (IRI) to help place students in the most appropriate level for instruction. Both inventories offer reading passages and comprehension questions geared to each of the four *Reading Advantage* levels (A, B, C, D). Passages are based on the theme and reading difficulty of the magazine article for each level. To assess students' progress in each level, teachers can use a Mid-Magazine Assessment and a Magazine Test for each magazine (four of each level). Both assessments include reading passages that match the corresponding magazine theme and multiple-choice questions that measure knowledge of comprehension strategies and vocabulary.

Some students, especially those who are socioeconomically disadvantaged, lack the cultural capital and experiences that are helpful on standardized reading tests. This puts them at a disadvantage on many reading assessments (Johnston, 1987; Rubin & Patterson, 2002). The passages and questions on the *Reading Advantage* Mid-Magazine Assessments and Magazine Tests share the same theme as the reading passages used during instruction. Using the same theme for instruction and assessment gives the students much of the background knowledge and vocabulary that will support them during the assessments and minimize the effects of a limited cultural capital and ensures that teachers receive accurate information about students' reading ability.

See page 16 for references.

READING ADVANTAGE PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS

Reading Advantage Effectiveness Evaluation Study—In progress Large Northeastern City

Great Source contracted with RMC Research Corporation of Portsmouth, NH to design and implement a study of the effectiveness of the *Reading Advantage* program with struggling adolescent readers during the 2004-2005 school year.

Purpose

The purpose of the study is to evaluate the effectiveness of *Reading Advantage* with struggling adolescent readers.

Demographics

Approximately 645 sixth graders in a large northeastern city participated in the study. 7 treatment schools (schools using *Reading Advantage*) and 7 control schools were selected.

Method

Students were assigned to treatment and control groups by matched pair analysis. Treatment classrooms received *Reading Advantage* materials and inservice on how to implement materials to ensure consistency across treatment sites.

Assessments

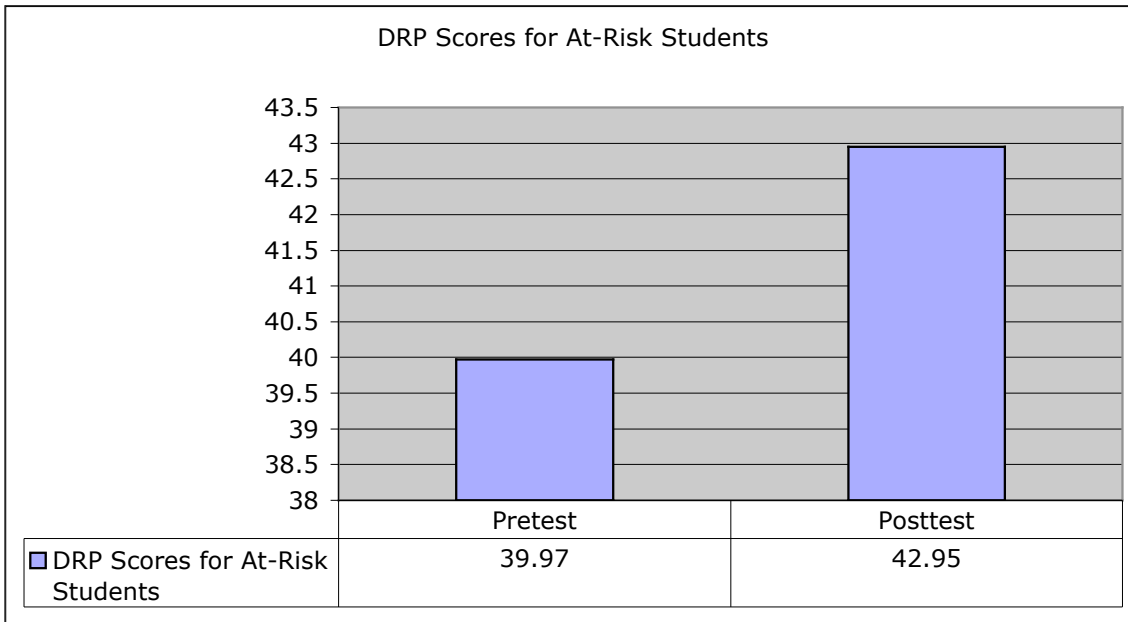
April: Degrees of Reading Power

Fall and spring: Developmental Reading Assessment to a sample of students

Results

Results on page 11 are from the Degrees of Reading Power test. Results from the Developmental Reading Assessment are expected in early August.

DRP scores for students identified as at-risk based on their pretest results show significant growth from pre to posttest.



Feedback from the test sites also supports the effectiveness of *Reading Advantage*:

“Students are interested in the magazine stories and often request the novels for independent reading. Vocabulary is integrated from the literature and used during the discussions and student writing.

Students are focused and attentive during small-group instruction. The reading materials are at their instructional level. The discussions are animated and are a good forum for relating text to real life. We observed high interest in the novels.”

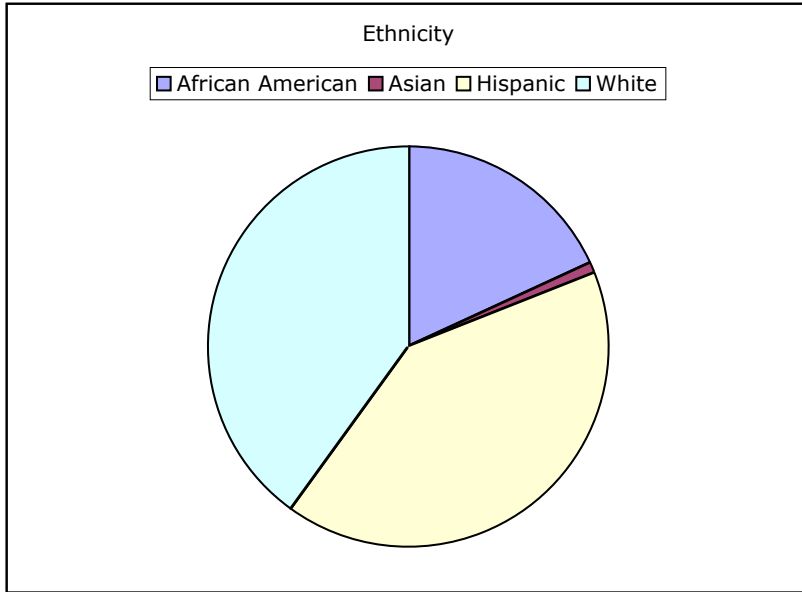
Jefferson Middle School Pilot Study
Aurora, IL

School Demographics

Enrollment: 782

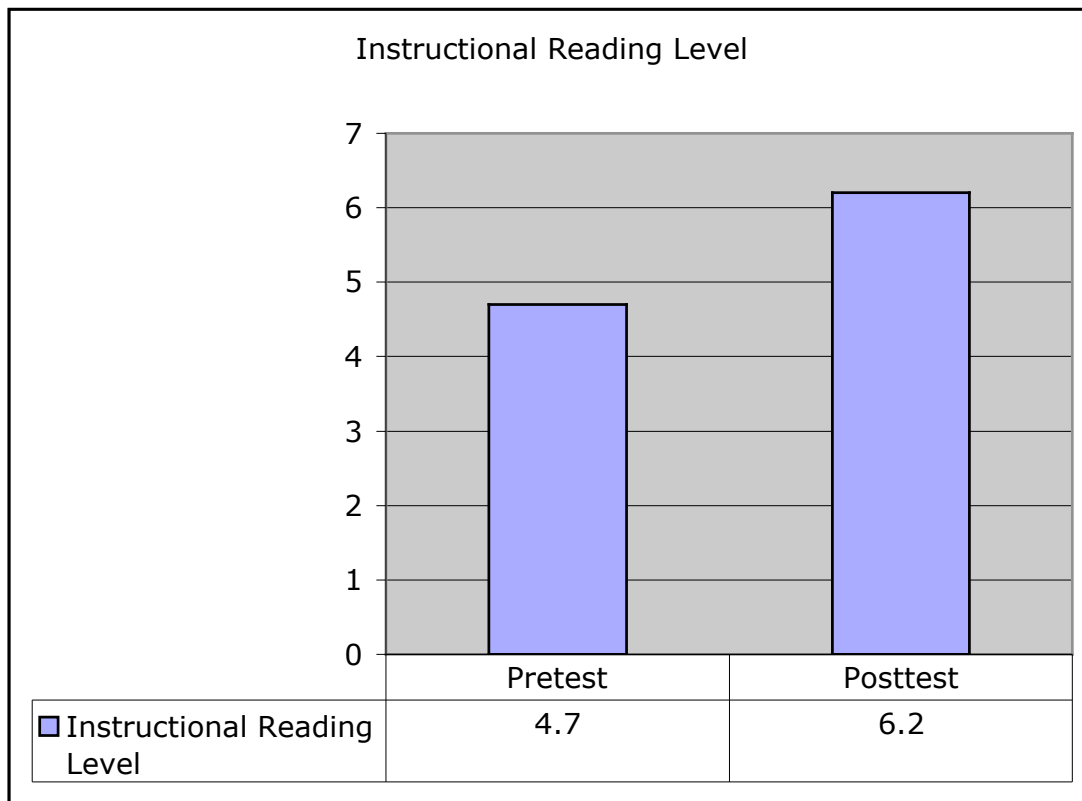
Students Receiving Free/Reduced-Price Lunch: 35%

Ethnicity: 18% African American; <1% American Indian; 1% Asian; 41% Hispanic; 40% Caucasian (Greatschools.net, 2005)



Results

Jefferson Middle School piloted *Reading Advantage* during the 2004-2005 school year with a class of 8th grade struggling readers. Students' reading level increased 1.5 years during an 8-month time period based on the STAR Reading Assessment (see chart page 13).



Qualitative information from the reading facilitator also supports the effectiveness of *Reading Advantage*:

“*Reading Advantage* allowed my struggling readers to learn from material that was at their level, but that was also interesting. It was a comprehensive reading program that offered lessons on reading comprehension and vocabulary development that were beneficial in enhancing students’ reading levels.

Reading Advantage increased my students’ interest in reading by building their confidence and their ability to read. Therefore, they became confident in going to the library to checkout novels to read!

Reading Advantage offered many opportunities for my students to build their vocabulary with the vocabulary activities and booklets.

I would recommend *Reading Advantage* to any school district that wants to focus on content-reading strategies! They will see results.”

Cheryl Rosentreter
 Reading Facilitator
 Jefferson Middle School
 Aurora, IL

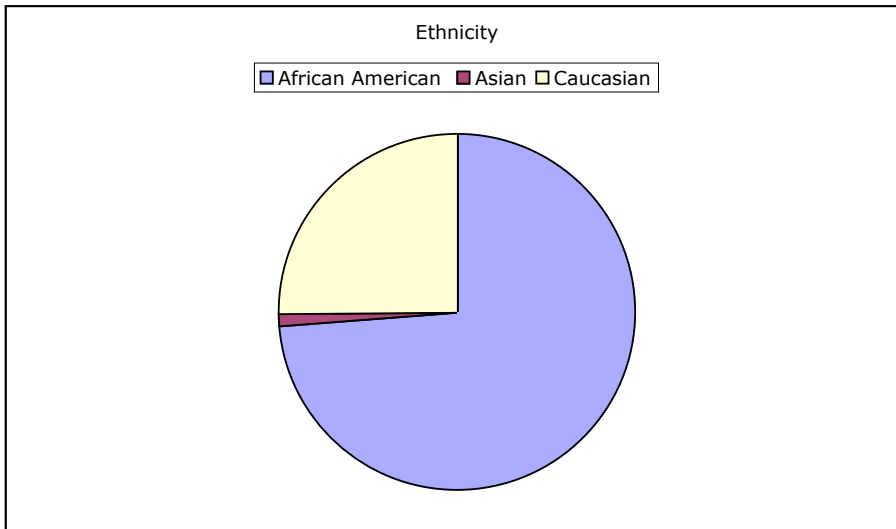
Cincinnati City School District Effectiveness Evaluation Study—In progress
Cincinnati, OH

District Demographics

Enrollment: 38,557

Poverty: 30%

Ethnicity: 73% African American; 1% Asian; 1% Hispanic; 25% Caucasian (Market Data Retrieval, 2004)



Method

7 treatment schools and 4 control school were selected for the *Reading Advantage* study in Cincinnati, OH. Treatment classrooms received *Reading Advantage* materials and inservice on how to implement materials to ensure consistency across treatment sites.

Assessments

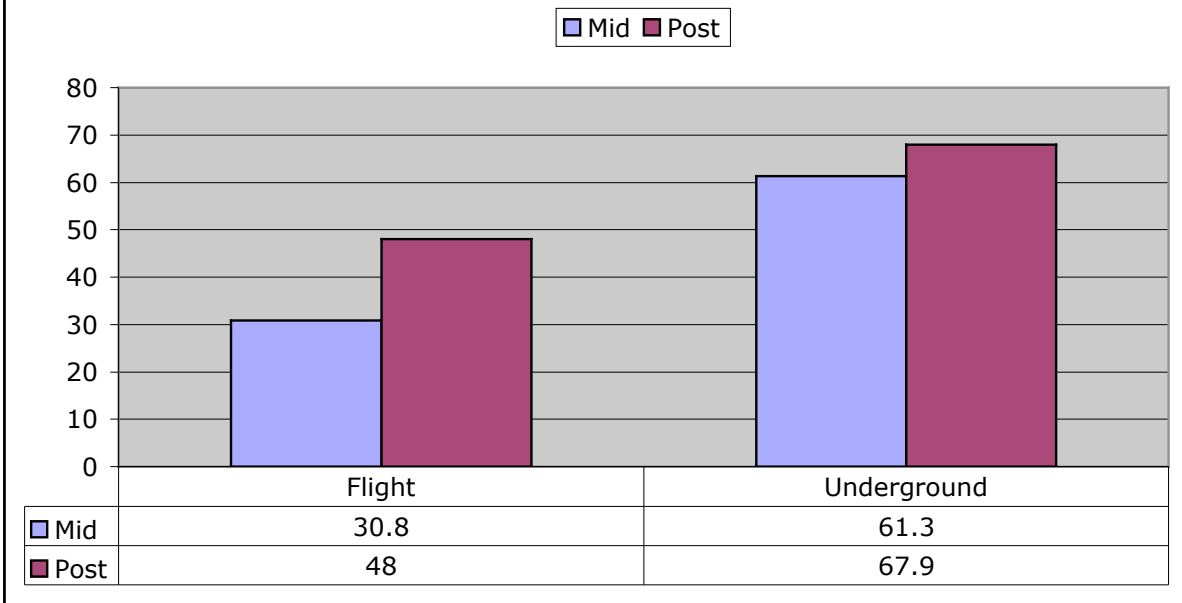
Fall & spring: Gates MacGinitie and *Reading Advantage* magazine tests
Spring: Ohio state assessment grade 8

Results

Each *Reading Advantage* magazine includes a mid-magazine and post-magazine assessment. Results from the *Reading Advantage* magazine tests show significant progress from mid to posttest and from the Flight to the Underground lesson tests (see page 15).

Results from the Gates MacGinitie assessment are expected summer 2005.

Reading Advantage Magazine Test Results



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