

Students with Disabilities Raise Test Scores and Narrow Achievement Gaps

Haines Elementary School –
Haines Borough School District
Haines, AK

School Statistics

Number of students: 180

Grades: K-8

Student Population:

11% Alaska Native/American Indian

3% Asian/Pacific Islander

66% Caucasian

2% Hispanic

18% Other

54% economically disadvantaged

14% special education

District Statistics

Number of schools: 4

Number of students: 280

Grades: K-12

District structure: Rural

Website: <http://www.hbsd.net>



Scientific
Learning®

Haines Elementary School began using the Fast ForWord® program to close the achievement gap between students with disabilities and general education students. From 2010 to 2012, the percentage of students with disabilities scoring at or above the proficient level on the Alaska Standards Based Assessments (SBA) increased by nearly 28 percent in language arts and 32 percent in mathematics. In 2012, Haines Elementary was named a National Title I Distinguished School.

Challenges

Haines Elementary is one of four schools in the rural Haines Borough School District (HBSD), located in the southeastern Alaskan panhandle. Over the years, educators at the Title I school noticed a growing achievement gap between students with disabilities and general education students.

“When we examined all the reasons that students had IEPs, the issue that stuck out most was working memory,” said Barbara Pardee, reading specialist and Title I coordinator for HBSD.

“The special education director and I were tasked with finding a program that would help students improve their working memory which, in turn, would help them become better learners.”

Solution

After conducting extensive research and visiting other districts, HBSD implemented the Fast ForWord online reading intervention in 2010. The Fast ForWord program uses the principles of neuroplasticity — the ability of the brain to rewire and improve — to treat the underlying cause of language and reading difficulties, once and for all. It was developed by neuroscientists to address reading skills while concurrently developing foundational skills including memory, attention, processing and sequencing.

At Haines Elementary, selected students work on the Fast ForWord program 30 minutes a day, five days a week. The program is targeted to students with IEPs in grades K-8, and to other learners based on teacher recommendation. In addition, all students in grade 2 work

on the Fast ForWord Language Series. Those students who don't complete Fast ForWord Language v2 and Fast ForWord Language to Reading v2 continue with the programs in grade 3.

"We want to make sure every student finishes the two Fast ForWord Language products to build the foundational reading and language skills they need to learn successfully in the classroom," said Pardee. "While we target Fast ForWord to our special populations school-wide, we also have several gifted children working in the program. It challenges our gifted students and they've excelled in the program as much as, if not more than, our special education students. They love it."

The Fast ForWord program is used at Tiers 1, 2 and 3 of the school's Response to Intervention program. It is also offered to students before and after school on a voluntary basis.

"We find that by putting all our second graders on the Fast ForWord Language program as a Tier 1 intervention, we have fewer needs for Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions. For students who struggle and test below grade level on our assessments, the Fast ForWord Reading program provides an effective intervention for Tiers 2 and 3," said Pardee.

"Over the last two years, our students with IEPs have improved their reading and writing scores by nearly 28 percent, and their math scores by 32 percent."

Results

- Improved SBA performance
- Shrinking achievement gap between special ed and general ed students
- National Title I School of Distinction

"Over the last two years, our students with IEPs have improved their reading and writing scores by nearly 28 percent, and their math scores by 32 percent — which is astounding," said Pardee. "The achievement gap is shrinking dramatically. Our results prove that Fast ForWord is effective with learners of diverse ability levels."

Students with Disabilities Grades 3-8 Percentage Scoring Proficient or Advanced on Alaska SBA

Subject	Year	Haines Elem.	Increase from 2010 to 2012
Language Arts	2010	57.9%	
	2011	70.8%	
	2012	73.9%	+27.6%
Math	2010	52.6%	
	2011	62.5%	
	2012	69.5%	+32.1%



In 2012-13, Haines Elementary was named a National Title I Distinguished School by the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development in recognition of its success in significantly closing the achievement gap between student groups.

“We became a Title I Distinguished School in 2012, based on the test scores of our students with IEPs growing so much in the last three years. We believe Fast ForWord is the cause for these great increases among our students with special needs and students on the brink of proficiency. Before Fast ForWord, we never had jumps like we’ve seen, especially with our special education students,” said Pardee.

“We’ve never had anything like Fast ForWord,” she continued. “A therapist can try to work on speech sounds with a student, but it’s physically impossible for a human to do what Fast ForWord does. When students work with the program, their processing skills and their working memory improve. What’s even more rewarding is when we hear students say things like, ‘I can follow the teacher when she talks now,’ or ‘I can understand what I’m reading.’ Those are really powerful testimonies.”

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