Struggling Learners Gain 1.6 Grade Levels in Reading Skills in 45 Days

Surrey Schools
Surrey, British Columbia, Canada

School Statistics

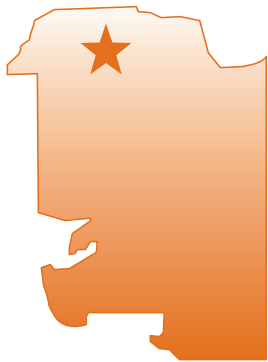**Number of Schools:**
123

Number of Students
 69,738

Grades:
K-12

District Structure:
Mixed

Website:
https://www.surreyschools.ca

Surrey Schools uses the Fast ForWord® and Reading Assistant™ online learning programs to address the needs of struggling learners. Overall, students have made dramatic, enduring gains in academic achievement and reading skills. Students who improved their reading skills had an average improvement of one year and six months in 45 days of Fast ForWord use.

Challenges
Surrey Schools is the largest district in British Columbia. It serves the cities of Surrey and White Rock, and the rural area of Barnston Island. The student population is diverse and more than 160 languages are spoken.

Like many districts, Surrey has limited access to speech and language pathology services for its students. "In Canada, we have fewer than 5,000 speech and language pathologists across the country, which is a fraction of the number serving students in the United States. So we have a very serious need for effective interventions for students who have language, literacy or auditory processing issues," said Sandra Collins, a speech and language pathologist and Fast ForWord coordinator for Surrey Schools.

Solution
Surrey first launched the Fast ForWord program in 1997. It significantly expanded its implementation in 2008 and added Reading Assistant in 2012.

Fast ForWord
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.

"Fast ForWord is a vital tool for speech and language pathologists. It addresses the issues we specialize in and the underlying causes of students' language and literacy problems, including the birth to age

five issues that often persist with these children," said Collins. "A key benefit of the program is that it allows us to optimize and extend the services of speech and language pathologists, and exponentially increase the number of children we can effectively serve."

Surrey implements the Fast ForWord program in approximately 40 schools. It is targeted primarily to struggling learners in kindergarten through seventh grade, and to other learners based on the recommendation of their learning support teacher or learning support team. It is also implemented in four regional centers, which are open until 5 p.m.

Students work on the Fast ForWord program 50 minutes a day, five days a week. "Using the 50-minute protocol allows us to get students through the program as quickly as possible," said Collins.

To enhance the program's use and effectiveness district-wide, Surrey has created its own implementation model. As part of this model, all staff members who work with students who participate in the Fast ForWord program are required to attend an orientation and an ongoing series of clinical discussion sessions. Other district specialists are also welcome to attend any session.

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"Our goal is to make sure everybody develops a good understanding of the neuroscience behind the Fast ForWord program," said Collins. "Then, during the clinical discussion sessions, we talk about interventions for students who have complex disorders, or who experience plateaus or struggle with certain exercises. We brainstorm ways we can support them and help them get through the material."

The district's two Fast ForWord coordinators maintain regular contact with each school and attend at least one team meeting at every site. "This allows us to have an ongoing dialog about the neuroscience and what's going on with struggling learners," said Collins.

Reading Assistant
Reading Assistant is the only online reading tool that uses speech recognition to correct and support students as they read aloud, building fluency and comprehension with the help of a supportive listener. No other program or e-book provides comparable real-time guidance and feedback.

Surrey primarily uses Reading Assistant in grades five through seven with students who have significant gaps in their reading fluency and comprehension.

"Our students who use Reading Assistant have long histories of reading challenges. They desperately want to be readers, but they're very anxious and uncertain. Over the years, they've developed idiosyncratic strategies, which they're reluctant to give up even though they're not effective reading strategies," said Collins. "We use Reading Assistant to get these students on the road to effective fluency and comprehension. Once they're on that road, they start to change quite rapidly. The great thing about Reading Assistant is that it gives student a boost in self-esteem, which helps them realize that they can be successful readers."

Results

According to Collins, students across the district who have made gains in their reading skills have achieved an average gain of one year and six months in 45 days of Fast ForWord use.

"Students quickly gain more confidence in themselves as learners. We see improvements in their reading skills, written language skills, receptive and expressive language skills, and in their overall ability to function at school," said Collins. "What's remarkable about the Fast ForWord program is that we're not simply placing a bandage over a problem; we're changing the trajectory of these students' lives. We're actually changing their brains. We're filling in learning gaps and, in many cases, making learning challenges disappear."

Collins reports that the Fast ForWord program has produced a significant return on investment for the district.

"The cost of Fast ForWord to our district would be a bargain at even twice the price. In five years, students have completed 2,500 products across the Fast ForWord Language Series and Fast ForWord Reading Series. When other districts say, 'We can't afford to purchase this,' my response is, 'You can't afford not to.' It's not competing with human-provided services; it's maximizing all the services we have," she said.

"Thanks to our implementation model, we've become very effective at building capacity and delivering the Fast ForWord program in a very efficient way," she continued. "This means we can get students through the program more quickly and, as a result, place more students on the program during the school year. So, each year, it costs less and less per student. Because we make the most effective use of every license, we can do more with less."

Fast ForWord®
reading assistant™

Scientific Learning®

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