

Struggling Middle School Students Achieve 1.4+ Years Reading Gain in One Semester

Salk Middle School – Spokane
Public Schools
Spokane, WA

School Statistics

Number of students: 750

Grades: 6 - 8

District Structure: Urban

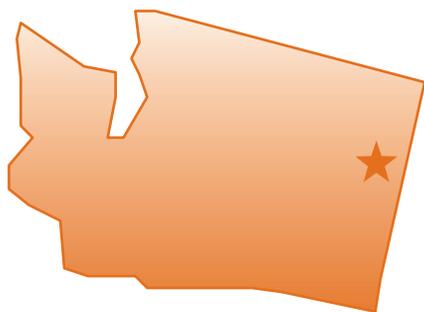
Website:

[http://www.spokaneschools.org/
Page/4636](http://www.spokaneschools.org/Page/4636)

Student Population:

2% African-American
2% American Indian/Alaskan Native
3% Asian/Pacific Islander
75% Caucasian
7% Hispanic
12% Multiracial

48% Free/reduced lunch
14% special education
1% ELL



Challenges

- 44% of students performing below grade level in reading

Solutions

- Fast ForWord
- Reading Assistant

Populations served:

- Grades 6-8 including:
 - Struggling readers
 - English language learners (ELLs)
 - Special education

Results:

- Average reading gains of 1.4 to 1.7 grade levels in one semester in the Fast ForWord program
- Average reading gains of 1.1 to 2.1 grade levels in one semester on the STAR Reading assessment
- Average gains of 2 to 4 points on the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) — more than twice as much growth as students' peers
- Increased pass rates in students' classes

In almost every middle school, there are students who struggle despite repeated intervention. Principal Carole Meyer set out to find a solution to target the root cause of students' reading difficulties once and for all.

"In 2012-13, 328 of our students scored at Level 1 (Below Basic) or Level 2 (Basic) on our state test in reading," she said. "That meant that 44 percent of our student body wasn't proficient in reading." Meyer is the principal of Salk Middle School, an urban Title I school in Spokane Public Schools, the second largest district in Washington.

After conducting extensive research, including reviewing studies on the What Works Clearinghouse website, Meyer decided to implement the Fast ForWord and Reading Assistant programs in fall 2013. "Our goal is to get every student reading at or above grade level before they leave our school," she said.



Empowering students with a blended learning approach

Salk Middle School targets the Fast ForWord and Reading Assistant programs to students who score at Level 1 or 2 on the state test in reading. Students work on the programs with teacher Shannon Gilfeather in a blended learning classroom.

“Combining face-to-face and online instruction gives students more power and control over their learning,” said Gilfeather. “We use Fast ForWord and Reading Assistant as interventions to help students fill in the skills they’re missing and to make sure those skills endure.”

Accelerating student progress with real-time data

Students work on the Fast ForWord program 30 minutes a day, five days a week. The program uses the principles of neuroplasticity — the ability of the brain to rewire and improve — to target the root cause of slow academic progress in struggling students and ELLs. Students can realize achievement gains of up to two years in as little as three months and maintain an accelerated rate of learning even after the program ends.

“Fast ForWord engages students and it gives us real-time data so we can see what’s happening with each child. It also helps parents understand exactly which skills their child is missing and how we can target those skills,” said Meyer.

“We set weekly goals and then do daily individual check-ins to see how students are doing and where they need to improve,” said Gilfeather. “We also have data walls where students document and track their progress. It makes their learning more tangible. When they can watch their growth daily, they can see that the effort they’re putting in is actually doing something. That improvement is a powerful motivator.”

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Increasing fluency and comprehension

Students also work on Reading Assistant 20 minutes a day, three days a week. Reading Assistant is the only online reading tool that uses speech recognition technology to correct and support students as they read aloud, building fluency and comprehension with the help of a supportive listener.

“As soon as students begin using Reading Assistant, they can see the connection between what they’ve learned in Fast ForWord and how it’s making a difference in their reading,” said Gilfeather.

“We have several students with Auditory Processing Disorders. With Reading Assistant, they can practice reading aloud and then listen to recordings of themselves,” she continued. “This helps them understand where they’re making mistakes, and it helps them pay more attention the next time they read aloud. The ‘Think About It’ and quiz questions also help boost comprehension, which is really important.”

In addition, Gilfeather and her students appreciate the high level of interactivity and individualization in Reading Assistant. “With other reading programs, it’s difficult to provide individualized attention with only one teacher and a class full of students. If a student makes a mistake, they may make it multiple times before the teacher gets there to fix it. With Reading Assistant, that corrective feedback is instant. It’s also individualized so students can proceed at their own pace. That makes it a very powerful tool,” she said.

Achieving growth on standardized tests

"In 2013-14 our state test changed, so we couldn't compare our test scores with the previous year. However, we do look at multiple measures of student progress," said Gilfeather, "and across the board, we've seen evidence of improvement for students who've used the Fast ForWord and Reading Assistant programs."

On the MAP, Meyer and Gilfeather compared the results of students who qualified for treatment and were served by the Fast ForWord program to the results of students who qualified for treatment but didn't use Fast ForWord. "The children who used Fast ForWord made significant gains over the group who did not," said Gilfeather.

Salk Middle School Struggling readers – MAP gains 2013-14

Grade	NWEA national growth target	Average gain for Fast ForWord students	Average gain for Non-Fast ForWord students
7	2 points	2 points	<1 point
8	3 points	4 points	.5 point

Increasing 1.4 grade levels or more in reading in one semester

They also examined data from Reading Progress Indicator (RPI), a computerized assessment designed to measure the impact of the Fast ForWord products, as well as the STAR Reading assessment.

"These students were all Level 1 and Level 2 readers, and they achieved more than a year of growth in only one semester," said Meyer. "We wanted to see if these gains were transferring to the classroom. So, we looked at students' pass rates across all six of their classes and saw that they were passing more than 90 percent of their classes!" she continued. "No one expected the pass rates to be that high after such a short period of time."

Salk Middle School Level 1 and Level 2 Readers Assigned to Fast ForWord Products

Semester	# of Students Assigned to FFW Group	Days Scheduled for FFW Use	RPI Average Reading Skill Gain*	STAR Reading Average Reading Gain*	Pass Rate of Students in Their Other Classes
Fall 2013	69	39	1.4 years	1.2 years	90%
Spring 2014	87	80	1.5 years	2.1 years	91%
Fall 2014	95	85	1.7 years	1.1 years	95%

*Gain scores include only the subset of students with both pre- and post-assessments for RPI or STAR Reading.

Sharing student success stories

"At the end of each semester, we ask students to reflect upon what they've learned and what they'd like to improve upon. Without any prompting, they say they've noticed improvements in their reading and that carries over into their other classes as well. They say they can think faster, things are easier, and they have more confidence," said Gilfeather. "We have so many success stories!"



Exiting special education

“In 2013-14, we had two students who worked on Fast ForWord and Reading Assistant for the entire year — and they improved so much we exited them from special education,” she said.

Accelerating learning for ELLs

“Last year a seventh grader, who’d only been in our country one or two years, came in reading at a third grade level. In just one school year, she grew over five grade levels in her reading and writing skills. She finished the school year a year ahead — at the eighth grade level,” said Gilfeather.

Increasing reading enjoyment

“We have a ‘Read a Million Words’ campaign building-wide. Out of 100 students in our school who read a million words, 50 were in Shannon’s class for struggling readers,” said Meyer. “These were kids who not only struggled to read but who didn’t want to read — and now they’re actually enjoying reading!”

Salk Middle School also offers a free ticket to a local amusement park to students who read for 600 minutes over a designated six-week period. “Over half of the tickets were given to students from my class,” said Gilfeather. “We’re pretty excited about that.”

“The Fast ForWord and Reading Assistant programs help students shift their mindsets,” said Meyer. “They begin to take accountability for their learning because they can see the tangible progress they’re making. That confidence carries over into their other classes. Our students have really blossomed with these programs.”



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