

# The Effects of the Nessy Reading & Spelling Program Used as a Primary Phonics Curriculum

A longitudinal comparison of a digitally delivered phonics program to a paper-based phonics program.

22 children from two different kindergarten classes were followed from the middle of their kindergarten year, until the middle of their second grade year.

Their literacy development was monitored three times per year and compared to students within the same year groups in over 22,000 schools, in records held by the University of Oregon's DIBELS Data System.



# The Question

Could a digital phonics program, delivered individually, ever compare in quality to a whole class teaching approach taught with traditional paper-based books and worksheets?

Upon school entry, all kindergartners in a Texas private school were tested with DIBELS - the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy

DIBELS is a set of procedures and measures developed at the University of Oregon for assessing literacy development from children in kindergarten through sixth grade.

These measures help teachers and schools determine how students are performing on important pre-reading and reading skills.



# The Process

All students were tested with these quick measures three times per year and students were provided with a primarily digitally delivered phonics program in accordance with their literacy skill development.

## Teaching and Intervention Steps









All children were screened.

It was found that that this Texas private school, like most schools across the US both public and private, had less than half of their students in grades K - 6 reaching the minimum grade level DIBELS Next benchmarks.

It is important to note that the initial screening results at this school were consistent with national statistics. NAEP data for 2011 reports that only 35% of American 4th graders scored at or above the proficient level in reading. This means that nearly two thirds of American 4th graders' literacy attainment was below their grade level. *(U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2005-2011 Reading Assessments)*

Students found to be missing key developmental skills on the screener were given time on Nesy Reading & Spelling 2 days per week for 45 minutes, after they completed a short phonological awareness training with their teacher or a tutor.

After instituting Nesy as part of the STRIVE Reading Program that year, the number of **kindergarten children reaching grade level benchmarks increased from 51% to 74%.**

| Grade | Beginning   | End   |
|-------|---|---|
| K     |  <p data-bbox="439 336 1234 437">           n=37<br/>           8  (22%)<br/>           10  (27%)<br/>           19  (51%)         </p> |  <p data-bbox="1267 336 2063 437">           n=39<br/>           4  (10%)<br/>           6  (15%)<br/>           29  (74%)         </p> |

The highest risk group (those that were struggling the most) also decreased from 22% to 10%.

The following graph charts the progress of the highest risk students from mid-kindergarten when the program began, to the end of the kindergarten year.

Students in kindergarten were assessed in December 2014 (Pink).

The gray bar indicates the grade level students need to attain. Students were re-assessed at the end of the academic year (green).

They all showed significant progress after using the digitally delivered program Nessy Reading & Spelling.



Year: 2014-2015  
 Grade: Kindergarten  
 Class: STRIVE K  
 Need For Support: Recommended Goals

UU UBELS Data System









### Nonsense Word Fluency - Correct Letter Sounds



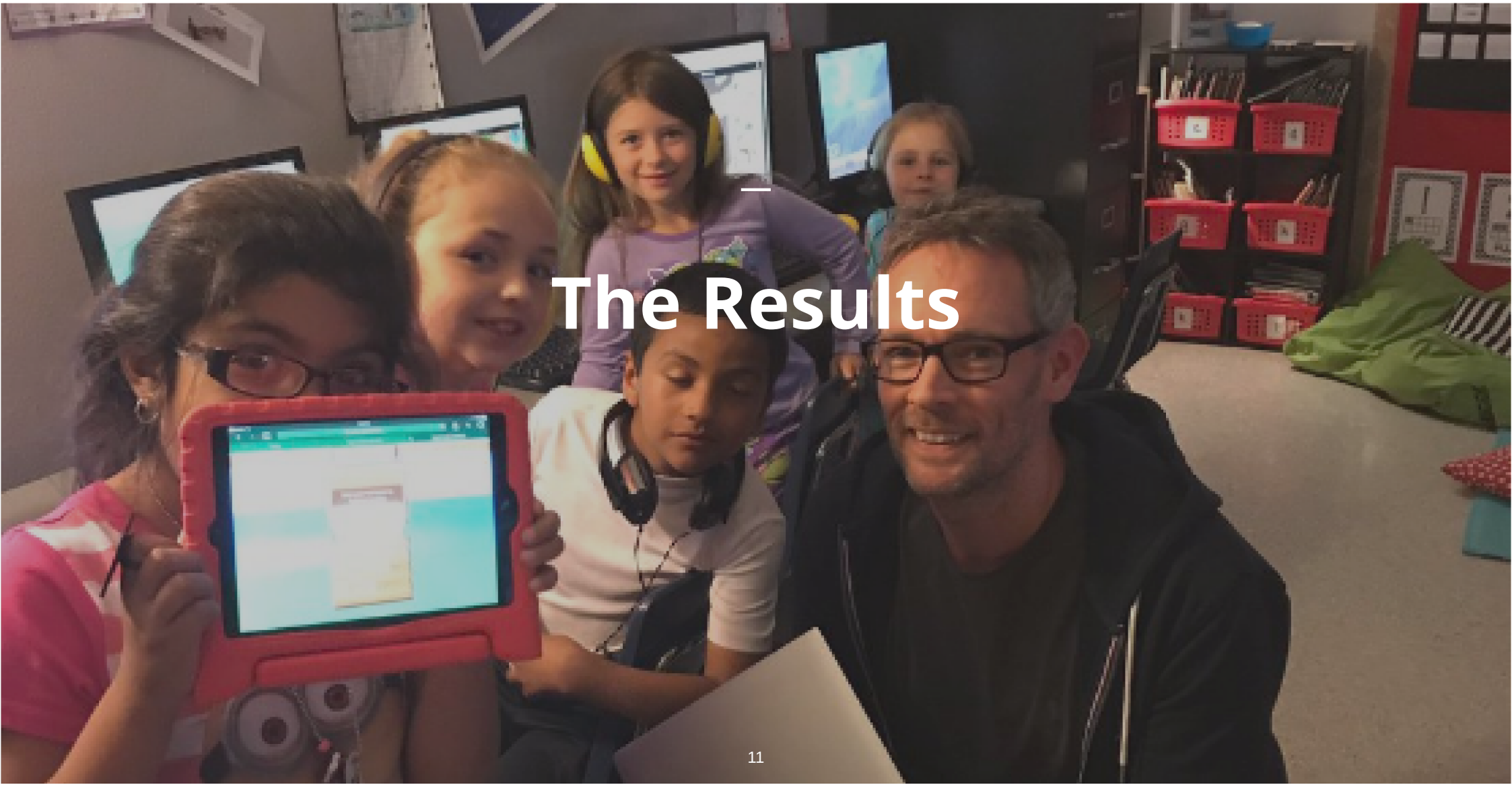
**Nonsense Word Fluency – Correct Letter Sounds is the most predictive of the DIBELS subtests of reading success and a healthy literacy outcome.**

When 1st grade children were first assessed, 40% of them were meeting minimum grade level benchmarks.

After instituting Nessy Reading & Spelling as part of the STRIVE Reading initiative, the number of **1st grade children reaching grade level benchmarks increased from 40% to 64%.**

| Grade | Beginning   | End  |
|-------|---|--|
| 1st   |  <p>n=43<br/>           13  (30%)<br/>           13  (30%)<br/>           17  (40%)</p> |  <p>n=42<br/>           4  (10%)<br/>           11  (26%)<br/>           27  (64%)</p> |

The highest risk group (those that were struggling the most) decreased from 30% to 10%.



## The Results

Students who began using Nessy in Kindergarten made great gains within the first two months, and maintained these gains through 2nd grade.

When Nessy was first implemented as part of the STRIVE Reading Program, only 51% of these students were meeting grade level benchmarks.

By the end of their kindergarten year, 74% met grade level benchmarks.

Mid way through their 2nd grade year, 79% of these students were meeting grade level benchmarks.

This is a mean score of 124.4 and in in the 89th percentile nationally.

**This represents a growth of 31 percentile points placing these students in the top 10% of the national sample.**



| Grade | Beginning September 2014                          | Grade | End December 2016                               |
|-------|---|-------|---|
| K     | <p>n=37<br/>8 (22%)<br/>10 (27%)<br/>19 (51%)</p> | 2nd   | <p>n=47<br/>4 (9%)<br/>6 (13%)<br/>37 (79%)</p> |

- 43 of the 47 students are at or above the 45th percentile which is the benchmark for a healthy reading outcome.
- 30 of the 47 students are now at or above the 80th percentile (64% of the students in the top 20% of the national sample).
- 22 of the 47 students are in the top 10% of the national sample.

A comparison of the digitally delivered phonics program, Nessy Reading & Spelling to the paper-based program, Saxon Phonics.

Saxon Phonics is an offshoot of the popular Saxon Math curriculum authored by Lorna Simmons and first published in 2005. It promised to be "beneficial for struggling readers because of the structure and repetitive characteristics associated with Saxon Publisher's curriculum."

Nessy Reading & Spelling is a digitally delivered phonics and spelling program written by Mike Jones and Pat Jones OBE, with resources developed out of the Bristol Dyslexia Centre in the United Kingdom. It was first designed to help struggling readers and those with dyslexia, but is now used as a general structured literacy and phonics program or for ESL/EAL curriculum in classrooms around the world after it was found to be effective for these populations as well.

## The Comparison

In the comparison groups, students were instructed in reading and spelling with the paper-based program Saxon Phonics by 8 certified teachers, led by team leaders who had multiple years experience teaching the Saxon curriculum.

44 of the students were first graders.

The second grade group grew from 29 to 32 students as the year progressed.

## Grade 1

At the beginning of the study 11% of students were identified as needing intensive support (red). This number remained unchanged with 11% of students identified as needing intensive support at the end of a year's teaching.

The number of students below grade level expectations and requiring strategic support (yellow) grew from 23% to 41%.

The number of students performing at grade level using only Saxon Phonics (green) dropped from 66% to 48%.




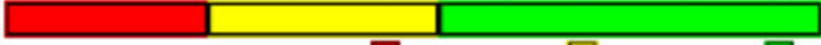
## Grade 2

At the beginning of the study 24% of students were identified as needing intensive support (red). This number increased to 25% at the end of one year's teaching.

The number of students requiring strategic support and below grade level expectations (yellow) grew from 17% to 28%.

The number of students performing at grade level when using only Saxon Phonics (green) dropped from 59% to 47%.

Year: 2013-2014

| Grade | Beginning  | End   |
|-------|--|---|
| K     | No students with data.   | No students with data.  |
| 1st   | <br>n=44                      5 ■            10 ■            29 ■<br>(11%)        (23%)        (66%) | <br>n=44                      5 ■            18 ■            21 ■<br>(11%)        (41%)        (48%) |
| 2nd   | <br>n=29                      7 ■            5 ■            17 ■<br>(24%)        (17%)        (59%)  | <br>n=32                      8 ■            9 ■            15 ■<br>(25%)        (28%)        (47%)  |



These results are concerning; indicating that the materials and instructional materials being provided to these children were not meeting their literacy needs. Even though they were being instructed by trained and certified teachers, who were very familiar with the phonics methods and materials they were teaching, their skills were not keeping pace and developing with enough momentum to provide the best skills necessary to help encourage the healthiest reading outcomes.

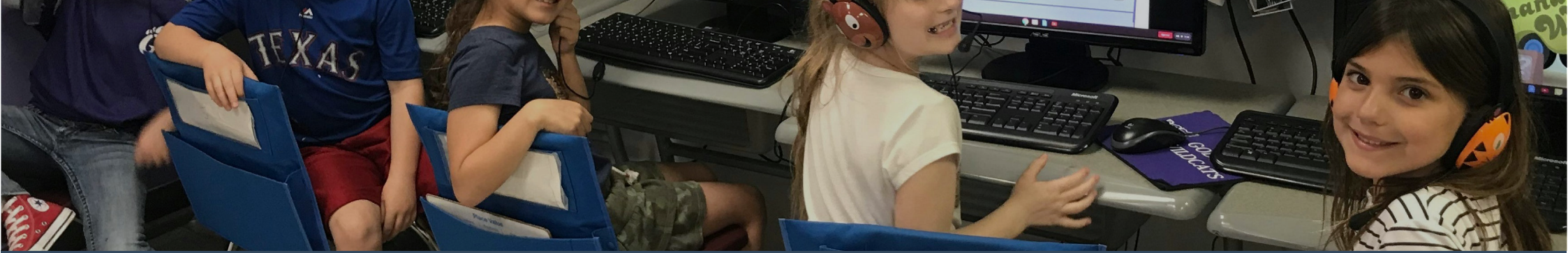
As several studies have now documented, the poor first-grade reader almost invariably continues to be a poor reader (Francis, Shaywitz, Stuebing, Shaywitz, & Fletcher, 1996; Torgesen & Burgess, 1998).

The results from the digital program Nessy Reading & Spelling being utilized in the classrooms a year later show very different and much improved results. The number of first graders in the highest risk (the most below grade level) dropped substantially from 30% to 10%.

The student group performing at grade level or above increased from 40% to 64%.



| Grade | Beginning  | End  |
|-------|--|--|
| 1st   |  <p>n=43<br/>           13 (30%)<br/>           13 (30%)<br/>           17 (40%)</p> |  <p>n=42<br/>           4 (10%)<br/>           11 (26%)<br/>           27 (64%)</p> |



# Conclusion

The performance of the students being taught individually with the digitally delivered curriculum Nessy Reading & Spelling improved outcomes in all three instances examined - two groups of kindergartners from from mid year to end-of-year, two groups of first grades from beginning year to end-of-year, and two groups of students from the beginning of kindergarten followed through to mid second grade.

The students being taught solely with the paper-based curriculum Saxon Phonics lost attainment levels in both first and second grades, even when being instructed by certified teachers with years of experience using these materials to teach phonics.

- Tiffany James 2019

Tiffany James is a Certified Structured Language Teacher, certified reading tutor, former reading specialist, qualified dyslexia screener, and dyslexia specialist with 25 years of kindergarten teaching experience. Because of her expertise in both reading program implementation for general readers, extensive knowledge of

screening and instructional grouping, and her specialism in dyslexia, Ms. James is a sought after educational consultant. Her knowledge and expertise in dyslexia identification, standardized testing, progress monitoring, and dyslexia advocacy, keep her in demand by both individual families looking for help and advice, and schools and school districts endeavoring to build successful literacy programs.

She is The founder and CEO of The Reading Center, a tutoring practice in Texas founded in 2003 to help struggling readers. The Reading Center has developed a reputation as a center for excellence for dyslexia intervention, screening, and information.