EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

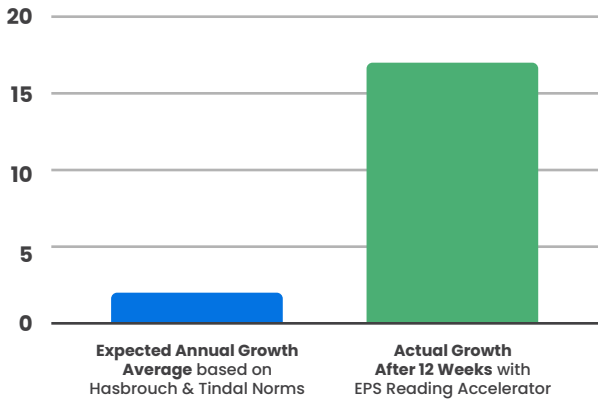
Closing the Gap: Lowest Performing Readers Outperform National Growth Rates in Oral Reading Fluency

An ESSA III Research Summary*

During the 2024-2025 school year, an urban middle school in the Northeastern United States implemented EPS Learning's Reading Accelerator program for 12 weeks to study its effectiveness with 48 students below the 10th percentile in oral reading fluency (ORF). This indicator was selected due to its relationship to overall reading proficiency, and its link to the "decoding threshold" (Wang et al., 2019). Students who have not yet crossed the decoding threshold are in need of development of phonemic awareness, phonics, and decoding skills before they shift to an intervention focusing on vocabulary and comprehension. Middle school students who are below the 10th percentile in ORF typically become stagnant in reading growth, gaining only two words correct per minute (WCPM) in fluency throughout an entire school year (Hasbrouck & Tindal, 2017). Reading intervention students in the subject school included those in mainstream classrooms, with or without IEPs, and those who are multilingual learners.

Student progress was evaluated using an automated, AI-powered assessment called Reading Assistant, which allows an entire class to receive an ORF assessment simultaneously, instead of the more labor-intensive methods requiring 1:1 administration. Utilizing this technology (built on the Amira platform) which carries substantiated validity and reliability allows secondary schools to assess students in foundational literacy at scale. This is critical since secondary schools often have large populations of students with literacy needs, and fewer human resources available to address the

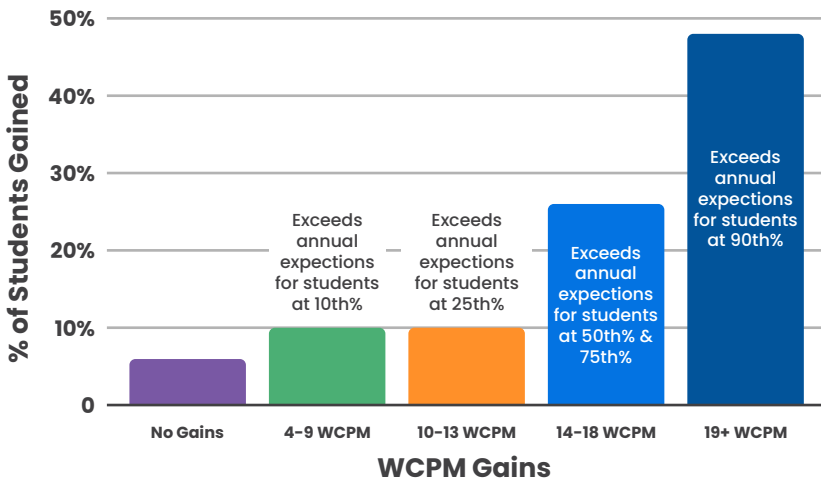
Comparison of Expected Annual ORF Growth vs Actual Reading Accelerator Student ORF Growth After Just 12 Weeks



issue. Currently most secondary schools are only assessing reading through a comprehension lens, without a reliable and scalable method to understand foundational literacy needs.

Student progress was compared to national norms in ORF, using Hasbrouck and Tindal's 2017 norms chart. Although students in the study included those in Grades 6-8, the Hasbrouck and Tindal data ends with Grade 6, which was used for this analysis. Subjects in the study received the intervention for only 12 weeks, completing less than half of the Reading Accelerator program. After only a third of a school year, the great majority exceeded annual growth expectations for all percentile ranks, even those at the 90th percentile, with average growth in WCPM exceeding 17. Since these gains were accomplished in one third of the school year, we can surmise that these lowest performing readers stand to build on this 12-week observed growth, and achieve significantly higher levels of ORF growth over the course of the full program and school year. The goal of this rapid growth in foundational skills is to move students across the decoding threshold, and onto the critical work of strengthening vocabulary, background knowledge, and comprehension.

Number of Students Exceeding Each Hasbrouck & Tindal Percentile Rank's Annual ORF Growth After Just 12 Weeks of Reading Accelerator



48% gained 19+ WCPM
(Exceeds annual expectations for students at 90th%)

25% gained 14–18 WCPM
(Exceeds annual expectations for students at 50th & 75th%)

10% gained 10–13 WCPM
(Exceeds annual expectations for students at 25th%)

10% gained 4–9 WCPM
(Exceeds annual expectations for students at 10th%)

6% made no gains

*This is an executive summary of an ESSA III study. The full report will be available this summer.

References:

Hasbrouck, J. & Tindal, G. (2017). An update to compiled ORF norms (Technical Report No. 1702). Eugene, OR, Behavioral Research and Teaching, University of Oregon.

Wang, Z., Sabatini, J., O'Reilly, T., & Weeks, J. (2019). Decoding and reading comprehension: A test of the decoding threshold hypothesis. Journal of Educational Psychology, 111(3), 387–401. https://doi.org/10.1037/edu0000302

Amira Technical Manual link:
https://docs.google.com/document/d/1jovjmXUYx9NE25OpIO6aUM88Uy_6rKPT/edit?tab=t.0

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