

Superkids shifts the bell curve

A fantastic first year

When they instituted *The Superkids Reading Program*, administrators and teachers in the School District of Wisconsin Dells, Wisconsin, never expected to see their students' reading achievement advance so quickly in one school year.

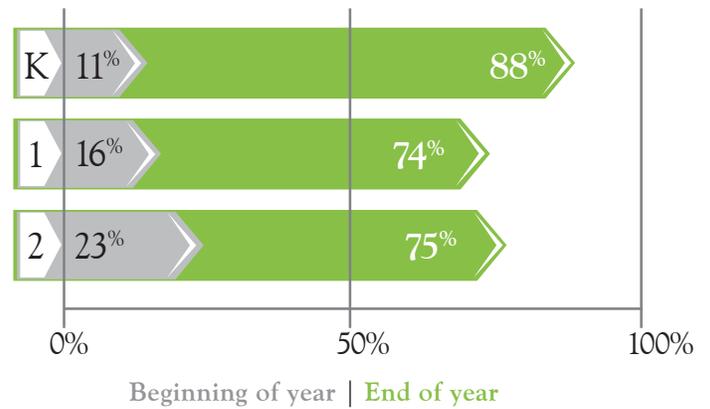
"Usually, it takes three to five years for a new curriculum to really take off," says Julie Ennis, principal of Spring Hill Elementary, one of three elementary schools in the district, "but we're seeing growth in these grade levels across the board." By the end of the first year, the majority of K-2 students were reading at or above grade level in each grade.

Focusing on reading acquisition

In 2017, Wisconsin Dells convened a literacy committee of administrators and teachers tasked with identifying new resources for their elementary schools. "We decided early in the process to separate the grade bands," says Sara Ketterer, the district's literacy coach, "with the goal of adopting a new K-2 structured literacy program by the end of that year."

Most Wisconsin Dells K-2 students read at or above grade level after one year of Superkids

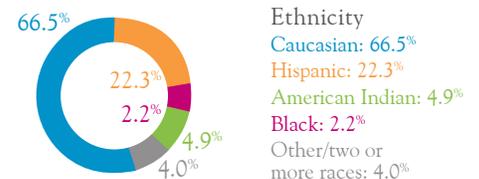
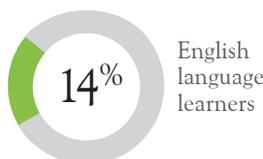
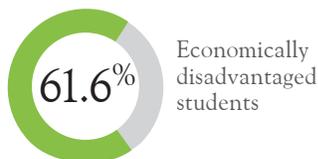
Percentage of students reading at or above grade level at three Wisconsin Dells elementary schools, 2018-2019



During its exploration, the committee had the opportunity to dive into reading research. "We looked at what the science tells us about effective reading and structured literacy instruction," says Ketterer. "That research hasn't yet made its way into

District Profile: School District of Wisconsin Dells, Elementary Schools 2018-2019

Wisconsin Dells contains three public elementary schools enrolling 869 K-5 students



many colleges' teacher training programs, so I knew it would be helpful for our teachers."

Before *Superkids*, Wisconsin Dells teachers used a basal reading program for many years. "Most of the K–2 teachers had already moved away from that curriculum," admits Ketterer. "Teachers were doing the best they could to bring in phonics and fill the holes in that program." But some students were left behind in the program's whole-language approach.

"Our special education and Title I teachers were feeling the effect of our whole-language curriculum because so many kids, who probably normally wouldn't need their services, were spilling over into getting those additional services," Ketterer explains.

Science-based structured literacy instruction

Teachers "had already identified that we really needed to be explicitly teaching our students phonics, handwriting, blending, decoding—teachers had already figured that out, and they were also looking for more structure," Ketterer says. "With *Superkids*, they feel confident about meeting standards and hitting all the content areas that they knew they needed to be hitting."

Superkids also supports Title I, special education, and ESL teachers. "At times, we pull students out of the classroom, and these teachers can continue with the lessons, the same content, because they know exactly what's going on in any classroom at a given day at each grade level," Ennis points out.

Intervention teachers appreciate knowing they "are doing the same thing that those kids are doing in the classroom," says Ketterer. "They're just doing it at more intensity or more frequency." All support teachers have the same access to *Superkids* materials, including its online components.

Cracking the code with *Superkids*

Literacy coach Sara Ketterer believes *Superkids*' research-based approach makes sense for all students. A focus on phonics and decoding helps both struggling and typical K–2 students. "Often, even excelling children

Superkids shifts the whole bell curve.

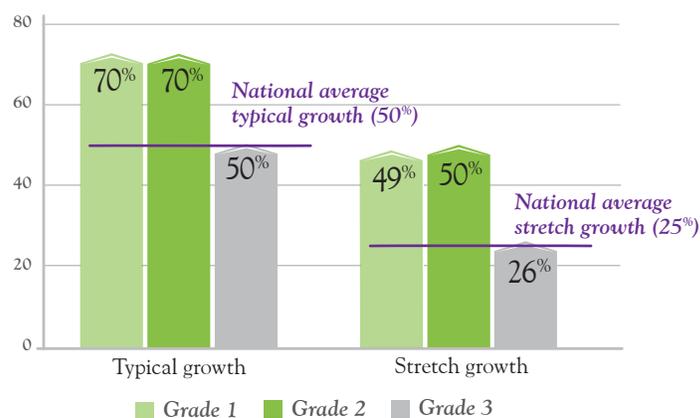
—Sara Ketterer, Literacy Coach

become much better spellers and readers by having somebody who cracked the code for them and told them explicitly the orthographic patterns of the English language," says Ketterer.

"Our third-grade teachers commented that their entering students, who had one year of *Superkids* last year, seem to be better readers and can decode," says Ennis.

After one year of *Superkids*, students in grades 1 and 2 improved more than 20 points higher than the national average

Percentage of students achieving typical and stretch growth in i-Ready reading assessments at Spring Hill Elementary, 2018–2019



Grade 3 students did not use *Superkids*.

Wisconsin Dells students showed remarkable gains during the first school year with *Superkids*. The i-Ready assessments document both "typical" and "stretch" growth compared to national averages. Typical growth is the average growth of students nationally at each grade and placement. Stretch growth means both that struggling students are on a path to proficiency and that typical students are on a path to advanced proficiency. "Every student has a stretch growth that is an ambitious and rigorous goal," explains Ketterer. "If kids meet the goal, we know they're closing an achievement gap."

Nationally, the i-Ready research shows that about 50% of students achieve typical growth and about 25% achieve stretch growth in a school year. "Grade 3, that did not use *Superkids*, nearly matched national averages last year," says Ennis. As a principal, she also looks at individualized data in the phonics, phonemic awareness, and vocabulary i-Ready domains. "We saw a 30% growth in some of those areas for our early grades," she says. "Normally, you also see a summer slump. But our incoming grade 1–3 scores this year are significantly higher than last year's."