

A strategic choice with *Superkids*

Among the highest academically achieving school districts in the Denver metro area, Littleton Public Schools earned the Colorado Department of Education’s prestigious “Accredited with Distinction” rating for eight years. And the school district boasts a roughly 90% graduation rate over the last four years.

Yet teachers and administrators knew they could improve their results for all students because some were still left behind. At the elementary level, early reading was a key focus. Now in the third year of *The Superkids Reading Program* implementation, teachers see more students achieving.

A core resource backed by research

Of the Littleton Public Schools’ 13 elementary schools, three are Title I schools, and all generally approached reading in the early elementary grades from a balanced literacy framework. However, teachers were free to choose the materials they wished to use. The district recommended designated blocks of time for the components of reading, but sometimes the elements felt disconnected. The district was looking for a comprehensive reading program that included strong

“*Having a common resource and common language in this research-based curriculum helped building-to-building collaboration.*”

—Amy McIntosh, Coordinator of K–12 Literacy

foundational skill development. Patti Turner, the district’s director of learning services, explains, “We had developed a universal literacy framework around the components of reading. We instituted it consistently across the buildings. But it didn’t feel cohesive in the classroom without a core resource to build instruction around.”

Fidelity to the foundations

Once *Superkids* was adopted, district leaders emphasized that teachers implement it with fidelity.

District Profile: Littleton Public Schools

All K–2 students in 13 elementary schools, 2018–2019 school year



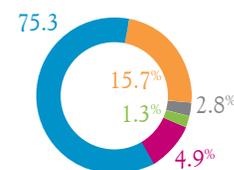
Students with an IEP



Students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch



English language learners



Ethnicity
Caucasian: 75.3%
Hispanic: 15.7%
Asian: 2.8%
Black: 1.3%
Other/two or more races: 4.9%

“We were pretty thoughtful about that phrasing,” says Heidi Wagner, elementary literacy Teacher on Special Assignment (TOSA). “We expected the teachers to use the resources with fidelity, to use everything that *Superkids* offered.”

Superkids provides the structured literacy instruction that benefits all early readers. “Reading is not a natural process for the brain; it has to be learned,” Amy McIntosh, coordinator of literacy notes. Wagner agrees, “We know from brain research that kids need systematic, explicit instruction. They’re not going to learn to read by osmosis: we have to be more intentional.”

Superkids has given us the opportunity to be more strategic about building a strong reading foundation early. ”

—Heidi Wagner, Literacy TOSA

All district leaders emphasize fidelity to the scope and sequence as a key to success. The repetition of skills within *Superkids* creates authentic opportunities for students to build automaticity. “Teachers note that kids are now much faster at identifying and using spelling patterns even across content areas like math, science, and social studies,” says Wagner.

I asked a second grader just last week, ‘Are you a good reader?’ And she said, ‘Yes!’ ‘How do you know?’ I asked her. ‘Because I love reading. It’s my favorite thing to do in the whole world and now I can read big, hard words!’ ”

—Libby Russell, Classroom teacher

Superkids works for all kids. It works for kids who learn quickly, and it works for our striving readers. ”

—Patti Turner, Director of Learning Services

Superkids for all

“We’ve learned from research,” says McIntosh, “that what helps a striving reader to learn to read is to see the structure of language and identify the patterns.” The structured literacy of *Superkids* and its focus on phonemic awareness and decoding help all students learn to read, but it also helps classroom teachers identify students who need further support to be successful. “They can more quickly identify striving readers, so we’re catching them earlier.”

“We have always had interventionists at all buildings,” explains Turner. “But with *Superkids* as a consistent resource, we can really align the tier two intervention with what’s going on in tier one. Interventionists could align vocabulary; they could align scope and sequence.” Because the district purchased *Superkids* for all literacy specialists and its special education team, intervention and classroom could align.

Prior to *Superkids*, interventionists focused on what the student needed and sometimes introduced concepts or skills that the teachers had not yet covered. “To be able to have a tier two that’s tightly aligned with what we’re doing in tier one instruction is really important,” says Turner.

“Right now, our interventionists can reinforce what’s happening in tier one instruction,” adds Wagner. “Using *Superkids* also creates that consistency for students; hearing common terms across their classroom and intervention is a huge benefit.” Turner explains that “*Superkids* works for all kids. It works for kids who learn quickly, and it works for our striving readers.”

Seeing the instructional shifts over the last three years, Wagner says, “Some teachers who were initially hesitant now tell me, ‘I understand more now about the science of reading and how *Superkids* supports that and is beneficial for all students.’”