Wyman Elementary Helps Students with Dyslexia and Other Reading Challenges Make Rapid Gains

Wyman Elementary – Rolla Public Schools

Rolla, MO

School Statistics

Number of students: 516

Grades: PreK–3

Website:
http://rolla.k12.mo.us/schools/wyman_elementary

Student Population:
83% Caucasian
5% Multi-Racial
4.4% Hispanic
3.7% Asian
3% African-American
1% American Indian/Alaskan Native

49% economically disadvantaged
4.5% English language learners (ELLs)

Challenge
- Growing number of struggling readers
- Increasing need for interventions for students with special needs who are not eligible for special education

Solution
- Fast ForWord®

Populations served:
- Grade K–3 including:
    - All first grade students
    - Struggling readers, including students with dyslexia
    - ELLs
    - Special education

Summary
The first school in Rolla Public Schools to implement the neuroscience-based Fast ForWord® program, Wyman Elementary was also the first to have a staff member certified in diagnosing dyslexia. Thanks to the school's innovative approach to assessment and intervention, students with dyslexia have achieved measurable improvements in a wide range of language, cognitive, and reading skills. In addition, diverse learners in grades K-3 who have participated in the Fast ForWord program have made improvements as well.

Results:
- Gains in foundational language, cognitive, and reading skills
- Rapid growth in reading levels

"Our results with the Fast ForWord program show our overwhelming success."
— Tina Morse, Second Grade Teacher

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As a teacher and a parent, Tina Morse knows first-hand the many challenges struggling readers face. After trying the Fast ForWord language and reading intervention with her son to address auditory processing and language impairment issues, she saw his reading skill level improve eight months in only three months' time. It was then she realized how much this neuroscience-based program could help students at Wyman Elementary. She sought donations from local businesses and purchased five student licenses in 2012, making Wyman Elementary the first school in Rolla Public Schools to offer the Fast ForWord program to its students.

Developed by neuroscientists, the Fast ForWord program is an online intervention that uses a unique three-step approach to deliver fast gains to struggling students.
- First, it prepares the brain for reading by improving the foundational language and cognitive skills that are often weak in these students.
- Second, it provides personalized, intensive practice on a variety of language and reading skills more than any other approach or intervention.
- Third, it uses patented speech verification technology to support and listen to students as they read aloud, like a guided reading coach.

Once these areas are addressed, students' language, reading, and overall learning improve quickly, and changes continue even after they complete the program.

In January 2015, Wyman Elementary expanded its use of the Fast ForWord program school-wide to accommodate the growing demand from students and parents. Around this time, Wyman also became the first school in the district to have a Title I reading teacher certified in diagnosing dyslexia.

"More and more students are being identified with dyslexia, as well as other learning challenges such as central auditory processing disorder (CAPD) and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)," said Morse, who teaches second grade at Wyman and also serves as the district's Fast ForWord director. "Unfortunately, these diagnoses do not qualify students for special education modifications or accommodations. The Fast ForWord program enables us to provide these students with an intervention to help them increase their reading skills and overall confidence."

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Helping students with dyslexia make fast and lasting gains
Research shows that dyslexia is now recognized as a primarily auditory disorder, with weaknesses appearing specifically in phonological processing. Unlike other intervention programs that help learners compensate for these difficulties by working around the issues, the Fast ForWord program takes a different approach. It aims to "rewire" the brain for reading by directly targeting the underlying causes of these issues. It provides:
- Exercises to improve phonological processing
- Individualized work to build phonemic awareness, phonics, targeted decoding, sight word recognition, vocabulary, grammar, and comprehension
- Guided oral reading support to build fluency for even the most reluctant readers

At Wyman Elementary, if a teacher thinks that a student might be dyslexic, the student is referred to the Title I reading teacher, Susan Jackson, for assessment. If the assessment shows that the student has dyslexia, he or she will begin participating in a two-pronged intervention program that includes:
- One-on-one tutoring with Jackson using a system based on the Orton–Gillingham multisensory

approach to reading instruction
- Individualized instruction in Fast ForWord program for 30 minutes a day

"Our students with dyslexia have made incredible gains with the Fast ForWord program," said Morse. "On the Reading Progress Indicator (RPI) assessments in the program, we had a second grade boy who made a reading level gain of six months in just two months' time. We had a first grader who had a grade-equivalent reading level of beginning kindergarten in September and by March she was up to 1.2 — a gain of one year and two months. Those are just a couple of examples. We have so many stories we can share!"

Helping diverse learners improve their language and reading skills
In addition to students with dyslexia, the Fast ForWord program is used by a variety of students across Wyman Elementary. Kindergarten teachers send their lowest performing students to Morse for Fast ForWord intervention when computers are available in her classroom. All first grade students work on the Fast ForWord program 30 minutes a day, five days a week. All second graders in Morse's class spend 30 minutes a day on the program. In the other second grade classes, students who test at the "Urgent Intervention" and "Intervention" levels on the STAR reading test work on the Fast ForWord program as part of an intervention group that Morse leads. In the third grade, the program is used in the classroom with struggling readers.

"Students with a wide range of academic skills use the Fast ForWord program. We have struggling readers, students with language impairments, students with autism, students with dyslexia, English language learners, students with CAPD, students with ADHD, and students with IEP and 504 plans all using the program and showing progress. It addresses so many learning issues, which is one of the reasons why I use it with my whole class," said Morse.

Sharing student success stories
Morse said that she frequently hears success stories from other teachers and parents who have noticed rapid improvements after children begin working on the Fast ForWord program.

One parent, who is also a teacher at Wyman Elementary, said, "I am so excited about the progress I've seen in my daughter Anna regarding her reading. As an educator, I know the value in correcting reading problems early. Anna entered first grade with several reversal problems and reading was a struggle for her. She has been working on the Fast ForWord program almost daily for the last nine months. Anna's proficiency level was 'struggling' when she took her first RPI test in January of 2015. In June, she took another RPI test and ranked in the 99th percentile. She gained 71 percentile points! Anna's proficiency level is now at the 'advanced' level. She is finally beginning to enjoy reading."

Morse also shared a story about another educator's children. "When our special education process coordinator's son was in the fourth grade, he was thought to have dyslexia. Before they got a confirmed diagnosis, they placed him on the Fast ForWord program to see if it could help," said Morse. "After working on it for two or three weeks, he came home and said, 'Mom, I can hear the teacher now.' Because his processing skills improved, he could clearly hear and understand what the teacher was saying. Later, her daughter was also diagnosed with dyslexia. In first grade, her daughter tested at a grade-equivalent reading level of beginning kindergarten. She used Fast ForWord and four months later tested at 2.8 — a gain of two years and eight months."

As students' language and reading skills improve, Morse sees improvements in their confidence as well. "One of Wyman's first Fast ForWord students started the program as a kindergartner," she said. "He was extremely shy. He would hardly speak and wouldn't make eye contact. He continued to use the program through the second grade. By the time he was in third grade, he was walking with his head held high. He was smiling, talking, and making eye contact. The Fast ForWord program changed his entire personality. The confidence he obtained from the skills he acquired changed his whole outlook on life. This past year, he scored proficient on his English language arts state test and advanced on his math state test."

Giving students what they need to succeed

Since Morse first brought the Fast ForWord program to Wyman Elementary, it has expanded to all three elementary schools, the middle school, and the junior high in Rolla Public Schools. Since then, other Missouri schools have implemented the Fast ForWord program as well.

"We now have the Fast ForWord program in five buildings in our district. As teachers and parents talk, word of our success is spreading throughout the community," said Morse. "Our results with the Fast ForWord program show our overwhelming success. We feel very fortunate to be able to offer it to our students. We have not only seen their academic levels grow, but their confidence, too."

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