Growth for *Phonics for Reading®* Users: Evidence for Students in Grades 3–5, Multilingual Learners, and Students with a Disability

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Research Report | February 2024

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Summary

Phonics for Reading is a foundational skills program designed to support older, striving readers become skilled, independent readers. In this study, we evaluated the growth of Grades 3–5 *Phonics for Reading* users in a large school district. We found that regardless of grade, Multilingual Learner status, or disability status, all student groups grew in skills taught in *Phonics for Reading*, advancing on the program's placement test from fall to spring. All student groups also experienced statistically significant positive growth from fall to spring on the *i-Ready Diagnostic* for Reading in the overall, Phonics, and Vocabulary scores. A substantial percentage of students mastered the content of *Phonics for Reading*, ultimately testing out of the program and moving one step closer to accessing On-Grade Level material and becoming fluent readers.

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Introduction

Developing reading skills is a major focus of a child's early academic life. Mastery of foundational reading skills, such as phonics, is critical for their continued reading success as they learn to read and eventually read to learn. This transition to becoming a fluent, independent reader who can effectively read and engage with written material in and out of the classroom is pivotal for academic success (Crone et al., 2023; Hernandez, 2011) and is linked to social and societal outcomes such as socioeconomic status, overall happiness, and societal connectedness later in adult life (Ritchie & Bates, 2013).

Decades of research point to the most effective instructional practices and strategies for teaching students to read (Castles et al., 2018). However, even with this wide research base informing instructional content and teaching strategies, we know many students need support with mastering foundational reading skills. This has become even more true since the COVID-19 pandemic changed the nature of how we engage and learn in and out of school, as many students continue to strive to recover (Curriculum Associates, 2023; 2024). The Grades K–2 students who experienced the brunt of disrupted teaching and learning, as well as social impacts of the pandemic, are now in grades where foundational reading skills are not the focus of content standards or instructional time. As students age, there is limited opportunity to catch up as classroom standards and content progress to higher-level reading skills. Without targeted support for these reading skills, students are at risk of continuing to fall behind. Given the importance of reading skills for academic and societal outcomes, it is critical to support striving readers and help them catch up and move closer to accessing and mastering grade-level reading skills.

A solution to supporting older, striving readers is Curriculum Associates' *Phonics for Reading* program. Authored by literacy expert Dr. Anita Archer, *Phonics for Reading* is an intervention program built upon systematic and explicit instruction to support students in Grades 3–12 become fluent, independent readers. Rooted in the Science of Reading (Scarborough, 2001), *Phonics for Reading* focuses on building students' confidence and skills in four primary strands: phonemic awareness, phonics, spelling and encoding, and decoding. The focus on these strands through systematic instructional routines and timely feedback allows learners to focus less on anticipating what instructional routines will be used and focus more on learning the skills of the program.

The research that underlies the Science of Reading and *Phonics for Reading* and guides best practices for literacy instruction tells us that all students can become independent, skilled readers regardless of age, reading ability, or background (Gough & Tunmer, 1986; Scarborough, 2001). As such, the foundational components of *Phonics for Reading* are intended to support learning and reading skills development for all older, striving readers, including Multilingual Learners and students with dyslexia. Regardless of background, age, or ability, all students receive high-quality instructional materials that scaffold them to learn the reading skills most necessary to be successful readers of the English language.

In the 2022–2023 school year, Curriculum Associates conducted a research study of Grades 3–5 students using *Phonics for Reading*. In this study we addressed several research questions regarding Grades 3–5 students, Multilingual Learners, and students with a disability:

1) How did students progress in *Phonics for Reading* from fall 2022 to spring 2023?

2) Do students using *Phonics for Reading* experience significant growth from fall to spring in phonics, overall reading skills, and vocabulary? Does their grade-level placement increase?

Where sample sizes allow, we evaluated these research questions for Grades 3, 4, and 5 individually, for Multilingual Learners, and for students with a disability. Where sample sizes were too small, we include results for only Grades 3–5 students combined.

Research Methodology

Data

Data for this study were a combination of district-provided student data and data available from Curriculum Associates' databases. The district provided all data for students' racial demographics, Multilingual Learner status, and disability status. Additionally, educators tracked and submitted students' beginning-of-year and end-of-year *Phonics for Reading* placement test results. The *Phonics for Reading* placement test is a paper-and-pencil, one-on-one assessment designed to identify where in *Phonics for Reading* students should begin instruction. The placement test consists of eight subtests, which students take successively until they do not pass a subtest with a score of 80% or higher. The subtest on which a student does not pass with 80% indicates where the student should begin instruction in *Phonics for Reading*. When a student passes all eight placement tests with at least 80%, they are considered to have mastered the content and graduate from *Phonics for Reading*. For this study, we requested that students complete the placement test at the beginning and end of the year as a pre-post measure of skills taught in *Phonics for Reading*. Educators tracked these data in a standardized template and submitted results to Curriculum Associates. To prepare data for analysis, the subtests were collapsed to the three content levels (i.e., books) of *Phonics for Reading*: Level 1 (i.e., the lowest), Level 2, and Level 3 (i.e., the highest).

Within Curriculum Associates' databases, we had access to students' fall and spring *i-Ready Diagnostic* for Reading data. The Diagnostic is an adaptive, computer-based assessment designed to provide accurate and actionable data to guide students toward academic growth. Scores range from 100 to 800, and educators receive detailed reports to understand how students perform relative to grade-level standards and national norms.

Three Diagnostic content areas were evaluated in this study: the Diagnostic Phonics domain scores and placements, the overall Diagnostic score and placement levels, and the Diagnostic Vocabulary scores and placements. The Phonics domain was thought to be the most aligned to the material taught in *Phonics for Reading*. The overall Diagnostic for Reading was used as a measure of general reading achievement. The Vocabulary domain was used as a more distal measure of the effects of *Phonics for Reading*. While vocabulary supports are a component of *Phonics for Reading* instruction, vocabulary is not a primary focus of the program. However, we know that vocabulary is important for students' reading abilities (Scarborough, 2001), and it was evaluated here to understand how students' vocabulary skills changed throughout a year of using *Phonics for Reading*.

Sample

A large, urban/suburban district in California using *Phonics for Reading* with Grades 3–5 students was identified in partnership with the Implementation Services team, which supports sites that purchase *Phonics for Reading*. We identified this district as a candidate for the study given the schools used *Phonics for Reading* previously, and administrators reported most educators implement *Phonics for Reading* as intervention for 30 or more minutes a day for four or more days a week. This implementation model is anecdotally the most used and so was preferred for an evaluation of the program.

The district provided a roster of students who used *Phonics for Reading*. To be included in the study, students were required to have valid fall and spring *Phonics for Reading* placement test scores, valid fall and spring *i-Ready Diagnostic* for Reading assessments, and have a reported Multilingual Learner and disability status. Students were removed from the sample if they were in the top or bottom 1% of growth on the Diagnostic. These students were removed given growth was so extremely large in magnitude that students were clearly outside of growth expectations and either their fall or spring scores were likely not accurate representations of their abilities.

The final sample included 568 students across Grades 3–5. More than half of the sample represented Grade 3 students, and the number of students per grade decreased as grade increased. The sample was mostly Hispanic, 35% of students were Multilingual Learners, and 17% of students had a reported disability. The percentage of Multilingual Learners was similar across grades. The percentage of students with a disability increased as grade increased, with only 12% of students having a disability in Grade 3 and 26% of students having a disability in Grade 5. See Table 1 for a more detailed overview of the student sample's demographics.

Table 1. Demographic Information for Students

	N	Race						Multilingual Learner Status		Disability Status	
		Asian	Black	Hispanic	Native Hawai'ian	Multiple Race	White	Yes	No	Yes	No
Grade 3	320	1.2%	1.6%	80.9%	.6%	.6%	9.7%	35.0%	65.0%	12.2%	87.8%
Grade 4	144	1.4%	4.9%	84.7%	.0%	1.4%	6.2%	35.4%	64.6%	21.5%	78.5%
Grade 5	104	.0%	3.8%	76.0%	.0%	.0%	12.5%	34.6%	65.4%	26.0%	74.0%
Total	568	1.1%	2.8%	81.0%	.4%	.7%	9.3%	35.0%	65.0%	17.1%	82.9%

Note: A small proportion of students did not have reported race. As such, the race percentage within grade may not add up to 100%.

Analysis

To answer our research questions, several analyses were conducted. To evaluate how students progressed in the *Phonics for Reading* program, we examined the percentage of students placing in each *Phonics for Reading* placement level in the fall and spring.

To evaluate the fall-to-spring growth on the overall, Phonics, and Vocabulary scores, inferential dependent samples *t*-tests were used. The average score difference between fall and spring and a standardized effect, which is standardized to the fall score, are reported. Assumptions were checked for all *t*-tests, and no major violations were identified. To further contextualize results, the average fall and spring scores and their respective standard deviations are also reported.

To evaluate students' growth in a more criterion-referenced way, we examined students' change in Grade-Level Placement from fall to spring. A cross-tabulation of fall and spring *i-Ready Diagnostic* Grade-Level Placements overall and for Phonics and Vocabulary was conducted, and the percentage of students in each transition cell is reported for each outcome. Although students who place On Grade Level may place into Early, Mid, or Late On Grade Level per Curriculum Associates' placement categories, for the purposes of preserving sample size, we collapsed these sub-categories into Grade-Level Placements (e.g., Grade 3, Grade 4, etc.).

Results

Grades 3–5 Students

How did Grades 3–5 students progress in *Phonics for Reading*?
First, we provide an overview of how Grades 3–5 students progressed in *Phonics for Reading* from fall to spring. Many students in Grades 3–5 improved their *Phonics for Reading* placement test levels from fall to spring (see Table 2). Note that the sample size is too small to track the placement-level transition by grade level, and the results represent the general distribution and how the placement distribution changed over the year. In Grades 3 and 4, around 40% of students progressed beyond Level 1 in spring compared to fall. Similarly, around 32% of students in Grade 5 progressed beyond Level 1 by the end of the school year.

As testing out is the goal of *Phonics for Reading*, it is worth noting that nearly 19% of students tested out in spring across all grade levels. Around 13% of students in Grade 3 and 21% of students in Grade 4 tested out in spring. Notably, one-third of students in Grade 5 tested out as well. The higher the grade, the more students mastered *Phonics for Reading* content and tested out at the end of the school year.

Table 2. Fall-to-Spring Change in *Phonics for Reading* Placement Level

	n	Fall *Phonics for Reading* Placement			Spring *Phonics for Reading* Placement			
	n	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Tested Out
Grade 3	320	68.8%	19.1%	12.2%	28.1%	29.1%	29.7%	13.1%
Grade 4	144	56.2%	32.6%	11.1%	18.8%	30.6%	29.9%	20.8%
Grade 5	104	44.2%	40.4%	15.4%	12.5%	25.0%	28.8%	33.7%
Total	568	61.1%	26.4%	12.5%	22.9%	28.7%	29.6%	18.8%

Do Grades 3–5 students using *Phonics for Reading* experience significant growth from fall to spring in Phonics, overall reading skills, and Vocabulary? Does their grade-level placement increase?

Next, we provide an overview of results for student growth on the *i-Ready Diagnostic* for Reading. Regardless of students' chronological grade, students on average experienced statistically significant growth from fall to spring on their Diagnostic overall, Phonics, and Vocabulary scores (see Table 3). In addition, the average growth for all grades and outcomes represents standardized effects considered large and meaningful in educational practice (Kraft, 2020; Lipsey et al., 2012).

Table 3. Fall-to-Spring Growth on the *i-Ready Diagnostic* Scale Scores for Grades 3–5 Students

		n	Fall Average (SD)	Spring Average (SD)	Average Fall-to-Spring Difference	St. Effect Size
Phonics	Grade 3	237	417.77 (49.66)	456.14 (52.48)	38.37*	.77
	Grade 4	110	432.28 (50.80)	464.38 (49.86)	32.10*	.63
	Grade 5	58	428.62 (54.21)	469.57 (51.95)	40.95*	.76
Overall Score	Grade 3	320	441.41 (46.49)	474.79 (50.53)	33.38*	.72
	Grade 4	144	453.17 (44.40)	475.72 (46.28)	22.54*	.51
	Grade 5	104	467.48 (48.21)	499.99 (52.99)	32.51*	.67
Vocabulary	Grade 3	320	446.59 (49.87)	475.72 (52.95)	29.13*	.58
	Grade 4	144	452.38 (50.10)	476.17 (50.39)	23.80*	.48
	Grade 5	104	473.95 (49.98)	505.17 (57.52)	31.22*	.62

*p < .001

Note: Students may test out of the Phonics domain, thus not allowing for a fall-to-spring growth calculation. For this reason, students who tested out of the Phonics domain in either fall or spring were removed from analysis, resulting in small sample sizes for the Phonics domain compared to the overall and Vocabulary analyses.

In addition, many students in Grades 3–5 improved in their Grade-Level Placement from fall to spring (see Table 4). Note that sample size was not large enough to evaluate Grade-Level Placement transitions for individual grades, and results represent Grades 3–5 combined. For many Grade-Level Placements on the overall, Phonics, and Vocabulary scores, a substantial percentage of students grew at least one Grade-Level Placement from fall to spring. Notably, 46 students who placed in Grade 1 on their overall fall Diagnostic gained two Grade-Level Placements and ended the year able to access Grade 3 reading content. Given the average class size in California ranges from 23–26 students (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.), this change in Grade-Level Placement represents nearly two classrooms of *Phonics for Reading* users who improved their reading skills by two grade levels throughout the school year.

It is also worth noting that 29% of students who placed into Grade 1 on their fall Diagnostic in Phonics and nearly half of students who placed into Grade 2 on their fall Diagnostic in Phonics tested out of the Phonics domain at the end of the year. This finding suggests that students' reading skills

progressed in such a way that they did not need to be evaluated on the Phonics domain in the spring, as they honed higher-order reading skills beyond those of phonics. A much smaller percentage of students tested out of the Phonics domain if they started the year placing in Grade K, which is to be expected given students needing the most support are not expected to progress through the entirety of *Phonics for Reading* in a school year.

Additionally, many students using the program experienced improvements in their Vocabulary Grade-Level Placements. Nearly two-thirds of students who placed in Grade K or Grade 2 in Vocabulary in the fall ended the year at least one Grade-Level Placement higher. Half of students who placed in Grade 1 in Vocabulary in the fall ended the year at least one Grade-Level Placement higher. These findings suggest that while students gained foundational reading skills, additional reading skills necessary for students to be proficient, independent readers also improved.

Table 4. *i–Ready Diagnostic* Grade-Level Placement Transition from Fall to Spring for Grades 3–5

			Spring *i–Ready Diagnostic* Phonics Domain Placement					
		n	Grade K	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Max Score	Tested Out
Fall *i–Ready Diagnostic* Phonics Domain Grade-Level Placement	Grade K	259	43.2%	34.0%	8.1%	3.5%	3.1%	8.1%
	Grade 1	184	3.8%	34.8%	17.4%	7.6%	7.6%	28.8%
	Grade 2	47	2.1%	14.9%	17.0%	8.5%	8.5%	48.9%
	Grade 3	12	.0%	8.3%	16.7%	8.3%	8.3%	58.3%
	Max Score	17	.0%	5.9%	5.9%	11.8%	17.7%	58.8%
	Tested Out	49	2.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	4.1%	93.9%
			Spring *i–Ready Diagnostic* Overall Placement					
		n	Grade K	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5
Fall *i–Ready Diagnostic* Overall Grade-Level Placement	Grade K	151	45.0%	45.0%	8.6%	1.3%	.0%	.0%
	Grade 1	230	3.5%	40.4%	34.8%	20.0%	1.3%	.0%
	Grade 2	103	.0%	9.7%	28.2%	59.2%	2.9%	.0%
	Grade 3	78	.0%	1.3%	5.1%	70.5%	18.0%	5.1%
	Grade 4	6	.0%	.0%	.0%	16.7%	50.0%	33.3%

		Spring *i-Ready Diagnostic* Vocabulary Domain Placement							
		n	Grade K	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6
Fall *i-Ready Diagnostic* Vocabulary Domain Grade-Level Placement	Grade K	120	34.2%	52.5%	5.8%	7.5%	.0%	.0%	.0%
	Grade 1	261	7.3%	43.3%	32.6%	14.6%	1.5%	.8%	.0%
	Grade 2	101	1.0%	12.9%	21.8%	60.4%	4.0%	.0%	.0%
	Grade 3	73	.0%	5.5%	9.6%	64.4%	19.2%	1.4%	.0%
	Grade 4	12	.0%	.0%	16.7%	8.3%	58.3%	16.7%	.0%
	Grade 5	1	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	100%

Note: Where sample sizes are less than 40 students per fall Grade-Level Placement, results are grayed out. Given the small sample size, these results are not stable and should be interpreted cautiously.

Multilingual Learners

How did Multilingual Learners progress in *Phonics for Reading*?

First, we provide an overview of how Multilingual Learners progressed in *Phonics for Reading* from fall to spring. Both Multilingual Learners and non-Multilingual Learners experienced improvements in their *Phonics for Reading* skills from fall to spring (see Table 5). Among Multilingual Learners, nearly 75% placed into Level 1 in the fall. Nearly half of the students who placed into Level 1 in the fall progressed beyond Level 1 in the spring. Specifically, in the spring, nine percentage points more students placed into Level 2 and nearly 27 percentage points additional students placed into Level 3. In addition, 17 (i.e., 9%) of Multilingual Learners tested out by the end of the school year, suggesting they mastered the skills taught in *Phonics for Reading* and achieving the goals of the program.

Non-Multilingual Learners tended to place into *Phonics for Reading* at a higher level than Multilingual Learners, as just more than half of students placed into Level 1 compared to nearly 75% of Multilingual Learners placing into Level 1. Nearly one-fourth of non-Multilingual Learners tested out at the end of the year.

Table 5. Fall-to-Spring Change in *Phonics for Reading* Placement Level by Multilingual Learner Status

		Fall *Phonics for Reading* Placement			Spring *Phonics for Reading* Placement			
	n	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Tested Out
Multilingual Learners	199	74.4%	19.6%	6.0%	30.2%	28.6%	32.7%	8.5%
Non-Multilingual Learners	369	53.9%	30.1%	16.0%	19.0%	28.7%	27.9%	24.4%
Total	568	61.1%	26.4%	12.5%	22.9%	28.7%	29.6%	18.8%

Do Multilingual Learners using *Phonics for Reading* experience significant growth from fall to spring in Phonics, overall reading skills, and Vocabulary?

Next, we provide an overview of Multilingual Learners' growth on the *i-Ready Diagnostic* for Reading. Sample size did not allow for disaggregation by grade level, and all results represent Grades 3–5 combined.

For both Multilingual and non-Multilingual Learners, students experienced statistically significant growth from fall to spring (see Table 6). Given the magnitude of the standardized effect sizes, these results represent large and educationally meaningful growth for both student groups (Kraft, 2020; Lipsey et al., 2012). Across all outcomes, Multilingual Learners experienced similar or larger growth than non-Multilingual Learners. These results suggest that *Phonics for Reading* may support both Multilingual and non-Multilingual Learners in developing reading skills.

Given the relatively small sample size for the Multilingual Learners, we could not evaluate change in Grade-Level Placement from fall to spring for this student subgroup.

Table 6. Fall-to-Spring Growth on the *i-Ready Diagnostic* Scale Scores by Multilingual Learner Status

		n	Fall Average (SD)	Spring Average (SD)	Average Fall-to-Spring Difference	St. Effect Size
Phonics	Multilingual Learners	159	414.12 (51.64)	455.49 (52.38)	41.37*	.80
	Non-Multilingual Learners	246	429.18 (49.71)	463.41 (51.36)	34.24*	.69
Overall Score	Multilingual Learners	199	435.17 (44.99)	466.90 (48.67)	31.73*	.71
	Non-Multilingual Learners	369	456.72 (46.81)	486.51 (50.64)	29.79*	.64
Vocabulary	Multilingual Learners	199	437.58 (49.70)	467.93 (50.08)	30.35*	.61
	Non-Multilingual Learners	369	461.42 (49.61)	488.40 (55.18)	26.98*	.54

*p < .001

Note: Students may test out of the Phonics domain, thus not allowing for a fall-to-spring growth calculation. For this reason, students who tested out of the Phonics domain in either the fall or the spring were removed from analysis, resulting in smaller sample sizes for the Phonics domain compared to the overall and Vocabulary analyses.

Students with a Disability

How did students with a disability progress in *Phonics for Reading*?

First, we provide an overview of how students with a disability progressed in *Phonics for Reading* from fall to spring. Both students with a disability and students without a disability improved in *Phonics for Reading* from fall to spring (see Table 7). At the beginning of the year, nearly 80% of students with a disability placed into Level 1. However, in the spring, 37 students (i.e., 38%) progressed beyond Level 1 compared to fall. Additionally, compared to the fall, six percentage points more students placed into Level 2 and 26 (i.e., 27 percentage points) more students placed into Level 3 in spring. Although a relatively small percentage of students with a disability tested out

of the program in the spring, students' growth into Level 3 was especially impressive, as nearly one-third of students mastered Level 1 and Level 2 *Phonics for Reading* skills and placed into Level 3 at the end of the year.

For those students without a disability, 57% of students placed into Level 1 in fall. In the spring, 22% of students without a disability mastered the content in *Phonics for Reading* and tested out of the program. Compared to students with a disability, students without a disability tended to place into *Phonics for Reading* at a higher level and continued to progress throughout the year.

Table 7. Fall-to-Spring Change in *Phonics for Reading* Placement Level by Disability Status

		Fall *Phonics for Reading* Placement			Spring *Phonics for Reading* Placement			
	n	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Tested Out
Students with a Disability	97	79.4%	16.5%	4.1%	41.2%	22.7%	30.9%	5.2%
Students without a Disability	471	57.3%	28.5%	14.2%	19.1%	29.9%	29.3%	21.7%
Total	568	61.1%	26.4%	12.5%	22.9%	28.7%	29.6%	18.8%

Do students with a disability using *Phonics for Reading* experience significant growth from fall to spring in Phonics, overall reading skills, and Vocabulary?

Next, we provide an overview of growth on the *i-Ready Diagnostic* for Reading for students with a disability. Sample size did not allow for disaggregation by grade level, and all results represent Grades 3–5 combined.

Regardless of disability status, students experienced statistically significant growth on their overall, Phonics, and Vocabulary scale scores (see Table 8). Additionally, the effect sizes associated with the fall-to-spring growth scores represent large and meaningful differences for an educational program (Kraft, 2020; Lipsey et al., 2012). These results suggest that *Phonics for Reading* may be beneficial for all students, regardless of disability status in mastering reading skills.

Table 8. Fall-to-Spring Growth on the *i-Ready Diagnostic* Scale Scores by Disability Status

		n	Fall Average (SD)	Spring Average (SD)	Average Fall-to-Spring Difference	St. Effect Size
Phonics	Students with a Disability	87	405.59 (51.54)	442.69 (52.89)	37.10*	.72
	Students without a Disability	318	428.10 (49.78)	465.12 (50.57)	37.02*	.74
Overall Score	Students with a Disability	97	426.34 (44.61)	451.49 (45.27)	25.15*	.56
	Students without a Disability	471	453.87 (46.47)	485.44 (49.96)	31.57*	.68
Vocabulary	Students with a Disability	97	432.70 (47.17)	455.74 (52.43)	23.04*	.49
	Students without a Disability	471	457.26 (50.66)	486.48 (53.22)	29.22*	.58

*p < .001

Note: Students may test out of the Phonics domain, thus not allowing for a fall-to-spring growth calculation. For this reason, students who tested out of the Phonics domain in either the fall or the spring were removed from analysis, resulting in smaller sample sizes for the Phonics domain compared to the overall and vocabulary analyses.

Conclusion

In this study, we evaluated how students using *Phonics for Reading* progressed on skills taught in *Phonics for Reading* as well as how students grew in their phonics, overall reading, and vocabulary skills. Regardless of grade, Multilingual Learner status, or disability status, all student groups grew in skills taught in *Phonics for Reading*, advancing on the program's placement test from fall to spring. All student groups also experienced statistically significant positive growth from fall to spring on the *i-Ready Diagnostic* for Reading overall, Phonics, and Vocabulary scores. Moreover, a large proportion of students progressed in their Grade-Level Placement from fall to spring. Each of these pieces of evidence points toward students using *Phonics for Reading* improve in their reading skills, moving them closer to becoming fluent, independent readers.

One of the particularly promising findings of this study was students' growth across several reading outcomes. That is, not only did *Phonics for Reading* users grow in their phonics skills, which are directly taught in the program, but they also grew in a measure of overall reading and vocabulary. These findings suggest that *Phonics for Reading* supports elements of students' foundational reading skills, and those skills benefit students in ways that extend far beyond only phonics.

One of the tenets of *Phonics for Reading* is that it may be used successfully with all students, including Multilingual Learners. Multilingual Learners typically have a strong command of reading skills in their native language and can engage with language in complex ways. However, they may need additional support to master English-specific reading skills, which are necessary for accessing written English content. As one of the fastest growing populations within the United States (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023), identifying programs that support Multilingual Learners is increasingly important. *Phonics for Reading* strives to provide these supports while honoring the knowledge and language skills students bring from their native language. Results from this study

suggest that Multilingual Learners do indeed benefit from the content taught in *Phonics for Reading*. In fact, Multilingual Learners using *Phonics for Reading* made similar or greater growth than students who were not classified as Multilingual Learners. These results provide evidence that *Phonics for Reading* may be a beneficial program to support Multilingual Learners in their journeys toward become proficient English readers.

We would be remiss not to acknowledge the societal context that Grades 3–5 students in this study were in Grades K–2 when the COVID-19 pandemic began in the United States in spring 2020. As we know, the pandemic resulted in school closures and disruptions to teaching and learning, as well as changes to norms at home and societally. While students were learning some of their most foundational reading skills, their daily lives were changing around them. Although students, their caregivers, and educators were doing all they could to stay on track academically, the reality is these students' learning opportunities looked very different than what is traditional and were likely limited at this time. In this study, we see these students who experienced some of the biggest educational impacts of the pandemic use *Phonics for Reading* and move closer to accessing on-grade level reading material.

Limitations and Opportunities for Future Research

This study represents students in one school district in California. Although this school district reported implementing *Phonics for Reading* in one of our most common implementation strategies (i.e., intervention 30-plus minutes/day, four-plus days per week), we know that implementation varies by context and this study reflects growth of *Phonics for Reading* students in only one district context. Moreover, we know that state policy shapes the experiences and opportunities for students in need of intervention programming. It is possible that the use case and implementation of *Phonics for Reading* and other curricula used alongside of it looks different in other states. We should replicate this research in additional states and school districts and with different student populations to understand the bigger picture of how students using *Phonics for Reading* expand their skills throughout the school year. Further, these results are descriptive and cannot make causal claims. Future research may consider including a comparison group for a more stringent test of the impact of *Phonics for Reading*.

Relatedly, given that we know implementation is related to students' educational outcomes, future research may consider including implementation measures such as how closely *Phonics for Reading* scripts were followed and how much time students spent using the program over the course of the year. Including information such as this will allow us to better understand the relationship between implementation and learning outcomes for *Phonics for Reading*, in turn allowing for more fine-tuned evidence for the most effective ways to support students through *Phonics for Reading*.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that this district used *Phonics for Reading* prior to the 2022-2023 school year. Although we do not have rosters to confirm which students previously received *Phonics for Reading* instruction, we can assume that many students in Grades 4 or 5 used *Phonics for Reading* in previous years. As such, results we observed for these students might be the result of year-over-year use of the program rather than what we might expect to see from a single year of usage. In future studies, we may include how long the students used *Phonics for Reading* in our

analysis to better understand the annual impact of the program and how that impact might change over time.

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