

## ***Open Court Reading: Texas Study***

SRA *Open Court Reading* is a comprehensive Grades K-5 literacy program that uses an explicit and systematic approach to teaching English language arts (ELA). Since its conception more than fifty years ago, *Open Court Reading* has been one of the most widely adopted ELA programs in the United States. The curriculum is grounded in research, emphasizing linking early literacy skills with later skills progressively. Current evidence of the program's efficacy is necessary to ensure that it continues to meet the needs of children, parents, and teachers.

The *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA)—the 2015 revision of the federal law regulating PreK-12 education in the United States—strongly recommends that schools and districts implement interventions with documented evidence of effectiveness (i.e., evidence-based interventions). ESSA specifies four categories of evidence-based studies based on the design and methods used in the research. This two-year study did not involve random assignment of participants to a treatment or control group; therefore, it did not meet the standards of an ESSA Tier 1 intervention. However, it did meet the standards required of a Tier 2 evidence-based intervention in that it was a quasi-experimental study that contained a relatively large analytic sample (i.e., more than 350 students) from multiple sites.

This study conducted by ICF, an independent third-party contractor, at the request of McGraw-Hill Education (MHE) helped determine the immediate impact of the *Open Court Reading* program<sup>1</sup> on literacy achievement in Grades K-5. Participants of the study included students and teachers from four schools within a single charter school district (OCR District) in Texas which first implemented *Open Court Reading* in the 2017-18 school year. Four elementary schools from a similar district in Texas that were not exposed to *Open Court Reading* served as a comparison sample (Comparison District). In Grades K-2, literacy achievement was measured by the Texas Primary Reading Inventory (TPRI)<sup>2</sup>; in Grades 3-5 it was measured by the appropriate reading tests of the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR®)<sup>3</sup>.

### **Key Findings**

#### **TPRI (Grades K-2):**

- For Grades K-2 students who were exposed to *Open Court Reading*, there was a significantly higher proportion of “Low Risk” K-2 students at the end of the school year (EOY) than at the beginning of the school year (BOY) (*McNemar's*  $\chi^2=30.38$ ,  $p<.001$ ). This was true for both years of implementation (2017-18 and 2018-19). When compared to students in the Comparison District there was no significant difference between the proportion of K-2 students overall in each group that were classified as At Risk at BOY in 2017-18 or 2018-19 school. However, in the 2017-18 school year, there was a significantly higher percentage of Grade 1 students in the Comparison District who had achieved Low Risk status at EOY.
- Within the OCR District “Still Developing” Kindergarten and Grade 1 students made significant growth in Phonemic Awareness (PA) and Graphophonemic Knowledge (GK) from BOY to EOY.
- In both 2017-18 and 2018-19, Still Developing OCR District students had a significantly higher percentage of Phonemic Awareness tasks in the “Developed” range at EOY, on average, than

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.mheducation.com/prek-12/program/microsites/MKTSP-THA14M0.html> for additional information. See also <http://s3.amazonaws.com/ecommerce-prod.mheducation.com/unitas/school/explore/sites/ocr/research-ocr-foundational-skills-five-ways-to-build-cornerstone-of-proficient-reading.pdf>.

Note for the remainder of the report SRA *Open Court Reading* will be referred to as *Open Court Reading*.

<sup>2</sup> See <https://www.tpri.org/index.html> and <https://www.tpri.org/resources/documents/20102014TechnicalReport.pdf> for additional information on the TPRI.

<sup>3</sup> See <https://tea.texas.gov/student.assessment/staar/> for general information and resources on STAAR.

Comparison District students, after controlling for BOY scores. In 2017-18, Still Developing Comparison District students had a significantly higher percentage of GK tasks in the “Developed” range at EOY, on average, than OCR District students, even after controlling for BOY scores; however, in 2018-19 there were no overall group differences, after controlling for BOY scores.

- With regard to the Inventory tasks that were administered to both low risk and at risk OCR District students, students made significant growth in Graphophonemic Knowledge (administered to Grade 2 students), Word Reading (administered to Grade 1 and Grade 2 students), and Comprehension (administered to all grades) from BOY to EOY during both years of implementation.
  - In 2017-18, approximately 60% of Grade 1 and 70% of Grade 2 students who were at the “Listening” level at BOY moved to either the “Instructional” or “Independent” level by EOY.
  - In 2018-19, approximately 55% of Grade 1 and 50% of Grade 2 students who were at the “Listening” level at BOY moved to either the “Instructional” or “Independent” level by EOY.
- For both years combined, after controlling for the BOY difference, OCR District students had a significantly higher percentage of WR tasks in the “Developed” range at the EOY than Comparison District students.
- Grade 1 and Grade 2 OCR District students combined had significantly higher EOY Comprehension scores in both 2017-18 and 2018-19 than the Comparison District students, after controlling for BOY comprehension scores. In 2018-19, OCR District students in Grades 1 and 2 each had significantly higher EOY comprehension scores than the Comparison District students in those grades, after controlling for BOY Comprehension scores.

#### **STAAR Reading Tests (Grades 3-5):**

- Following one year of *Open Court Reading* implementation, OCR District students in Grade 5 in 2017–18 performed significantly better on the STAAR Reading assessment than they performed on their Grade 4 STAAR Reading assessment.
- After being exposed to *Open Court Reading* for one school year 63% of students from Grade 3 to Grade 4 or from Grade 4 to Grade 5 continued to build literacy skills at either the expected rate or an accelerated rate. From the first to second year of implementation, 67% of students from Grade 3 to Grade 4 or from Grade 4 to Grade 5 continued to build literacy skills at either the expected rate or an accelerated rate, with a higher percentage of students exceeding growth expectations than in the previous year (34% vs 24%).
- OCR District students in Grade 5 improved their performance more than Grade 4 students over both years of implementation. A higher percentage of Grades 4 and 5 OCR District students increased their performance level from 2017-18 to 2018-19 in comparison to pre-implementation performance to their performance after one year of exposure to the program.
- In 2018-19, Grade 5 students from the OCR District had higher STAAR Reading percentile scores than matched comparison students from the Comparison District, though this difference was marginally statistically significant ( $p=.07$ ).

#### **Teacher Perceptions:**

- More teachers had positive, as compared to negative, perceptions of the program after using it for one or two years. While a few of the responding teachers felt negatively about *Open Court Reading*, most perceived the program either somewhat or extremely positively.
- When asked to identify the most beneficial components of *Open Court Reading*, the most commonly identified were the Green Band (foundational skills) component, letter sound cartoons, the writing component, and the comprehension component as most beneficial.
- When asked which components teachers found least beneficial, three teachers indicated the writing component and two teachers mentioned the inquiry section.
- OCR District teachers generally found professional development on *Open Court Reading* to be beneficial. While professional development was perceived beneficially, OCR District teachers made several suggestions regarding training when asked how *Open Court Reading* could be improved. Some teachers felt the training might be more effective if it targeted certain grades rather than combining all grade levels into a single training. Some teachers also reported they would just like to have more training. Finally, some teachers specifically requested additional training on using manipulatives and on workstations.

DISCLAIMER: Performance can improve due to many factors, including innate ability and prior education of the students participating, as well as differences among teachers and their pedagogies. We believe that, even taking these factors into account, *Open Court Reading* does contribute to improvements in student outcomes.