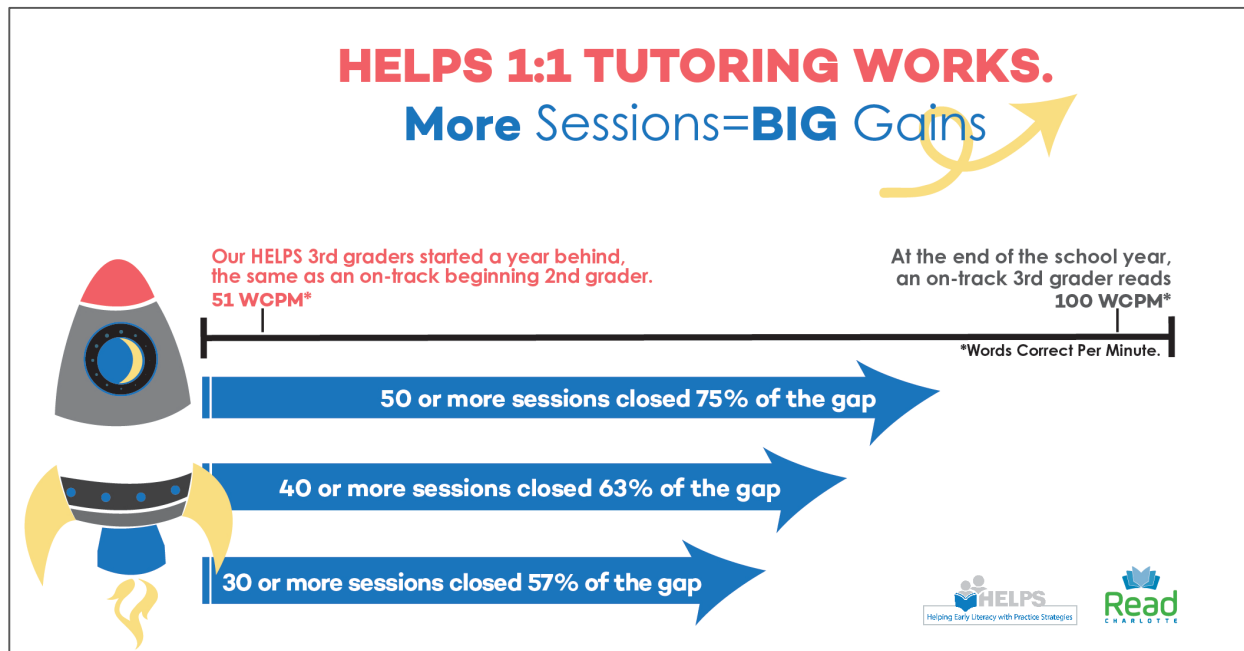




Results From Year One of HELPS 1:1 Tutoring in Charlotte-Mecklenburg

Prepared by Read Charlotte and the Helps Education Fund

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Helping Early Literacy With Practice Strategies (HELPS) is an evidence-based, research-validated program proven to improve children's reading fluency. Developed by John Begeny, a professor at North Carolina State University, the highly scripted program is included on the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) standard treatment protocol list of approved literacy interventions. It can be delivered by trained volunteers, teaching assistants and teachers alike. Reading fluency is a student's ability to read with speed, accuracy and proper expression. Research finds high correlations between reading fluency, comprehension and overall reading achievement. Read Charlotte estimates about 20%-25% of third graders in CMS learn to sound out individual words (phonics) but don't read with enough speed or accuracy (fluency) to understand what they are reading. An analysis of CMS third graders in 2018 found a 62% correlation between third grade end of year oral reading fluency scores and student performance on the North Carolina third grade end of grade (EOG) reading assessment.

Read Charlotte partnered with CMS and a host of community partners to launch HELPS tutoring in 10 CMS schools in the 2018-2019 school year. Volunteers received a 3-hour training and follow up coaching and support. Students were intended to receive a 15-20 minute tutoring session

three times a week. A total of 155 third graders received 5,866 tutoring sessions. A core group of organizations assisted with the launch and implementation: Helps Education Fund, Augustine Literacy Project, United Way of Central Carolinas, Project LIFT and Read Charlotte. Other organizations partnered with Read Charlotte to assist with tutor recruitment and training.

Participating CMS Schools

Ashley Park PreK-8
Druid Hills Academy
Huntingtowne Farms Elementary
Marie G. Davis K-8
Montclair Elementary
Reedy Creek Elementary
Steele Creek Elementary
Sterling Elementary
Westerly Hills Academy
Winterfield Elementary

Partnering Organizations

Above and Beyond Students
American Girl Store
Augustine Literacy Project
Bank of America
Belk Foundation
Black Child Development Institute - Charlotte
Charlotte Mecklenburg Library
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools
Deloitte
Dilworth Rotary Club
First Presbyterian Church
For Charlotte Mission Network
Forest Hill Church
Freedom Communities
Hope Community Church
Levine Jewish Community Center
Mecklenburg County
Myers Park United Methodist Church

Myers Park Presbyterian Church
Pineville Neighbors
Project LIFT
Selwyn Avenue Presbyterian Church
Temple Beth El
Temple Israel
UNC Charlotte – College of Education
United Way of Central Carolinas
Uplift Church
UrbanPromise Charlotte
YMCA of Greater Charlotte

Key Results

- The average CMS third grader who received HELPS 1:1 tutoring started in Fall 2018 reading 51 words correct per minute (WCPM) – a full year behind in reading fluency.
- **Out of 155 students who received HELPS 1:1 tutoring, 46% (71) exceeded national norms for expected growth in oral reading fluency.** This far exceeds the 3%-14% of participants we expect to see with improved outcomes from typical reading interventions.
- **The 117 students who received 30 or more HELPS sessions** on average started the year reading 51.2 WCPM and finished third grade reading 79.1 WCPM. They **closed 57% of the gap** needed to get to 100 WCPM, the benchmark for on-level reading fluency at the end of third grade. This is a gain of about 1½ grade levels.
- **The 63 students who received 40 or more HELPS sessions** on average started the year reading 52.5 WCPM and finished third grade reading 82.6 WCPM. They **closed 63% of the gap** needed to get to 100 WCPM by the end of third grade. This is a gain of just under 1½ grade levels.
- **The 31 students who received 50 or more HELPS sessions** on average started the year reading 52.2 WCPM and finished third grade reading 87.9 WCPM. They **closed 75% of the gap** needed to get to 100 WCPM by the end of third grade. This is a gain of slightly more than 1½ grade levels.
- The 38 students who received less than 30 HELPS sessions on average started the year reading 49.9 WCPM and finished third grade reading 71.1 WCPM. They closed 44% of the gap needed to get to 100 WCPM, but finished with the reading fluency level they should have had at the start of the school year.
- In Fall 2018, only 9 students started the year with on-level reading fluency. **At the end of the school year, more than double (20) were on grade level** for oral reading fluency.
- **Students who received 50 or more sessions throughout the year (20% of all students) made the greatest gains**—average growth in reading fluency of 35.7 WCPM. On average, these students started at the 24th percentile at the beginning of the year. **Twenty out of 31 – 64.5% – exceeded their expected growth** in oral reading fluency.
- Across the board, **students who received HELPS tutoring on average experienced greater gains in reading fluency in Spring 2019 than Fall 2018**. Students who got 30 or more total sessions realized growth in oral reading fluency in the spring that was about 2/3 greater than national norms. This is the opposite of what we usually see, i.e. gains in student reading achievement (generally and for reading fluency specifically) lower in the spring semester compared to the fall semester.

Five Key Lessons From Year One of HELPS Tutoring in Charlotte-Mecklenburg

One: Quality implementation is important.

In the fall, we delivered just under half (47%) of the full dosage of 3 weekly HELPS tutoring sessions to participating students. We redoubled efforts in the spring, especially after observing that students who had 20 or more sessions in the fall appeared to experience the greatest growth in reading fluency. As a result, the median number of HELPS sessions increased from 9 sessions in the fall semester to 27 sessions in the spring semester – a threefold increase. This boosted spring semester dosage to 70%. Overall, out of 155 HELPS students, 117 students received 30 or more sessions and 63 students received 40 or more sessions. This good result reflects the hard work and excellent coordination of volunteers and school sites, and great commitment by everyone involved (including students, school staff, volunteers, ALP, HEF and Read Charlotte).

Two: Growth in the spring semester bucked local and national trends.

Research shows reading achievement (including fluency) usually slows down in the spring compared to the fall. Students who received HELPS tutoring, however, on average *exceeded* national norms for reading fluency. On average, the 117 students who received 30 or more HELPS sessions in the spring grew by 14.4 WCPM compared to their expected growth of 9.5 WCPM. The 63 students who received 40 or more HELPS sessions grew by 15.1 WCPM in the spring compared to expected growth of 9.1 WCPM. The 31 students who received 50 or more sessions grew by 16.8 WCPM in the spring compared to expected growth of 8.4 WCPM.

Three: We can produce “real world” results on par with academic research.

To our knowledge, the 155 students in these 10 CMS schools represent the largest organized implementation of the HELPS 1:1 program. This involved over 150 trained adult volunteers. (A few teachers and teacher assistants also tutored.) Individual students received tutoring from 2-3 adults and startup of HELPS across these schools was staggered over several months. Fall 2018 implementation was also interrupted by two hurricanes.

The best comparison of this experience is a randomized controlled trial study with 59 second graders in which HELPS was delivered by certified teachers or teaching assistants in a single school. The students on average started at the 35th percentile in reading fluency and received an average of 50 HELPS sessions between October and April. In this 2011 study, students grew an average of 40.5 words correct per minute compared to a control group.

By comparison, in Charlotte the 31 third graders in 6 different schools who received 50 or more sessions started at the 24th percentile in reading fluency and averaged growth of 35.7 WCPM. We naturally would expect second graders to grow reading fluency faster than third graders. To maintain grade level performance for reading fluency from fall to spring, second graders need to grow by 35 words compared to third graders who need to grow by 30 WCPM. Given the difference in grade levels and starting reading fluency levels for students we served, these “real world” results hold up well to those achieved under controlled research conditions.

Four: Students who get more HELPS sessions gain more in reading fluency.

Oral reading fluency is an important measure of reading achievement. In spring 2018, there was a 62% correlation between CMS third grade end-of-year DIBELS Oral Reading Fluency scores and performance on the North Carolina End of Grade assessment. Although we are cautious about predicting direct linkage between HELPS and 2019 EOG scores, the student data show that HELPS contributed to improvement in reading fluency of tutored students.

There were 30 students who got 20-29 HELPS sessions and another 63 students who got 40 or more HELPS sessions. In fall 2018 there was no statistically significant difference in reading fluency between these two groups. By the end of the year, however, the students who had 40 or more HELPS sessions on average were reading 8 words more correct per minute than the students who had 20-29 sessions. This statistically significant difference is about 70% greater than the impact we'd expect to see for similarly targeted evidence-based literacy interventions in general (tutored students compared to a control group who get no intervention). No doubt other factors such as classroom instruction, support at home, and other interventions also contributed. However, on balance the evidence shows that students who received more HELPS sessions made greater gains in reading fluency.

Five: Students need more HELPS sessions to get to grade-level fluency by the EOG.

A third grader who is "on-level" for reading fluency starts the year reading at least 70 WCPM and finishes reading 100 WCPM or more in the spring. The average HELPS third grader in fall 2018, however, started the year reading 51 words correct per minute – the equivalent of an on-track beginning second grader. To get to the third grade end of year benchmark would have required growth of 49 words in a single year, which is close to double the national norm for third graders.

Students who received 50 or more sessions grew just over 1.5 grade levels in a single year and closed three quarters of the gap to on-level reading fluency by the end of third grade. These results suggest three things for the future:

- First, we need to ensure 100% of students receive 50 or more HELPS sessions during an academic year.
- Second, we need to better align HELPS with students' needs. This includes making sure that lower performing students are prioritized for more comprehensive supports (such as ELL and EC). It also means considering prioritization of HELPS for third grade students 1 year behind or less.
- Third, the evidence shows that HELPS works even for students who start at lower levels of reading fluency. We need to start working with these students earlier – in second grade (and perhaps even first grade) – so we have sufficient time to get them up to reading 100 WCPM by the time they take the third-grade reading EOG.