

Blended Learning Is the Key to Intervention Prevention

Here's how a Pennsylvania district uses a blended approach to transition 15% of reading intervention students back into the traditional classroom within one semester

By Linda Baker

In Neshaminy School District (PA), nearly 20% of our struggling K-2 students spend 30 minutes a day, five days a week in small-group reading intervention. To limit the time that these students spend in intervention programs, we have an “all hands on deck” approach: With parental involvement and our blended learning model, Neshaminy educators identify and build upon students’ strengths to lay the foundation for reading success.

Our blended model starts with an engaging digital curriculum, 1:1 instruction, and small-group work. After we implemented this approach districtwide last year, we saw enormous growth in a majority of our students, especially among struggling or reluctant readers. Ten to 15% of students entering the intervention program at the start of the school year were able to “graduate” and transition back to the traditional classroom by January. We have found that by focusing on phonics and the skills needed to decode the English language, our students are able to bring what they’ve learned into the classroom, effectively bridging the gap between intervention and our ELA curriculum.

Teaching Students to Decode

Up until four years ago, each school's reading intervention staff developed materials based on best practices. With the goal of making students proficient readers before they entered third grade, a small team of teachers attended trainings through [Reading Horizons](#), and quickly realized how powerful the decoding approach could be for their students. Every year we’ve expanded our use of the curriculum, and today use it in all seven of Neshaminy’s elementary schools.

At Ferderbar Elementary, our reading interventionists see approximately 90 students daily. We use a “pull-out” model, so students who need reading intervention leave the traditional classroom during independent work time (or what we call “The Daily 5”) and focus on mastering one to two skills per week. This systematic process of introducing phonetic and decoding skills allows students to rapidly and efficiently crack the “code” of the English Language to become more successful readers.

[Research](#) shows that when students learn how the English code works through an explicit, easy-to-follow, and multisensory approach, reading becomes second nature and guessing is dramatically reduced. The Reading Horizons method features a unique marking system to help students figure out multisyllable words on their own. With our blended model, students are empowered to make the connections they need to learn the method independently on their device, or in whole-class or small-group instruction with their teachers. The result is more meaningful interactions with texts and improved comprehension.

How Blended Intervention Works

An intervention classroom at Joseph Ferderbar looks subtly different from a traditional learning setting. We've found students learn better when they're standing and are able to look up at what they're doing, as opposed to looking down at a worksheet or iPad. We use wall-mounted whiteboards so students can hear, speak, write, and see the words—all while having fun. This model works well for small groups, keeping each student actively engaged in activities and showcasing what they've learned to their teachers and fellow students.

When marking and decoding words, students are urged to “stay on the road,” which simply means to begin marking under the word from left to right, then come up and around the end of the word to prove the vowel sound. To provide motivation, each student has a “driver's license” with his or her photograph and name on it which encourages students to “stay on the road”. The challenge is fun for students and provides incentive for doing well during sessions.

Last year, Joseph Ferderbar adopted the *Reading Horizons Discovery*® digital platform to prevent summer slide and complete our blended learning model. In addition to the 30 minutes a day they spend on direct instruction, intervention students spend at least one hour per week using the software. The digital curriculum allows students to practice and use what they've learned through access to lessons, vocabulary, games, and a library of decodable text. Thanks to the fun interface, students often forget they're learning while playing!

Increasing Parent Involvement

We've found that students who practice outside of school develop their literacy skills at an increased rate, allowing them to feel more confident and fluent when reading and writing. This year, we've encouraged parents to use Reading Horizons during the summer and at home. During the school year, we send students home with folders that include reinforcement activities like skill words and sentences that students are working on, and decodable “little books.” Parents also have the choice to attend workshops our district hosts where we teach them the same marking system for decoding and proving words on whiteboards that we teach their children. Parents have said that after attending these workshops, they had a better understanding of how to help their children at home, and felt more prepared to support their children's academic progress.

Today, instead of dreading it, our students are excited to engage in reading. Measuring progress frequently using informal assessments, periodic benchmark assessments, and the information in the “data dashboard” generated by the software helps us drive instruction by focusing on individual students' growth and areas of need. Our decision to take a blended approach to intervention and increased parent support has brought our vision to fruition: Students are regularly graduating from their intervention plans, and we have seen consistent growth in students' performance and engagement.

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