

What are the most effective before/after school tutoring strategies to help students who are behind grade level on the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA)?

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For AFT/ATF Teacher Leaders 2018

Rationale

Many times, students enter school below grade level. If they do not make adequate progress, a teacher is left with the choice of promotion or retention. Some students who are behind may need more time and retention is a good option. However, for most students, research has shown, retention has many negative consequences including lower academic achievement, aggression, dropping out of high school, as well as reduced college attendance. Research has also shown that retention is only effective when the retained students receive substantial additional services during the retained school year. One of the most common services given to students who are not proficient is after school tutoring. This research looks at the strategies used during tutoring. It also uses quantitative reading data to measure the growth of four students who attended tutoring twice a week for forty minutes a session.

Review of Literature

For many years New Mexico legislation has been introduced to hold back students in the third grade who fail to meet proficiency. Research has been conducted which counters this legislative push. Researchers have found retention to have negative effects on children. Early retention has been shown to result in low achievement, aggression, and higher high school dropout rates. Retention had a dramatic negative effect on 2 and 4-year college attendance- a 26% advantage for promoted students over retained students. (Marsico Institute 2012) A state that has implemented mandated retention for third graders has been Florida. Close studies of Florida's retention practices have shown retention was paired with funding. For example, since 2006 Florida has legislated a separate education fund guaranteed to be spent on literacy. These funds are to be spent on highly qualified literacy coaches, intensive summer reading camps for lagging readers, and other supports. (Marsico Institute, 2012) Furthermore, Florida policy guarantees important intervention services for retained students such as 90 minutes of additional reading instruction a day. These interventions are not guaranteed to barely promoted students. New York has had similar policies as Florida. The RAND report stated that the positive effects of retention seen in the state can be contributed to the additional services retained students received in the retention year. (Marsico Institute, 2012) Under No Child Left Behind, underperforming Title I schools were required to provide supplemental services, including free tutoring. Research has consistently shown that tutoring programs can effectively improve students' reading skills. When investigating successful tutoring programs, it has

been found that programs using certified teachers produced larger impacts than those using paraprofessionals or volunteers. It has also been found that effective programs implement the reading of new material by students, reading comprehension practice, word analysis and letter-sound relationship strategies, and writing activities. (Schultz and Mueller, 2007) Another key to the success of tutoring programs is insuring a tie to classroom instruction. Positive results came from programs who met three times a week for 10-60 minutes. (Department of Education, Washington, DC, 2001)

Background

My Title-I school is located in the South Valley of Albuquerque. The students in my first-grade class participate in a 50-50 Dual Language program. Twenty-two out of thirty-seven students are English dominant; fifteen out of thirty-seven are considered English Language Learners. The students participate in a 50/50 Dual Language program and have one teacher who instructs in Spanish for half the day and one teacher who instructs in English for half the day. All thirty-seven students participate in simultaneous literacy instruction and are taught language arts in both English and Spanish. According to the Developmental Reading Assessment, 37% of the class is at beginning steps, 26% is nearing proficient, and 37% is proficient in English reading.

Study Design

Four students from my class were chosen to participate in after school tutoring. Two of the students were nearing proficient according to the Developmental Reading Assessment; two of the students were at beginning steps according to the Developmental Reading Assessment. The students met twice a week for forty minutes. During this time, 10 minutes were spent on phonemic awareness activities, 20 minutes were spent on guided reading activities, and 10 minutes were spent on guided writing activities. The Early Success intervention reading program, which is a research-based intervention program for students in grades 1 and 2, was used during the twenty minutes of guided reading. Guided reading included shared reading, independent reading, and rereading for fluency. The Wilson Foundations phonics program was used during phonemic awareness activities in order to tie tutoring sessions to daily classroom phonics activities.

Data and Results

The students were given the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) three times this school year. Three of the students participating in tutoring showed a year growth in their reading development (see table 1 below). They were also given phrases to read tied to the phonics patterns being practiced, and three out of four students were able to read the phrases with 87% accuracy or above (see table 2

below). When conducting anecdotal records of the guided reading stories, three out of four students were able to reread the stories with 90% accuracy or above. Student A, who did not make as much growth as the others is in the Student Assistant Team process and will be referred for further evaluation and support. Other student who began the year at a DRA 2 and did not participate in tutoring only grew to a level 4.

Table 1	DRA- Fall	DRA- Winter	DRA-Spring
Student A	3	4	6
Student B	4	4	10
Student C	3	6	12
Student D	3	6	12

Table 2	Fundations Phrases
Student A	63%
Student B	93%
Student C	99%
Student D	87%

Both teacher reported seeing a change in the behavior and effort of the students participating in tutoring. As the tutoring teacher, I felt the extra time spent with children helped to strengthen and develop our relationship. I was able to work with the students in a small group and get to know them on a more personal level. The students' Spanish teacher reported the students participating more in class and having greater confidence in their Spanish reading skills.

Recommendation and Next Steps

As evidenced in the research above, it is critical to fully fund interventions such as reading specialist, small group reading instruction, and tutoring outside of the school day. When students are struggling with grade level standards it is critical to consider intervention support prior to retention. The negative effects of retention are far more detrimental to the future of children than beneficial. We must begin to fully fund our schools to support all students. Advocating for interventions rather than remediation is in the best interest of our students.

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