

Preparing students for “reading to learn”



Learning to read in the primary grades

Primary literacy instruction is unique: that’s what the teachers and administrators at the Interstate 35 Community School District believe, and that’s why a K–2 solution like the Superkids Reading Program made sense when they sought a new reading curriculum.

The primary grades need something different.

—Karen Reynolds,
first grade teacher at Interstate 35 Elementary

The committee evaluating reading programs for the Interstate 35 Elementary School was open to the idea of a reading program that covered through grade 5 but was also comfortable splitting the grades. Principal Casey Christensen explains, “When we looked at some of the other programs, we just didn’t feel they met the specific needs of the primary grades.”

“Whether you’re looking at the Iowa Core standards or the skill set, the question is ‘what curriculum is going to meet the needs of that grade, that age level?’” Christensen elaborates. “If they’re getting the skills covered, that’s the important thing.”

Ready for grade 3

At Interstate 35, teachers try to ensure students enter third grade as skilled readers. “One of the big selling points was that if you teach Superkids with fidelity, your kids should go into third grade ready to read to learn instead of learn to read,” says Nicole Truman, a first grade teacher at Interstate 35 Elementary.

First grade teacher Karen Reynolds echoes this perspective. “There are a few different skills you need to learn to read, as opposed to reading to learn.” She credits Superkids’ explicit phonics instruction as a key component of the program.

“We like the explicit instruction piece on the phonics skills,” says first grade teacher Anna Johnson. We think

Interstate 35 Elementary School

Madison County rural school district serving the towns of Truro, New Virginia, and St. Charles



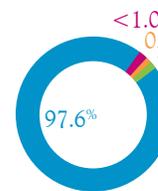
Students with Individual Education Plans, K–5



Students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, K–5



Children in the district under age 17 in poverty



Ethnicity

Caucasian: 97.6%

Hispanic: <1.0%

African American/Black: 0.5%

Other Ethnicities: <1.0%

that is really good for K–2. Students need that explicit instruction on those skills.”

Checking all the boxes

Superkids checks the boxes for a research-based reading curriculum. “This is a better all-around picture of how they’re reading,” explains Reynolds, who was active in evaluating and choosing the program.

Interstate 35 teachers appreciate Superkids’ integration of letter patterns, sight words, comprehension skills, and decoding and blending. Johnson says that Superkids “hits the areas being tested.”

“We’ve seen a huge difference in student writing.”

—Casey Christensen,
Principal at Interstate 35 Elementary

Principal Christensen also highlights the value of the Superkids’ writing component to students’ writing growth and achievement. He emphasizes that it includes important composing skills. “Not just the handwriting piece—I’m talking about writing in complete sentences, uppercase, lowercase, punctuation. Those kinds of things.”

Teachers use Superkids to reach all readers. Interventionists are able to use Superkids to reteach decoding, and the reading libraries let teachers organize small groups for struggling as well as advanced students. Superkids gives Interstate 35 teachers the resources to differentiate their instruction.

The community of Superkids

Interstate 35 students are enthusiastic about Superkids. Following the Superkids’ adventures is “kind of a hook to get them interested in reading for some of the ones that aren’t as naturally interested in it,” says first grade teacher Nicole Truman.

She explains that great debates happen among students who question whether the Superkids are real kids or not—“kind of like Santa Claus.” She adds, “On the last day of the school year, we have Superkids Day and the kids all get to dress up as their favorite Superkids character.” Even the bus driver joined the fun,

allowing students to decorate the bus like the Superkids’ clubhouse.

“Parents are saying, ‘Wow, my kids really like those stories you’re reading. They really like those kids.’”

—Casey Christensen,
Principal at Interstate 35 Elementary

Parents have embraced the Superkids too. “In all the years that I’ve taught, which is many, I’ve never had parents comment on my reading program,” says Reynolds.

Seeing growth

Test scores are reflecting the influence of Superkids. In the last two state assessments, Interstate 35 students scored five or more points higher than state average in grades 2 and 3 Iowa Assessments. Principal Christensen points out that the 2015–2016 Iowa Assessment showed 85% of grade 3 students reached proficiency or above in reading, more than eight points higher than state average (76.9%). These students had the benefit of Superkids use in their elementary reading program when they were in second grade in 2014–2015.

Percentage of grade 3 students proficient in reading on Iowa Assessments

The gray line shows the state average for these years (76.8% and 76.9%). Source: State Annual Yearly Progress reports, 2014–2015 and 2015–2016

