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ABSTRACT

This booklet describes early reading programs in six different elementary schools in Colorado that share the same goal--all children must be fluent readers and writers by the time they enter third grade. The six schools, while different in size, location, and socioeconomic makeup, each emphasize: early intervention; a balanced, consistent teaching approach by all teachers; 30 minutes daily of one-to-one reading work tailored to each child's learning style; reading at home with parents; and community involvement. Every school program described in the booklet makes reading part of everything the children do during the school day, stresses accountability for students and teachers, and provides in-depth professional training and support. All school programs reported drops in the need for remedial and special education services, and all have scored "impressive" gains in standardized tests since refocusing instruction on early literacy. (Contains 8 charts of data.) (RS)

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is
for
Literacy...



is
for
Love

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An Update on Early Reading Programs in Six Colorado Schools



colorado department of education

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L is for Literacy, L is for Love

When James started first grade, he knew only six letters. He had almost no concept of books and print, despite the extra help his single dad provided at home. The other children made fun of his attempts to read, and he was starting to act up in class. Embarrassed and frustrated, and just days into his school year, James was ready to give up on school.

But his school wasn't ready to give up on James. He was immediately assigned to spend 30 minutes each day with a teacher specially trained to help children with serious reading problems. Using an approach tailored to James' specific reading challenges and learning style—and lots of patience and love—his teacher soon began to help James see meaning in letters and words. Within weeks, he had gained self-confidence and proudly showed off his new skills to anyone who would listen.



As his skills grew throughout the year, so did his determination to succeed. One day when he missed the school bus, James walked the two miles to school so he wouldn't miss his reading lesson.

By the end of first grade, James easily read second-grade materials. Now a fourth-grader, he is reading more than one year above grade level and is an advanced student.

James and the other young readers you'll learn about in this booklet come from schools whose faculties and staffs have much in common: a willingness to innovate, the courage to change, and a deep conviction that all children must be fluent readers and writers by the time they enter third grade. Here are some of the ways six Colorado schools are making that happen.*

*The children's names have been changed, but their stories are real.

Comments from Educators

What struck me about all the models was that improved learning was the driving force, and accelerated student achievement was the exciting result. The staffs worked in teams to meet their challenges, but they were not content to stop there. The view of the teaching/learning process as continually evolving is well stated by the team at Leroy Drive as they ponder how they can "develop better ways..." This will only mean continued achievement in learning for all students—no matter what stands in their way.

Carrie Ekey
Primary Teacher



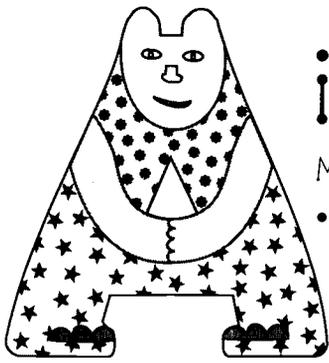
The programs described in this booklet are based on what we know about good reading instruction. Each program, although tailored to each site's specific needs, includes components that can be replicated in any school in Colorado. The success of these approaches shows that schools can indeed create programs that can meet the needs of all learners.

Dr. Patricia Hagerty
Center for Collaborative Leadership

The six programs described share several common themes: early intervention instead of remediation; sustained professional development supported by modeling and coaching; a common language used by staff about emergent readers and writers; large blocks of time for literacy learning; and parent involvement to support a child's learning. Together, these elements make a strong literacy program.

Sharon Dwyer
Title I Coordinator

This report has been prepared by *Partnerships/Goals 2000* to recognize early literacy initiatives across Colorado.



is for Achievement

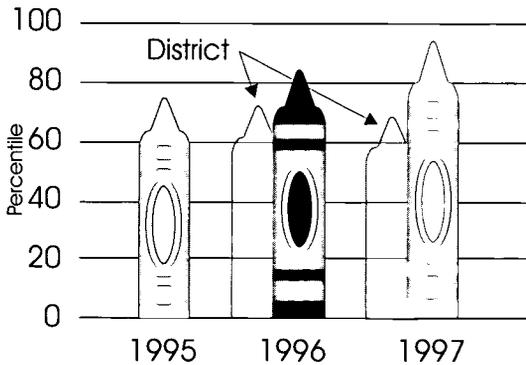
Montview Elementary School, Aurora Public Schools



Poverty—even homelessness—can't keep the children of Montview Elementary from learning to read and write. This year Montview fourth graders soared to the 92nd percentile in a national literacy test, nearly 25% above the district as a whole.

It wasn't always that way. Just a few years ago the school scored below the 30th percentile, with a hefty percentage of students routed to remedial or special education programs. Given the school's 80% poverty rate and 120% turnover rate, substandard performance might be expected.

Montview Historical Data
Fourth Grade Riverside Language Arts
Performance Assessment



Expected, perhaps—but not accepted. Firmly convinced that all children can learn, no matter what social and economic challenges they face, Montview's staff voted to adopt a completely different approach to teaching and learning. Literacy Learning, developed in New Zealand, stresses individual learning plans for each student, letting children progress at their own speed—and lots of individual support for children and teachers.

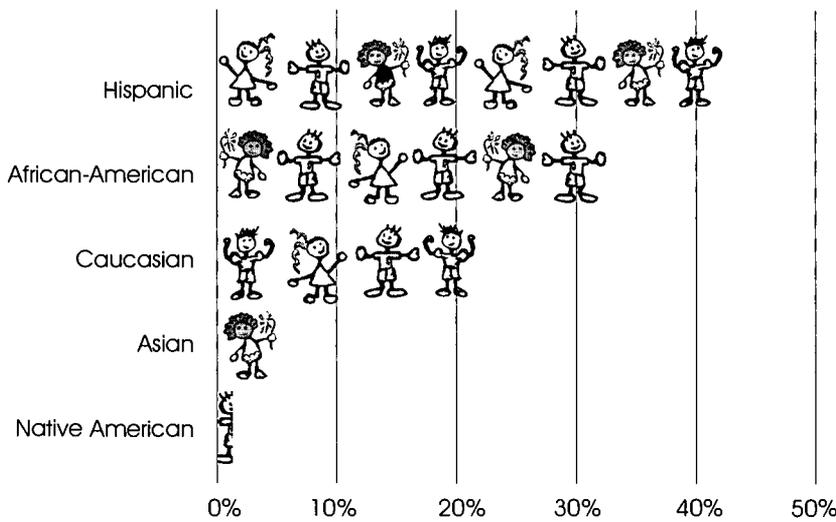
"Our instructional approach is based on sound literacy and math research, but it also acknowledges Montview's socioeconomic makeup and high turnover," said principal Deborah Backus. "We make sure our teachers have the skills and tools they need to help these kids perform as well as those who are better endowed socially, financially, and emotionally."



It begins on the first day at school: each child is assessed to determine his or her reading and writing skills. "We look at their strengths, then build from there. They succeed from the very beginning, and that propels them to achieve even more," assistant principal Jane Dooley-Stuart explained.

At various times, every child works individually with the teacher, with other students at the same skill level, or independently. Children learn at their own pace, not one dictated by a textbook's teacher manual. But they are expected to read and write fluently by third grade—and they do. In fact, several children once targeted for special education now shine as gifted and talented.

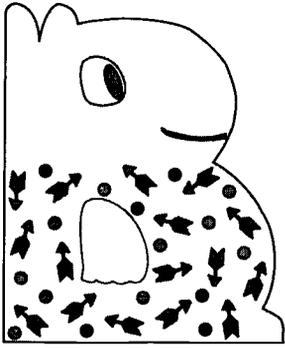
Literacy is woven into everything the children do. After they complete their 'must-do's,' students decide what they want to know more about. Then they read and write letters, biographies, and speeches about their selected topics. Their 'draft books,' records of skills they have mastered and are working on, reinforce the message of learning as achievement. Chad even asked Santa for a new draft book!



Teachers are learners, too. Every teacher works with a coach who helps hone instructional and diagnostic skills. Teachers collaborate on innovative ways to help children succeed, heartily supported by the administration. Skilled paraprofessionals support the individual reading instruction that is the cornerstone of this approach. "Every teacher is an expert in literacy instruction," Backus noted, "so we don't have to go the remedial reading/writing route." In fact, the former remedial reading teacher is now a teacher coach.

The community is a big part of the equation. Long-time residents of the neighborhood volunteer at the school, helping the students gain a respect for seniors. Parents are employed as translators or paraprofessionals. Family nights and a planned resource center help parents understand the value of education.

"Montview is a 'no excuses' school," says principal Backus. "We have high expectations of ourselves—and of our students. We push our students and teachers to work to their potential and build on their strengths—and we make sure everyone has all the support they need at every step along the way."



is for Bucket

Northeast BOCES/Otis Elementary School, Otis R3



Imagine having to memorize every book, newspaper, or letter you read. That's what Melissa, an Otis first grader, believed: reading is memorizing whole books in one huge chunk.

Brad thought he had aced the alphabet. He chanted confidently, "...H, I, J, K, amineto, P." Letters were just sounds to Brad, not visual symbols that he could combine into words and stories.

Children's notions about language and reading can set the tone for their reading experiences. If misconceptions aren't corrected early, children may set up a pattern for failure that will follow them for a lifetime. As Joy Perry, an Otis Elementary School teacher, said, "I could see things going wrong for some kids in the first grade. By third grade, they were failing. I just didn't know how to help them."

Early and individual tutoring was the answer. Otis Elementary was one of nearly a dozen northeastern Colorado schools that opted to participate in the Early Prevention program offered through the Northeast Board of Cooperative Education Services (BOCES). A hybrid of several other successful approaches, EP is tailored to the needs and structure of rural schools.

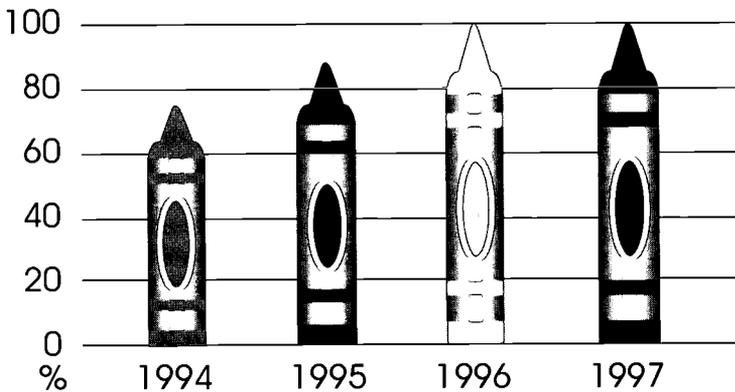
The program targets the lowest 20% of first-grade students. Those students are assigned to trained tutors—teachers, skilled paraprofessionals, and trained community volunteers—who expose



students to a wide variety of literature, including rhymes and high-interest stories, for 30 minutes every day. Children see and read their own stories in print. They learn letters, sounds, and words through magnetic letters and association. Every session includes at least three books, writing, and phonics.

Books and other tools are selected according to each child's special challenges. For example, Melissa tried to memorize because she had no concept of words as separate parts of the whole story, Joy Perry said. "To push her beyond memorization, I would choose texts that showed in pictures and words things like a ball, a cow, and a bucket. When she read 'pail' I could help her understand that the word in the text started with the letter B, then help her work out 'bucket' by looking at the whole word."

First-Graders Reading at Grade Level
Otis Elementary School

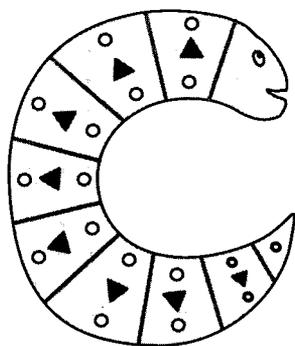


Other techniques zero in on auditory and visual discrimination problems—perhaps speaking the text into a child's ear as she reads, or encouraging another to use his finger to guide his eye along a line of text.

"Direct instruction—teaching each child the way that child needs to be taught—is the key," says Marcia DeGroot, Title I coordinator and EP trainer for the Northeast Colorado BOCES. "Kids, not curriculum, drive instruction." That approach works: 72% of the children served last year needed no further help when they entered second grade.

Everyone is benefiting. Teachers feel renewed and able to make a difference, and

children are more confident of their abilities, DeGroot reports. Students actually enjoy reading and writing now—and two children from Sedgwick who emerged from the program won first and third places in their district spelling bee.



is for Community

Monterey Elementary School, Harrison School District Two, Colorado Springs



Greta and Carlos had a lot in common. Both came from families who moved a lot—Greta’s father was in the military and Carlos’s family were agricultural workers. Both knew little English—Greta spoke only German with her mother, and Carlos’s family spoke Spanish. Both entered Monterey well into the school year. Both were shy and reluctant to speak to teachers and classmates. Both might have been lost in the big, bustling city school—but instead, both children became Monterey success stories.

Success is what Monterey is all about. Almost two years ago the school adopted Success for All, an approach that was designed to reach children in poor, urban schools like Monterey, where 75% of the students are low-income or poverty level. Monterey’s Colorado Springs

neighborhood ranks highest in the city in violent crimes. The population is highly transient, with up to 45% of students moving into or out of the school district each school year.

“Low-income students generally start at lower academic levels and can catch up only through determined and well-planned efforts by principals, teachers, parents, and the community,” said Maryann Wiggs, former co-principal of Monterey. “We needed a consistent philosophy and structure to make sure we could help them.”

Success for All, developed at Johns Hopkins University, provided the structure. In addition to 90-minute group reading sessions, individual tutoring helps children

who aren’t keeping up with their classmates. Children write stories beginning in kindergarten. Reading aloud to each other in pairs helps them become fluent readers in a cooperative setting.

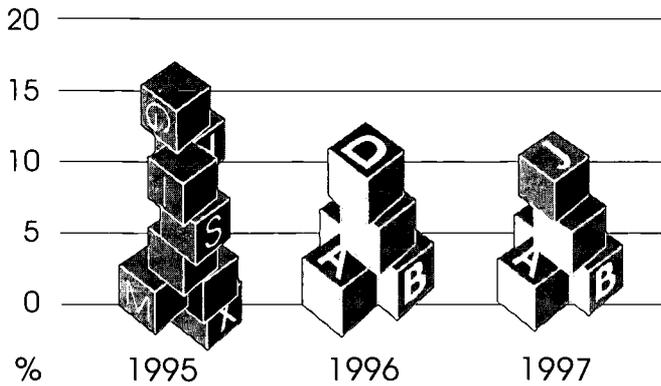
“Every child must read aloud 20 minutes a day outside of class,” said Judy Owen, Monterey’s Success for All coordinator. “But that’s not always possible at home, so we started a volunteer listener program for people who could listen to children read after school. Students from an alternative high school took this on as a community service project, another high school service club joined in, and a Colorado College



student has gone through tutor training. Many parents are also volunteer listeners."

Monterey and its surrounding neighborhood have forged a new partnership for progress. "The community has always backed us," Owen said, "but now we have a climate of 'we're all in this together,' and we are listening more to each other's needs." That means the school is providing more services to parents for the benefit of children, such as after-school care, access to service agencies, and health-related services such as immunizations. Parents, in turn, are joining forces to help make the neighborhood safer and are taking a greater role in the school and their children's education. "All this promotes a sense of community—which helps give the children the stability they need to learn," Owen said.

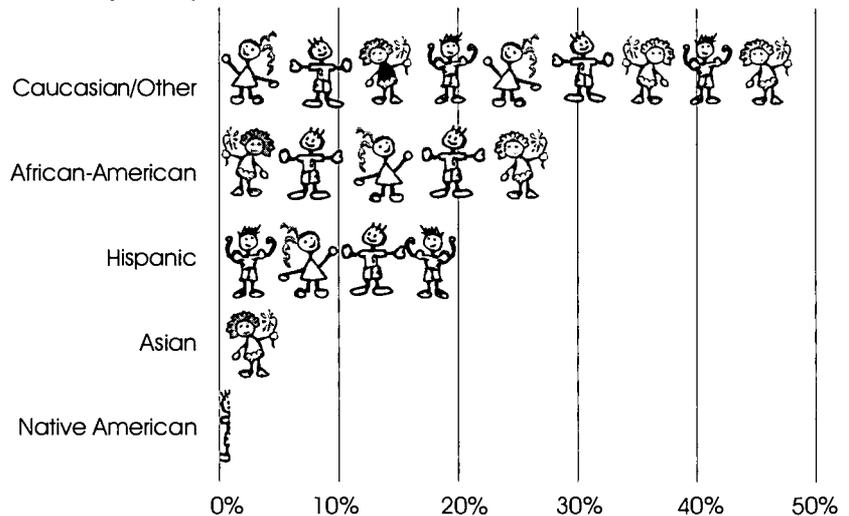
Monterey Special Education Referrals

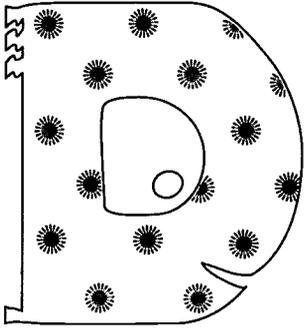


The results to date have been impressive. "Ninety-four percent of our first graders will enter second grade at or above grade level, and we've had a 15% reduction in the number of students eligible for Title I services and a 4% reduction in special education referrals," Wiggs said.

And Greta and Carlos? After intensive tutoring in English and reading, Greta became one of the top readers and writers, and Carlos, now confident and outgoing, is reading at grade level.

Monterey's Kids





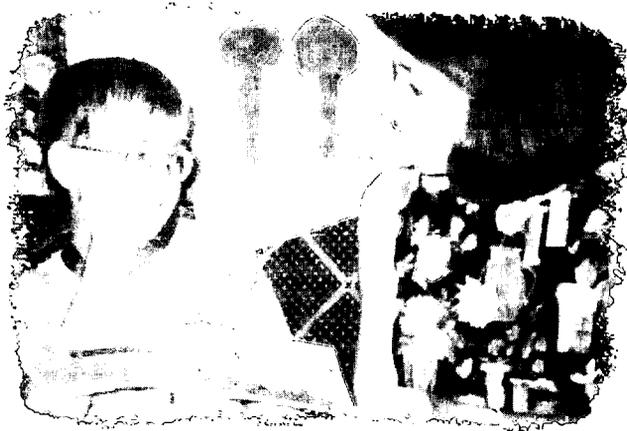
is for Determination

Leroy Drive Elementary School, Adams 12, Northglenn



A school-wide focus on reading and the hard work of students and teachers, wrapped up in a reading program based on several successful models, gave Leroy Drive Elementary School students what they needed to become fluent readers.

In developing the Leroy Drive program, Bette Burkey, the literacy resource teacher, researched programs throughout Colorado and the world. "All the successful programs held the belief and expectation that all children can learn to read," Burkey said. "They also incorporated regular progress assessment, books at different levels, at least 30 minutes of daily guided reading instruction in small groups, writing, and independent reading practice."



That research was the foundation for Leroy Drive's Reading Intervention Program, and it was just the beginning of a series of innovative literacy programs that enlisted the faculty, administration, and the community as reading coaches. The RIP approach is based on small-group intervention for at-risk readers, and individual teaching with CLIP (Collaborative Literacy Intervention Project) for those having the most difficulty.

"We were determined to have all students reading at grade level by the end of the school year," Burkey said. "For students who were still below grade level at the end of the first year, we recruited the principal, music teacher, physical education teacher, and literacy resource teacher to work with these students for an extra 30 minutes of reading four times a week. The children also received 30 minutes of reading instruction in addition to their regular classroom reading time."

Getting the community into the act was another important tactic. The HOSTS (Help One Student to Succeed) program gives adult volunteer mentors an opportunity to read with a child for 30 minutes a day. Parent Power Packs for at-home reading encourage the home-school connection. "Home support, making reading a priority, makes a big difference," Burkey emphasized.

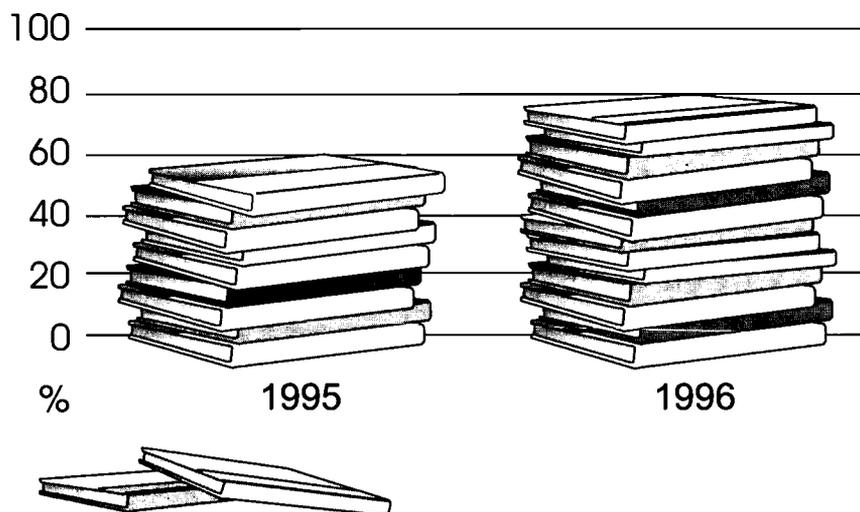
Adam is a good example. His older brother had been in special education and Adam seemed destined to follow the same path. The strain of adjusting to a new blended family setting and a mild speech problem made reading even more challenging for Adam. But small-group work during the school year and his mother’s involvement over the summer—they visited the library often and read 20 books together—helped Adam maintain his gains into the next school year.

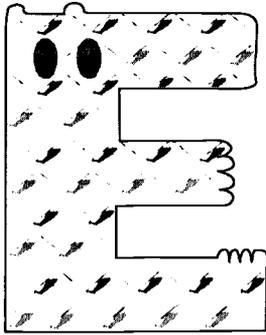
The small-group approach has been very effective for us,” Burkey said. “Children who need minimal intervention gain just as quickly in groups, and those who need more support get individual attention.” She added, “Another plus is that our first-grade teachers are all on the same wavelength now. They are all using the same strategies to help children—just as the formal programs do.”

When RIP began in 1994-95, over half of Leroy Drive second-graders were reading below grade level. By the end of 1996-97, almost all were reading at or above grade level. Referrals to special education have dropped.

Encouraged by three years of steadily growing literacy with their hand-crafted approach, Burkey and the team at Leroy Drive now plan to develop better ways to serve second-language readers and special education students. They’ll also tackle what may be an even greater challenge: instilling a love of reading in kids who can read but choose not to.

Literacy Gains from First to Second Grade
Leroy Drive Students Meeting District Reading Standards





is for ELM

Mesa County School District 51



In Grand Junction, the emphasis on reading begins in preschool. Since 1989, Mesa County School District 51 has participated in the Colorado Preschool Project, which follows children from preschool through kindergarten to determine whether preschool programs made a difference for future learning.

Preschool efforts do help many children. At-risk children who participate in state and federally funded preschool programs are better prepared for kindergarten—but many others still struggle. Clearly, more intensive reading instruction is needed if these children are to become fluent readers when they enter grade school.



According to Judy Thornburg, executive director of elementary instruction, the district had adopted a new language arts curriculum in 1993-94, but they wanted to do more for at-risk readers. "We knew that programs like Reading Recovery and Accelerated Reading were very successful with first-graders, but we couldn't fund the massive staff development required to put those programs in place. So we developed our own program, Early Literacy Mediation—ELM—using the same principles."

Like other successful literacy models, ELM stresses 30 minutes of one-to-one reading every day. That made it difficult for the small trained staff to serve all the children who needed help. To deliver reading assistance to more children, the school board voted to fund reading instructional assistants for every first-grade classroom 3½ hours a day. Each assistant focuses on a child's specific problem—perhaps word recognition or sentence structure—using tools like magnetic letters, word games, and picture cards. "The results were so impressive that the board voted to do the same thing for second grade."

Thornburg said, "Now we have 125 trained reading assistants—that's an enormous commitment of resources. And it shows how committed our board is to literacy."

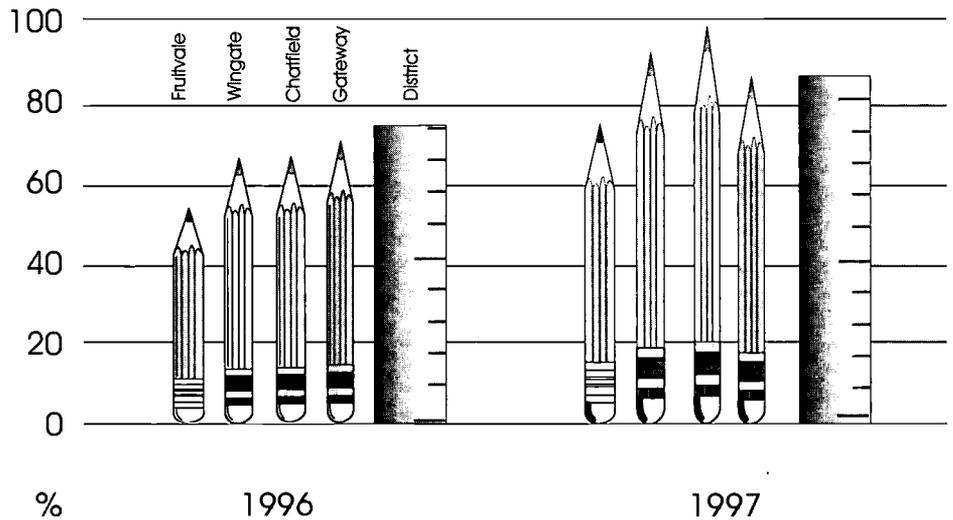
Even so, some children may have to wait for individual help from the instructional assistants. The children having the most difficulty are served

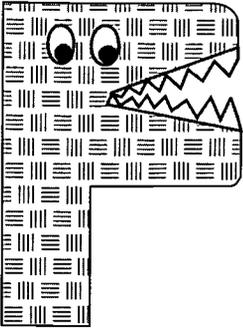
first, while other teachers who have unscheduled time work with the less needy children. As a child completes a level and moves into the regular reading curriculum, a new one enters that slot.

Tiffany is one student who received individual attention from the start. She was a beautiful child who had a congenital brain injury that compromised her motor skills and some cognitive areas. She had been in the preschool enrichment program and had worked very hard in kindergarten, but she just couldn't "get" reading. Her mother, a young, single woman with little education, refused to allow Tiffany to be placed in special education because she believed it would stigmatize her. Instead, Tiffany was placed in a multiage classroom for her first-grade year, where she worked with an ELM-trained teacher who pulled out all the stops. Today, at the beginning of third grade, Tiffany is still somewhat behind, but she's reading.

Judy Thornburg sums up: "I don't think a child like Tiffany, with her medical and social background, would have succeeded if we hadn't made a commitment to focus on literacy at a very early level. Think what it means to her community and to society, to have a reader, someone who has an excellent chance to achieve!"

Reading Gains from First to Second Grade
Mesa County District 51 and Selected Schools





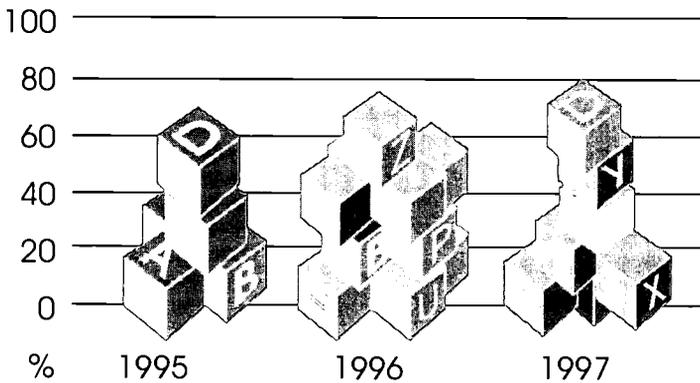
is for Family

Cherry Creek Schools



For young children with traumatic home lives, success in reading may be the only success they have known. Take Patricia, who at eight years of age had never been to school. Her entire life had been spent moving from shelter to shelter with her drug-addicted mother. She entered first grade only after her grandfather obtained custody. She didn't know that words told a story, much less that books contain stories that have beginnings and ends. She knew only two animals, dogs and cats. But after just five months of very hard work with her teacher and grandfather, Patricia was reading above grade level. "Patricia may always remember the deprivation of her first seven years," said her teacher Amanda Swartley, "but she has given up illiteracy forever."

First Grade Students Reading At or Above Grade Level
Cherry Creek Schools



Patricia's triumph over illiteracy is one of scores of similar outcomes from the Cherry Creek Schools' Literacy Project, supported in part with funding from *Partnerships/Goals 2000*. Cherry Creek uses three strategies for first-graders with severe reading deficits—Reading Recovery, SuPR (Success in Primary Reading, a less intense version of RR), and CLIP (Collaborative Literacy Intervention Project). Each involves daily 30-minute individual reading sessions tailored to a student's specific needs. The results are dramatic and usually permanent, and most children need no remedial support after completing the program. And many of the

strategies are just as effective for children of average and high abilities.

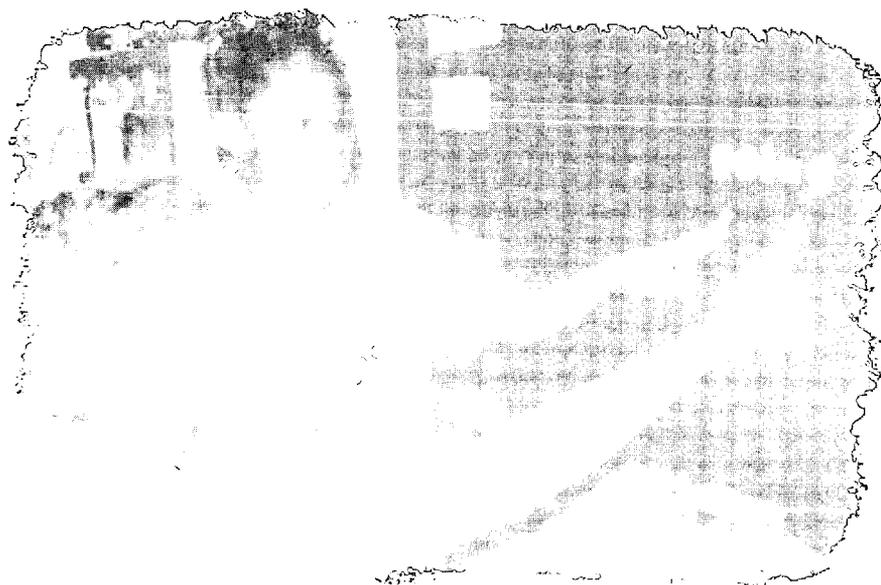
All three programs help children become independent by teaching them to rely on themselves instead of on their teachers. Many students even go on to help their classmates, often using almost the same words as their teachers. In Starship, older students learned to teach sophisticated reading strategies to younger children. They took their responsibility so seriously that they even formed a company with a board of directors and daily activity schedules to make sure they fulfilled their mission.

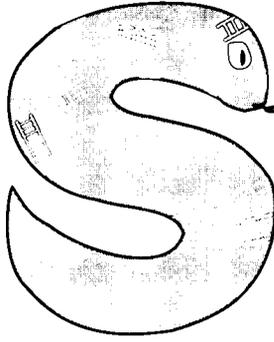
The Lightspan pilot lets parents enjoy playing reading and writing computer games with their children. Children can check out a CD-ROM and Sony Playstation to play—and learn—on their home TV sets.

Parent involvement is an essential ingredient. Tran, a recent arrival to the United States, was the lowest reader in his class because of his limited English skills. As Tran and his parents worked at home on his reading program, their grasp of English grew along with his. Parents and child alike became more self-confident, and Tran is now in the gifted-and-talented program.

Greater learning demands new ways of teaching. “Excellent, ongoing professional development is the single most effective tool for improving student achievement,” said Barbara Randall, executive director of elementary education at Cherry Creek Schools. Teachers regularly participate in seminars, demonstrations, coaching, team learning, and working with students as they are observed through a one-way glass—intensive training designed to help them help students learn. Teacher Pat Lusche said of her session: “To teach while all your colleagues watch, then pick your lesson to shreds, you’ve got to really believe in children—and in yourself. But I’ve learned so much!”

And so have the children.





ix schools, very different at first glance. But a look beneath the surface differences—size, location, socioeconomic makeup—quickly reveals stunning similarities.

Most striking is the unshakeable belief in each school that all children can learn to read—and an abiding commitment to helping every child master literacy skills.

Next is the focus on each child’s specific needs. Although the instructional approaches used by each school ranged from nationally recognized programs to home-grown strategies, all emphasize:

- early intervention
- a balanced, consistent teaching approach by all teachers
- 30 minutes daily of one-to-one reading work tailored to each child’s learning style
- reading at home with parents
- community involvement

Every school makes reading part of everything the children do during the school day. All the schools stress accountability—for students as well as teachers. And for teachers, they provide in-depth professional training and support.

All the schools report drops in the need for remedial and special education services. And all have scored impressive gains in standardized tests since refocusing instruction on early literacy.

Best of all, in each school you’ll find shining eyes, proud grins, and joyous exclamations of I CAN READ!

Acknowledgments

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