

Bookworms Case Study Brief

OVERVIEW

In the summer of 2018, the Center for Research in Education and Social Policy (CRESR) at the University of Delaware (UD) was approached to conduct a case study of the implementation of the Bookworms curriculum at a Case Study District (CSD) in rural Southern Delaware. The district, which educates approximately 3500 students and a large percentage of low-income children, has historically struggled in getting students to demonstrate academic proficiency and thus turned to the Bookworms program in their reform efforts. Through our analysis, we consistently found **where CSD students were once underperforming the state average, these same students are now outperforming the state average three years later. Additionally, these results are seen in nearly all subgroups of students [including English Language Learners (ELL) and special education].** Bookworms taught students how to think critically, understand what they read, and write clearly—crucial skills that align with both Common Core standards and the state-mandated assessment.

"It's amazing to me, the amount of progress that I've seen this year with my students. I have students reading 161 words a minute, and the baseline for the end of first grade is 47 words a minute."

WHAT IS BOOKWORMS?

Based on leading literacy research and best practices, the Bookworms curriculum is a reading and writing program that places significant emphasis on grade-level reading, differentiated skills instruction, and genre-based writing strategy instruction. Bookworms is unique in that lesson plans are Open Educational Resources (OERs)—freeing funds usually allocated by schools and districts for curriculum purchases. Additionally, the curriculum is notable in the high volume of reading required of students. In order to maximize daily reading and student engagement, Bookworms incorporates 265 whole books instead of the shorter reading passages that are often found in other curricula.

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Key to the Bookworms curriculum is the daily inclusion of three 45-minute instructional blocks. The first block consists of general English Language Arts (ELA) instruction, the second block consists of shared reading, and the third and final block is designed to provide the class with differentiated skills instruction.

IMPLEMENTATION

CSD was not considered a simple place to enact curriculum change. Prior to implementing Bookworms, this district faced broad challenges such as difficult school climates, staff and teacher transitions, funding limitations, and curriculum shortcomings that impeded instruction and student academic achievement, especially for students experiencing poverty and students of color. Additionally, the district's student demographics are notable—slightly over half of students are identified as low income, approximately 20% are classified as ELLs, a third are African American, and 20% are Hispanic.

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Despite a challenging educational climate, the adoption of Bookworms across pilot schools was gradual and generally well-received by the majority of staff and teachers. Throughout the four-year rollout (2014-2019), the schools "soft launched" Bookworms by encouraging teachers to introduce components of the curriculum—e.g., novels, shared reading—which exposed teachers and staff to

the program and resulted in authentic buy-in. While the majority of staff and teachers cited Bookworms as being “a lot” to process and implement, many were disappointed by their current curriculum and welcomed the introduction of novels into the classroom. In general, the teachers stated their expectation that **by exposing students to more text, early elementary students would grow in phonics, fluency, word identification, and comprehension, and would, overall, become better readers and achieve improved test scores.**

“I think for me, I hated our previous curriculum so much that I was glad to see anything. And I very much wanted children to be reading real books. So, this curriculum spoke to me in that way.”



Additionally, the OER nature of the lesson plans made the adoption affordable, and costs typically accrued for curriculum acquisition were re-invested in principal and teacher support. This added a robust system of professional learning [such as ongoing professional development (PD), “reboot” trainings, instructional observations and modeling with the Bookworms team, curriculum resources, and administrative supports] critical to the Bookworms adoption and implementation. The additional support was vital and well-received by teachers, especially in the early stages of the pilot program.

EVALUATION

To evaluate the rollout and impact of the Bookworms curriculum and associated PD at the district’s four elementary schools, CRESA utilized several methods. First, CRESA staff interviewed CSD instructional staff and administrators to gain insight into their experience adopting the Bookworms curriculum. Next, based on the findings from

these interviews, CRESA staff interviewed CSD staff who supported the district in order to gain their perspective of the rollout as well as their general thoughts on the current state of Bookworms and their vision for the future of the curriculum. Finally, CRESA staff analyzed results of the Smarter Balanced assessment—Delaware’s state-mandated assessment of all students, grades 3-8—to determine the impact of the Bookworms curriculum adoption on students’ academic proficiency.

FINDINGS

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Overall, when implemented with fidelity, staff and teachers categorized Bookworms as a successful program. Further, despite some concerns, staff and teachers believed it positively impacts students of different levels and abilities. Teachers cited both real and anecdotal data to capture the success and impact of the Bookworms program, including among students receiving Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions, students learning English (ELLs), and students with disabilities (SWDs). And while the administration, staff and teachers all expressed support for the curriculum, **the improvement seen in the academic achievement of the students was the true measure of CSD’s success.**

“My students’ growth this year was absolutely amazing. I was able to get 84% of my students at or above grade level... and 74% in my other group. And to me, that’s amazing because I have 50% of my students or more in both groups that are ELL learning a second language.”



CRESP summarized student performance data for three cohorts of students. These data come from the state-required Smarter Balanced assessment administered annually in the spring beginning in grade 3. Cohorts 1 and 2 had lower 3rd grade average ELA scores compared to the state, yet **both cohorts either met or exceeded the state's average scores by 5th grade** and had significantly faster average yearly growth. Cohort 3, comprised of students who are currently in 5th grade, had 3rd grade ELA scores on average slightly higher than the state. **By the end of 4th grade, CSD students had considerably surpassed the state average.** The upward trajectory of scores was consistent across not only multiple cohorts, but also multiple demographic groups within those cohorts (see Figures 1 and 2). In addition to gains on test scores, CRESP observed overarching gains in the number of students demonstrating academic proficiency. For example, in Cohort 1 only **36.9% of CSD students met state ELA standards in 3rd grade; by 5th grade, 61.0% of CSD students were meeting ELA standards.**

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RECOMMENDATIONS

CSD had experienced many years of frustration with the academic performance of their students and turned to the Bookworms curriculum to launch a “turn-around.” Coming on the heels of a year-long “guided reading PD,” **Bookworms introduced a new and different approach to reading instruction to those in the district.** District leaders were aware that the Bookworms skill-based differentiation model was very different from previous approaches (e.g., guided reading), and the district office staff introduced the curriculum slowly and with ample support in

Figure 1. 2015 through 2017 3rd through 5th grade Cohort 1 SBA ELA Performance, by student subgroup.

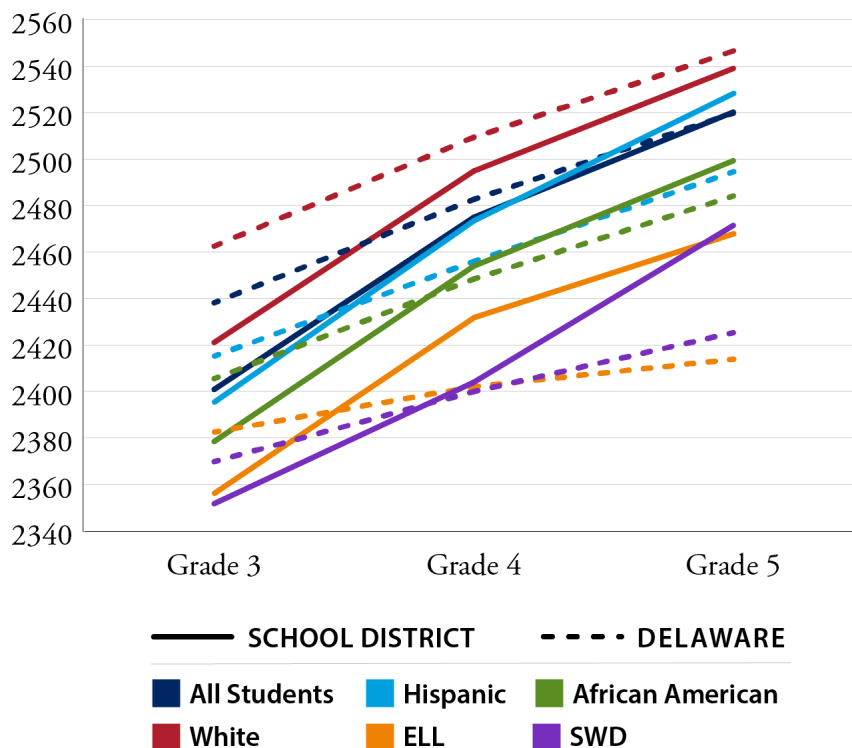
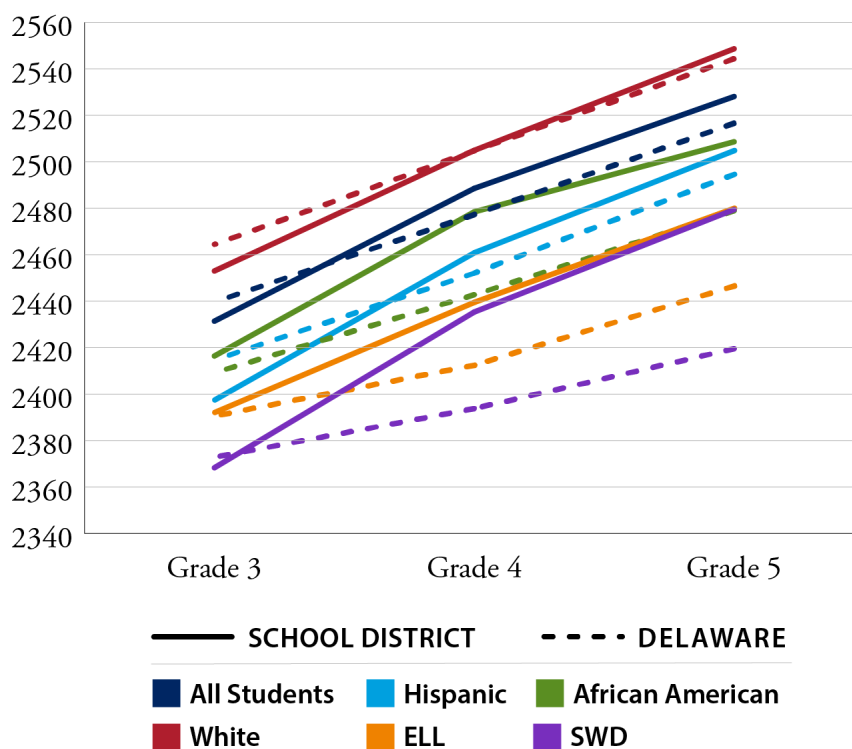


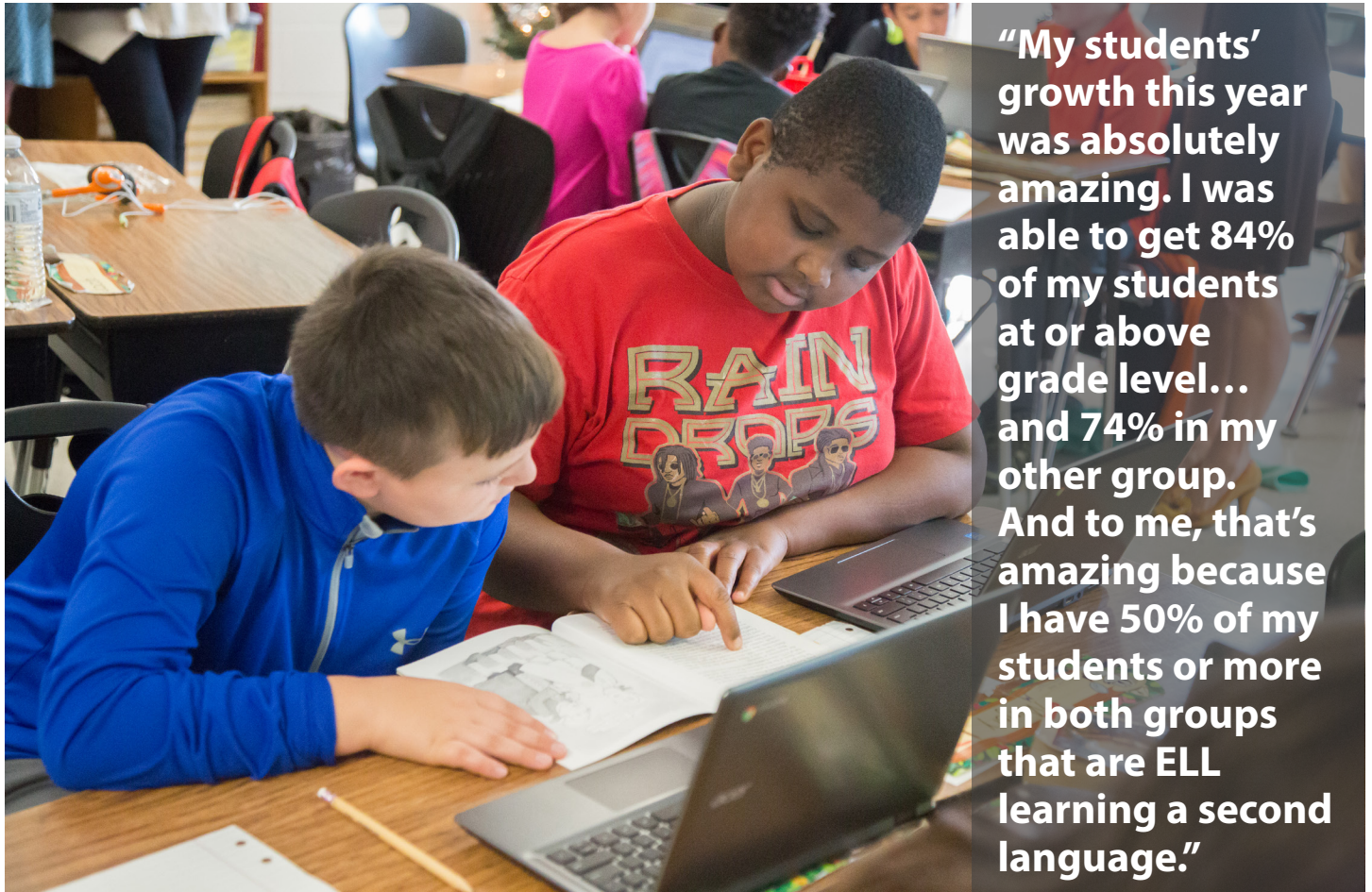
Figure 2. 2016 through 2018 3rd through 5th grade Cohort 2 SBA ELA Performance, by student subgroup.



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order to cultivate trust and buy-in. And the results were clear: **CSD’s students were thriving through the Bookworms curriculum, prompting resounding support for the program at the conclusion of the pilot.**

“...don’t come in with any preconceived notions because everything you have been taught about reading flies out the window with this curriculum.”

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Upon reflection of their experience introducing Bookworms to their school district, the CSD administrators shared the following recommendations to those thinking of using the curriculum. First, school leadership (principal) “buy-in” and engagement from the onset of Bookworms, as well as

participation, monitoring, and problem-solving with teachers throughout implementation, were all critical to success in both implementation and student outcomes. In particular, program fidelity, trust, patience, and flexibility were identified by staff and teachers as recommendations to colleagues considering implementing Bookworms in the future.

“...follow it with fidelity. Follow all pieces and all components.” ■

For more details, access the full report at cresp.udel.edu/publication/bookworms-case-study-report/.

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