

Iowa Elementary School Pairs Best Practices With Student Motivation and Sees Significant Gains on Iowa Test of Basic Skills

Library Circulation at All-Time High

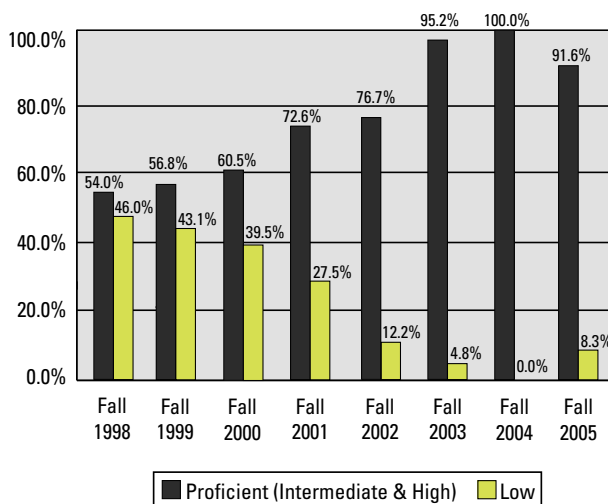
Source: Sharon Kokemuller, Hawthorne Elementary School principal

Introduction

“The use of Accelerated Reader in our school over the past 8 years has dramatically increased our reading achievement....Never before in the history of our school has a reading program so highly motivated our children to want to read as this computer-based reading management program does.”

Principal Sharon Kokemuller is talking about the remarkable results Hawthorne Elementary has seen while using Accelerated Reader™ (AR™), first introduced in the school in 1998. Since its full implementation in the 2000-2001 school year, fourth-grade students’ reading scores on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS)¹ have grown dramatically (see Graph 1) and the school has seen a marked increase in library circulation (see Graph 2). Similarly, math scores at Hawthorne have been rising steadily since the school implemented the Accelerated Math and MathFacts in a Flash programs after the 2000-2001 school year (see Graph 3).

Graph 1: Fourth-Grade Students’ Reading Achievement Grows Dramatically While Low Scores Decline (ITBS)



Educator Background

Sharon Kokemuller has been principal of Hawthorne Elementary since the fall of 1999. Previously, she was a fourth-grade teacher for 9 years and an elementary Title I Reading teacher for 8 years, both in the Keokuk School District. Kokemuller earned bachelor’s degrees in elementary education and English from the University of Iowa and a master’s degree in administration with a reading endorsement from Truman University.

As an educator, Kokemuller has won the Keokuk Teacher of the Year and Wal-Mart Teacher of the Year awards, both in 1998, a WGEM Golden Apple Educator Award in 2002, the state’s ISEA Team award in 2004, and was named Employer of the Year by Iowa’s local Business and Professional Women organization in 2005. Also in 2005, Hawthorne Elementary was awarded the No Child Left Behind National Blue Ribbon Award, to honor Hawthorne’s exceptional students who are among the state’s top 10% of fourth graders in reading and math achievement.

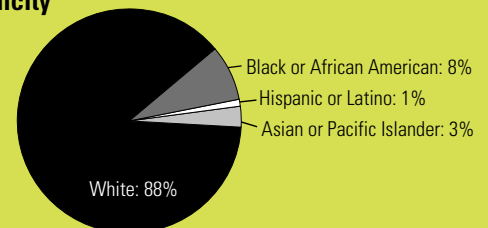
School Profile

Hawthorne Elementary School
 Students: 390, Grades: Pre-K–5
 Keokuk, Iowa

Demographics

Rural
 Title 1, Targeted Assistance
 Free or reduced lunch: 54%
 Mobility: 7%

Race/Ethnicity



Study Description

Accelerated Reader spells success for Hawthorne Elementary

When AR was first brought to the Keokuk School District in 1998, it was used in a variety of ways as determined by each teacher. In 1999, a group of enterprising educators at Hawthorne Elementary decided to establish a schoolwide program to implement AR according to Renaissance Learning's best classroom practices, set goals, and celebrate student achievement. Renaissance Learning's recommendations were quickly put into practice throughout the school. Students began to complete daily reading logs and take home TOPS reports² to involve their parents, and teachers increased time spent reading in their classrooms, took daily status of the class,³ and became actively engaged in guiding students' book selection by regularly monitoring and adjusting students' ZPD⁴ ranges.

When the district caught wind of Hawthorne's resulting increase in reading achievement, it implemented a similar plan at all its elementary schools and brought in Renaissance Learning consultants to deliver professional development on best practices to teachers, associates, and library clerks.

To underscore the importance of properly implementing AR, Kokemuller and her staff have pursued and achieved many Renaissance Model and Master Certifications,⁵ both at the teacher- and school-level. Hawthorne's educators believe deeply in certification as a means to celebrate the success of the group as a whole—students and teachers alike—as well as demonstrate that the school is united in their quest to implement Accelerated Reader's best practices and see gains in achievement as a result.

In the fall of each school year, students at Hawthorne Elementary take either the STAR Early Literacy or STAR Reading standardized, computer-adaptive assessments. Results of the criterion-referenced STAR Early Literacy assessment are used by classroom and Title I teachers to plan reading instruction and target individual students needs. AR is then used in conjunction with the school's reading curriculum to provide students with differentiated instruction and multiple learning practices. AR is a computer-based, progress-monitoring tool that promotes guided independent reading practice and provides immediate feedback to students about whether they've

understood what they've read. The norm-referenced STAR Reading assessment is taken again at the end of the year to measure students' growth.

"We know that by setting high academic standards in our school and incorporating Accelerated Reader with our school's reading program and other content subject areas, and by keeping parents involved in their children's education and enlisting them as important members of our team, higher levels of student achievement will be the result."

Math scores at Hawthorne Elementary on the rise with Accelerated Math and MathFacts in a Flash

Accelerated Math™ and MathFacts in a Flash™ were implemented at Hawthorne Elementary after the 2000-2001 school year. Accelerated Math is used both during summer school and in the school's before- and after-school program, Kid Zone, where teachers present material covered during the school day in new ways to remediate and enrich the curriculum. Accelerated Math aligns with Hawthorne's chosen math text and allows teachers to quickly assess students' skills and generate appropriate practice assignments with immediate feedback. Once students master a skill, the program generates a test for the student to confirm success. Students also take the norm-referenced, computer-adaptive STAR Math assessment two to three times throughout the year, first to establish students' starting points and then to monitor progress.

MathFacts in a Flash was added to Hawthorne's computer lab to provide students with additional practice on basic math skills, such as addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division facts. This software also provides students with immediate feedback, which Hawthorne's educators believe helps to motivate their students and improve their computational skills.

Accelerated Reader Results

Fourth grade ITBS scores (see Graph 1) show that prior to full implementation of Accelerated Reader at Hawthorne Elementary, the percent of students scoring proficient in reading (in either the intermediate or high categories) was increasing slowly. Once Hawthorne began a full implementation of AR in the 2000-2001 school year according to Renaissance Learning's best practices, scores began to rise markedly. When tested in fall of 2001, fourth-grade students' scores rose from 60.5% of students scoring proficient the previous year to 72.6%. In addition, students scoring in the low category decreased from 39.5% in fall of 2000 to 27.5%. What's more, since 2003 more than 90% of students have scored proficient. In fall of 2004, Hawthorne reached a new level of success when 100% of students scored proficient.

Hawthorne Elementary students visit the library daily and hold an Open Library time after school to encourage students and parents to read together. As a result, the school's library circulation reached an all-time high circulation rate of 55,804 books in 2006 (see Graph 2).

Keeping parents involved in students' learning is of the utmost importance to the educators at Hawthorne Elementary, including inviting parents into the school as classroom volunteers to read to students or help with skills and vocabulary practice; holding a monthly "Team Meeting" where students, staff, and parents gather to celebrate student and schoolwide success; and maintaining near perfect attendance by parents at parent/teacher conferences.

The school also boasts an AR committee that establishes a theme each year, which the school supports by developing quarterly events for students that meet goals, decorating the school, dressing the library clerk in costume, and doing cheers at assemblies. The bottom line at Hawthorne is to make reading fun, motivate students, and achieve success for all students at their individual levels.

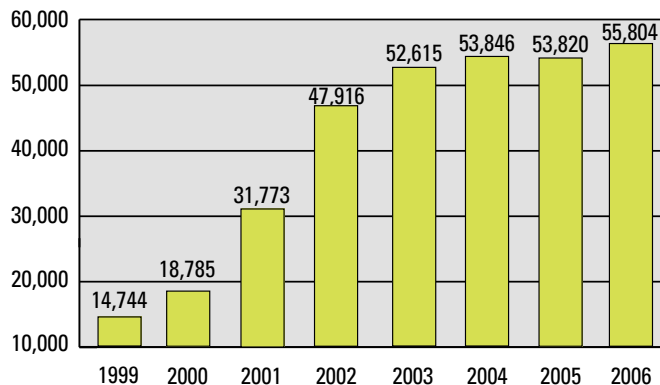
Accelerated Math and MathFacts in a Flash Results

Fourth-grade math scores on the ITBS have also steadily increased since the implementation of Accelerated Math and MathFacts in a Flash, with students scoring proficient increasing 25.9% from 2001 to 2005, and students scoring in the low category decreasing from 31.4% down to 5.6% (see Graph 3).

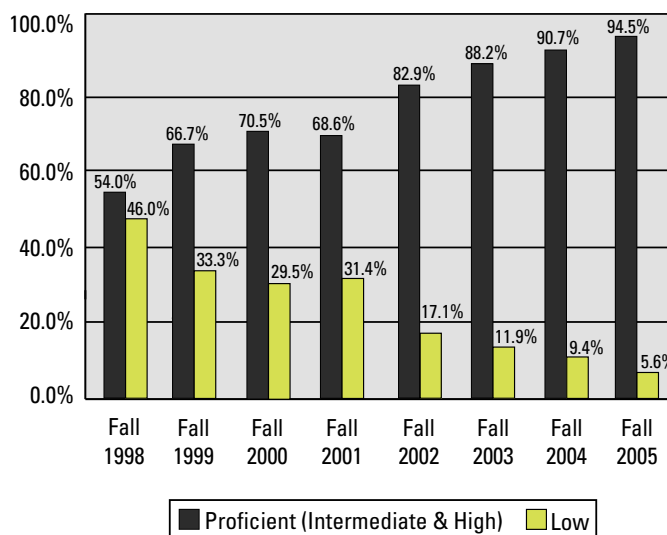
Eliminating the Achievement Gap

As Principal Kokemuller notes, Hawthorne's accomplishments do not stop there. "Our school is making great strides in eliminating the gap that at one time existed between socio-economic groups, and students with an IEP (individualized educational program)." (KCS D Report to the Community 2004.) During the last two assessment years, Hawthorne has seen very little difference in performance between the low and high Socio-Economic Status (SES) groups on the ITBS. In fact, statistically, in the fall of 2005, low SES students ranked above high SES students in the high category. Furthermore, 100% of IEP students scored in the proficient/intermediate category that year.

Graph 2: Library Circulation Growth at Hawthorne Elementary School



Graph 3: Fourth-Grade Students' ITBS Math Scores Increase Steadily While Low Scores Decrease



(more information on back)

Conclusion

As a result of all of this hard work, enthusiasm, and success, Hawthorne Elementary welcomes many visitors from both the district and community to view the facility, and fields questions from staff at other schools asking for advice on similar efforts to implement at their schools. Principal Kokemuller credits all of the school's achievements and the interest it's generated to the students, parents, and educators working together.

"We know that by setting high academic standards in our school and incorporating Accelerated Reader with our school's reading program and other content subject areas, and by keeping parents involved in their childrens' education and enlisting them as important members of our team, higher levels of student achievement will be the result."

¹ Riverside Publishing. (n.d). *Iowa Test of Basic Skills*. Itasca, IL: Author.

² TOPS reports print automatically after a quiz is taken in AR to provide immediate feedback about that quiz as well as cumulative information. Teachers use TOPS reports to monitor progress and make data-driven decisions, while students are motivated by immediate feedback and can take them home to share with parents and others.

³ Status of the Class is an informal assessment where teachers have brief, daily conferences with students to monitor and guide reading practice and offer support and praise.

⁴ ZPD stands for zone of proximal development, which is the level at which a student can achieve success reading a book that is neither too easy nor too difficult.

⁵ Renaissance Certification is a professional recognition program for educators implementing Accelerated Reader and/or Accelerated Math according to Renaissance Learning's research-based best practices. It is important to note that before achieving Master Certification, Model Certification must be achieved; therefore, achieving Master Certification is the utmost honor.



For more information, or for additional copies of this report, contact:

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