

Overview

Founded in 1998, Rainbow District School Board covers a geographic area of more than 14,757 square kilometers in the heart of Rainbow Country, providing quality programs and character education to students in Sudbury, Espanola, and Manitoulin. RDSB includes:
14,438 students across 29 elementary schools and 9 secondary schools, offering English and French Immersion programming.

In 2023, RDSB partnered with Halifax Learning to implement the SpellRead program with Grades 2–12 students in Intensive Support Programs. In the first year, programming was implemented in 6 schools, ranging from elementary, intermediate, and secondary students.

The initial work set out to ensure the best Tier 3 instruction for Intensive Support Program students. These students have learner profiles that vary in terms of disability and often require Tier 3 reading and writing support, as their needs differ from the regular program.

Many may also have multiple exceptionalities and benefit from programming delivered by staff with specialized training. As such, they require specialized, evidence-based reading and writing instruction to ensure the best outcomes.

Many of these students also have delays in educational and developmental milestones. These ISP students not only needed, but deserved, the best program to help them acquire reading and writing fluency.

Halifax Learning was selected for its robust training program, comprehensive student package, inclusive participation design, and research-based program delivery.



NEED

K-12 tier 3 programming options for students in the Intensive Support Program and regular program.

Scope:

In the initial year, 6 teachers in the elementary, intermediate, and secondary panels were trained, working with 30 students. In the second year with Halifax Learning, RDSB added 6 more teachers, reaching 52 students. At this point, the scope broadened beyond intensive support program classrooms to include Special Education Resource Teachers (elementary/intermediate, regular program), Special Education Program Leaders (secondary, regular program), and secondary teachers (credit-bearing, regular program) implementing the program.

Basic Outcomes:

The basic outcomes are two-fold: improve teacher expertise in how to teach reading and remediate difficulties for struggling students, and improve outcomes for students in both Intensive support classrooms and the regular program. Specifically for students, outcomes include significant improvement in reading fluency, increased knowledge of multiple reading strategies, and improved spelling outcomes.

Training Outcomes:

Educators are not only trained to run a program; they are equipped with the tools and learning to support struggling readers and writers.

Training includes word-level knowledge, including phonemes and graphemes, use of pseudowords to support fluency, phonemic awareness, segmenting, blending, and orthographic processing.

It also includes text-level knowledge, such as supporting fluency, comprehension strategies, and written response strategies.

Staff are supported throughout with access to online course materials, in-person training, and comprehensive resource manuals.



PROGRAM OVERVIEW

- 100 + sequenced lessons
- Explicit instructions in all English sounds
- Intensive, small-group intervention

Student Outcomes:

From the first year that Halifax Learning's program was taught, students saw an increase in overall retention of graphemes/phonemes, reading fluency, and reading strategies. These gains all came with a significant decrease in compensatory reading strategies.

Students in the program have also demonstrated improvements in their oral pronunciation of multisyllable words, as well as at the single-syllable word level.

Most consistently, students have improved by 2 grade levels in reading upon completion of the first part of the program, and by 4 grade levels upon completion of the second part.

Qualitatively, families are seeing improvements in overall confidence and well-being, and educators are noting improvements in these areas as well.



Looking Forward:

The program continues to be implemented and expanded each year, building on the success of Halifax Learning's approach. Training outcomes for staff have been very positive, with many educators becoming more confident and proficient in teaching reading. There have also been encouraging results for students in both regular program and Intensive Support Program classrooms.

Implementation continues to broaden, with plans to extend the program to additional ISP classrooms, while continuing to train new special education resource teachers and secondary teachers.

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