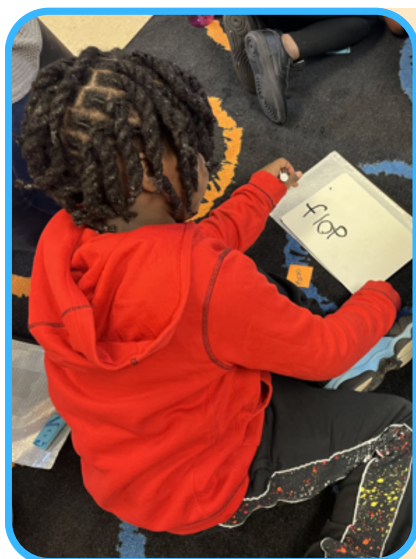


'I'm confident all our students will learn to decode'

Johnson STEAM Academy Magnet School, USA,
February 2023



Kathy Gilbert, Title 1 Teacher at Johnson STEAM Academy (JSA), told us about the impact that Sounds-Write has had at this Magnet school in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. JSA has been a neighborhood school for over a century. It has before and after school care, extracurricular after school programs, and families see JSA as a vital stakeholder in their community.



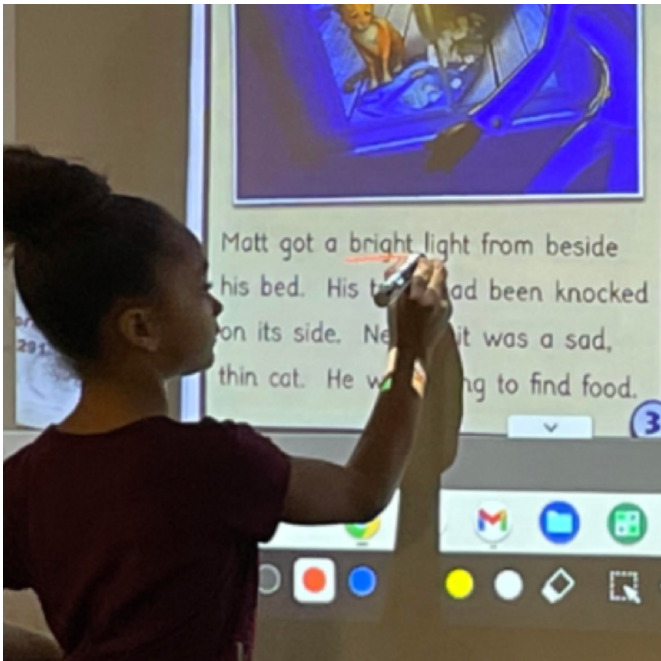
- School: **Johnson STEAM Academy Magnet School**
- Location: **Cedar Rapids, Iowa**
- Pupils on roll: **350**
- Age range: **5-10**
- Free/ reduced lunch: **77%**
- Homeless: **10%**
- Additional learning needs: 18%**
- Diversity: **42% White, 34% African American, 14% Mixed race, 10% Hispanic/Latino**

Why did you choose Sounds-Write?

In early 2020 funds for literacy efforts became available and our literacy team set out to find a more effective reading intervention approach for our first graders. As a Magnet school, we're encouraged to think 'outside the box', so when we learnt about Sounds-Write through John Walker's blog, we implemented some of its elements with first grade small reading groups, with great success.

Teachers were intrigued by the concept of teaching sounds in words instead of in isolation, and students were engaged and excited with Word Building and Sound Swap. They caught on quickly to the routines and clearly were gaining alphabetic code knowledge and mastery in blending, segmenting and phoneme manipulation.

During the summer of 2020 we trained a few teachers and coaches. The training was outstanding and teacher buy-in was immediate and robust, so that by the end of the 2020-21 academic year three quarters of certified staff had completed the Sounds-Write training course. Enthusiasm and support for Sounds-Write continues to be extremely high and currently Sounds-Write is taught as an intervention K-5 and delivered whole group, small group and 1-1 depending on grade level and student need.



What impact has Sounds-Write had on student progress?

At the beginning of 2021-2022, 44% of our first graders were at state reading benchmark. By spring, it was 52% of the class. We attribute this 8-point increase - the highest in many years - to implementing Sounds-Write. This academic year (2022-23), the percentage of second and third graders at state reading benchmark has already increased by an incredible 11 points between the fall and winter and we're expecting further gains to be achieved by the end of the academic year.

What has your experience been of teaching Sounds-Write?

When I teach Sounds-Write lessons I am confident all our students will learn to decode - I never felt this way with any other phonics approach. There is a simplicity and directness, engagement and joyfulness to the lessons. Students are eager to participate and "get it." It is a real pleasure to teach daily Sounds-Write lessons and see student improvement in reading, spelling and writing! Young non-blenders become confident blenders in a short amount of time. Sounds-Write in the upper grades focuses on vocabulary, morphology and etymology in a logical way which sparks student interest and builds student confidence.

What would you say to other schools about the Sounds-Write programme?

Sounds-Write has been a grassroots, teacher-driven effort in our school. We are one of the first schools in the US to implement it. Sounds-Write gave us something positive and workable to focus on during the pandemic. My advice to other schools is to "stay the course" and don't let any barriers stop you from implementing this transformative, highly effective approach.

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