

'They train you and they train you well'

Paul Penna Downtown Jewish Day School, Canada,
February 2023



Lindsay Springer, Director of Student Services, and Rachel Harris, Primary Resource Specialist, talked to us about why they chose Sounds-Write and how it has transformed literacy instruction at Paul Penna Downtown Jewish School, a dual-language curriculum school in Toronto.



- 📍 School: **Paul Penna Downtown Jewish Day School**
- 📍 Location: **Toronto, Canada**
- 📍 Pupils on roll: **193**
- 📍 Age range: **5 - 14**
- 📍 Additional learning needs: **12%**

Why did you choose Sounds-Write?

When we returned to in-person learning in September 2021, we realised the gravity of lagging literacy skills in our youngest cohorts, who had spent much of their foundational learning years at home, online and in a disrupted school environment. We began screening to identify at-risk students and set out Tier 2 interventions in grades 1 and 2 to close the gap. These students often expressed negative feelings about reading. In order to remove barriers to learning to read, we implemented a new approach to literacy instruction based on early screening, early intervention and the use of a science-informed approach to instruction.

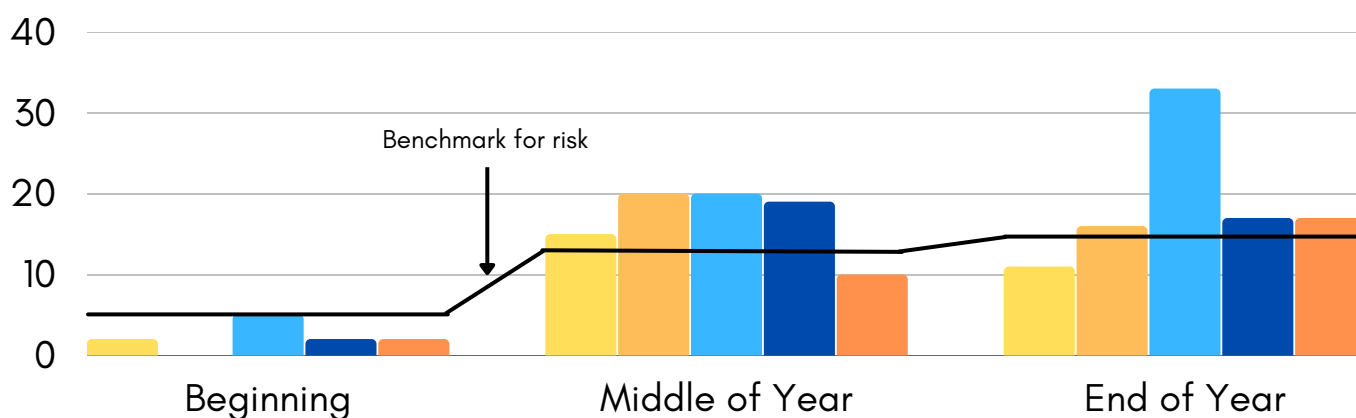
We chose Sounds-Write because of the body of compelling research supporting the use of a speech-to-print approach to phonics instruction. We liked the fact that it can be applied to core curriculum as well as to intervention settings. However, what sets Sounds-Write apart is the teacher training element. They give you everything you need in the training and there's no additional cost after that. They're not trying to sell you things. You are trained and you are trained well, and then you can do Sounds-Write with sticky notes or magnets, with really very little additional financial input.

"Students are reflective of their writing. They're looking to see if a word looks correct after they've written it, if it sounds correct after they've read it."
(Grade 3 teacher)

How did you implement Sounds-Write and what impact did it have on student progress?

We began by screening all students in grades 1 and 2 and placed those students identified as at-risk in Tier 2 intervention groups. These small groups worked through the Sounds-Write programme with a resource teacher 3 times a week for 40 minutes. We repeated the screening test again in the middle and at the end of the year to track their progress. All students began the program below the beginning-of-year benchmark but by the middle of the school year, they had improved their word reading fluency significantly, and by the end, some students had even surpassed grade level. There has also been significant improvement in students' writing skills over the course of the program. So just as students went from becoming non-readers to more proficient readers, those same students developed significant independence in their ability to spell and write words and sentences.

Nonsense Word Reading Fluency (Grade 1 Intervention Students)



How do teachers feel about the programme?

It was important for our teachers to understand that changing their approach to literacy instruction would benefit all students. Once they saw the improvements in the students who were struggling the most, the buy-in was pretty quick. By mid-year, we had teachers begging to be trained to use Sounds-Write. And another beautiful element is that there's place for modeling and coaching within Sounds-Write. We model and support teachers in using the scripts and the lessons and that's really boosted their confidence. We have now trained all of our primary teachers in Sounds-Write and implemented the program as core literacy curriculum from SK-grade 3.

"We've watched C. challenge herself because she felt she had the tools. She'd say 'No, don't tell me, I'm going to figure it out'. And as a parent I sleep a lot better knowing that she could take that agency for herself." (Parent)