

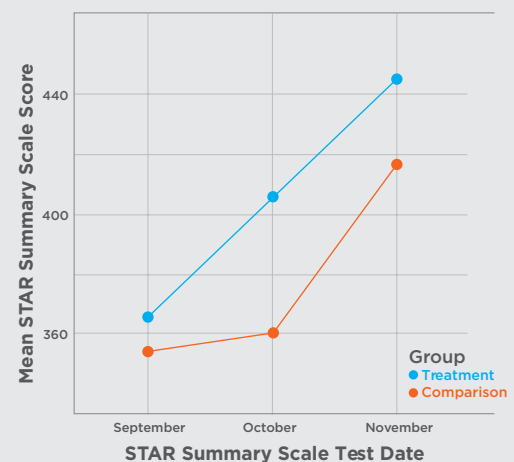
McREL's small-scale study suggests big gains possible with VocabularySpellingCity®

Services McREL provided to VSC:

- ✓ Identified goals for quality, customized research design
- ✓ Scaled the study in collaboration with VocabularySpellingCity
- ✓ Managed data collection and produced in-depth analysis of results
- ✓ Created user-friendly report to drive continuous improvement
- ✓ Laid the foundation for larger-scale studies

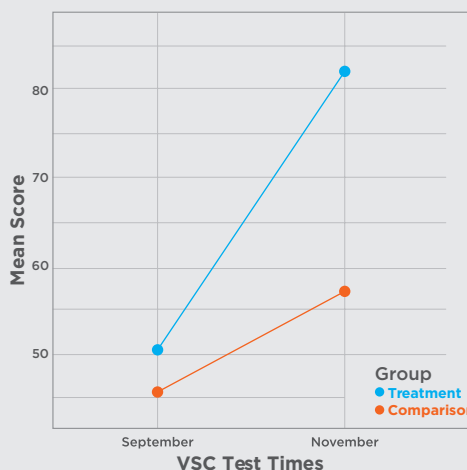
Results: Reading comprehension

Scores in the treatment group *improved more* over time than did the comparison group.



Results: Vocabulary retention

Students in the treatment group *scored better* on post-tests, *retaining more words* than the comparison group.



“The kids enjoyed using the program, they benefited from it, and the fact that they improved so rapidly came as an exciting surprise. VocabularySpellingCity definitely merits further evaluation.”

— Dr. Sheila A. Arens, Executive Director, Research & Evaluation, McREL International

“McREL's analysis boosted our confidence.”

— Barbara Kruger, Director of Professional Learning & Partnerships, VocabularySpellingCity



Assessment of online vocabulary-builder shows great gains and ease of use

The Challenge

There's nothing more disheartening for a teacher than to see students come to dislike reading. How can an activity that we know to be rewarding—in terms of career prospects and cultural participation—be perceived as dull?

VocabularySpellingCity is an online, supplemental spelling and vocabulary-builder that strives to help K–12 students learn, retain, and use words. Not just for the sake of collecting words, but to deploy them immediately, integrating them into their reading and their lives. The program's creator, Time4Learning, engaged McREL International to find out how well it's working.

Strategic Solution

The research team reached out to a school in Florida with an offer of free training and use of VocabularySpellingCity following the small-scale study, in exchange for being an evaluation site. Eight teachers, two each in grades 2–5, participated. Half would start using the program in the fall and half would wait until spring.

With strong principal and teacher support, a literacy coach with 30 years of experience, and aides in all participating classrooms, the school was no slacker in its commitment to literacy. Yet students still had trouble retaining words, leading them to struggle with word recognition and comprehension.

The quasi-experimental study lasted from October 2016 through February 2017. The school offered three significant advantages as a study site:

- All teachers used the same textbook series, *Journeys*—key to isolating the effect, if any, that introducing VocabularySpellingCity would have.
- It was a Title I school with a clear need for better literacy skills.
- The school participated in STAR testing, providing additional data to help determine if VocabularySpellingCity made a difference.

With parents' consent, teachers and their classrooms were divided into treatment and comparison groups. Both groups at each grade level used the same vocabulary instruction and word selection from *Journeys*. The treatment group also accessed

VocabularySpellingCity, which offers 35+ learning games, to help learn eight new vocabulary words and review previously taught words.

In addition to the standardized tests and customized pre- and post-testing of students' vocabulary retention, the researchers assessed teachers' satisfaction with the program via surveys and focus groups.

Results

The results from the qualitative and quantitative assessments were encouraging:

- The treatment group scored better on study-specific tests, retaining more words than their peers who did not have access to VocabularySpellingCity.
- Students in the treatment group also experienced greater gains than their peers in STAR Summary Scale and Lexile® scores.
- The sweet spot in terms of time commitment for students in the treatment group was an unexpectedly brief 10 minutes daily.
- Teachers reported students literally begging to use VocabularySpellingCity because they experienced so much success with it: "I find that my kids are now self-motivated to want to learn new vocabulary words."

"Naturally we felt we had a good product, otherwise we wouldn't be as committed as we are to helping teachers serve students. McREL's analysis boosted our confidence because we can see the results with our own eyes. The program works, the kids love using it, and it produces results fast," said Barbara Kruger, director of professional learning & partnerships at VocabularySpellingCity.

Next Steps

"There is cause for optimism because we all want reading to be fun and rewarding for children, and that can only happen when they're confident with words," McREL researcher Sheila Arens said.

McREL and VocabularySpellingCity are now exploring opportunities to conduct larger-scale research on the program to further examine its impact.