



# ASSESSING THE EFFICACY OF THE GRAPSEED ORAL-LANGUAGE-ACQUISITION PROGRAM

SUMMARY OF 2011–14 RESEARCH FINDINGS

## Researchers

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“We’re excited about what this product can potentially do for children. We talk about it as a game changer for our students, and we think it could be a game changer for our country.”

—Mike Shembarger, Principal, Retired  
Berrien Springs Public Schools, Michigan

*Assessing the Efficacy of the GrapeSEED Oral-Language-Acquisition Program: Summary of 2011–14 Research Findings*

Researchers: Julia B. Smith, EdD, Oakland University, and Judith M. Smith, PhD, University of Michigan

Edited by Michelle Speckler

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## About this report

English learners constitute the fastest-growing segment of the US K–12 student population by representing 10% of public school enrollment<sup>1</sup> and a wider range of languages and cultures<sup>2</sup> than ever before. For today's US school districts, the issue of how to best serve this broad spectrum of children is at the forefront of both classroom and boardroom conversations.

At GrapeSEED, we know the stakes are high. Schools that successfully reach their English learners exert positive and lasting change in the lives of those students, the health of their communities, and the bottom lines of their districts. So we turned to the Department of Organizational Leadership in Oakland University's School of Education and Human Services to help us illustrate the learning gains possible with the use of GrapeSEED.

From 2011 through 2014, the department's Julia Smith, EdD, conducted unbiased, independent research studies on the effectiveness of GrapeSEED when used with students in preschool through second grade. The studies ranged from one to three years and used a variety of testing measurements. Smith and Judith Smith, PhD, a University of Michigan expert in program evaluation, literacy, and behavior management, analyzed the data. The researchers shared their findings in 2014. This report summarizes their findings and highlights the major results.

### STUDY PROCESS

Teachers were trained to deliver GrapeSEED according to established program procedures. Fall assessments were given in October, midyear assessments in January, and spring assessments in June. Results were compared with benchmarks established at the University of Arkansas.

### GEOGRAPHIC AREAS

**Berrien Regional Education Service Agency (RESA), Michigan.** Berrien RESA comprises 11 school districts, including **Berrien Springs Public Schools**. Located in rural Michigan, Berrien Springs is also the home of Andrews

University, which draws primarily adult students from 37 countries worldwide. In addition to students from the local farming community, Berrien Springs serves (1) students from other districts who enter as part of the Schools of Choice program and (2) the children of university faculty and students. More than half of the student population are from economically disadvantaged homes, and approximately 40% are English learners.

**Parker Elementary—Clintondale Community Schools, Michigan.** Most of the students at Parker Elementary come from lower-income areas of the township, and others take public transportation from Detroit as Schools of Choice students. The majority of students live in one-parent households, and some live with grandparents. Fully 100% of the students were eligible for free or reduced-price lunches at the time of the study.

### ASSESSMENTS

**Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals (CELF)** is a standardized test that determines whether students have language disorders or are delayed. It enables researchers to compare subgroups of students within a larger sample.

**Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State to State for English-Language Learners (WIDA ACCESS for ELLs)** is a language-proficiency assessment designed by the WIDA Consortium, an educational consortium of state departments of education that establishes and implements proficiency standards and assessments for ELLs in grades K–12.

**Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA)** is a standardized test that assesses whether students are reading at, above, or below their grade levels. Teachers use the scores to match students to books at the students' abilities.

**Michigan Literacy Progress Profile (MLPP)** is a collection of assessments designed to track and promote literacy growth of kindergarten through second-grade students.

# What is GrapeSEED?

GrapeSEED is an English oral-acquisition program for children in preschool to second grade. Backed by more than 40 years of pedagogical and curricular research, the program today serves 66,000 students in 860 schools and across 17 countries. In the United States, the program supplements English-learner programs and is used with at-risk and economically disadvantaged students; in Tier I, II, and III programs; and in Response to Intervention initiatives.

## GROUNDING IN LANGUAGE-ACQUISITION THEORY AND RESEARCH

Hallmarks of the GrapeSEED program include accelerated language development, interactive teacher-student relationships, and enhanced student interest, engagement, and joy. And that's no accident. GrapeSEED's curriculum designers created the program's framework based on respected language-acquisition theory and research.

**Affective Filter Theory.** Educational researcher Stephen Krashen identified the negative emotional and motivational factors that slow second-language acquisition. GrapeSEED classrooms are safe places where students take risks and willingly practice English.

**Functional-Notional Approach.** This approach is part of a learner-centered movement away from grammar-focused practices and toward the use of more-authentic language. GrapeSEED instruction is constructed around meaningful words practiced in relevant settings.

**Progression-of-Learning Model.** In this model, teachers gradually adjust instruction to help students progress from receptivity to expression. GrapeSEED students get exposed to vocabulary multiple times and in various contexts in order to embed the language into their memories and move them closer to fluency.

**Natural Approach.** Developed by Stephen Krashen and Tracy Terrell, this approach promotes second-

language learning the way children learned their first languages. GrapeSEED's curriculum emphasizes the aspect of communication and includes strategically selected vocabulary and ideas, effective visuals, pertinent gestures, and repetition.

**Vertical Phonics.** GrapeSEED students get introduced to the most-frequent sounds of a phonogram at one time. Sound-phonogram relationships are memorized easily. And there are few special decoding rules.

**Total Physical Response.** Developed by James Asher, this teaching method coordinates language and physical movement so as to create brain links between speech and action. The language-body conversations are parts of every GrapeSEED lesson in order to boost language learning and vocabulary learning.

## ON-SITE TEACHER TRAINING AND SUPPORT

GrapeSEED Foundation Training teaches the most-effective ways to achieve oral-language development. After implementation, professional learning specialists visit GrapeSEED classrooms to provide personalized insight and coaching. In addition, GrapeSEED offers learning opportunities so educators can continue learning new ways of integrating best practices into their curricula.

## OUR GOAL

GrapeSEED's goal is to assist schools in closing the achievement gap and thereby reduce the dropout rates that plague America's education system. But that goal can be reached only if all children become empowered to overcome language barriers and gain command of English. The studies described on the following pages demonstrate that GrapeSEED does just that. Each study underscores the fact that the use of GrapeSEED results in measurable, repeatable, and accelerated achievement among students like yours, students in schools like yours, and students measured by the kinds of assessments you use. Contact GrapeSEED today to learn more.

# 1

**Demographic** Preschool students in the Great Start Readiness Program  
**School/District** Berrien Regional Educational Service Agency, Michigan  
**Assessment** Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals

**At-risk preschool students showed more-significant and faster growth than expected for their ages in every subtest area. As a result, they progressed out of at-risk status faster than predicted.**

This study was part of a larger study<sup>3</sup> that was designed to evaluate the effectiveness of GrapeSEED when used with the Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP), a Michigan state-funded preschool program for at-risk students. The analytic sample covered the 11-district Berrien Regional Education Service Agency (RESA) and comprised 21 classrooms and 432 students. Of the sample, 40% of the students received free or reduced-price lunches, 29% were designated limited English proficient (LEP) or English learner (EL), 26% were black, 7.5% were Hispanic, and 2.5% were classified as other.

Each GrapeSEED lesson took 20 to 30 minutes. Students were evaluated in the fall and spring by means of six key CELF subtests that determine oral-language ability: Phonological Awareness, Sentence Structure, Word Structure, Recalling Sentences, Recalling Sentences in Context, and Expressive Vocabulary.

## FINDINGS

For every subtest, the percentage of students performing at or above their age norms increased significantly from the fall to the spring assessment (figure 1). The difference between fall and spring was due solely to the improvement of at-risk students, because all of the students who were at or above their age norms in the fall maintained that status in the spring.

The CELF test accounts for the natural occurrence of student growth over time through the use of nationally normed data, whereby normal growth shows as a flat line. The upward slope in figure 1 shows that in every category,

GrapeSEED students improved faster than did their national peers. As a result, GrapeSEED students became able to move out of at-risk status faster than predicted.

Educators agree on the importance of moving students out of at-risk categories as quickly as possible in order to eliminate the need for long-term interventions, to improve students' self-worth, and to contain school costs. In addition, an analysis of subgroup data indicated that GrapeSEED narrowed or closed the learning gap among LEP/EL students; Hispanic, black, and other students; and free- or reduced-price-lunch students across a variety of subtests.

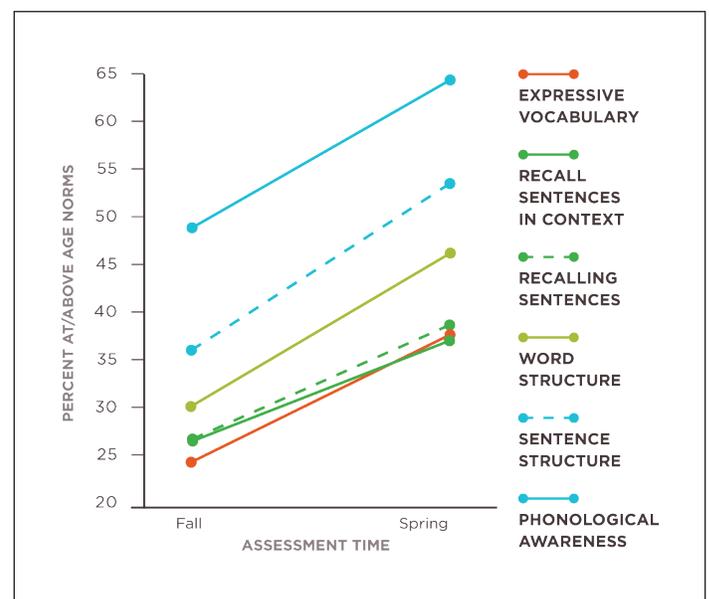


Figure 1. Change in percentage of Berrien RESA GSRP preschool students who were at or above their age norms on CELF assessment subtests, Fall 2013–Spring 2014 (N=432)

# 2

**Demographic** English learners in second grade  
**School/District** Berrien Springs Public Schools, Michigan  
**Assessment** WIDA ACCESS for ELLs

**Seventy-four percent of English learners achieved reading-proficiency-level goals—and the ability to exit English-learner status—in less than half the time of the national average.**

In this three-year, longitudinal study<sup>4</sup> at Berrien Springs Public Schools in Michigan, English learners were in GrapeSEED pull-out programs from kindergarten through second grade. The same students were tested in spring 2014 through the WIDA ACCESS Placement Test for English-language learners.

WIDA proficiency levels are defined as Entering, Emerging, Developing, Expanding, Bridging, and Reaching. Students who achieve the Bridging level or above it are eligible to exit English-learning status. Therefore, WIDA’s Bridging level is a critical goal at most schools, and Bridging and Reaching data are combined in this study. Because writing is not a focus of GrapeSEED, data for the Writing portion of WIDA is not included here.

## FINDINGS

Analysis of the data confirms the power of GrapeSEED’s cumulative effect. Students’ proficiency, as evidenced by average second-grade, spring WIDA levels, indicated acceleration of the natural-language-learning progression. Of particular interest are the study’s data on reading. National averages indicate it takes English-learner students six to eight years to attain the reading-level proficiency required to exit English-learner status, but 74% of GrapeSEED students reached it in three years—which is less than half the national average (figure 2).

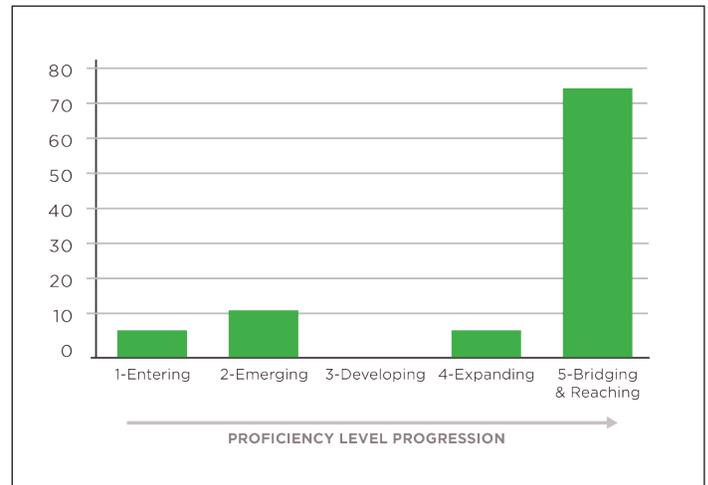


Figure 2. WIDA reading-proficiency levels among second-grade English learners who used GrapeSEED, Spring 2014 (N=432)

### Listening

- 85% of students achieved their schools’ proficiency-level goals: Bridging 74%, Reaching 11%.

### Speaking

- 48% of students achieved their schools’ proficiency-level goals: Bridging 11%, Reaching 37%.

### Reading

- 74% of students achieved their schools’ proficiency-level goals: Bridging 59%, Reaching 15% (figure 2).

# 3

<b>Demographic</b>	English-speaking kindergarten and first-grade students from low-income families
<b>School/District</b>	Parker Elementary—Clintondale Community Schools, Michigan
<b>Assessment</b>	Developmental Reading Assessment

**Kindergarten students achieved exceptionally high scores; results indicated a positive correlation between the amount of GrapeSEED used and learning gains, as well as evidence of sustained learning benefits after program participation.**

In a three-year study<sup>5</sup> of English-speaking children from low-income families (100% were eligible for free or reduced-price lunches), 215 kindergarten students and 152 first-grade students received GrapeSEED. GrapeSEED lessons ranged from 20 to 40 minutes.

### GAINS IN KINDERGARTEN

After using GrapeSEED in the first year of the study (2011/12), 100% of the kindergarten students tested met or exceeded DRA2 grade-level benchmarks (level 3 or above). In the second year, the same thing happened with a new group of students. In the third year, with yet another group, 97.5% of students met or exceeded grade-level benchmarks (figure 3).

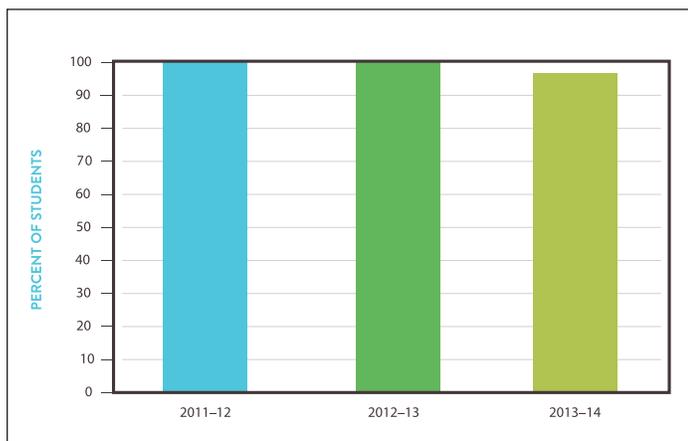


Figure 3. Percent of kindergarten students meeting DRA2 text-level benchmarks, 2011–14 (N=71)

### GRAPESEED GAINS SUSTAIN IN HIGHER GRADES

Researchers examined the DRA scores of second-grade students who had gone at least a year without any GrapeSEED lessons and discovered that GrapeSEED had had a significant and lasting effect on student DRA scores ( $p < .001$ ). The data showed that the GrapeSEED students performed better than those who had not received GrapeSEED. Such a finding implies that GrapeSEED’s effects increase even after students no longer participate in the program. The finding also negates the so-called implementation effect, which posits that during research studies, teachers work diligently to carry out a program with fidelity but that the effect goes away over time. This study shows that GrapeSEED students continued improving over multiple years.

### MORE GRAPESEED MEANS MORE GAINS

Researchers compared the DRA scores of second-grade students who didn’t receive GrapeSEED with the scores achieved by students who received GrapeSEED only in kindergarten, or only in first grade, or in both kindergarten and first grade. Data showed that students who received the most GrapeSEED experience also achieved the highest DRA scores.

# 4

**Demographic** English-speaking kindergarten students from low-income families  
**School/District** Parker Elementary—Clintondale Community Schools, Michigan  
**Assessment** Michigan Literacy Progress Profile

**Kindergarten students in the GrapeSEED program scored above national norms in sight-word-identification assessments. In addition, GrapeSEED leveled the playing field —boys matched or outperformed girls in the same assessments.**

In a study<sup>6</sup> of English-speaking children from low-income families (100% were eligible for free or reduced-price lunches), 71 kindergarten students received GrapeSEED. Students were assessed in the fall (October), at midyear (January), and in the spring (June).

### STUDENTS EXCELLED BEYOND NATIONAL NORMS

Kindergarten students excelled well beyond the national norm of 30 sight words as set by a National Center for Education Statistics study<sup>7</sup> for the US Department of Education. Figure 4 shows that kindergarten students who received GrapeSEED scored an average of 37 sight words.

### LEVEL ACADEMIC PLAYING FIELD

After a GrapeSEED program, data indicated no significant difference between the abilities of kindergarten boys and kindergarten girls to read books; and boys either matched or outperformed girls in the MLPP Sight Word/Decodable Word List assessment (figure 5). On average, boys scored 1.4 points higher than girls in the fall assessment and 2.0 points higher in the spring assessment, which is notable because it's been a long-accepted norm in early childhood education that boys typically start kindergarten on a lower literacy level than girls and that that gap tends to widen with age.<sup>8</sup> The researchers suggested that GrapeSEED's "quick pace, amount of movement, and kinesthetic activities" promoted the boys' increased literacy achievement.

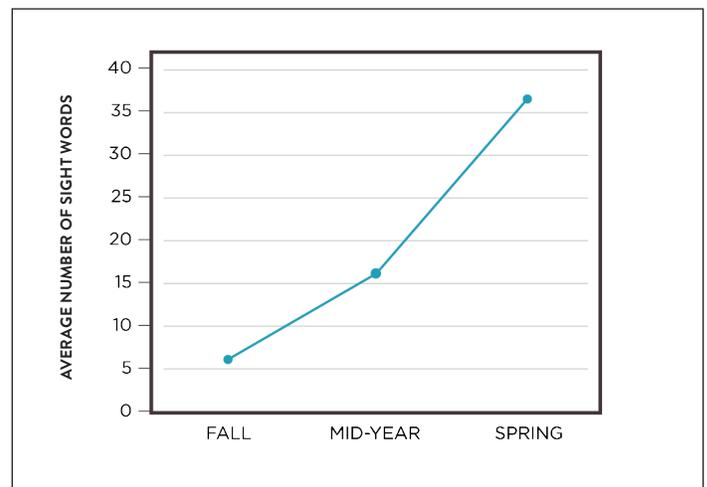


Figure 4. Kindergarten gains in MLPP sight words, Fall 2013–Spring 2014 (N=71)

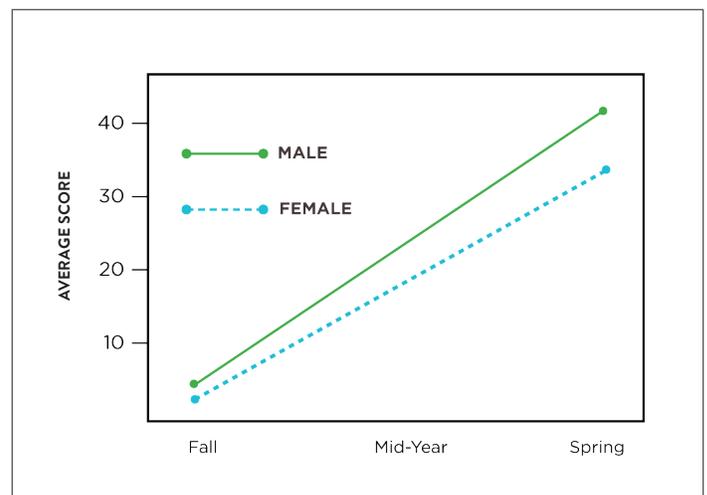


Figure 5. MLPP Sight Word/Decodable Word List assessment scores among male and female kindergarten students, Fall 2013–Spring 2014 (N=71)

# 5

**Demographic** Preschool students in the Great Start Readiness Program and kindergarten students  
**School/District** Berrien Springs Public Schools, Michigan  
**Assessment** Developmental Reading Assessment

**Students with the most exposure to GrapeSEED outperformed their peers, and at-risk students showed the most-significant growth.**

This two-year study<sup>9</sup> involved the Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP), a Michigan state-funded preschool program for at-risk students. In the second year of the study, the researchers followed 114 students as the students moved from preschool to kindergarten. Those preschoolers who received GrapeSEED were participants in the GSRP. Students were divided into four groups: those who had GrapeSEED in preschool, those who had it in kindergarten, those who had it in preschool and kindergarten, and those who had no GrapeSEED.

### AT-RISK STUDENTS SHOWED THE GREATEST GAINS

A comparison of kindergarten DRA text-level scores showed a positive correlation between GrapeSEED use and improved scores (figure 6). Students who received GrapeSEED in both preschool and kindergarten scored higher than those who received only one year of GrapeSEED; students who had had no exposure to GrapeSEED had the lowest gains. It is interesting that the highest performers were students who had been judged to be at risk. Those at-risk students had had GrapeSEED for two years and outperformed their peers who had not been considered at risk.

### DRA SCORES MORE THAN DOUBLED

GrapeSEED's emphasis on oral-language development helped students build a bridge to reading and writing. A comparison of DRA text-level scores before and after full GrapeSEED implementation in fall 2013 showed that kindergarten DRA text-level scores more than doubled after addition of the program—from a combined mean of 2.58 to a mean of 5.7 (figure 7).

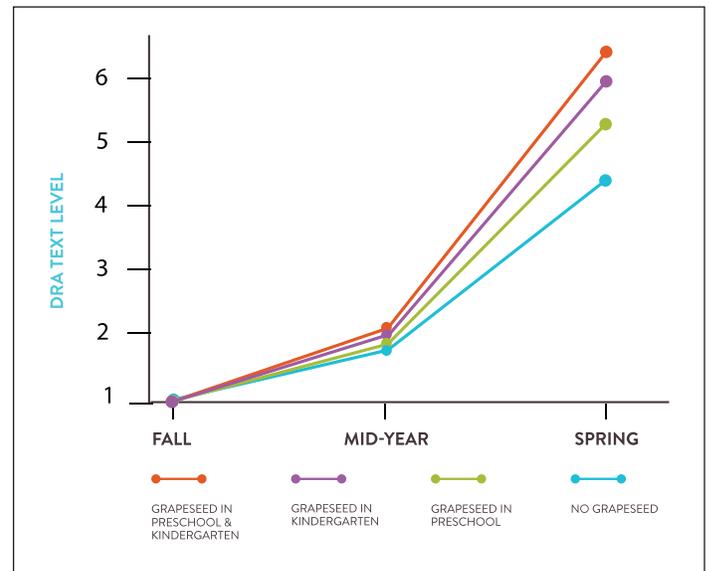


Figure 6. Correlation of DRA text levels and amount of GrapeSEED exposure over time, Fall 2013–Spring 2014 (N=114)

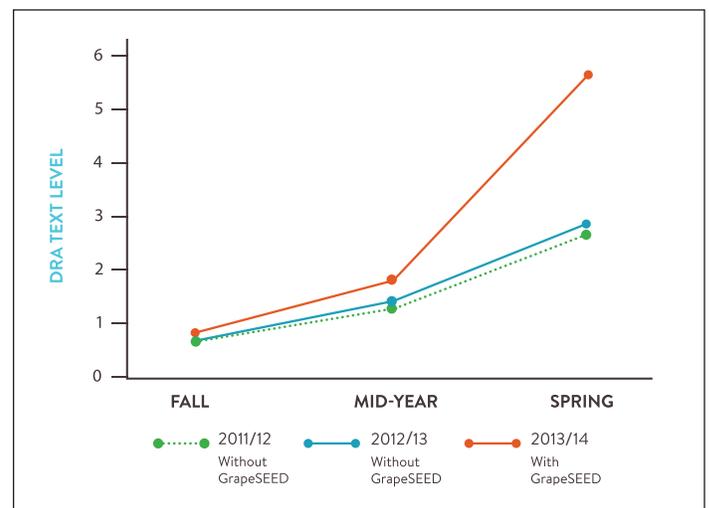


Figure 7. Kindergarten DRA text-level scores with and without GrapeSEED, Fall 2011–Spring 2014 (N=154)

## Conclusion

More than only successful GrapeSEED implementations, the studies described on the previous pages represent victories. Behind the data and the statistics are children, many of whom had been struggling as English learners or were members of low-income families or underserved populations. With GrapeSEED's help, those children became empowered to overcome language barriers and equipped themselves with the oral-language skills needed for attaining academic success and success in life.

Today more than ever, schools and school districts across the United States are turning to GrapeSEED's unique oral-language-acquisition program—and for good reason. As the five study summaries included here illustrate, GrapeSEED accelerates the learning process and transforms the learning experience into joyful and engaging instruction that makes a positive difference. The following findings illustrate GrapeSEED's learning gains across a variety of environments and assessments.

- **Accelerated learning and faster progression out of the at-risk category.** Moving students out of at-risk categories eliminates the need for long-term interventions, improves students' self-worth, and contains school costs. At-risk preschool students improved faster than did their national peers in every CELF subtest (page 3). And 74% of second-grade English-language learners achieved reading-level proficiency in three years—less than half the time of the national average (page 4).
- **Closed the gap by raising the levels of students in subgroups.** To retain funding, school districts are tasked with elevating individual subgroups by closing the gap from the bottom up. At-risk kindergartners who had had GrapeSEED for two years outperformed their peers who were not at risk (page 7).

“What I really like about [GrapeSEED] is that each child's needs get met—from the child who is struggling to the child who can read and write. It's a really wonderful program, and I can hardly wait to see what it brings next.”

—Aleece Tousignant, Teacher  
Parker Elementary—Clintondale Community Schools, Michigan

- **Provided the language skills required to progress to reading and writing.** GrapeSEED's emphasis on oral-language development helped students build a bridge to reading and writing. A comparison of DRA text-level scores before and after GrapeSEED showed that kindergartners' scores more than doubled after addition of the program (page 7). Kindergarten students scored an average of 37 sight words as measured by the MLPP—well beyond the national norm of 30 sight words (page 6).
- **Established a solid foundation for future success.** The DRA scores of second-grade students who had gone at least a year without any GrapeSEED lessons indicated that the program had had a significant and lasting effect because students continued improving over multiple years (page 5).

GrapeSEED is committed to providing today's English-language instructors with specific resources that support preschool through second-grade students. We look forward to hearing about your achievements and to including your school or district in our next report. Contact us today at [info@grapeseed.com](mailto:info@grapeseed.com) or visit [grapeseed.com](http://grapeseed.com) to learn how.

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“This year the school has a population of roughly 450 students, of whom 119 are English learners, and for years we struggled to find a product that would meet the unique needs of those learners. GrapeSEED is the first product we’ve seen that is comprehensive, sequential, and designed to help English learners learn English faster.”

—Mike Shembarger, Principal, Retired  
Berrien Springs Public Schools, Michigan



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