



CASE STUDY

Sweetwater Primary School

Executive Summary

Sweetwater Primary School in Tennessee, a Title I school where 84 percent of students qualify for free and reduced lunch, implemented Reading Horizons® in late 2020 to improve literacy outcomes and to shift away from the whole-language approach. As part of Sweetwater City Schools—a district previously identified as struggling—this initiative emphasized explicit phonics instruction and skill mastery to ensure all students achieve reading proficiency.

The implementation process began with manageable schedules and intensive teacher coaching, focusing on the Reading Horizons® Daily Core 4 structure. Teachers quickly embraced the Structured Literacy approach, gaining confidence in their ability to deliver impactful instruction. By the end of the 2022–2023 school year, Sweetwater’s success led to plans for district-wide adoption of the program.

The results have been dramatic. By the end of 2023, 75 percent of K–2 students were reading at or above grade level, compared to just 14 percent at the beginning of the year. Growth across demographic groups, including ELL (133 percent growth) and Hispanic/Latino students (126 percent growth), exceeded typical benchmarks. Teachers reported significant gains in student phonics skills and expressed enthusiasm for the program’s impact on early literacy.

In preparation for the 2023–2024 school year, Sweetwater is transitioning to the latest version of *Reading Horizons® Discovery* and has conducted comprehensive training to ensure ongoing program success.

Things to consider before reading

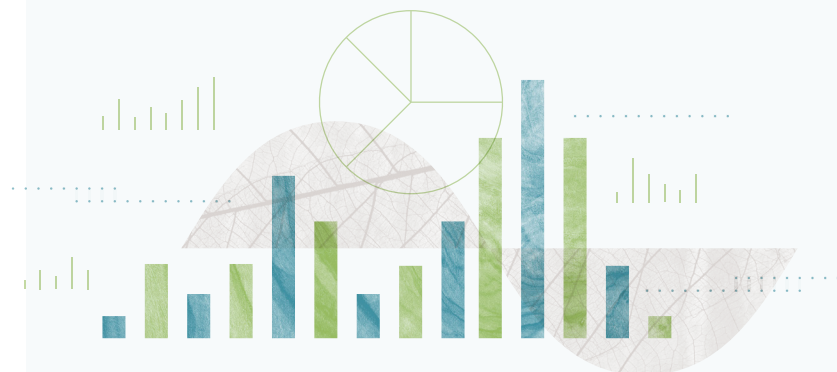
Use this **Relevance Checklist** to determine if Sweetwater Primary School’s literacy success aligns with your school’s goals and needs:

Does this description sound like your school?

- Are you a school or district administrator aiming to implement explicit phonics instruction for **Title I or high-need schools**?
- Are you transitioning from a **whole language approach to Structured Literacy** methods?
- Do your student **demographics** reflect similar challenges?
 - Economically disadvantaged students (e.g., 84 percent), ELLs, or minority populations
- Do you have these **foundational supports**?
 - Leadership and coaching teams committed to improving literacy outcomes
 - Teacher enthusiasm for structured instructional methods
- Can you provide the **resources** for program implementation?
 - Dedicated time for phonics instruction
 - Training and coaching support for teachers

If these conditions resonate, Sweetwater Primary School’s success with Reading Horizons® may offer valuable perspectives and strategies for achieving your literacy goals.

Checklist adapted from Danks (2023)





Sweetwater

PRIMARY SCHOOL

Case Study

The Impact of the *Reading Horizons*® Method
Implementation on Student Learning

AT-A-GLANCE

Sweetwater City Schools
2022–2023 Academic Year

Where reading momentum begins™



Background and Goals

Sweetwater Primary School, situated in Monroe County, Tennessee, is classified as a Title 1 school, where 84 percent of students are eligible for free and reduced lunch. The school’s student body is 78 percent white students, 2 percent Black students, and 15 percent Hispanic students. This school is a part of the Sweetwater City Schools district, which was designated as a struggling school district by the state department in 2019.

Recognizing the importance of student achievement, the school administration implemented the Reading Horizons explicit phonics program in the latter part of 2020. Sweetwater City Schools was fully aware that they were joining the science of reading movement later than some other institutions, so they placed significant emphasis on quickly bringing their teachers up to speed on these methodologies.

Teachers displayed a strong enthusiasm for incorporating Reading Horizons into their teaching practices. Interestingly, the shift from the whole language approach to Structured Literacy was smoother and more straightforward than initially anticipated.

Sweetwater Primary School established a clear objective: to diligently teach phonics and thoroughly reinforce all skills taught until mastery is achieved. By doing so, they aimed to significantly enhance reading proficiency for all students, ultimately lifting the school district out of its struggling designation.

Implementation

At Sweetwater Primary School, the administration and instructional coach had two primary objectives for their Reading Horizons implementation: ensuring that the program was taught with integrity and reinforcing the acquired skills to a level of mastery. Through a collaboration with Reading Horizons, the teachers were provided with coaching to facilitate a seamless shift toward daily explicit instruction and guided skills transfer.

To kick-start a successful implementation, the initial step involved crafting a manageable schedule for the teachers. It was important for the teachers to be

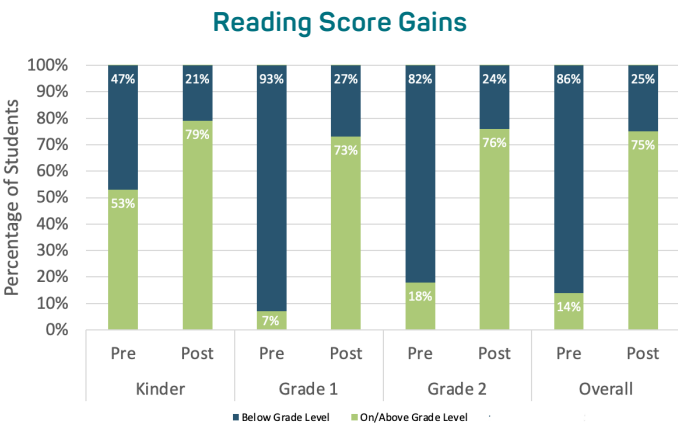
deliberate in allocating dedicated time for phonics instruction. The next critical phase was to provide coaching to the teachers. If teachers were going to instruct using the Reading Horizons® method, they must teach all four parts of the Daily Core 4. By coaching the teachers on the Daily Core 4 and empowering them, the transformation process within their implementation began.

Following effective coaching cycles with guidance from Reading Horizons coaches and constructive feedback, the teachers developed a sense of confidence in their ability to deliver impactful phonics instruction. As the school year progressed, there was a growing belief that through consistent implementation of Reading Horizons, all students had the potential to read proficiently. The success has been so remarkable at Sweetwater Primary School that the district will implement Reading Horizons throughout the entire district this upcoming school year.

Results

In total, 448 students in kindergarten (155), Grade 1 (160), and Grade 2 (133) were tested using the *high performance and high growth* categories from i-Ready. For kindergarten, the pre-test and post-test occurred in the winter and spring, whereas the pre-test for Grades 1 and 2 occurred in the fall.

Overall, all grade levels saw gains from the pre-test to the post-test: 14 percent of students were on or above level at the beginning of the year, and 75 percent were on or above level by the end of the year. At the kindergarten level, the percentage of students reading on or above grade level increased from 53 percent to 79 percent.

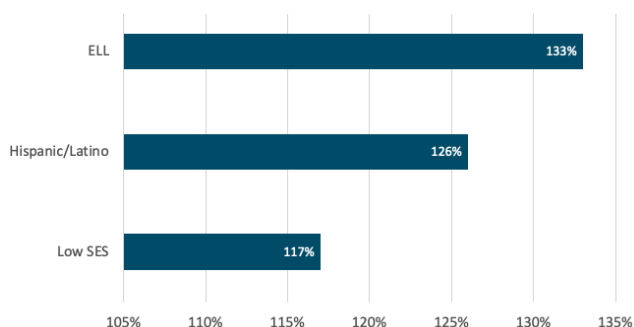


SWEETWATER PRIMARY SCHOOL

Grade 1 saw an increase from 7 percent to 73 percent while Grade 2 realized an increase from 18 percent to 76 percent.

Additionally, progress to typical annual growth was measured for 517 students belonging to certain demographic categories: English language learners (49), Hispanic/Latino (204), and economically disadvantaged (264). All demographic groups exceed typical annual growth benchmarks with English language learners achieving 133 percent growth and Hispanic/Latino and economically disadvantaged students realizing 126 percent and 117 percent growth, respectively.

Progress to Typical Annual Growth



“I think my students have shown growth through the use of this program. What I like is that I have learned more about the phonetic decoding skills that are a necessity for my students to become stronger readers.”

—CRYSTAL INGRAM, first-grade teacher

Next Steps

Sweetwater Primary School is preparing to transition to the new *Reading Horizons Discovery*® program in the upcoming school year. The school conducted training sessions to equip their teachers with the skills needed for teaching explicit phonics using state of the art technology. Building upon the coaching cycle from the previous year and the additional preparation for the current year, the teachers are now well-prepared for success in implementing the program for years to come.



“I have LOVED Reading Horizons and feel like I send my kindergarteners to first grade much more prepared in phonics skills!”

—SHERRI RICHESIN, kindergarten teacher