

## COMAL INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT BOOSTING PROFICIENCY AND CONFIDENCE

### Case Study

#### Quick Facts:

Large rural Texas district  
Serves 5 counties  
589 square miles

Total student population 16,600  
32% Minority  
33% Economically Disadvantaged

#### BACKGROUND

In 2008, Comal Independent School District purchased the Failure Free Reading Elementary, Secondary and Life Skills Solution programs for a total of 160 Reading and Math Mastery Program (RAMP) and Essential Academics (EA) special education students in 8 of its 14 elementary schools, all 5 middle schools, and all 4 high schools.

#### IMPLEMENTATION

Failure Free Reading instruction consists of daily scripted, teacher-led oral language development small group lessons, followed by a talking software session and print reinforcement activities. Multiple exposures, specialized story content, and explicit comprehension instruction enable students to immediately begin building comprehension, fluency and engagement with age-appropriate texts regardless of reading ability. Participating teachers attended a half day onsite training session. Students were placed at the level of challenge using Failure Free's online diagnostic prescriptive assessment.

*"I was flabbergasted at how well it worked. Two of my 5th graders had not made much progress in five years of school. In one year they moved from DRA 4 to DRA 18, and Guided Reading Level D to K (beginning 2nd grade)".*

*-Tania Fey*

#### Startzville Elementary

M'Liss Brockman, an Essential Academics Teacher at Startzville Elementary, taught Failure Free instruction in 2008/09 with five 3rd grade, five 4th grade, and one 5th grade students with learning disabilities, with the assistance of an instructional aide. Of the 3rd graders: one was classified as MR, one as dyslexic, and one as OHI.

#### Morningside Elementary

Tania Fey, K-5 Behavior/Resource Teacher, taught eight 4th and 5th graders, and eight 3rd graders. All of her students have a learning disability and are mildly cognitively challenged, and are at least two grade levels behind academically. She progressed at the rate of one lesson every one or two days. All started in Red (the lowest Failure Free level). Most had very little sight word recognition, and were "not grasping phonics".

## Outcomes for Elementary Students

- Both Ms. Brockman and Ms. Fey reported a marked difference in the ability levels of their students. Both teachers reported that the independent activities enabled them to reinforce punctuation – which helps the students prepare for TAKS.
- All of Ms. Brockman's EA students passed TAKS-A and all of her 3rd and 4th grade RAMP students passed TAKS-M in March 2009 (and her 5th grader passed it the second try).

## Canyon High School

Theresa Mishler, a RAMP and Inclusion teacher, taught Failure Free in four classes in 2008/09. All of her students have learning disabilities, and almost all initially placed in the Verbal Master (VM) levels. Her class sizes ranged from 5 to 17 students. Theresa teaches 1 VM lesson per day and assigns the Unit Review print and writing activities each week. According to Ms. Mishler, "It's user friendly. I like the computer part of it. The print is large so (the students) can read it, and the software talks so they can hear the words. And I like the writing (component)."

*"The confidence this builds! You have these kids who don't think they can do anything. These kids feel so bad about it. They're frustrated. They get the attitude that they're never going to get it This is the first time (they've been able to read). They're so proud taking this home to their parents".*

*-Tania Fey*

*"We had more students pass TAKS-M and TAKS-A because of Failure Free... the exposure to words, the writing and picking out the main idea. They have to write an essay on TAKS. Failure Free assists them in understanding what the bigger words mean, and applying them to real life... I absolutely love the program".*

*-Theresa Mishler*

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## ABOUT FAILURE FREE READING

Failure Free Reading's unique sight word-based (non-phonetic) approach to reading intervention was developed for the very lowest achieving readers by former special education director Dr. Joseph Lockavitch. In numerous quality

research studies, the programs have produced dramatic gains in reading comprehension, fluency, vocabulary, attitudes, positive behaviors and esteem for low incidence, LD, at-risk, and ELL/ESL populations.