

## BUILDING FLUENCY & COMPREHENSION FOR STUDENTS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS

### Case Study

#### Quick Facts:

Crenshaw County AL School District  
Rural Pre K-12 School  
Student Population: 813

Free/Reduced Lunch: 62%  
Target Population: Low Incidence

#### BACKGROUND

Crenshaw County School District's (CCSD) Highland Home School began using Failure Free Reading in its 3 self contained classrooms in 2006. Angie Meridith, special education teacher, and her three aides taught eight students, including four boys with Autism. All four were verbal, and could retain words. Prior to Failure Free, the students had used the Edmark Reading Program, communication symbols, and 1st grade stories from the school's core reading program. The stories were too long and not interesting for the students. "It was hard to motivate them, and the process was too time-consuming," according to Meridith, "and they retained little."

#### IMPLEMENTATION

Failure Free was implemented each morning in an uninterrupted 2½ hour reading block. The students rotated every 20 minutes between scripted teacher instruction, talking software, and print reinforcement activities. The students completed 7 of each lesson's 8 activities (not the drawing) including the word scramble.

*"These students need  
to know that  
they've done well.*

*The software feedback  
is the driving force  
that keeps  
them going."*

*Angie Meridith, Special  
Education teacher*

#### RESULTS

All four students' word identification and reading comprehension improved significantly. Meridith matched the more fluent readers with the laborious Autistic readers who immediately mimicked the other students' fluency. The students' parents were extremely pleased at their progress:

**Adam**, a Kindergartner who was just pulled for reading, is a very engaged learner, and exceptional student who completed Failure Free's Red Level at the same rate his counterparts progressed through the first grade reading curriculum. He took his Illustrated Booklets to the regular classroom to read them to his classmates.

**Austin**, a 9 year old 4th grader with Cerebral Palsy. Prior to Failure Free, Austin had learned one word. He did not understand the basic concepts of print. After one year, he could read the first paragraph in the first story of Failure Free's Red Level. See video clip of Austin at <http://www.failurefreeonline.com/n/video/video.php?v=crenshaw2>

**Jon**, a 12 year old sixth grader reading at a low 2nd grade level. His ritualistic behavior included rubbing his thumb on the page after reading each word, precluding any fluency. He progressed into Failure Free's Green Level in one semester, and eventually to Failure Free's Teal Level. The layout of Failure Free's Instructional Reader pages didn't trigger his ritual which enabled him to read fluently. Steve took the initiative to read to the low incidence students and he felt great pride in being able to do that. According to Meridith, "he just excelled."

**Zach**, an 8 year old who had to be motivated to read, and who was difficult to understand prior to Failure Free. He began in Failure Free's Red Level and in two years progressed into Failure Free's Orange Level. He read in a sing song style and would take forever to read, but by the end of the first semester, was reading fluently -- <http://www.failurefreeonline.com/n/video/video.php?v=crenshaw3>. He also never had to be motivated to read again.

*"When we say  
it's time for reading,  
they jump up.  
They go to their tables,  
and they're really  
excited about it --  
especially the computer  
component. It's a  
very motivational  
program."*

Failure Free Reading's highly structured, multi-modal, language development-based (non-phonetic) methodology meets the unique instructional needs of students with Pervasive Developmental Disorder -- "Not Otherwise Specified" (PDD-NOS), Autistic Disorder, and Asperger's disorder, by providing:

**Routine & Structure:** students with Autism feel secure and in control when they know what to expect each day. They also need order and detail

**Clear Instructions:** students need to know what is expected of them

**Visual learning:** visual supports and written instructions maintain focus and interest

**Explicit comprehension instruction:** is taught in scripted oral language development lesson, talking software, and print reinforcement activities

**Syntactic control:** students need simple, concrete language

**Semantic control:** students learn Dolch Word List and EDL Core Vocabulary words in the context of easily comprehensible stories they can relate to

**Positive reinforcement:** essential for increasing desired behavior

**Repetition:** students need ample repetition that meets their individual needs

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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.