

RESEARCH UPDATE

Paterson Public School District
Paterson, NJ

Expert 21 Students Outperform Peers on New Jersey State Literacy Assessment in Randomized Controlled Study

PROFILE

District: Paterson Public School District

Evaluation Period: 2010–2011 School Year

Grades: 6, 7, 8

Model: 90-minute Core English Language Arts

Assessment: New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (NJ ASK) Language Arts and Literacy Test; Gates-MacGinitie Reading Comprehension Subtest; *Scholastic Reading Inventory* (SRI)

DISTRICT CHARACTERISTICS

Paterson Public School District is the third-largest district in New Jersey, with an enrollment of 28,400 students in Grades Pre-K through 12. The majority of students in Paterson are Hispanic (59%), 33% are African American, 5% are Caucasian, and the remaining 3% are Asian or of other ethnic descent. Eighteen percent of students are English language learners, and 15% receive special education services. Eighty-six percent of students in the district qualify for free or reduced-price lunch.

IMPLEMENTATION OVERVIEW

In the fall of 2010, New Roberto Clemente (NRC) Middle School implemented *Expert 21* in three middle school classrooms—one each in sixth, seventh, and eighth grade—as part of a randomized controlled research study.

Implementation Model

Program implementation at NRC Middle School followed the recommended *Expert 21* model: each day, teachers began the lesson with a whole-group introduction, then broke students up into small groups or partners for collaborative activities and targeted, differentiated instruction. The class period was typically closed with

another 15- to 20-minute whole-group session to review and consolidate the day's learning. At the end of each workshop unit, students completed *Expert Projects* and took xSkills tests.

Participants

A total of 282 sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade students compose the sample in this report. One hundred forty students were randomly assigned to *Expert 21* classrooms, and 142 were randomly assigned to the school's regular English language arts (ELA) course, which is based on the *Elements of Literature* textbook series published by Holt. A total of six teachers participated in the study: three (one per grade) were randomly assigned to teach *Expert 21*, and three (one per grade) were randomly assigned to teach the usual ELA course. Nearly three-quarters (71%) of the overall sample are Hispanic, 27% are African American, and 2.5% are Caucasian. Seven percent of the student sample has a special education designation. No English language learners are included in the study.

Measures

New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge Language Arts and Literacy Subtest (NJ ASK LAL)

The NJ ASK is the official assessment of academic performance for the state of New Jersey. The Language Arts and Literacy portion comprises two components: Reading and Writing. It includes reading passages, multiple-choice items, constructed-response items, and writing tasks. Student scores are categorized into three performance levels: Partially Proficient, Proficient, or Advanced Proficient. The NJ ASK was administered to students in both the *Expert 21* treatment and comparison classrooms in spring 2010 and spring 2011.

Gates-MacGinitie Reading Tests (GMRT), Reading Comprehension Subtest

The GMRT is a normed, valid, and reliable test of reading achievement for Grades K to 12. The Reading Comprehension subtest assesses reading comprehension of fiction and nonfiction passages. Extended Scale Scores on the Reading Comprehension subtest were used for data analyses. The GMRT was administered to students in both the *Expert 21* and comparison classrooms in September 2010 and June 2011.

Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI)

The SRI measures reading comprehension by focusing on the following skills: identifying details in a passage, recognizing cause-and-effect relationships, pinpointing sequence of events, drawing conclusions, and making comparisons and generalizations. During test administration, the computer adapts the test continually, according to student responses. Performance on the SRI is reported as a Lexile® (L) measure. Lexile measures can range from Beginner Reader

(less than 100L) to Graduate-School Reader (1720L). SRI was administered to students in both the *Expert 21* and comparison classrooms in fall 2010 and spring 2011.

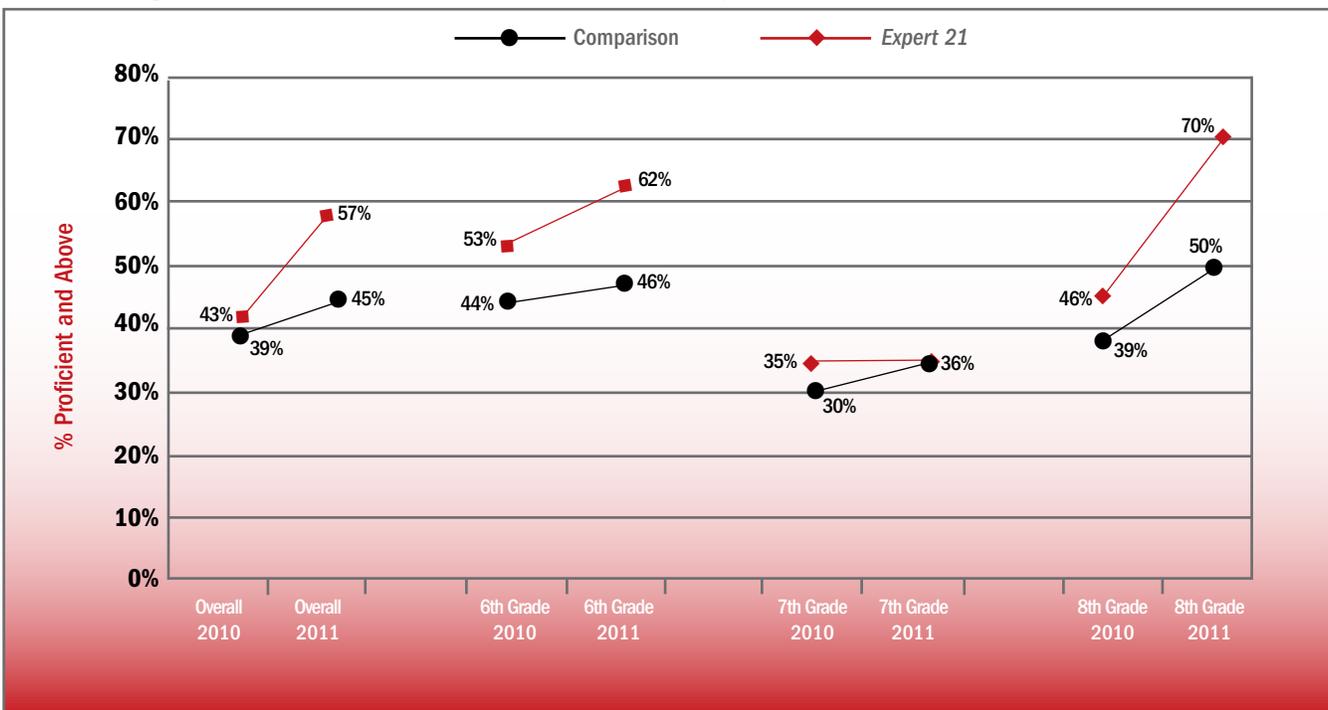
RESULTS

NJ ASK LAL

Results show that a significantly greater proportion of *Expert 21* students performed in the Proficient or Advanced Performance Level on the 2011 NJ ASK LAL. As Graph 1 shows, 57% of *Expert 21* students scored in the Proficient or Advanced categories on the 2011 NJ ASK LAL, compared to just 45% of students in the comparison group—a statistically significant difference ($p = .001$). The most dramatic difference between *Expert 21* students and their peers is evidenced in eighth grade. Prior to their eighth-grade year, the *Expert 21* group and comparison group had similar passing rates of 46% and 39%, respectively, on the 2010 NJ ASK LAL. In 2011, 70% of students who participated in *Expert 21* as eighth-graders scored Proficient or Advanced on the NJ ASK LAL, compared to just 50% of their non-*Expert 21* peers.

Graph 1.

New Roberto Clemente School *Expert 21* and Comparison Students (N = 247)
Percent Scoring Proficient or Above on the 2010 and 2011 NJ ASK LAL, by Grade



GMRT

Results on the GMRT reveal a trend toward greater improvement among *Expert 21* students than among comparison students. *Expert 21* students achieved a statistically significant average fall-to-spring gain of 6 points on the GMRT ($p < .01$), whereas the comparison group's average gain of 1 point was not statistically significant (Graph 2). However, the difference between the two groups in GMRT performance does not rise to the level of statistical significance. This pattern of findings may be attributable to the small sample size and limited number of classes per grade—factors that limit the power of statistical analyses to detect program effects in the data.

SRI Results

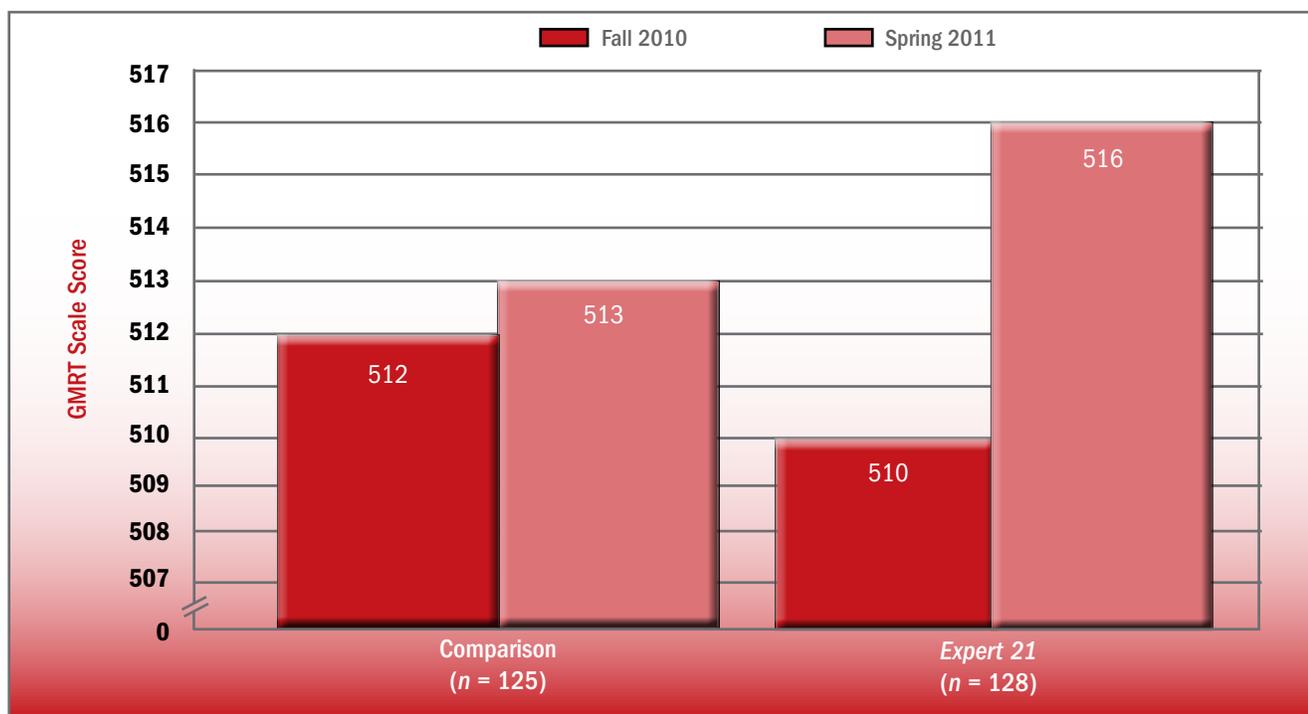
Findings show that both *Expert 21* and comparison group students achieved significant growth on SRI, with gains of 58L ($p < .001$) and 61L ($p < .001$), respectively. The difference between the *Expert 21* and comparison groups' spring 2011 SRI scores is not statistically significant.

CONCLUSION

This randomized controlled study at New Roberto Clemente Middle School in New Jersey shows that sixth, seventh, and eighth-grade students who participated in *Expert 21* outperformed their peers on the NJ ASK LAL, with a significantly greater proportion of *Expert 21* students scoring Proficient or Advanced compared to the comparison group. *Expert 21* students also demonstrated significant fall-to-spring growth in other measures of reading comprehension: the GMRT and SRI. Overall, this rigorous study suggests that *Expert 21* provides students with learning advantages in reading comprehension, writing, and general language arts and literacy achievement.

Graph 2.

New Roberto Clemente School *Expert 21* and Comparison Students (N=253)
Performance on Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test, 2010 and 2011



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