The educators at Midway ISD sought an alternative method of literacy instruction beyond a traditional reading program, but their experience with Fountas & Pinnell Classroom™ (FPC) since 2018 has surpassed their expectations. Teachers have received a newfound confidence in their approach to literacy from the rich materials and scaffolded instruction of FPC. Beyond a new level of competency in literacy as measured through assessments and report cards, FPC has influenced the culture at Midway ISD, turning reluctant students into avid readers. A full spectrum of students have received a new level of support in their journey to read, including populations such as economically disadvantaged students, special education students, and advanced students.

SNAPSHOT: Midway Independent School District

Location: Woodway, TX
Elementary schools: 6
Total schools: 11
Grades supported: Pre-Kindergarten through Grade 12
Student population: 8,282
Number of classroom teachers: 494
ELL student population: 234, 3.3%
Students with IEPs: 663, 9.4%
Economically Disadvantaged: 34.8%
ABOUT FOUNTAS & PINNELL CLASSROOM™

*Fountas & Pinnell Classroom™* is a systematic and explicit multi-text approach to literacy instruction for all students in grades pre-K through 6. The System is designed to support whole-group, small-group and independent learning opportunities through instructional contexts including interactive read-aloud, reading minilessons, shared reading, phonics, spelling, and word study, guided reading, book clubs, and independent reading. *Fountas & Pinnell Classroom™* includes original and acquired trade books, lessons, conferring and discussion cards, minilessons, and professional learning tools.

BACKGROUND AND DISTRICT DEMOGRAPHICS

Between January and February 2020, researchers from the Center for Research in Educational Policy (CREP) at the University of Memphis conducted a total of five interviews with school and district-level staff in Midway Independent School District (ISD) to learn directly from educators implementing *FPC* on their experiences with the curriculum’s impact on their student achievement and teaching.

Midway ISD is a public school district located in central Texas with an enrollment of more than 8,100 students pre-K through 12th grade across eleven schools including six elementary schools. School-level staff from two of the district’s elementary schools participated in the interviews. The district includes part of the city of Waco, the neighboring communities of Woodway, Hewitt, Speegleville, plus parts of McGregor, Lorena and Crawford. The interviews conducted by the Center for Research in Educational Policy included the following individuals:

- Ginger Rowe, District Elementary Coordinator
- South Bosque Elementary
  - Stacey Voight, Principal
  - Britney Boyd, Kindergarten Teacher
- Amber Pearson, Reading Instructional Specialist
- Castleman Creek Elementary
  - Sydney Dietert, 3rd Grade Teacher
JOURNEY TO FPC

FPC was implemented in Midway ISD in the 2018–19 school year. Kindergarten through 3rd grades at two of Midway ISD’s six elementary schools piloted FPC using four of the seven instructional contexts: Interactive Read-Aloud; Guided Reading; Reading Minilessons; and Phonics, Spelling, and Word Study. Beginning in the 2019–20 school year, all six elementary schools in the district implemented FPC with the addition of the Shared Reading context. FPC is the only Heinemann resource being used in the district at this point.

During the interviews with the district, Ms. Rowe, the District Elementary Coordinator, emphasized that there was a paradigm shift for their district when moving to FPC. Multiple teachers mentioned that Midway’s prior literacy curriculum relied on one student text to teach multiple standards across the week.

South Bosque Principal Stacey Voight brought FPC to the district based on her previous experience with Fountas & Pinnell Literacy™ (FPL) materials at prior schools with similar demographics. As the district’s approach to reading was based on basal readers and worksheets, she wanted to teach reading differently. As a principal, she was not seeing teachers reading with students, so she showed FPC samples at grade-level professional learning community meetings. The staff liked what they saw in FPC. Now with FPC, students are reading numerous books and looking across texts for skills at a much higher level.

With FPC students are now reading numerous books and looking across texts for skills at a much higher level.

Compared to previous experiences with traditional reading programs, Ms. Boyd developed a better understanding of comprehensive literacy with a deeper philosophy of literacy instruction after participating in formal professional development for FPC. Ms. Rowe went on to say that Fountas and Pinnell have been cutting edge leaders in the field, so it was an easy sell for teachers and principals.
PROFESSIONAL LEARNING
Each person we spoke to reported receiving an introductory overview of FPC and sample materials before the district piloted FPC, and then formal professional development after purchasing FPC from Heinemann both during the pilot and district-wide implementation phases. There was also an overwhelming consensus that their teachers are implementing FPC with high consistency—most said between 85–95% in the second year of implementation.

Ms. Rowe noted, as with any new initiative, there was an expected learning curve for teachers during the first year of implementation, but after a semester, teachers realized the effect FPC was having on their students. Ms. Dietert said FPC is “much more applicable to the students and makes more sense to them.” They are able to compare texts and look across texts rather than thinking in isolation. Ms. Rowe specifically mentioned that with FPC, they are teaching students “to think at a much higher level than we did before,” and Principal Voight expressed “students aren’t reading to pass a test ... they are reading because they have a passion for it.”

Ms. Pearson also pointed to the Fountas & Pinnell Literacy Community on Facebook where users can engage with Heinemann personnel, and other educators which has helped with implementation. “Heinemann was amazing and always answered our questions,” she said. Elementary Coordinator Ginger Rowe noted how beneficial the sample pacing guides were in helping teacher determine which lessons to use for each instructional context for the day (pacing guides available in the Online Resources). Ms. Boyd called the curriculum “responsive”, saying it provides more opportunities to tailor instruction to what each student needs, and Ms. Rowe shared that students are constantly applying what they have learned through the texts.

IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS
Throughout the first year of implementation, teachers grew increasingly more efficient with a deeper familiarity of the resources, and ultimately more confident and thoughtful in their teaching. While many of the respondents talked about the learning curve associated with implementing a new literacy system, they emphasized Principal Voight’s observation that it was so powerful to see FPC in action.

Ms. Dietert expressed her gratitude for the amount of resources in FPC—“You can’t make a wrong choice.” Ms. Pearson, a Reading Instructional Specialist, agreed that any first-year implementation nerves were reduced because the...
students are doing so well and making progress. Principal Voight also acknowledged that she was an advocate for FPC because it is research-based and she knew it was what was best for their students. She went on to say that with FPC, all the resources help teachers implement best practices in reading.

One of the teachers shared that the biggest difference with FPC versus their prior curriculum is that it allows teachers to utilize materials to meet students “where they are,” a sentiment shared by other respondents as well.

**FPC IN ACTION: SHIFT IN TEACHER AGENCY**

Teachers talked about having freedom and flexibility in how they implement FPC. Ms. Pearson noted a shift in teacher agency in that FPC enables teachers to choose resources that respond directly to their specific students rather than following a specific sequence, “there are so many choices and options... You’re not bound to a certain thing or a certain way.”

Ms. Rowe reflected, with FPC, they finally have a strong word study component for their teachers and students. She also noticed a positive shift in their guided reading instruction. She noted that while guided reading had always been part of their instruction, the FPC materials give improved structure and support: “The word work part of the guided reading lessons are really well designed to meet the needs of [students] reading on that particular level.” Meanwhile, Ms. Rowe said that before FPC,
IMPACT OF FPC ON SCHOOL CULTURE AND LITERACY INSTRUCTION

FPC IN ACTION: DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF THE READING PROCESS
The overwhelming consensus is that FPC was a positive switch from their previous curriculum. Ms. Pearson pointed out how FPC is effective in elevating reading comprehension, and that the biggest change is observing students thinking at a deeper level. She went on to say, “This is our second year and it’s been amazing—we’re seeing amazing results.” South Bosque Kindergarten teacher Brittney Boyd says she loves FPC, and that they have seen student growth from using the resources. “The lessons really are built on the way students process reading and writing.” She went on to say, “I learned so much about the process of teaching reading.” Principal Voight stated that when the data came in for mid-year assessments, they realized FPC was working, and that “turned the tide. Teachers realized ‘this does work if I do it with fidelity’.” They concluded this was the best way to teach reading.

INCLUSIVE AND CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE
Additionally, those we spoke with felt that the impact is being seen across a wide variety of students. Principal Voight shared that FPC offers robust differentiated instruction, including providing options for students at advanced reading levels, a sentiment also expressed by Ms. Rowe and Ms. Dietert. Principal Voight went on to say that because of FPC, “Our teachers now really know their students because they’re working with each of them one-on-one or in a small group.” Ms. Pearson and Principal Voight talked about seeing improvements with English Learners (EL), students with disabilities, economically disadvantaged students, and students with dyslexia, while Ms. Boyd felt FPC is an inclusive curriculum. Ms. Rowe also pointed to increases for special education students. According to Principal Voight, “with the FPC leveled readers…we’re able to give students a book they can have success with rather than a book way above their level.”

Several respondents stated that they felt the FPC materials were culturally responsive. According to Ms. Boyd, “Heinemann made it possible for children to read about other cultures and other parts of the world in a very age-appropriate way.” Principal Voight felt FPC materials were more culturally responsive than she had seen in any traditional reading program. Ms. Dietert reported that even she is learning new things about other cultures as a result of using FPC.
INCREASED STUDENT ENGAGEMENT
There was also an overwhelming consensus that students are more engaged in reading since the implementation of FPC. Ms. Pearson talked about how students want to go to the library to choose what books they want to read: “Students learn what genre they like...now they’re going to the library and asking for specific genres and interests, not what color dot they are or what level they are.” She went on to say, “Students are going to the library and picking books they want to read based on the interactive read-alouds they’re hearing in class...It’s just been beautiful to watch.”

Ms. Boyd commented that the FPC books are wonderful and very engaging, and the students always love the books. Ms. Rowe talked about the positive feedback she received from teachers and parents regarding children’s excitement for literacy. Principal Voight mentioned not just seeing an increase in reading levels, but feeling that FPC engages students in critical thinking. Students are now talking and asking questions at a higher level. She said, “when I go in to the classroom to read for 15 minutes, it turns into 30 minutes because the children say ‘I can make a connection!’ It’s the critical thinking...with FPC.”

Principal Voight also mentioned that students now have a passion for reading, and they just don’t want to stop—even when they are in math or other subjects, they want to keep reading! Ms. Dietert agreed that FPC makes students want to read and motivates them to be good readers.

Principal Voight spoke about the impact to their spelling instruction, “We no longer need spelling tests...[because] FPC’s word work component integrates so well with writing and reading.” This was echoed by Ms. Pearson, who stated, “Children’s spelling, looking at word meaning and decoding, it’s just been phenomenal what they are picking up on.” Ms. Rowe noted that the writing scores of every single campus have increased since last year. Ms. Dietert also noted the positive impact of FPC on her students’ writing, noting: “I’ve never had a class that can just naturally write an entire page without stopping...I definitely attribute that to the way this curriculum encourages them to think deeply.” Ms. Boyd also talked about how students are more comfortable sharing their thinking, and it carries over through the rest of the day. She remarked, “it’s very authentic and it becomes a part of who they are as a learner.”

The impact on student progress and achievement was evidenced by an increase in state test scores, which they attributed to FPC. Ms. Pearson felt that due to FPC, “Our test scores doubled in every category including all sub-populations for the pilot schools.” Ms. Rowe pointed to increases on state assessments at the pilot campuses, and that second grade students were also making progress on district checkpoint assessments. “We saw a bigger percentage of children learning at a higher performance level,” she observed. Principal Voight pointed out that the data shows FPC is working, so teachers are less worried and no longer feel they need to teach to the test. “FPC is what’s driving our success”, she observed. Ms. Dietert also felt her test scores have gone up compared to the same point a year ago, attributing those increases to FPC.
EVIDENCE OF THE IMPACT OF FPC ON ACHIEVEMENT

To examine the potential impact of FPC on state assessment scores in Reading, the percent change in the percentage of 3rd grade students meeting or mastering grade level performance on the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) in Reading were judged descriptively. However, to make the comparisons as rigorous as possible, the percent change is compared to the percent change for all 3rd grade students in the state of Texas to provide a common frame of reference over time. It should be noted that these data are cross-sectional, tracking changes in the same grade level but different students over time. For these analyses, the following comparisons were made:

MEETING GRADE LEVEL PERFORMANCE (FIGURE 1)
- **Pre-FPC Pilot**: The two pilot schools saw declines nearly 2–3 times that of the state in the percentage meeting grade level performance between 2016–17 and 2017–18.
- **Post-FPC Pilot**: The two pilot schools had increases 3–6 times that of the state between 2017–18 and 2018–19. One pilot school had a 30% increase in the percentage meeting grade level performance after the pilot year.

MASTERING GRADE LEVEL PERFORMANCE (FIGURE 2)
- **Pre-FPC Pilot**: The two pilot schools saw larger declines in 3rd grade students mastering grade level performance than other elementary schools in the district between 2016–2017 and 2017–18.
- **Post-FPC Pilot**: The two pilot schools demonstrated a larger increase of 3rd grade students mastering grade level performance than the state and every other school in the district except for one in 2018–19.

These descriptive analyses provide suggestive evidence that after one year of use, FPC bolstered the reading achievement of students in the two pilot schools in comparison to the remaining elementary schools in the district and the state. This was based on the pilot schools only using a selection of the seven available instructional contexts. Therefore, the results could potentially have been stronger if all seven instructional contexts had been implemented. Furthermore, beginning in the 2019–20 school year, all six elementary schools in the district are implementing FPC, in grades K-4.

A NOTE ON METHOD
- The percent change in the percentage of 3rd grade students meeting or mastering grade level performance in 2016–17 vs. 2017–18. This serves as a “baseline” or “pre-pilot” measure of school performance. The percent change between the two years was calculated for the six Midway ISD elementary schools and the state of Texas.
- The percent change in the percentage of 3rd grade students meeting or mastering grade level performance in 2017–18 vs. 2018–19. This serves as the “impact” measure of school performance after one year of piloting FPC. The percent change between the years was calculated for the six Midway ISD elementary schools and the state of Texas.
- Since the percent change for the state of Texas serves as a common reference point for both analyses, between the two sets of analyses, ideally:
  - The performance of the two pilot elementary schools should increase relative to the state while the performance of the four remaining elementary schools would be less than the two pilot schools.
  - This would give preliminary evidence that FPC had a differential impact in the two pilot elementary schools vs. the four other elementary schools that did not implement FPC relative to the state’s performance.
PILOT SCHOOLS OUT-PERFORMED OTHER SCHOOLS IN THE DISTRICT

Figure 1: Percentage of 3rd Grade Students Rated as “Meets Grade Level Performance” on STAAR for All Students: Percent Change from 2016–17 to 2017–18 vs. 2017–18 to 2018–19

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<th>Impact Measure</th>
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Note: Numbers represent the percent change between years

Pilot Elementary Schools had a larger percentage increase between 2017–18 and 2018–19 (after the pilot year) in 3rd grade students meeting grade level performance than the state and nearly all other elementary schools in the district.

This was after the pilot schools had larger percentage declines between 2016–17 and 2017–18 (pre-pilot) than the state, and for one pilot school, more than three of the four other elementary schools.

Figure 2: Percentage of 3rd Grade Students Rated as “Masters Grade Level Performance” on STAAR for All Students: Percent Change from 2016–17 to 2017–18 vs. 2017–18 to 2018–19

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<th>Baseline Measure</th>
<th>Impact Measure</th>
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<td>STATE</td>
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Note: Numbers represent the percent change between years

Pilot Elementary Schools had a larger percentage increase between 2017–18 and 2018–19 (after the pilot year) in 3rd grade students mastering grade level performance than the state and nearly all other elementary schools in the district.

This was after one of the pilot schools (Pilot Elementary 2) had a larger percentage decline between 2016–17 and 2017–18 (pre-pilot) than the state and three of the four other elementary schools.
The educators at Midway ISD sought an alternative method of literacy instruction but their experience with FPC since 2018 has surpassed their expectations. Teachers have received a newfound confidence in their approach to literacy from the rich materials and scaffolded instruction of FPC. Beyond an increased of competency in literacy as measured through assessments and report cards, FPC has influenced the culture at Midway ISD, turning reluctant students into avid readers. A full spectrum of students have received a new level of support in their literacy journey, including populations like economically disadvantaged students, special education students, and advanced students. Ms. Dietert summed it up well by saying “I have faith in this curriculum. It will do what I need it to do”, while Ms. Voigt said, “the kids love it, and we love it!”

Every person interviewed in Midway ISD would wholeheartedly recommend FPC to other districts. Ms. Pearson discussed how they have already been recommending FPC to others who ask about it. They really believe in FPC, and she has never seen a literacy system that propels students to think about and talk about books this way in her 16 years in education. “Now kids are talking about the books and thinking about them after school,” Ms. Pearson said. In explaining her support for FPC, Ms. Rowe said it is a more natural way of teaching reading and is more student-centered than their previous curriculum. Principal Voight described FPC as high-quality Tier 1 instruction, “This is a timeless approach to teaching reading that will never go out of style.”

CONCLUSION

NOTES


2 While cross-sectional analyses can be illuminating, they are not as rigorous as longitudinal analyses looking at the same students over time. Looking at changes in 3rd grade reading outcomes over multiple years involves looking at different groups of students. Any changes over time could be due to changes in the composition of the students, random fluctuation, or other school, teacher or student factors not necessarily related to FPC.
ABOUT THE CENTER FOR RESEARCH IN EDUCATIONAL POLICY

The Center for Research in Educational Policy (CREP) at the University of Memphis is a State of Tennessee Center of Excellence. Since 1989, we have been committed to improving education by serving as a valuable resource in educational research, evaluation, and consultation. As national education policy shifts, CREP strives to provide up-to-date, relevant data useful to both schools and policy makers through high-quality research, rigorous program evaluation, and published research and policy briefs.

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