



THE Literacy CENTER

An interactive multisensory curriculum



Case Study #14

Harmony Elementary School

East Central Independent School District, San Antonio, Texas

The Literacy Center is an Effective Support Tool for the Texas Reading Initiative

“Kids need to feel successful and it’s our job to find settings, programs, and resources to help them be successful,” comments David Shobe, principal at Harmony Elementary School in San Antonio, Texas. The Literacy Center, from LeapFrog SchoolHouse™, “is helping to make our students successful,” he concludes.

Shobe purchased two Literacy Center programs after seeing a LeapFrog SchoolHouse presentation at the Texas Elementary Principals and Supervisors Association conference. The veteran administrator felt it dovetailed nicely with his K–4 school’s emphasis on phonics as the building block for reading skills.

The Literacy Center also matched up with the Texas Reading Initiative’s requirements, a statewide effort to have all children read at or above grade level by the end of third grade in 2003 (<http://www.tea.state.tx.us/reading/model/model.html>). The initiative calls for “diagnostic assessments to identify children at risk of reading difficulties” and then requires “differentiated intervention instruction” for each struggling child. Ongoing monitoring and end-of-year performance analysis are also key elements of the Texas Reading Initiative. Shobe recognized that The Literacy Center with its built-in assessments and individualized multimodal instruction fit the initiative’s needs precisely.

Growth in Skills Attributed to LeapFrog SchoolHouse

According to Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) scores, Shobe and his staff have made notable progress since using The Literacy Centers in their reading resource room. Last year, Harmony’s students raised their scores on all 20 TAAS indicators, and 86% of third graders and 93% of fourth graders passed the reading component. In math, 85% of Harmony’s third graders and 91% of fourth graders passed.

“I give a lot of credit to LeapFrog SchoolHouse for the growth in these kids,” says Shobe. “Literacy is the foundation from which all else grows. If a student can’t read, the student is not going to be able to do math.” Amy Nelson, Harmony’s curriculum coordinator, observes that children who come to the school without knowing any letter sounds, for example, have been able to establish a solid foundation for reading by using The Literacy Centers. “We give LeapFrog SchoolHouse full credit for this,” she says. Likewise, Nelson and Shobe attribute their students’ degree of growth, as measured by the Reading Inventory, to

intensive use of The Literacy Center and its focus on phonics. Students gravitate to the different technology components, such as the LeapDesk™ workstation or the LeapMat™ learning surface, because they're fun, motivating, and interactive.

The independent nature of The Literacy Center's components, especially the LeapPad® classroom learning system with its associated library of interactive books, has been a great benefit to these students. While Harmony's paraprofessionals are working with other children in the dedicated Literacy Center room, walk-in students can choose a book to read on their own. The LeapPad unit automatically guides them through exercises, providing both visual and auditory feedback (via headphones) throughout the experience. "The kids absolutely love [using] LeapFrog SchoolHouse™ products," says Shobe. "They can't wait until it's their turn." In fact, it's common for students to head to the dedicated Literacy Center room for extra practice, "even if it's for only 15 or 20 minutes," he adds.

Nelson and Shobe point out the value of having a separate room for the LeapFrog SchoolHouse Literacy Centers. Their observations show that in a student's regular classroom, the level of instruction is often too advanced, which can lead to frustration. By using that time to work independently with a LeapPad book or the LeapDesk workstation, "students get positive reinforcement and achieve some learning success," states principal Shobe.

Current Gains Will Drive Success in the Future

Some of Harmony Elementary's youngsters have been using The Literacy Center since late in their kindergarten year. Generally, students work with it for 20–30 minutes per day. A district-developed test administered every nine weeks helps to determine their skill levels. Now in second grade, many of these students are reading at grade level.

Such improvement assumes even greater importance in the replacement of TAAS with the more stringent Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) exam. Beginning in 2003, third graders will not be promoted to fourth grade unless they pass TAKS's newly designed reading assessment. In addition, TAKS is not only a more difficult test, but a higher percentage of a school's students will be required to pass it. Thus, in 2001, 86% of Harmony Elementary School's third graders passed the reading portion of TAAS, equal to all Texas third-grade students. However, under TAKS's higher "bar of excellence," 95% of third graders must pass the reading portion in 2003.

Mindful of this new mandate, Harmony's teachers and staff have been concentrating on second graders this year to ensure they will have the skills needed to pass the TAKS reading test next year. Shobe and Nelson agree that LeapFrog SchoolHouse Literacy Centers have been crucial to the efforts of enhancing students' skills because The Literacy Center's components deliver highly individualized instruction.

"TAKS will not be as 'predictable' as TAAS tests were," notes Amy Nelson. "It requires additional higher-order thinking skills." However, The Literacy Center appears to address the expected TAKS skills because of the The Literacy Center's emphasis on phonemic awareness and phonics along with a carefully constructed curriculum that builds upon that foundation. In addition, since The Literacy Center provides an easy way to gauge a student's mastery level, it supports the school and district focus on frequent assessments as the best way to prepare students.

All-Time High Success Rate

"We are committed to creating as many different kinds of learning situations as possible," says principal Shobe, "and LeapFrog SchoolHouse Literacy Center has helped us do that." He cites as evidence the school's all-time high success rate at promoting students to the next level, noting that The Literacy Center provides individualized instruction for students, thus boosting their confidence along with their skill levels. "This is a child-centered school," concludes Shobe. "Being successful is what we're all about."