Executive Summary:

Quasi-Experimental Study of Collaborative Classroom's Being a Reader Comprehensive Reading Program—Grade 1

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COLLABORATIVE CLASSROOM | Learning Reimagined™

About Collaborative Classroom

Collaborative Classroom is a mission-driven, nonprofit organization committed to ensuring that all students become readers, writers, and thinkers who learn from, care for, and respect one another.

Our Approach

Collaborative Classroom's evidence-based programs help children develop as proficient readers and writers, appreciate the ideas and opinions of others, learn to agree and disagree respectfully, think critically about big ideas, and become responsible citizens of the world.

How we teach matters as much as what we teach. Our commitment to continuous, embedded professional learning empowers educators to grow their teaching practices, build the school community, and create the conditions for authentic, student-centered learning.

Introduction

As a learning organization, Collaborative Classroom consistently examines the impact of our programs on teachers and students. We collaborated with WestEd, a premier educational research organization, from 2022 through 2024 to understand how *Being a Reader* supported first-grade students' mastery of foundational skills. WestEd designed a quasi-experimental study comparing results obtained via the widely used i-Ready® assessment between a district implementing *Being a Reader* and a neighboring district implementing another popular core program.

What Is Being a Reader?

Being a Reader™, a comprehensive K–5 reading program, integrates foundational skills instruction, practice in reading comprehension strategies, and rich literacy experiences with explicit social skills instruction and activities that foster students' growth as responsible, caring, and collaborative people.

Being a Reader follows a continuum of reading development to meet each student at their instructional point of need and take them to their next level of literacy. Multiple strands of instruction work together to develop comprehension, fluency, decoding strategies, word analysis, spelling, vocabulary, and independent reading. Progress monitoring and other assessment tools help teachers make informed, targeted instructional decisions to ensure reading success for every child.

Research Question

The main research question was whether *Being a Reader* helps first graders, especially subgroups of students who often have differing achievement levels, improve their literacy skills as compared to students who receive instruction in another core curriculum, as measured by i-Ready.

Key Findings

When researchers examined reading proficiency using i-Ready scores, they found that using *Being a Reader* did not lead to a significant score difference when compared to another core reading program. *Being a Reader* students and students receiving instruction in another program made similar progress throughout the year, both meeting or exceeding grade-level benchmarks (see Figure 3 below, taken from the researchers' report; the *Being a Reader*-instructed group is the Treatment group and the alternate program-instructed group is the Comparison group).
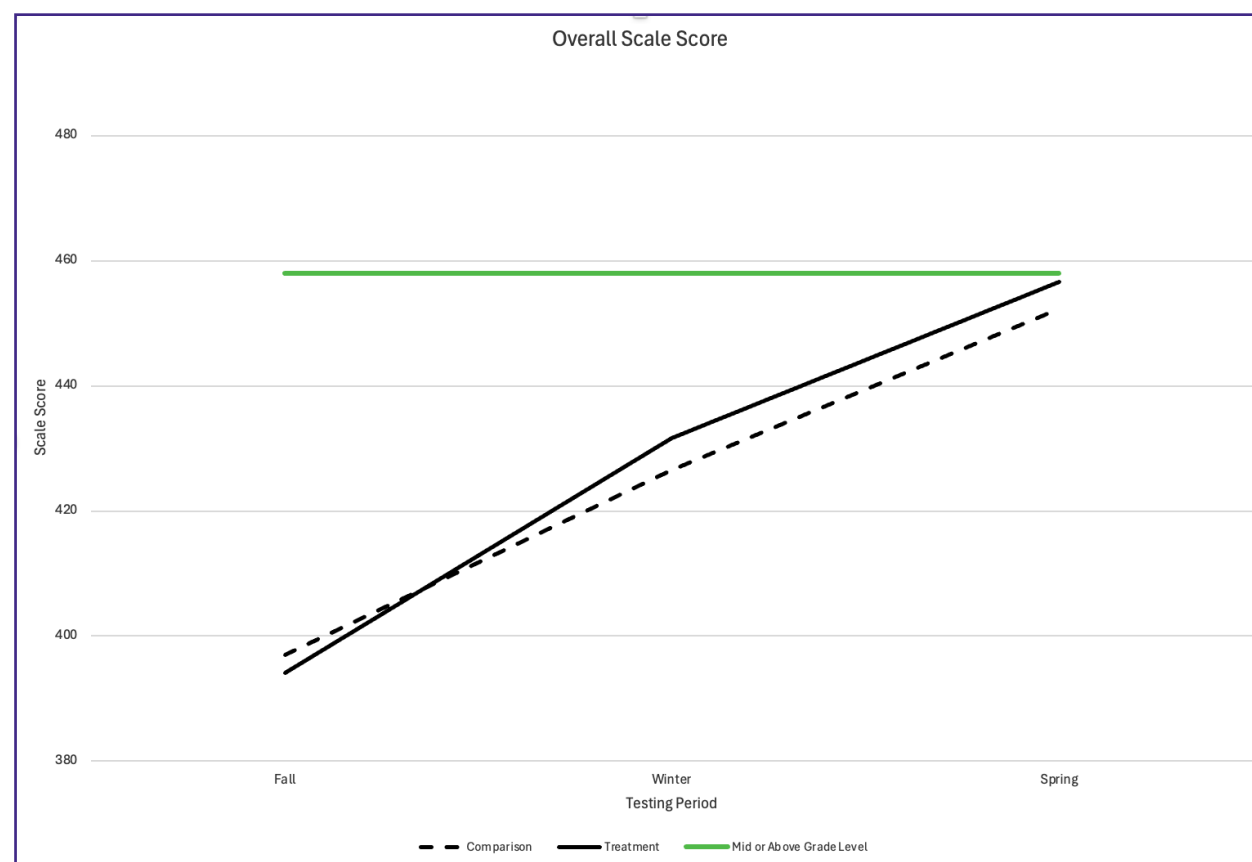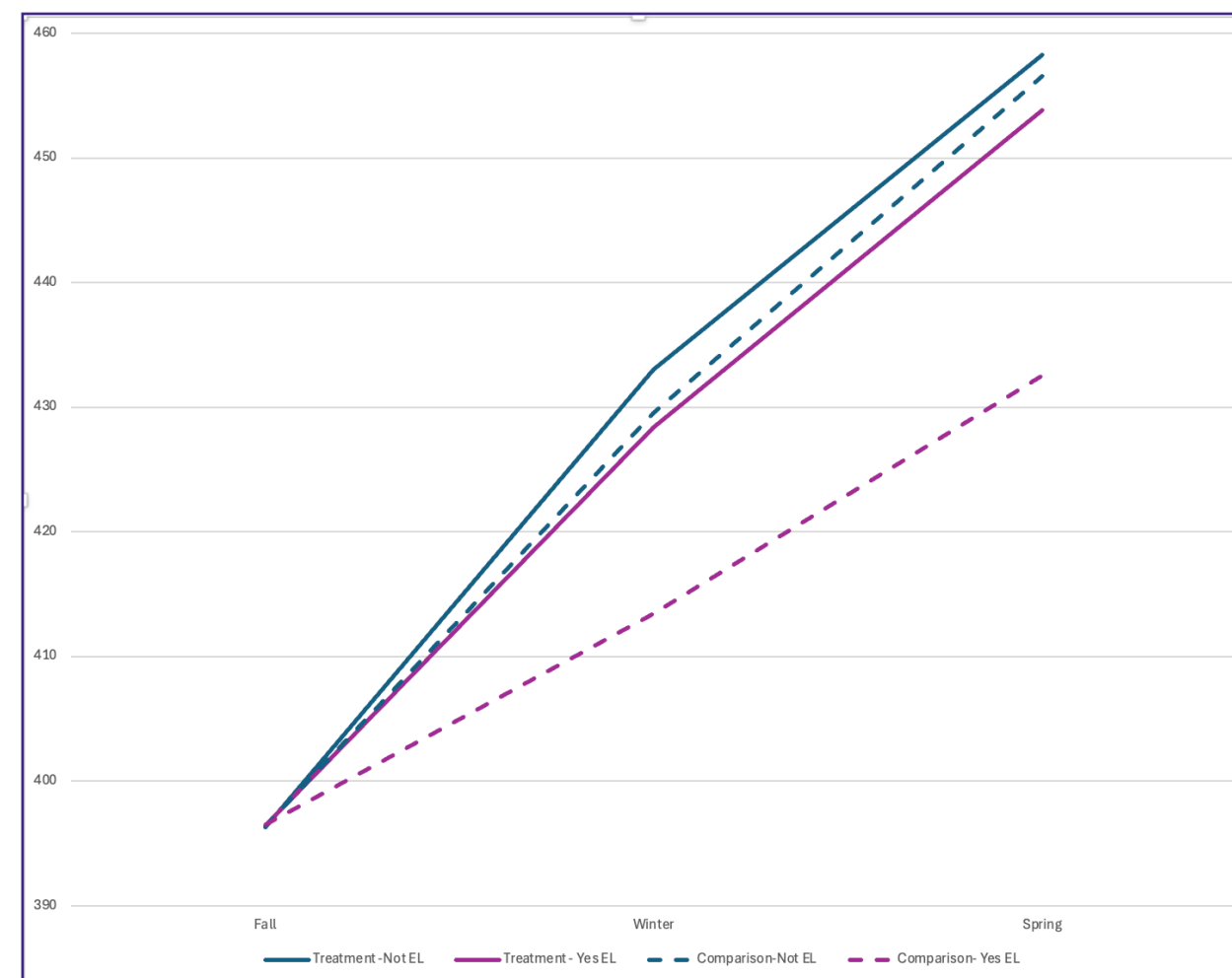

Figure 3: Regression Adjusted Means: *Being a Reader* and Comparison Matched Sample Overall Spring Scale Scores

Reading Skills of English Learners Improved

However, one subgroup showed statistically significant results: English Learners. Students learning English as a second language saw a boost in their reading skills with *Being a Reader*, especially in areas like phonological awareness (the ability to hear and manipulate sounds in words) and word recognition (see Figure 9). This result is an important finding for a population historically underserved in the core curricula and one that has grown significantly in many schools and districts.

> "[O]ne subgroup showed statistically significant results: English Learners. Students learning English as a second language saw a boost in their reading skills with *Being a Reader*, especially in areas like phonological awareness."

Yes EL = English Learners   **Not EL** = Students who are not classified as English Learners

Figure 9: Regression Adjusted Means: *Being a Reader* and Comparison Matched Sample EL Interaction Overall Scale Scores

Discussion

While there was not a statistically significant difference between the two groups's results overall (except within the subgroup of English Learners), there were additional implications from the results.

Differences Between the Treatment and Comparison Districts

First, students in the Treatment district were more diverse and represented a much larger group of students than in the Comparison district (see Table 2). This implies that student achievement in a large, diverse district was similar to the growth of students in a less diverse, smaller district.

In addition, according to state-level reporting of student demographic data, the Treatment group represented a district with significantly higher proportions of low-income students and students with high needs than the Comparison group's district (see the Treatment and Comparison District Profiles at right). Typically, districts with student populations similar to those of the Treatment group often have lower achievement as they work to meet the needs of their diverse population. However, in this study, we see equal if not slightly better achievement for this type of student group across multiple subtests.

		Being a Reader		Comparison		Total	
		n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Gender							
	Female	276	50.6%	158	53.2%	434	51.6%
	Male	269	49.4%	139	46.8%	408	48.4%
Ethnicity							
	Asian	14	2.6%	11	3.7%	25	2.9%
	Black	100	18.4%	15	5.0%	115	13.7%
	Native American/Alaskan Native	0	0%	R	R%	R	R%
	Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0	0%	R	R%	R	R%
	White	35	6.4%	268	90.2%	303	35.6%
	Hispanic	378	69.4%	0	0%	378	44.9%
	Multiracial	18	3.3%	0	0%	18	2.1%
IEP status							
	Has an IEP	87	16%	61	20.5%	148	17.5%
	Does not have an IEP	458	84%	236	79.5%	694	82.5%
504 statuses							
	Active 504	10	1.8%	43	14.5%	53	6.3%
	No 504	535	98.2%	254	85.5%	789	93.7%
EL status							
	EL	119	21.8%	31	10.4%	150	17.8%
	Not EL	426	78.2%	266	89.6%	692	82.2%

Note: R=Redacted due to small cell sizes

Table 2: Full Sample Descriptives by Program

TREATMENT DISTRICT PROFILE

Title	% of District	% of State
First Language not English	28.6	26.0
English Language Learner	17.1	13.1
Low-income	85.0	42.2
Students With Disabilities	26.8	20.2
High Needs	89.3	55.8

COMPARISON DISTRICT PROFILE

Title	% of District	% of State
First Language not English	15.3	26.0
English Language Learner	7.9	13.1
Low-income	49.4	42.2
Students With Disabilities	23.8	20.2
High Needs	59.8	55.8

"

"Typically, districts with student populations similar to those of the Treatment group often have lower achievement as they work to meet the needs of their diverse population. However, in this study, we see equal if not slightly better achievement for this type of student group across multiple subtests."

Differences Between the Treatment and Comparison Districts *(continued)*

Additionally, students in the Treatment group started the year with lower i-Ready scores than the students in the Comparison group, yet ended the year with higher scores. While not statistically significant, one could interpret these results as students in the Treatment group making greater gains than the Comparison group. This finding occurs in multiple subtests, indicating consistency in the findings (see Figures 5–8).
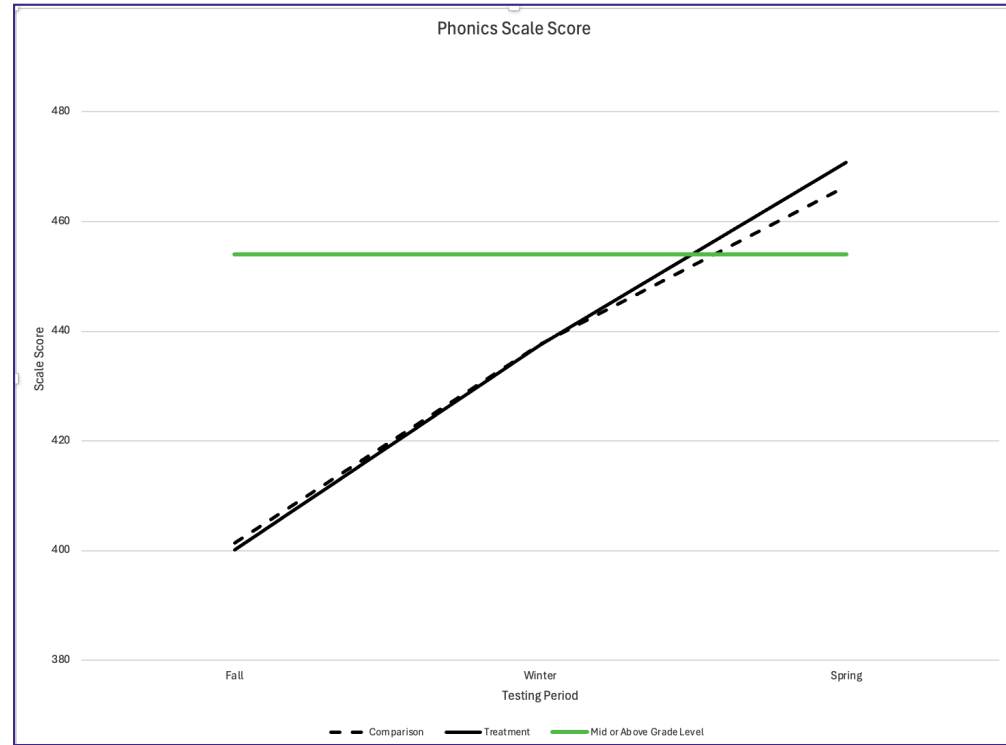

Figure 5: Regression Adjusted Means: *Being a Reader* and Comparison Matched Sample Phonics Spring Scale Scores
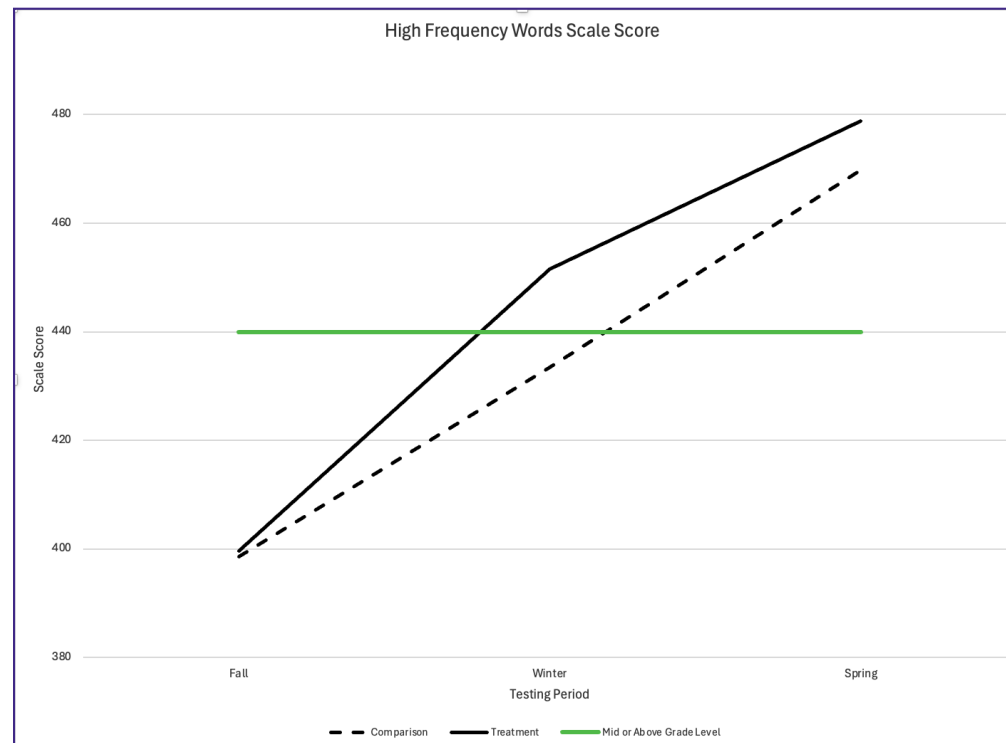

Figure 6: Regression Adjusted Means: *Being a Reader* and Comparison Matched Sample High-Frequency Words Spring Scale Scores

Figure 7: Regression Adjusted Means: *Being a Reader* and Comparison Matched Sample Vocabulary Spring Scale Scores
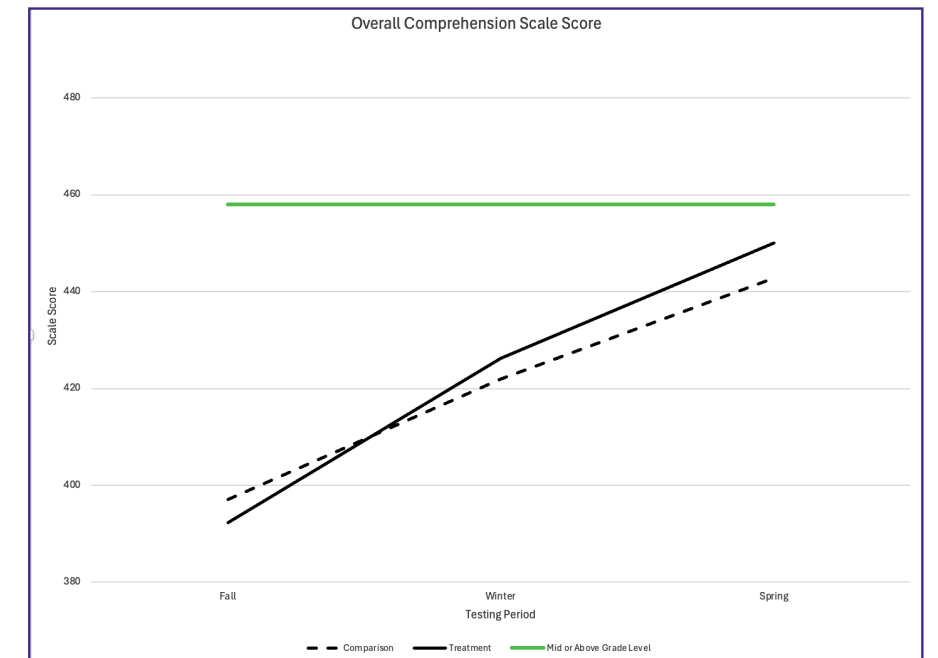

Figure 8: Regression Adjusted Means: *Being a Reader* and Comparison Matched Sample Comprehension Spring Scale Scores

Statistically Significant Results for English Learners

The most important finding in the study is the statistically significant result for English Learners.

The National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth[1] found that instruction in the key components of reading for students whose first language is English is also effective for students who speak a different language at home. Instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension—the five components of reading studied in the National Reading Panel (2001)—all had "clear benefits" for English Learners.

The Panel also concluded that instruction was most effective when it was tailored to English Learners' specific needs and that students learning English needed more instruction in oral English proficiency than their peers (vocabulary knowledge and listening comprehension).
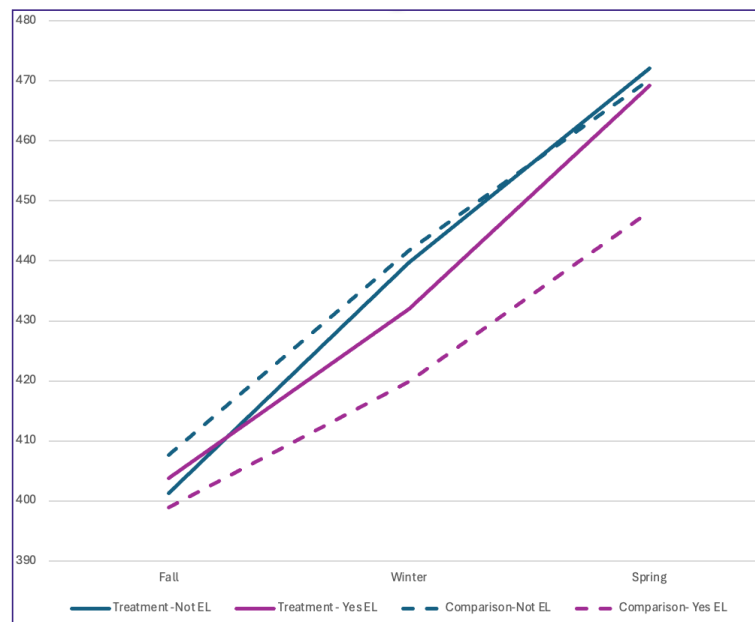

Figure 11: Regression Adjusted Means: *Being a Reader* and Comparison Matched Sample EL Interaction Phonics Scores

"Because foundational skills instruction in *Being a Reader* is differentiated, the students' instruction comes at their exact points of need and supports mastery of the increasingly complex skills necessary for decoding and encoding."

[1] August, D. and Shanahan, T. (2006). *Developing Literacy in Second-Language Learners: Report of the National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth*. Center for Applied Linguistics, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates: Mahwah, NJ.

Aligned with the Design of Being a Reader

This research aligns with the design of *Being a Reader*. Students receive instruction on the five areas identified as part of the NRP report *while* they engage in deep discussions and significant amounts of discourse in their core instruction.

Because foundational skills instruction in *Being a Reader* is differentiated, the students' instruction comes at their exact points of need and supports mastery of the increasingly complex skills necessary for decoding and encoding.

In Figures 11–13, the power of that instructional design can be seen in the achievement of the students for whom English is their second language. In some cases, the English Learners in the Treatment group performed equal to or higher than their non-English Learner counterparts in the Comparison group.
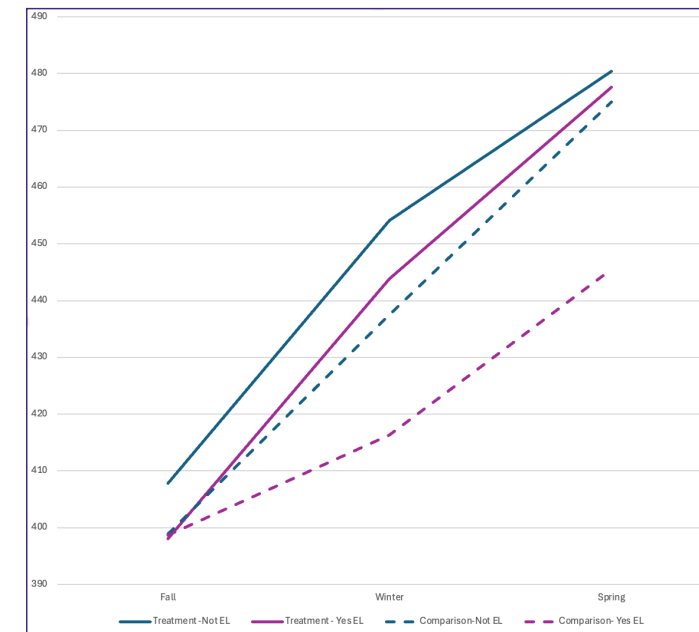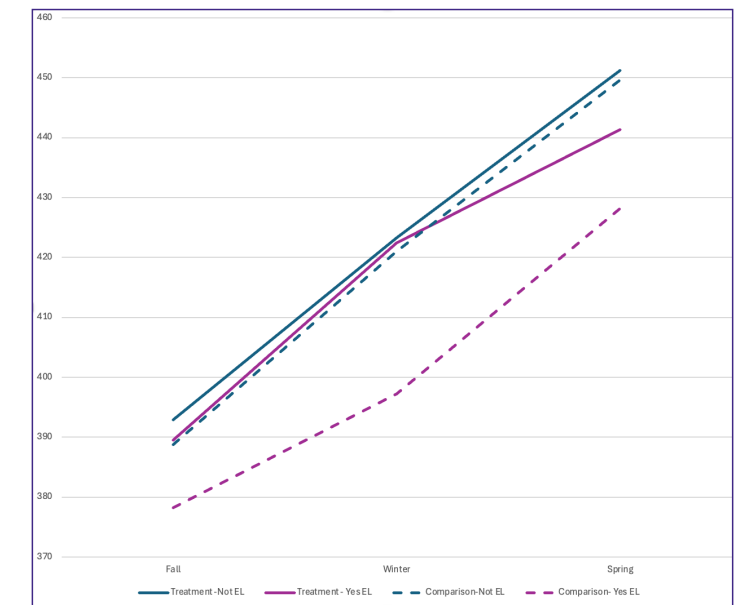

Figure 12: Regression Adjusted Means: *Being a Reader* and Comparison Matched Sample EL Interaction High-Frequency Words

Figure 13: Regression Adjusted Means: *Being a Reader* and Comparison Matched Sample EL Interaction Vocabulary Scores

Statistically Significant Results for English Learners *(continued)*

While this finding is significant, we are eager to learn more. Additional questions to ask include:

• *What additional supports are in place for these students?*

• *How can our organization learn more about what supports in the curriculum are making a difference for English Learners?*

It is also noteworthy that African-American, Indigenous, Hispanic, and other groups did not have enough overlap in the populations of the Treatment and Comparison groups to be analyzed separately in this study. The only other group with enough students to be matched was students who have an IEP. The data showed similar results with this subgroup as was seen with the general population, with no statistically significant differences between the two groups being studied.

What's Next?

At Collaborative Classroom we are committed to continually learning from our implementations and look forward to sharing more of our learning. The results of this study reveal promising insights.

Notably, English Learners showed meaningful improvements, particularly in phonological awareness and word recognition. This finding aligns with research emphasizing the importance of targeted instruction for English Learners, especially in oral language development and vocabulary. The fact that students from a district with a large, diverse population saw similar growth to those from a district with a smaller, less diverse population speaks to the potential of *Being a Reader* in language-diverse classrooms.

While further research is needed to explore how additional supports can maximize these gains, this study offers a solid foundation for understanding that *Being a Reader* can support diverse learners. As we move forward, the key will be building on these successes and continuing to refine our approach for all students, especially those with unique needs.

READ THE FULL REPORT
Scan the QR code or visit collabclass.link/br-study_final-report to read the full report.

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