



**TWO PILOT STUDY RESULTS IN FRESNO COUNTY, CALIFORNIA  
2017-2018**



November 5, 2018

With thanks to Fowler Unified School District, Gloria Regier, Eric Cederquist, Fresno County Probation, Meredith Wiley, Amber Jacobo, and David Jansen

## **RIME MAGIC: A BREAKTHROUGH FOR STRUGGLING READERS**

### **BACKGROUND**

Reading is an essential skill for school and life success. Beginning in the earliest grades, many students struggle to acquire basic reading skills on time and adolescents who have been struggling with reading for many years face significant challenges in trying to master fundamental reading skills. While comprehension—understanding of content—is critical for reading success, many students struggle at a more basic level with the words themselves—understanding how letters translate into sounds and words, a process known as decoding. Children who go beyond third grade without mastering the ability to decode new words in the text are ultimately doomed to school failure.

Dr. Joseph Torgeson, Director Emeritus of the Florida Center for Reading Research, (2009) notes that those destined to be poor readers in fourth grade “almost invariably have difficulties in kindergarten and first grade with critical phonological skills. Their knowledge of letter names, their phonemic awareness (ability to hear, distinguish, and blend individual sounds), their ability to match sound to print, and their other skills in using the alphabetic principle are weak. These weak phonological skills, in turn, mean it is difficult for these children to identify (decode) unknown words, and their efforts to do so produce many errors.”<sup>1</sup>

Scholastic, Inc., recently published a breakthrough system of reading instruction that both prevents decoding issues at the outset and brings fast success to students who have fallen behind in word recognition. (*Rime Magic: Phonics-Powered Prevention and Intervention For All Students*, Scholastic, 2017). Rime Magic is not a program. Rather, it is a seven-step, highly engaging process based on quick immersion. Five to ten minutes a day dropped into any reading curriculum will prevent first- and second-grade students from falling behind in word recognition at the outset. It is also effective in working with older students who are struggling with decoding. Although it is now being used in many schools and districts in the Bay Area and around the country and has received many accolades from educators and parents, Rime Magic has not yet been formally evaluated. Promising outcomes from two pilot projects recently completed in Fresno lead the nation in evaluating this transformational reading instruction technology, setting the stage for a more comprehensive research project.

Cradle to Career (C2C) collaborated with the Fresno County Probation Department to conduct an initial small pilot in Fresno County Juvenile Hall to determine the efficacy of Rime Magic in helping struggling readers in juvenile justice settings who are experiencing significant issues with decoding. A second pilot was conducted in two schools in the Fowler Unified School District during the 2017-18 school year at Malaga Elementary and Sutter Middle Schools. This second, larger pilot focused on the impact of Rime Magic on both early learners in first and second grade to prevent decoding issues and also on struggling fourth through eighth graders in

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<sup>1</sup> Torgeson, J. (2009). Preventing Early Reading Failure and Its Devastating Downward Spiral, *National Center for Learning Disabilities*, March 3, 2009. Accessed 11/3/18 via <http://www.bharathiyartamilpalli.org/training/images/downwardspiral.pdf>

special education. C2C provided technical assistance to both the Juvenile Hall and Fowler pilots by measuring and documenting the efficacy of Rime Magic intervention through systematic collection and analysis of the data.

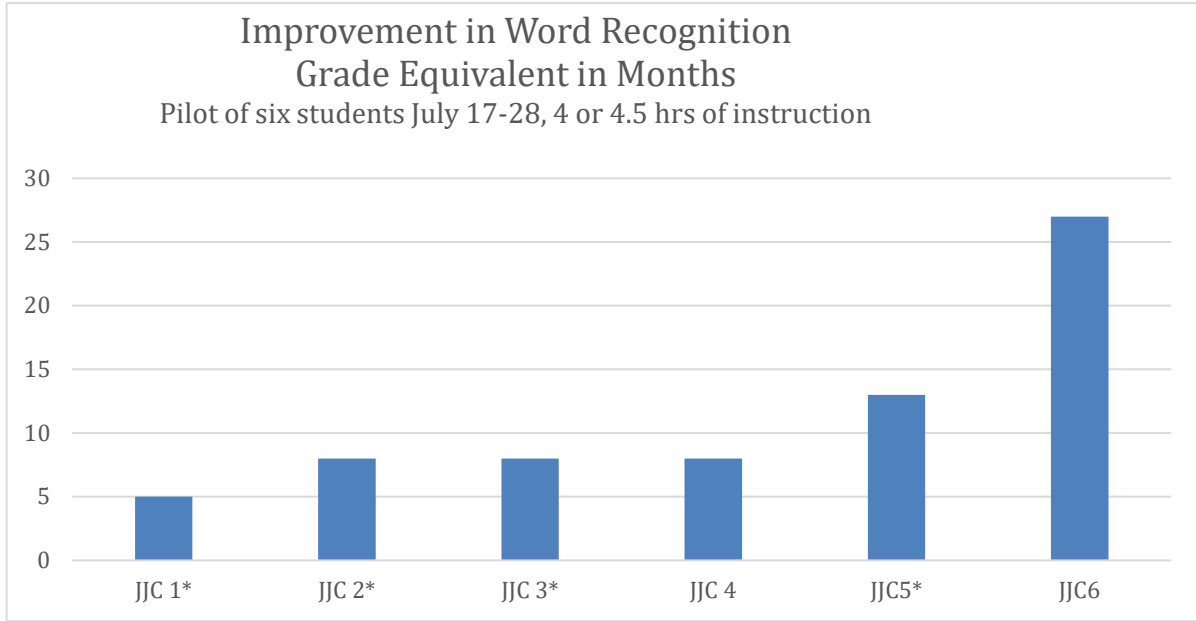
**RIME MAGIC FRESNO JUVENILE JUSTICE CAMPUS PILOT OUTCOMES**

The pilot for six youth at Juvenile Hall was conducted for two weeks from July 17 to July 28, 2017 in five thirty-minute sessions a week. Thirty minutes total were subtracted for pre- and post-assessments and a questionnaire at the end with the students. Each session consisted of Rime Magic and supported reading with a challenging book of high interest to the student. The total time for instruction if a student had 100 percent attendance over the two-week intervention was 4.5 hours. Two students missed a day, as noted below, so their total instruction time was 4.0 hours each.

There was marked improvement by all students as measured by the Slosson assessment. The Slosson Oral Reading Test (SORT-R3) is designed to quickly assess a student’s level of word recognition, word calling, or reading level. It is used for pre-school through adult, with confidence levels of 95% and 99% established.

The Slosson scores are shown below, with the level of improvement in months following in the chart. Four of the six students are identified through FCSS as Special Education. The highest level of improvement was 27 months. One student’s first language was not English.

| Slosson Pre Score Date | Slosson Pre Score | Slosson Post Score Date | Slosson Post Score | Hours Spent | IEP | Word Recognition Improvement in months |
|------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|-------------|-----|--|
| July 17, 2017          | 1.8               | July 28, 2017           | 2.3                | 4           | yes | 5                                      |
| July 17, 2017          | 1.4               | July 28, 2017           | 2.2                | 4.5         | yes | 8                                      |
| July 17, 2017          | 2.8               | July 28, 2017           | 3.6                | 4.5         | yes | 8                                      |
| July 17, 2017          | 2.8               | July 28, 2017           | 3.6                | 4           | no  | 8                                      |
| July 17, 2017          | 3.3               | July 28, 2017           | 4.4                | 4.5         | yes | 13                                     |
| July 17, 2017          | 4.2               | July 28, 2017           | 6.5                | 4.5         | no  | 27                                     |

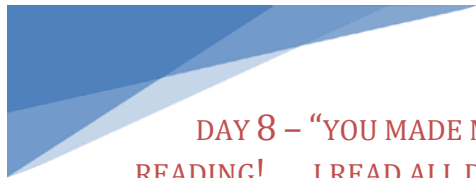


\* Special Ed Students

**Other Gains Made By Juvenile Justice Campus Students**

The scores above reflect gains in word recognition grade equivalent (Slosson Oral Reading Test) only. There were also huge breakthroughs for each participant in their attitudes, confidence and enthusiasm for reading, which will affect future growth. This information is reflected in a questionnaire done with each of them on the final day. Each student achieved significant growth and had positive things to say about themselves and their progress.

“I can read better now – Rime Magic did good for me. Showed me how to sound words out so I



**DAY 8 – “YOU MADE ME ADDICTED TO READING! ... I READ ALL DAY IN MY ROOM. I READ AT NIGHT TIL 12 O’CLOCK!”**

can get the full effect. I can read in front of people now. If it’s something interesting to me I’m a read it. If not, I’m not.... Still some words I can’t read but instead of skipping it, I just figure it out.” (Student #1 achieved 5 months growth)

JJC Student #2 with 8 months growth in two weeks

“Ever since you started helping me, I started reading every day...I can comprehend the words better and it ain’t that hard how it used to be. I feel better... it’s the little part that’s magic that helps me read it better.” (Student # 2—achieved 8 months growth) On the eighth day student burst through the door and declared. “You made me addicted to reading! I’m stuck on it! Now you made me read more—I like this book! I read all day in my room! I read at night till twelve o’clock! I never used to read.”

“At first I didn’t understand some of the words but now it’s getting easier.... I really didn’t like reading but now I like reading. Last night I finished the whole book. [Bronxwood by Coe Booth]....A lot of stuff happening in that book. At the end it got really exciting.” (Student #3—achieved 8 months growth)

“Thanks for coming and teaching me reading. And for helping us. I’m better at reading. It’s easier” (Student #4—achieved 8 months growth) On Wednesday of the second week probation staff reported that he volunteered to read aloud in class for the first time.

“Before Rime Magic reading was kind of hard. I couldn’t understand the words. I always tried to avoid reading and watched movies instead I have a library card so now I’ll probably go to the library and look for the same author.” (Student # 5—achieved one year, one month growth)

“It helped with reading different, difficult words...I learned new words, different words. It helped my reading.” (Student #6—achieved two years, 3 months of growth)

Since the conclusion of the two weeks, Sharon Zinke, the Rime Magic developer and teacher in the JJC pilot, has gone back to visit some of the youth trained in Rime Magic. She has found that they have continued reading. She also notes that having relevant books to their culture and lives helped them want to read beyond their level, creating further excitement to read.

### **FOWLER UNIFIED SCHOOL PILOT OUTCOMES**

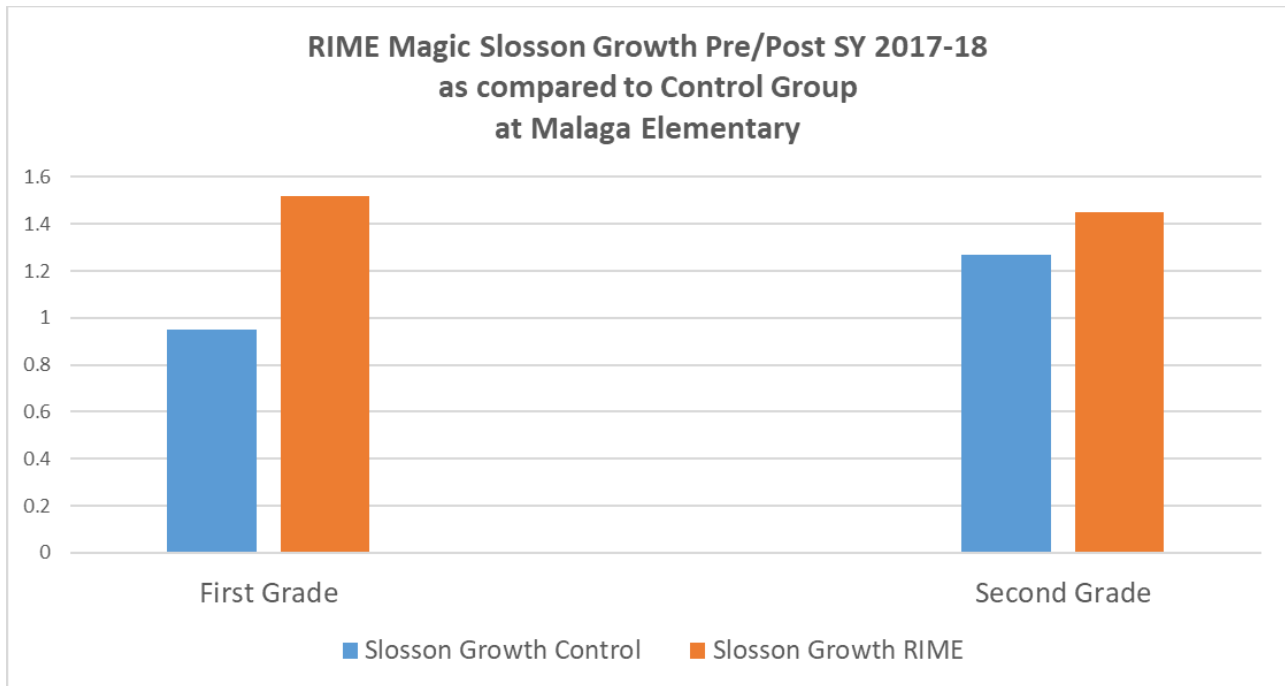
Fowler Unified identified two target populations for the Rime Magic Pilot - general education and Special Education. A total of 71 students participated in general education, whether in the pilot or as a control group. A total of 55 intervention and Special Education students participated using the technique.

The District designated one first and second grade self-contained classroom (a total of 35 as control and 36 using Rime Magic). There were twenty (20) third to fifth grade Special Education students at Malaga Elementary School in two classrooms participating with no control group. There was a total of thirty-five (35) sixth through eighth grade Special Ed students at Sutter Middle School who also participated in the pilot. As noted, control groups in first and second grade occurred. Although control groups were intended for special education as well, none of the Special Education teachers were willing to give up the opportunity to participate in the pilot to provide a control group.

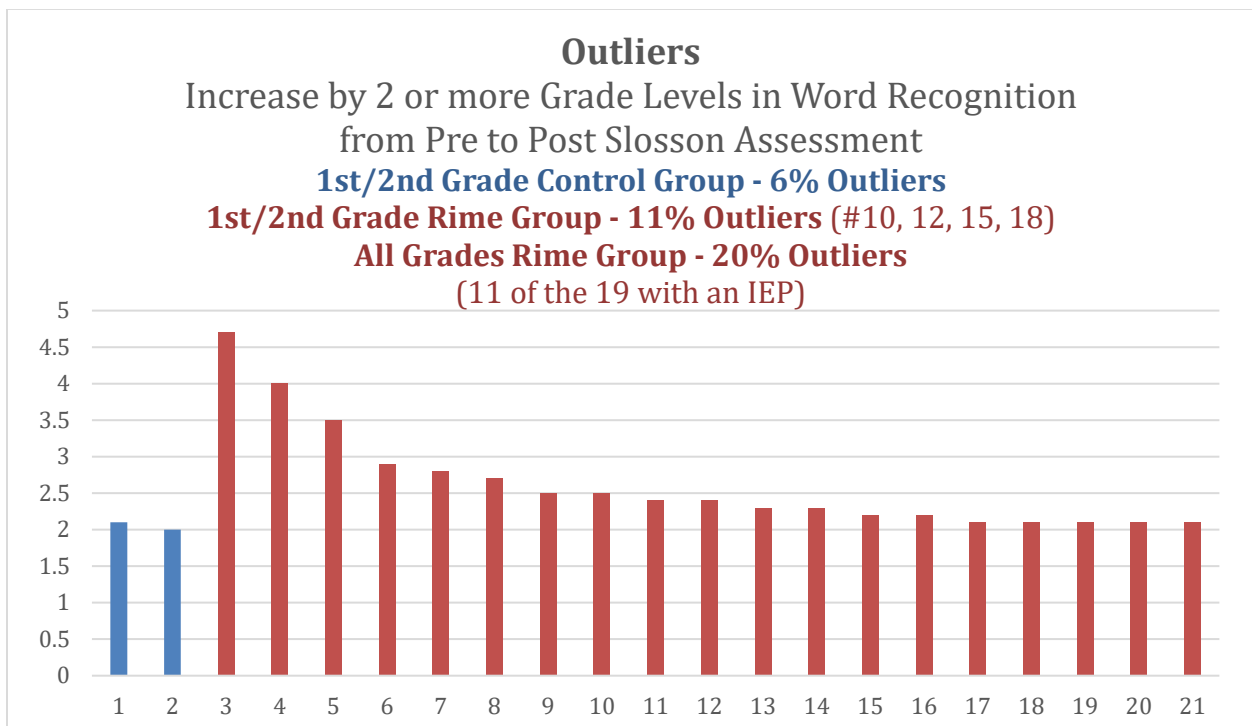
Sharon Zinke, the developer of Rime Magic, trained two classroom teachers and three Special Education teachers on the basic techniques and implementation of Rime Magic prior to the start of the school year. Mrs. Zinke continued to provide support throughout the year in the role of a coach for participating staff. Staff received three coaching visits from Mrs. Zinke over the course of the school year. The Pilot teachers designated 15-20 minutes daily for Rime Magic instruction.

As a means of determining the impact of RIME Magic instruction on students over time, Fowler Unified staff administered the Slosson Oral Reading Test (SORT-R3), a standardized word recognition test at the beginning of the school year and again at the end-of-the-year to both the pilot and control groups. Additional data was collected for comparison as well i.e., 2017-18 Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) scores for 1st - 5th grades , and the 2016, 2017 and 2018 state-required Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) annual test scores for 3rd-8th grades as available.

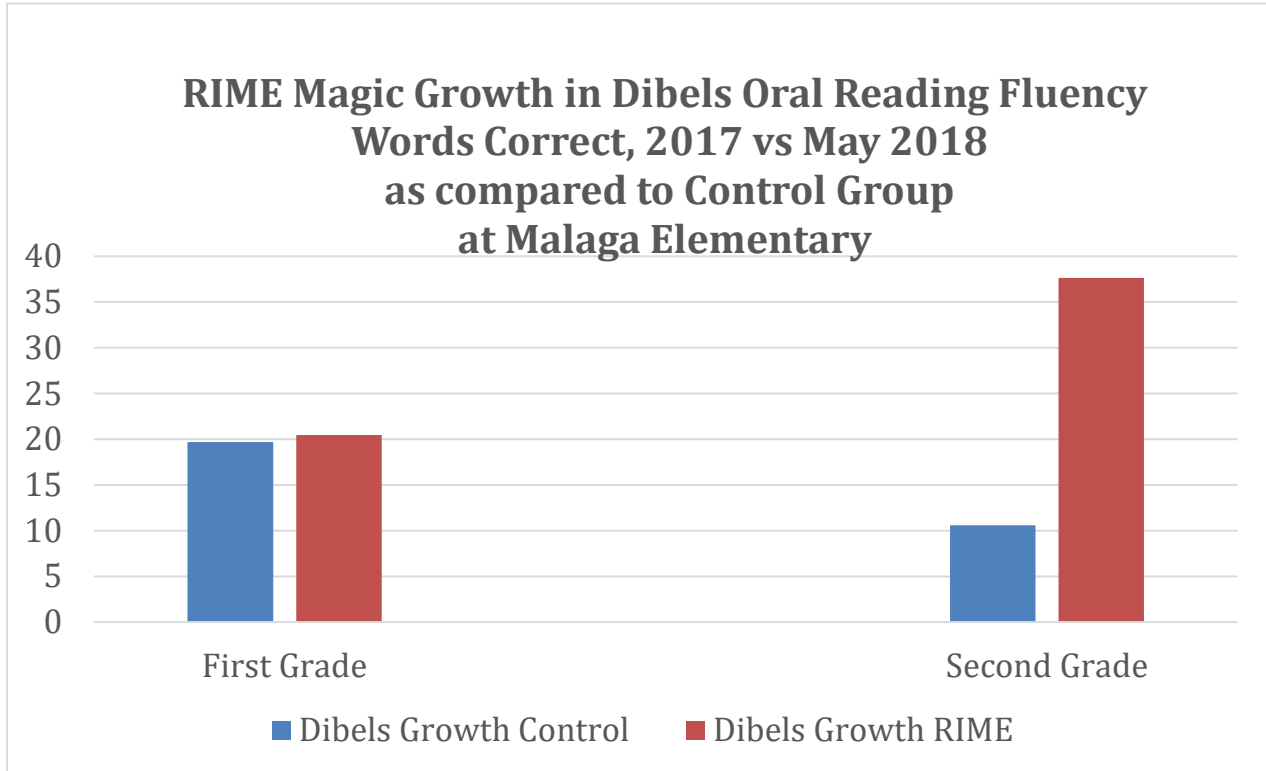
Slosson growth in both first and second grade did better in the RIME groups than the control groups as seen below in the chart.



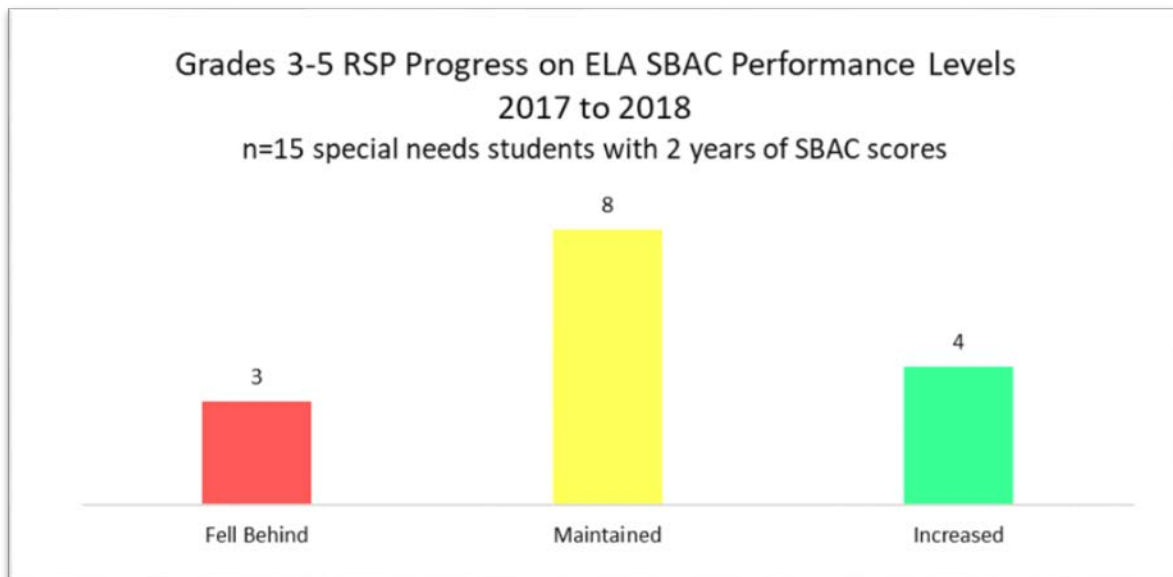
Some students advanced from the Slosson pre-test scores by more than two grade levels by the post-Slosson measurement. The number, while small, was double that of the control group for first and second graders. There is no control group for those in Special Education or who were part of the grade 3-5 intervention group to compare against, however the number of “outliers” who advanced two grades or more was notable for those with an IEP – an impressive 57.8%.

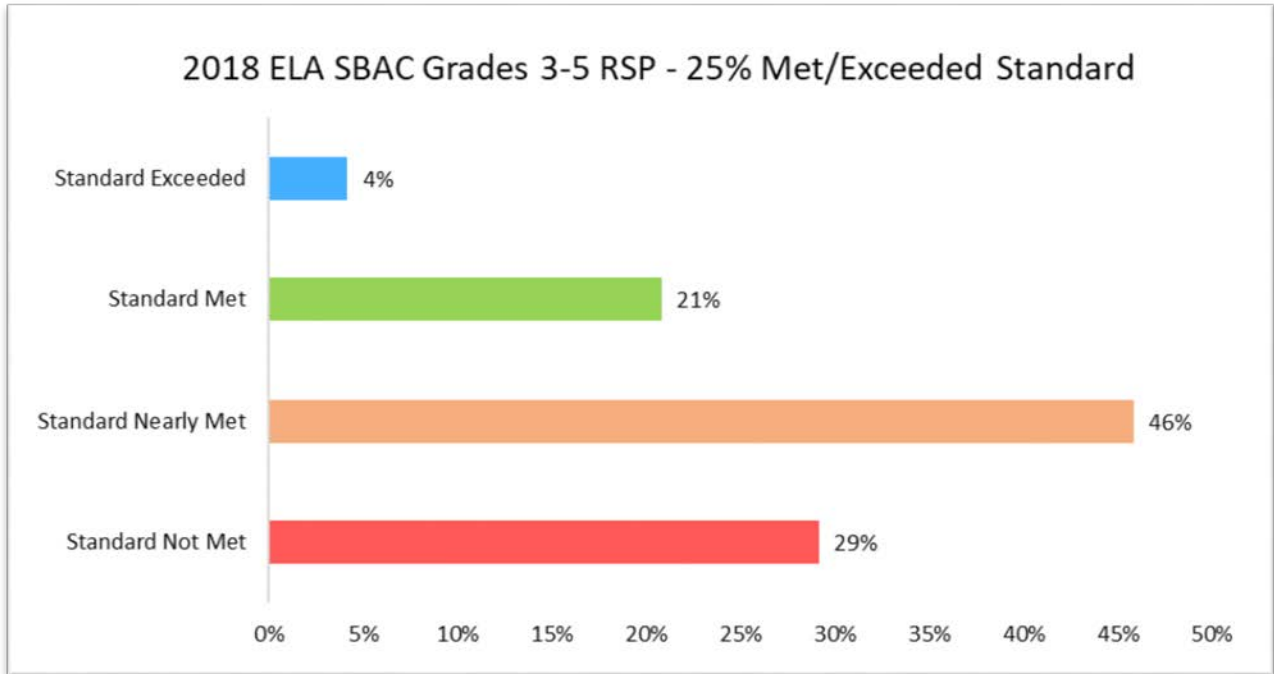


When compared to the control groups, first graders receiving RIME Magic instruction did only slightly better on average (about 4%) on the DIBELS oral reading growth test. However, second graders receiving RIME Magic instruction did substantially better than the control group on the DIBELS oral reading growth test.

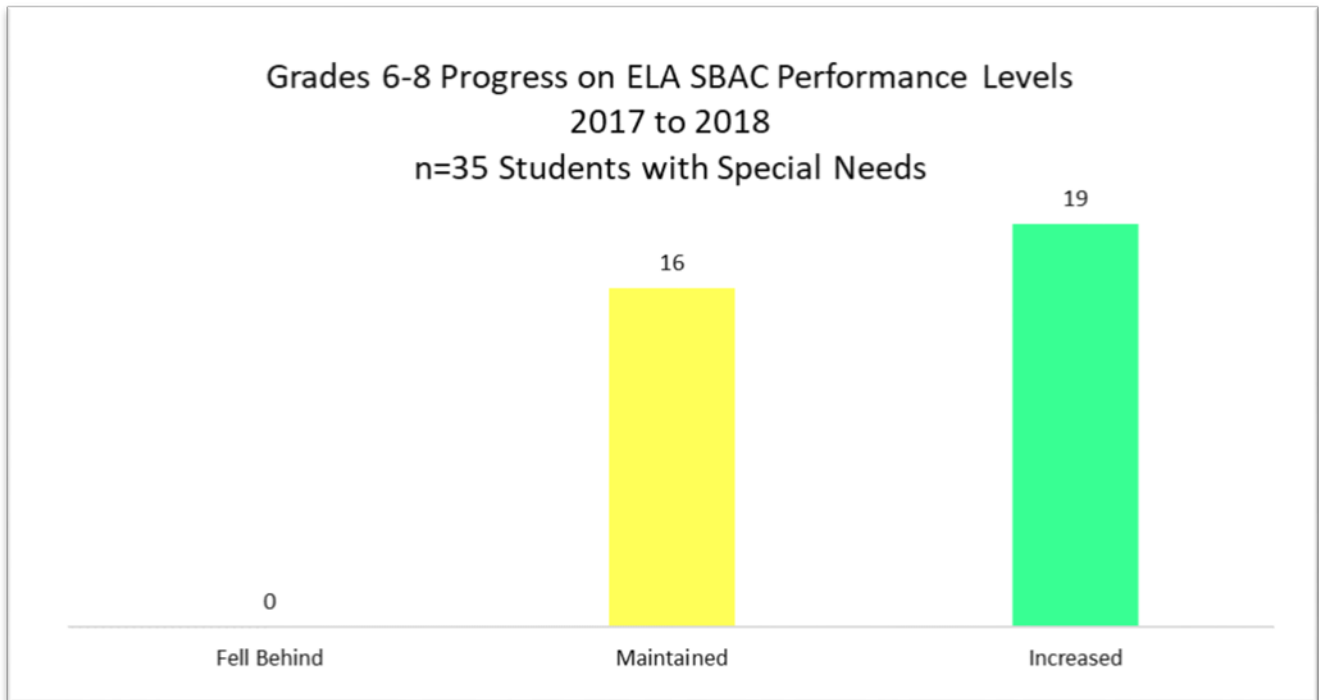


Third through fifth graders in a Resource Specialist Program (RSP) SBAC scores were positive generally. A student in RSP means they spend more than 50% of their day in a general education classroom and receive additional small group instruction with the RSP teacher to meet the needs of each student’s individual education plan (IEP).

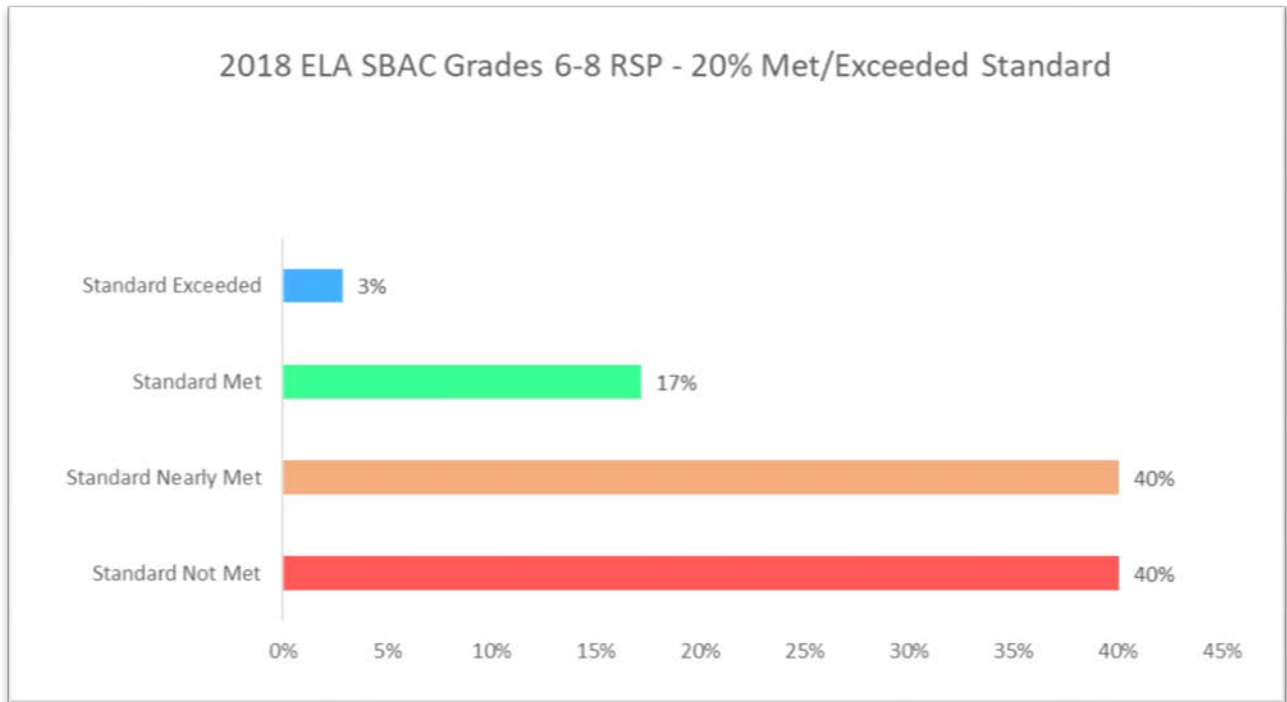




For middle school Special Education students, research shows that those qualified for Special Ed do not make significant growth as they proceed through the grades. The fact that the 6th to 8th graders at Sutter maintained or increased their performance levels and that 7 out of 35 met or exceeded standards in English Language Arts is significant.







Much of the intervention research for struggling readers focuses on spending 45 minutes to an hour a day in small groups with students using various techniques. Rime Magic in most cases used 15-20 minutes a day and integrates with any other reading curriculum as a support.

For the Special Education students, the enthusiasm of the teachers was so strong after learning about the technique that they were unwilling to give up the opportunity for improvement for their students to become a control group. There is further research needed in this area, but the results appear promising. To provide a sense of the level of improvement, the data collected included each 5th - 8th grade students SBAC scores over a three year period. From 2016 to 2017, there was no intervention other than usual Special Education instruction. From 2017 to 2018, Rime Magic as an intervention occurred.



**THE ENTHUSIASM OF THE SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS WAS SO STRONG, THEY WERE UNWILLING TO PROVIDE A CONTROL GROUP WHICH WOULD NOT ALLOW THEM TO UTILIZE RIME MAGIC.**

As the information was shared with other districts in Fresno County through Cradle to Career presentations on the progress of the study or through word of mouth, more schools are now adding the practice. Central Unified School District used it in their summer program and are piloting it in some classrooms this year. Selma Unified School District has trained all its reading intervention teachers and is beginning to use it in some of their schools. Clovis Unified School District is beginning to use it. Lindsay Unified School District teachers in neighboring Tulare County are undergoing training and the district intends to add it in all their schools. Fowler Unified is expanding its use of Rime Magic to other district elementary schools and RSP programs this year based on these results.

White = Baseline **Red** = Decreased Level **Yellow** = Maintained **Green** = Increased Level in SBAC  
 1 = Grade level proficiency not met 2 = Nearly met 3 = Met Grade Level 4 = Exceeded Proficiency

| <b>Grade 5</b> | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 |
|----------------|------|------|------|
| Student A      | 3    | 4    | 3    |
| Student B      | 2    | 2    | 3    |
| Student C      | 3    | 2    | 2    |
| Student D      | 1    | 1    | 1    |

| <b>Grade 6</b> | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 |
|----------------|------|------|------|
| Student A      | 2    | 1    | 4    |
| Student B      | 1    | 1    | 3    |
| Student C      | 1    | 1    | 3    |
| Student D      | 1    | 1    | 3    |
| Student E      | 1    | 1    | 2    |
| Student F      | 1    | 1    | 2    |
| Student G      | 1    | 1    | 3    |
| Student H      | *    | 1    | 1    |
| Student I      | *    | 1    | 2    |
| Student J      | 1    | 1    | 2    |
| Student K      | 1    | 1    | 1    |

| <b>Grade 7</b> | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 |
|----------------|------|------|------|
| Student A      | 1    | 1    | 1    |
| Student B      | 1    | 1    | 2    |
| Student C      | 1    | 1    | 1    |
| Student D      | 1    | 1    | 1    |
| Student E      | 2    | 2    | 3    |
| Student F      | 1    | 1    | 2    |
| Student G      | 1    | 1    | 1    |
| Student H      | 2    | 1    | 1    |
| Student I      | 3    | 2    | 3    |
| Student J      | 1    | 1    | 2    |
| Student K      | 1    | 1    | 1    |
| Student L      | 1    | 1    | 1    |

| <b>Grade 8</b> | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 |
|----------------|------|------|------|
| Student A      | 1    | 1    | 1    |
| Student B      | 1    | 1    | 1    |
| Student C      | *    | 1    | 2    |
| Student D      | *    | 1    | 1    |
| Student E      | *    | 1    | 2    |
| Student F      | 2    | 1    | 1    |
| Student G      | 1    | 1    | 2    |
| Student H      | 1    | 2    | 2    |
| Student I      | 1    | 1    | 2    |
| Student J      | 1    | 1    | 1    |
| Student K      | 1    | 2    | 2    |
| Student L      | 1    | 1    | 2    |

## CONCLUSION

These two small pilots are an example of collaboration of researchers, educational practitioners, and teacher educators with a common goal of improving outcomes for struggling readers.

Despite a knowledge base of interventions available to practitioners, these interventions are not widely employed in typical classrooms. The low cost of instructional materials and teacher training needed, the ease of incorporating Rime Magic into existing curriculum, the quick success young students' experience, and the promising outcomes provide a solid foundation for a larger research-based scaling study.

To view comments by those involved with the Fowler Unified School District pilot, please click on the video link: <https://vimeo.com/276144730>