



OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH STUDY

In October 2021, Union County Public Schools (UCPS) partnered with Hanover to understand the impact of two early literacy programs implemented by select district schools—Jolly Phonics and Orton Gillingham—on student engagement and learning. Hanover conducted three research studies to inform the district’s decision-making on future programming: Hanover **surveyed** and conducted **focus groups and in-depth interviews** with teachers, instructional support specialists, and school administrators, and also **analyzed student-level data**. In this document, Hanover synthesizes findings across the three research studies and outlines recommended next steps for UCPS to implement in response.



KEY FINDINGS

- Teachers and instructional support specialists advise UCPS to adopt and implement a single early literacy program districtwide.
- Teachers, instructional support specialists, and school administrators prefer Orton-Gillingham over Jolly Phonics.
- In focus groups and interviews, educators indicate that both programs meet most students’ early literacy needs.
- However, educators report that both programs place insufficient emphasis on key components of literacy instruction. Furthermore, both programs struggle to accommodate the needs of students at both ends of the achievement spectrum.
- Educators credit both programs with increasing student engagement and self-efficacy.
- Findings from the three studies suggest that both programs improve literacy. Yet, whether one program outperforms the other remains unclear.
- Teachers and instructional support specialists felt better prepared to implement Orton-Gillingham than Jolly Phonics.
- Teachers and instructional support specialists find the supplementary resources provided by the Jolly Phonics and Orton-Gillingham programs lacking.
- Teachers and instructional support specialists lack the time needed to manage increasingly heavy workloads.
- In addition to manipulatives and technology, teachers and instructional support specialists need a comprehensive set of classroom instructional materials.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE DISTRICT

Related to Program Preferences:

- Consider districtwide implementation of Orton-Gillingham.
- Select an early literacy program based on rigorous criteria and input from teachers and instructional support specialists.
- Adopt and implement a single early literacy program across UCPS schools.

Related to Program Strengths & Weaknesses:

- Investigate the feasibility and desirability of developing classroom instructional materials internally or purchasing from a publisher/vendor.
- Assist teachers and instructional support specialists with identifying appropriate interventions and supplementary instructional materials to use with struggling and advanced students, respectively, in classrooms using either Jolly Phonics or Orton-Gillingham.

Related to Program Impact and Efficacy:

- Examine fidelity of program implementation to assess if differences in program outcomes reflect differences in program quality or differences in program delivery.
- Investigate effective practices used in non-program schools that may reinforce the impact of early literacy programs.

Related to Program Training and Resources:

- Evaluate the accessibility and usefulness of resources for teachers and students when selecting programs.
- Provide extensive training when introducing a new program to ensure teachers and instructional support specialists implement the program correctly and effectively in the classroom.
- Examine fidelity of implementation to assess if differences in program outcomes reflect differences in program quality or differences in fidelity of program implementation.

Related to Instructional Challenges and Supports:

- Build additional time and flexibility into educators' schedules for planning, collaboration, and professional learning.
- Examine workloads to identify responsibilities to potentially eliminate, reduce, or reallocate.
- Investigate the feasibility and desirability of developing classroom instructional materials internally or purchasing from a publisher/vendor.



OVERVIEW OF METHODOLOGIES

Hanover completed three research studies to gain insight into the implementation and impact of early literacy programs in the district.



Early Literacy Survey

October-
November 2021

186

Responses

{ Classroom Teachers (85%)
Literacy Coaches (4%)
School Administrators (11%)



Early Literacy Qualitative Study

January 2022

2

Focus Groups

{ 1 Teacher Session
1 School Administrator Session

7

In-Depth Interviews

{ 5 Teachers
2 Instructional Support Specialists



Early Literacy Data Analysis

January 2022

3

Years of Enrollment
& Demographic Data

1

Year of
Academic Data