

REAdy for the Grade 2020 – New Haven Report

Evaluator: Anita M. Baker, Ed.D.

Evaluation Services, Lambertville, NJ

New Haven conducted a fully virtual 6-week REAdy for the Grade program with all key elements (group and individual tutoring, family engagement and distribution of literacy supports and books), for 30 children summer 2020. The program was designed and overseen by Micaela Scelza, a reading specialist who has directed the program for multiple years, and Xia Feng, then Deputy Director¹ of the New Haven Free Public Library. Four other local staff members, including veteran REAdy for the Grade instructors Geoconda Berrios and Eric Glaviano, and specialists Christine Rafferty and Michael Rafferty provided tutoring and academic support throughout the summer. Parents were provided with direct assistance to help their children. The program met enrollment and attendance goals and was well received by both the children and their family members. All 30 participants received the support they needed to maintain or enhance their reading skills, they learned more about how to take full advantage of virtual programming, accessed instructionally appropriate books, earned incentives, and had fun. Details about the program follow.

Program Implementation

Individual Tutoring. Each student was assigned to and then worked 1:1 with one of the staff members in individual 45-minute tutoring sessions each week (parents/guardians signed their child/children up for a maximum of two sessions per week). After an initial assessment of independent reading level, each session was tailored to the students' reading level and specific areas of focus. All sessions were conducted through Google Meet using *Reading A-Z* <https://www.readinga-z.com/> an online reading program designed to support reading instruction. Each tutor had a cohort of students (n=8) they worked with throughout the summer.

Group Tutoring. Every Tuesday and Wednesday the New Haven REAdy for the Grade program conducted group tutoring sessions through Google Meet. These community-based sessions were designed to bring the students together and to provide additional opportunities for participants to read a picture book, practice sight words, and engage in movement and arts-based literacy activities.

Family Nights. The very popular family nights were recreated for the virtual program. Four one-hour sessions were held online for participants and family members to learn together.

Incentives. Students who attended family night, at least one individual tutoring and both group tutoring sessions each week received \$30 gift cards. Awards were sent at the end of the program.

Google Classroom is a digital safe space that provides a web-based learning environment where students log in to collaborate with their peers and teachers. The New Haven RfG site also used *Remind* a communication platform that helps educators reach students and parents via text messages to communicate about Google Meet links, updates, and questions.

FAMILY NIGHTS 5:00 – 6:00			
June 25			July 16th
Introduction to the program, question and answer session.			Micaela and the team will plan a family night where we will do literacy activities together.
July 28th			August 6th
Join us for a zoom program all about animals with Animal Embassy. See some cool animals and learn about their habitats, food, and more!			Celebration of the program! Fun literacy activities for the whole family.

¹ Xia Feng retired from New Haven Free Public Library at the end of the summer 2020.

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Enrollment

As shown in table 6a, the New Haven READY for the Grade program served a diverse group of children summer 2020. It can also be seen in the table that the grade levels and descriptive characteristics of those who participated during summer 2020 were somewhat different than the group that participated in 2019.

- As shown, most of the 2020 students (73%) were rising first and second graders; a total of 60% were females, 40% were males.
- The students were diverse in terms of race/ethnicity (somewhat more so than in 2019); 47% of participants were identified as Hispanic/Latinx, 40% were identified as Black/African-American, 10% were identified as Asian and 3% (1 student) was identified as White/Caucasian.
- About half of the students spoke English as their primary language at home, 40% spoke both Spanish and English at home and three students spoke other languages including two who spoke English and Hindi and one whose primary language at home was Chinese.

Table 6a: Enrollment Details, New Haven READY for the Grade

	2020 N=30	2019 N=41
Grade in Fall		
PK/Kindergarten*	0	2%
First Grade	40%	22%
Second Grade	33%	34%
Third Grade	17%	41%
Fourth Grade*	10%	0
Gender		
Female	60%	68%
Male	40%	32%
Race/Ethnicity		
Asian	10%	4%

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Black/African American	40%	20%
Hispanic/Latinx	47%	73%
Native American	0	0
White	3%	2%
Biracial	0	5%
Primary Language at Home		
English	50%	49%
Spanish and English	40%	44%
Other**	10%	8%

* Grade level enrollment requirements were relaxed somewhat for 2020.

** Two students spoke English and Hindi, one spoke Chinese at home.

Attendance

As described previously, participants could participate in multiple ways during each week of the summer and as shown in Table 5b many students took full advantage of this.

- As many as 27 total hours per student was possible, and on average students attended 21 hours (keeping in mind that many students did not select the optional second individual tutoring session during weeks 2 - 6). Five of the 30 students had perfect attendance and all but two attended more than half of the possible sessions. During the final weeks, almost all students attended all sessions.
- The 30 students participated in a total of 638 hours of instruction/participation during summer 2020 including 102 hours through family nights; 311 through group tutoring and 225 through individual tutoring. On average, each student participated in about three hours of family night instruction, 10 hours of group instruction and 8 hours of individual tutoring, 21 hours total.

See Table 6b for Attendance Details, New Haven Ready for the Grade, Summer 2020, n=30

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Table 6b Attendance Details	Total Hours Available	Total Hours Attended	Average Hours Attended
Family Nights	120	102	3
Group Tutoring	360	311	10
Individual Tutoring*	330	225	8
TOTAL	810	638	21

*Students could elect to participate in one or two individual tutoring sessions each week

Achievement

All students participated in a reading assessment during the first individual tutoring session where their independent and instructional² reading levels were determined using the *Reading A-Z* program. Staff used these assessments to customize tutoring strategies and where possible engaged parents/guardians and other family members to help reinforce specific skills. The books used during individual and group tutoring sessions were available online to participating families and all children were encouraged to read silently and to others in between sessions. A comparison of initial session and final session reading levels showed that 15 students (54%) were at the same independent reading level (e.g., June independent reading level = L, August independent reading level = L), 12 students (43%) advanced one level (e.g., June independent reading level = L, August independent reading level = M), and 1 student advanced more than one level (2 students were not tested due to technical difficulties). While several students were still reading below their appropriate grade level (hence their need for this program), **no students lost ground over the six weeks of the program**. Additional notes showed development of very specific skills such as enhancement of decoding strategies, recognition of sight words/vocabulary development or comprehension, that had been the focuses of the individual sessions (see Table 6c following).

² An independent reading level is the one where the reader knows most of the words and can comprehend the text without too much difficulty. A book at an instructional reading level is more challenging for the reader, but not too hard.

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Table 6c: Achievement Notes, New Haven READY for the Grade, 2020

<p><i>A has excellent site word memory and uses various strategies to decode unfamiliar words. He is an enthusiastic learner and tutoring centered around fluency and comprehension and attention to detail.</i></p> <p><i>This summer she has learned to write her name and can identify more letters. She is a very enthusiastic participant in all tutoring session.</i></p> <p><i>D has an excellent sight word recall. He can also decode well. This summer he has worked hard on fluency and comprehension. He loves to learn new words and ideas. He enthusiastically partakes in all tutoring sessions.</i></p> <p><i>At the beginning of the program E was not able to identify any letter of the alphabet. After working with her this summer, she can identify 10 letters on her own. She has a new confidence and she is working so hard.</i></p> <p><i>G is much more confident while reading and not as quick to ask for help. She tried to read the words on the page with much more independence.</i></p> <p><i>H is an excellent reader and has an excellent vocabulary. She's doing better at self-correcting her errors.</i></p> <p><i>H worked really hard this summer. He is using his strategies and is continuing to practice reading at this level. Handwriting has improved greatly.</i></p> <p><i>H is still learning the alphabet. She is learning two languages at the same time.</i></p> <p><i>J is much more confidence in her reading. She has stronger skills with fiction than nonfiction.</i></p> <p><i>K improved greatly. She has a new sense of confidence. She is also working hard on using strategies to help her when she comes across an unknown word.</i></p>	<p><i>A has VERY STRONG decoding skills. He is much stronger in retell and comprehension with strategies.</i></p> <p><i>A has increased the amount of sight words that he can read automatically. When reading predictable text his fluency improves. He wrote his own story about his family and can read it fluently.</i></p> <p><i>B worked so hard during her assessment. She used her strategies and really did a fantastic job. We are working on looking at clues in the text to help unknown words.</i></p> <p><i>G worked so hard this summer. His inferential thinking has greatly improved. He also greatly improved his self-correcting strategies.</i></p> <p><i>L is using more strategies to decode words. She has increased her sight words and has strong comprehension skills. She continues to work on fluency and attention to punctuation.</i></p> <p><i>L loves to learn new ideas and concepts. He is using more strategies to decode unfamiliar words. The focus of tutoring was on fluency and word attack. His comprehension is strong.</i></p> <p><i>L comes to tutoring motivated to learn. He has a good command of sight words and has improved in his ability to use different strategies to decode an unfamiliar word (e.g. initial sound, stretch, look at the picture for clues, etc.) He is beginning to pay attention to punctuation and fluency.</i></p> <p><i>N worked very hard this summer learning consonant blends, which he applies to his independent reading. He is self-correcting by looking at the initial and final ending sound.</i></p> <p><i>N worked very hard this summer in her lessons. She is very focused during her sessions with strong decoding skills. She has an excellent vocabulary and</i></p>
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<p><i>M is always positive and has a great work ethic. He applied reading strategies that were taught.</i></p> <p><i>L tried hard however, she forgets letters and sounds.</i></p> <p><i>M has gained a great amount of reading confidence. She is constantly pushing herself and using her strategies.</i></p> <p><i>He feels confident and when not sure sounds out words and connects with pictures too.</i></p> <p><i>Z is more enthusiastic to read. She asked me to send her a book to read to mom.</i></p> <p><i>Z is much more confident with decoding multi-syllabic words while reading. She attacks the word instead of stopping all together. She is a much more confident reader.</i></p>	<p><i>is able to use the context of the story to help her figure out unknown vocabulary.</i></p> <p><i>R worked so hard this summer. When we first began, she did not use any strategies and would just say she did not know the word. Now she is using strategies and moved up a level.</i></p> <p><i>S did well with literal comprehension. She needs to continue to work on fixing her errors when she does not know a word.</i></p> <p><i>S was very focused during lessons. He was quick to apply strategies that were taught. He is stronger with decoding multisyllabic words.</i></p>
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Parent/Guardian Feedback

A total of 12 parents/guardians answered a brief survey³ about the READY for the Grade summer program in New Haven, 2020. As shown in Table 5d, and the following comments, all or almost all parents verified that they and their children benefitted from participating in RfG summer 2020. Additionally, all respondents agreed that program leaders were helpful and that they planned to sign up again next summer.

Table 6d: Parent/Guardian Feedback, New Haven READY for the Grade, 2020

<i>% who answered YES to the following questions</i>	2020
	N=12
Did your child read more over this summer?	100%
Do you feel more confident with helping your child read?	100%
Does your child feel more confident as a reader?	92%
Did your family read more over the summer?	92%

³ Note that the parent survey was administered by the New Haven RfG program. Some parents had more than one child participating.

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Were the program leaders helpful?	100%
Will you sign up again next summer	100%

<p>What did you like about the program?</p> <p><i>Teachers where very nice and helpful</i></p> <p><i>The individual tutor my son has, also the whole team are amazing.</i></p> <p><i>The groups were great for connection to others, learning and fun.</i></p> <p><i>Family night it forces us parents to do things as a collective in busy environment to just relax live in the moment of togetherness</i></p> <p><i>The individual meetings 1:1 are so productive. New Haven school needs to do this for the young people.</i></p> <p><i>All teachers look after all the children. The class is always fun.</i></p> <p><i>The staff taking the time to know my daughter.</i></p> <p><i>The flexibility and the enthusiasm with learning.</i></p> <p><i>My son absolutely LOVED [teacher], and I appreciate her working to be his tutor after doing his assessment. She was great to work and connect with.</i></p> <p><i>The way reading was made to be fun.</i></p> <p><i>I liked that the program helped the parents by giving some strategies to help the students to read and sound out letters and gave ideas to help the students use phonics rules as they read.</i></p> <p><i>The gifts are the extra cherry on top but I would have done it for free.</i></p>	<p>What do you feel your child gained?</p> <p><i>He feels more confident when reading and pronouncing difficult words</i></p> <p><i>The confidence to read by herself. [The chance] to see the face of an educator.</i></p> <p><i>Becoming a more confident reader and learning to comprehend what she reads.</i></p> <p><i>My son gained an improved sense of confidence when reading and trying new words. He learned new strategies in identifying the words within the words, which helped to significantly improve his reading abilities.</i></p> <p><i>To read more and pay more attention</i></p> <p><i>My child gained helpful strategies for reading.</i></p> <p><i>Not to dislike reading and not to worry about mistakes</i></p>
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Conclusions and Issues for Further Consideration

While the site used an online reading curriculum and virtual platforms to connect that were new to them, the program maintained its familiar feel and family appeal and as described in the previous section, accomplished

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important results. They successfully recruited and engaged 30 students, helped students strengthen their online learning skills (e.g., readiness and focusing, chatting, muting), and maintain or in many cases advance specific reading abilities. Staff confirmed in a post-program interview that it took a couple of sessions to help students, many of whom had NOT been online in spring, get into the mindset of distance learning. They used games, encouraged children to write, reinforced proper etiquette for digital learning, and relied heavily on the *Reading A-Z* program which all agreed was *awesome*. Staff specifically commented that the reading program was easy to use and that they did not experience any technical challenges using it. They especially loved being able to send books and worksheets to families after group and individual tutoring sessions. Further they added to their programming with other online/video and live-stream programming (e.g., Sightword Rap, Africa is Me Show, Animal Embassy, Readers Theatre) and used interactive activities (such as treasure hunts, movement activities and writing and games supported through Reading A-Z). Confirming the responses of parents to the feedback survey, staff all pointed out that parents had been very receptive and engaged with their children's involvement. They changed their schedules around to ensure children's participation and left older siblings to help out if they were not able to be engaged online.

The staff reported they held weekly meetings and used group chats and other features of the online programs to help them adapt and keep the program on track. They all felt very supported by each other and even though it had been a steep learning curve (especially for some staff members), all the components worked. They also recognized that even though they missed being in-person with children and families, and that sometimes it was difficult for children to find a quiet place and a device, there were some benefits to the virtual strategy. Specifically, they eliminated the need for transportation and childcare for siblings, attendance was better, and both children and families reported the individual attention was really helpful, especially after having very little individual attention during spring online learning when the district was first faced with many changes. **Staff hope to incorporate some of these strategies for summer 2021, and perhaps to deliver hybrid programming next summer even if there are no restrictions on in-person use of the library. Parents weighed in as well. Their responses to the question about what should change for next year are shown below.**

What would you change about the program?

Nothing (6) (including 1 Absolutely Nothing)

I would like to see this during the school year because the schools just don't have it together for the younger group yet.

More class time. My girl who is more eager to continue because of how fun the class is

I would change the individual tutoring time. I would make the individual tutoring time section to meet four times a week. And make the program longer than two months.