

# Jolly Phonics



**How this school more than doubled  
the number of children performing  
above the K Benchmark**

**Windham Primary School: A Case Study**

# Jolly Phonics at Windham Primary School

*Windham Primary School is a large K-3 school in Southern Maine in the US. They have almost 800 students enrolled, with over 220 of those across 12 kindergarten classes.*



*The school aims to create an educational environment for its students that promotes positive and successful learning experiences, and enables all members of the school community to develop their unique potential.*

## By Julie Young Instructional Leader



We tip-toed into Jolly Phonics several years ago. We had one staff member who had used it in another job and introduced a few reading interventionists to the concepts of synthetic phonics and to the motions associated with the letter sounds. Slowly the interventions began incorporating the motions into letter learning with our most struggling learners and they found the students to be engaged and having greater success with learning letter sounds.

For the most part, our students were learning to read at a typical pace but we lacked a scope and sequence or a consistent approach at teaching phonics across our twelve kindergarten classes. Those who did not learn to read easily, continued to struggle throughout primary school.

In an attempt to gain consistency across the twelve kindergarten classes as well as decide on a phonics scope and sequence, our team leaders organized a full day Jolly Phonics introductory training for our kindergarten teachers and literacy interventionists. All who attended the training agreed that this was the missing link to our literacy instruction. The following school year all of our kindergarten classes used Jolly Phonics.

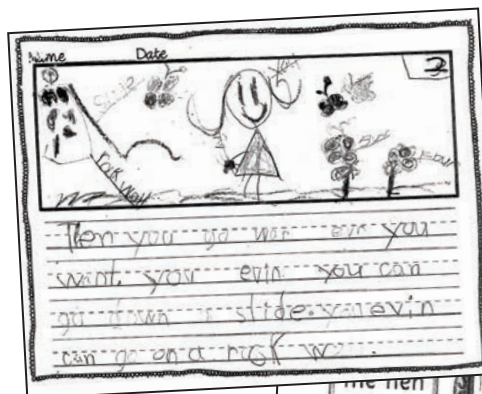
The first year of implementation was wildly successful as our students were excited about the lessons and our reading achievement data soared. All students benefited from the engaging lessons and our data indicates that our higher achieving

students benefited as much if not more than others. Our end-of-year Kindergarten DRA2 benchmark is a level 4. In previous years only a handful of students read beyond a DRA level 4. Last year most students reached the DRA4 and continued to much higher levels with many students reading a year or more above grade level.

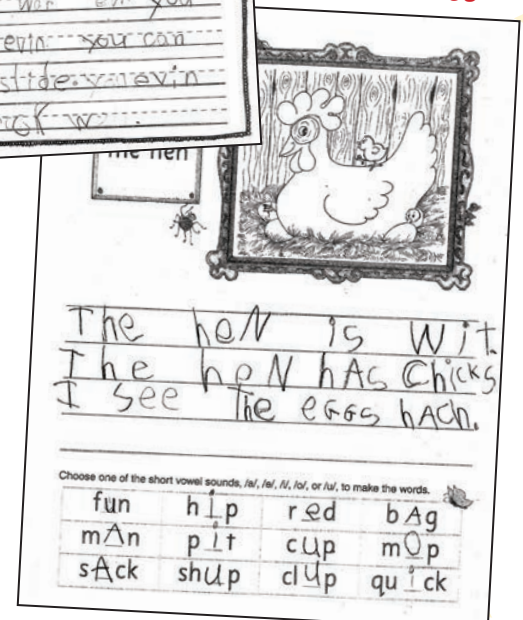
Our data was compelling enough to extend Jolly Phonics learning into our first grade classes. During the summer our first grade teachers attended trainings in Jolly Phonics and have continued the lessons for our students. They are beginning the school year with a review of the letter sounds and motions, Jolly Phonics Level 3 and then moving into Jolly Grammar.

It is so exciting to see our early learners blending sounds and eager to read and write.

Jolly Phonics successfully engages a broad range of learners in every class. Those students who entered school already reading along with those who are receiving their first experience with letter learning can sit side by side and have an entry point into the lessons. It is exciting to see all students actively engaged in the same lesson.



*Writing samples from K and First Grade classes*





# Results that speak for themselves



**By Dr Kyle Rhoads  
Principal**

Jolly Phonics quickly changed the way our teachers teach, our learners learn and our mindset about how much kindergarteners can and will learn! This systematic program increased the letter sound acquisition across all types of children. Teachers used a multi-sensory approach to letters and letter sounds. Teachers were amazed at how much more a kindergartener could learn using this program!

Imagine, twelve classroom teachers instructing literacy acquisition skills related to letters and letter sounds in a similar fashion. Learners getting excited about the lessons. Through teacher data analysis, lessons being accelerated. Lessons and the practice permitting differentiation and stretching of learning. The skills learned transferring to independent reading and writing. The smiles on the faces of learners as they gained vital skills having fun! Jolly Phonics made this our everyday reality!

**I was also the parent of a kindergartener. I was shocked by her reading development because of the skills she learned from Jolly Phonics and the instructional practices of her teacher. At home she would mimic the sound movements, sound out difficult words and say the sounds as she wrote words. Her motivation, enthusiasm and confidence from Jolly Phonics truly impressed me as an educator and as a parent!**



**By Jennie Smith-Brock  
Jolly Phonics trainer**



There is a long history of research, from around the world, that shows the positive effects that Jolly Phonics has on the reading and spelling ability of young students, including those who come from low socio-economic backgrounds or are English-language learners. Schools in Maine that have implemented Jolly Phonics have typically seen a reduction by 1/3 to 1/2 in the percentage of kindergarteners performing below grade level on district reading and writing assessments and a doubling of the percentage of kindergarteners performing above grade-level.

Windham Primary School, in its first year using Jolly Phonics, surpassed even that. The school had 4 years of data from the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA2) to use for comparison. This new approach cut the below-grade-level numbers by 1/3 compared to 2017, and by over 1/2 compared to 2016 and 2018. The percentage of students who ended their kindergarten year above grade level more than doubled compared to 2017 and tripled compared to 2016 and 2018.

The Jolly Phonics approach is different from most traditional phonics programs. The students are taught 42 letter sounds (not just the 26 "alphabet sounds") at the brisk pace of 4-5 per week in the first term of kindergarten, so that they will have learned one way to read and spell each of the sounds of English by Thanksgiving. Phonemic awareness is embedded. Students learn, from day 1, how to blend sounds into words for reading and segment words into sounds for spelling.

**Jolly Phonics does not teach words as wholes; instead, students are taught to see what part of a "sight word" has a tricky spelling and then blend all the sounds. Handwriting is explicitly taught, with the same sequence as the letter-sounds. The staff at Windham Primary School has done a fabulous job incorporating this program into their daily teaching routine, with very positive results for the students in their charge.**

# The impact of Jolly Phonics in my class



**By Laura Record**  
**Kindergarten Teacher**

I am currently in my second year teaching the Jolly Phonics program with kindergarteners. Over the course of last year and the start of this school year, I have seen significant growth and confidence in my students' reading and writing abilities.

My students greatly enjoy the corresponding stories and jingles for each letter, often asking to have them played repeatedly and to get a "sneak peek" at the next day's letter. Their active engagement during lessons has attributed to their reading growth and success. One student entered school without knowing any letter sounds, and now after one month of school, she knows 19 sounds. She's not the only student to have shown this growth. Students who began school knowing some letter sounds have also continued to build upon their sound knowledge.



Within the first week of Jolly Phonics, children are taught to blend sounds and read words. Their letter sound knowledge has taken the guess work out of reading, and they are now truly reading, and reading confidently. As the program progresses, it teaches vowel teams, digraphs, and their corresponding rules. With children not having to wait until higher grade levels to learn these sounds and rules, they are able to read books that are interesting to them. I had more students exiting kindergarten last year at a DRA level 6, 8, 10, and 12 than in my past 20 years of teaching. I even had to purchase books at higher DRA levels to accommodate their growing abilities.

One of my favorite pieces of the program is their approach to teaching sight words or "tricky words." Children are taught to apply their skills when reading a tricky word. The Jolly Phonics method removes guessing a word and pure word memorization, hence embracing reading. These tricky words are later combined with dictation lessons to write sentences and learn the rules of sentence structure.

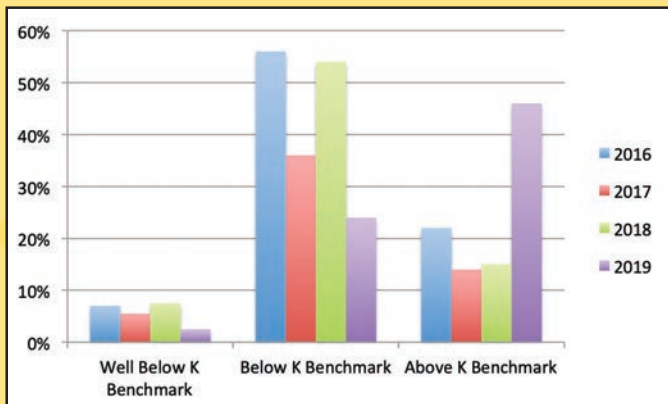
The skills taught during our phonics lessons have transferred over to our Writer's Workshop time. Jolly Phonics has helped children become braver writers; persevering to write unknown words. It is rare to hear children say "I can't." Instead, they are helping each other find letters to match sounds in words. With students not struggling as much to write words in their stories, they focus more on their actual story and the story telling process.

I am pleased to be teaching Jolly Phonics again this year in my classroom. The benefits of this program have been demonstrated by my students' growth, and also, and most importantly, by their confidence and joy in reading and perseverance in writing.

The below grade-level numbers were cut by 1/3 compared to 2017, and by 1/2 compared to 2016 and 2018.

Meanwhile, the above grade-level numbers more than doubled, with 2x the percentage in 2016 and 3x the percentage in 2017 and 2018.

On average, the number of children performing well below or below the K Benchmark dropped from 55% to 27%, while the number of children performing above the K Benchmark rose from 17% to 46%.



(Graph showing the percentage of children performing well below, below and above the Kindergarten benchmark each year between 2016 and 2019 inclusive.)



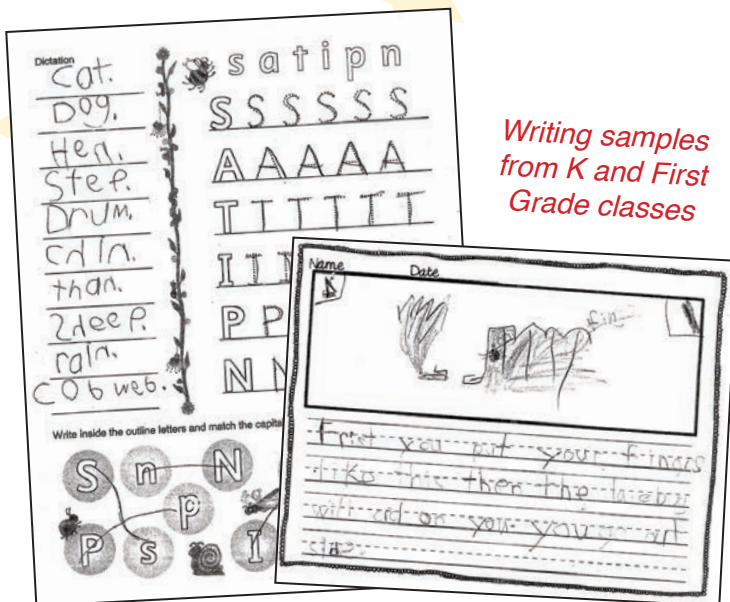
# The impact of Jolly Phonics in my class

**By Lindsey Pettus**  
**Kindergarten Teacher**



Last year kindergarten teachers in my school had the opportunity to attend a workshop on Jolly Phonics. As a kindergarten team we were excited and intrigued about this program and what it had to offer our students. To me it seemed like the missing piece of our literacy instruction, and I was excited to see what it could do for my class in both reading and writing.

It was immediately apparent how engaging it was for students. They were eager to hear the stories, listen to the songs and learn the new letter sound motions. The whiteboard activities have a great progression and the children's progress was apparent within the first few weeks.



*Writing samples  
from K and First  
Grade classes*

One of the things I was most excited about was the program's accessibility for students of all levels. Coming in to my classroom last year I had children with little to no literacy experience; no ability to recognize letters of any kind, including in their own name; a student who was already reading at a middle of kindergarten level; and all levels in between. As we progressed through the lessons I was happy that children at both ends of the spectrum were making growth. My neediest learners were able to start associating letters with sounds and my high flyers were able to start learning long vowel teams

and apply their new phonics skills to their writing. Some students who were not successful the first time through — for a variety of reasons including being new to the concept of school, learning to listen and follow directions and adapting to the expectations of being in the classroom — were able to repeat the Jolly Phonics 1 program and make huge growth the second time through.

As I continued to use the program and facilitated guided reading groups throughout the year a few things were apparent. The first was that students no longer needed to be prompted to sound out words. When they came to a word they did not know, they immediately began to sound it out. Another was their confidence; in the beginning of kindergarten you always have students telling you "I can't read." These statements very quickly left my students vocabulary as they realized that they now had the tools they needed in order to be a reader. They were willing to take a chance on even long words and trusted in their ability to figure it out. The application of phonics was also very evident in their writing. Students in my class were starting to sound out words in writing much earlier in the year than in the past, and they were including medial vowels and long vowel teams in their writing. The overall effect was that kindergarten writing became stronger, more readable and more robust as children felt confident in trying to write more words.

Jolly Phonics provided a skill that my students in the past were lacking, or under using. It unlocked the door for reading and writing at a new pace and level than I had seen in 12 previous years of teaching kindergarteners, and above all it was enjoyable for the students and teachers alike.



# The impact of Jolly Phonics in my class



## By Kiely Treschitta Kindergarten Teacher

Jolly Phonics has completely transformed my Kindergarten classroom. Students are excited and show me they are ready for Jolly Phonics each day with their whole body listening. The only time I hear voices are when they are doing the actions of the letter sounds. We love hearing the songs and stories about the letter sounds. The lessons are visually appealing for students. When my students are in reading groups, they are constantly sounding out the words with their Jolly Phonics actions. How could students not love it? It's a fit for all types of learners: visual, kinesthetic and much more. By January of last year, all my students knew their letter sounds. I was thrilled with their progress in such little time.

We start off our lesson with all the students on the rug facing the smart board. A review is always how we start in order make sure students are ready to tackle new information. A few students come up to the smart board and complete interactive activities. Every student wants a turn! When the interactive lesson is complete, the students must go back to their seat and apply what they learned on an independent activity.

As we get through the letter sounds, we also learn about sentence dictations and tricky words. In the past students have struggled with tricky words but this program makes the goal of learning tricky words attainable. It's fun for the students and they are learning. What more could a school want in a program? Teachers look forward to teaching these lessons at our school because students are engaged and our data shows growth.

This is my second year using the program and I still enjoy teaching it. The looks on students' faces during the lessons are incredible. Students are learning, motivated and are applying what they learn throughout the day. This is not another phonics program. It will change how you and students feel about phonics.



## By Jenny Hopkins Parent of Twins



My family LOVES Jolly Phonics. The catchy songs and motions were so easy to practice at home. The boys loved to come home and sing the new song and show me the new motion. They were both so excited to be reading words within the first few weeks. I couldn't believe how quickly they were able to retain and apply all the new sounds.

The best part of the program was how it was able to meet the diverse needs of my boys. I have twin boys who were in the same kindergarten class, one was a struggling reader and the other was an average reader. Amazingly, the lessons were able to meet both their needs. They both gained skills that they were able to apply to their own reading. They were able to blend, write out sounds, tell me numerous phonics rules and read tricky words.

It impressed me how one program could benefit two types of learners. I am happy to report that at the end of kindergarten, my struggling reader was reading at grade level and my average reader ended the year reading above grade level.

They are now entering first grade feeling successful and confident in their ability to read and write!