

# Evidence Based Research in Fairfax County Public Schools on the Effectiveness of the *Benchmark Literacy* Comprehensive Literacy Program February 2016

## The U.S. Department of Education on Research

The U.S. Department of Education has stated that all schools should use instructional programs that have been proven effective in the classroom by “**evidence based research.**” To that end, Benchmark Education Company has taken part in various independent research studies and product installations during the last five school years.

## The Fairfax CPS/Benchmark Education Research Study Partnership

Starting during the 2011–12 school year, Lake Anne and London Towne elementary schools were chosen for inclusion in an independent, university-based study of Benchmark Education’s ***Benchmark Literacy*** comprehensive program. These schools were matched by demographic and socioeconomic variables, one serving as the experimental school and one as the control school. The experimental school (London Towne) introduced *Benchmark Literacy* with on-site Professional Development into its K–6 literacy classrooms. The control school (Lake Anne) used literacy programs from other publishers. The results of this study, published in 2012, showed statistically significant reading growth by students in the *Benchmark Literacy* school vs. the control school.

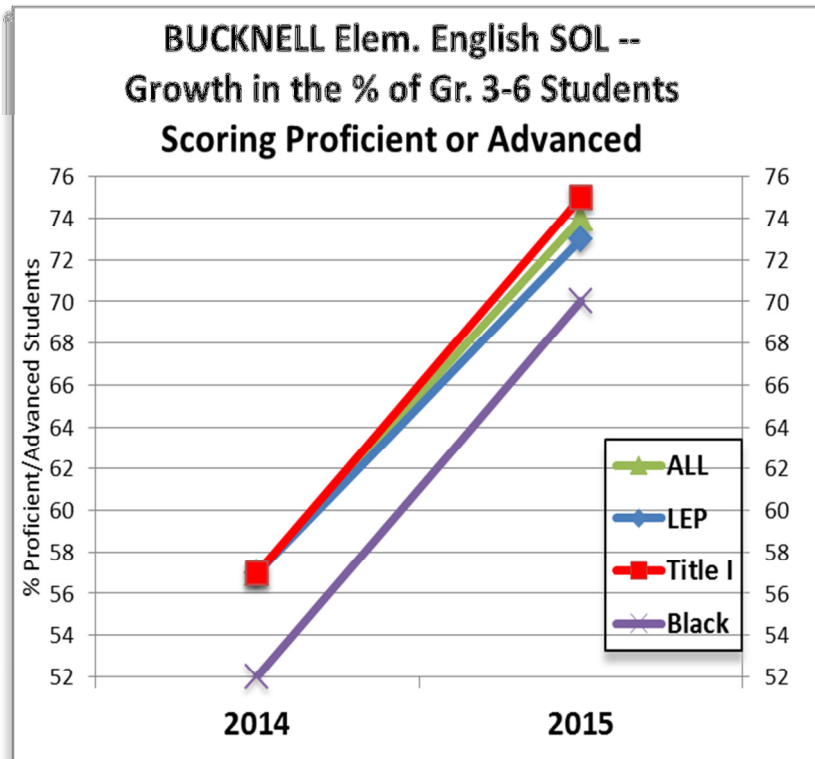
The control school’s (Lake Anne’s) administrators then expressed interest in implementing the *Benchmark Literacy* program during the 2012–13 school year. Benchmark Education’s prior knowledge of this school and the willingness of the administration and teachers to take part in a study made the school a good candidate for this research. The results, published in 2013, showed greatly accelerated student literacy growth at Lake Anne, termed “rare” and “impressive” by the university-based evaluators.

Lake Anne also provides dual-language instruction. The school’s administrators and teachers showed interest in participating in a subsequent research study introducing Benchmark Education’s **Spanish Literacy Program** with on-site Professional Development during 2013–14. As a result, Benchmark Education introduced its Spanish Literacy Program to 286 dual-language students for those subject areas taught exclusively in Spanish in the school: Grades K–6 Math and Science with integrated Literacy. The results, published in 2015, showed significant continued acceleration in literacy as measured by both English and Spanish assessments.

This new Feb. 2016 report will reference the literacy achievements resulting from the use of *Benchmark Literacy* with long-term Professional Development at both Lake Anne and London Towne. After the early successes at these two schools, ***Benchmark Literacy was chosen by six additional Fairfax elementary schools*** for implementation as their comprehensive literacy program during the 2014-15 school year. This report will show new evidence of impressive and accelerated gains in Proficiency at these six schools on the 2015 VA *Standards of Learning* English test as compared to 2014 SOL results before *Benchmark Literacy* was introduced.

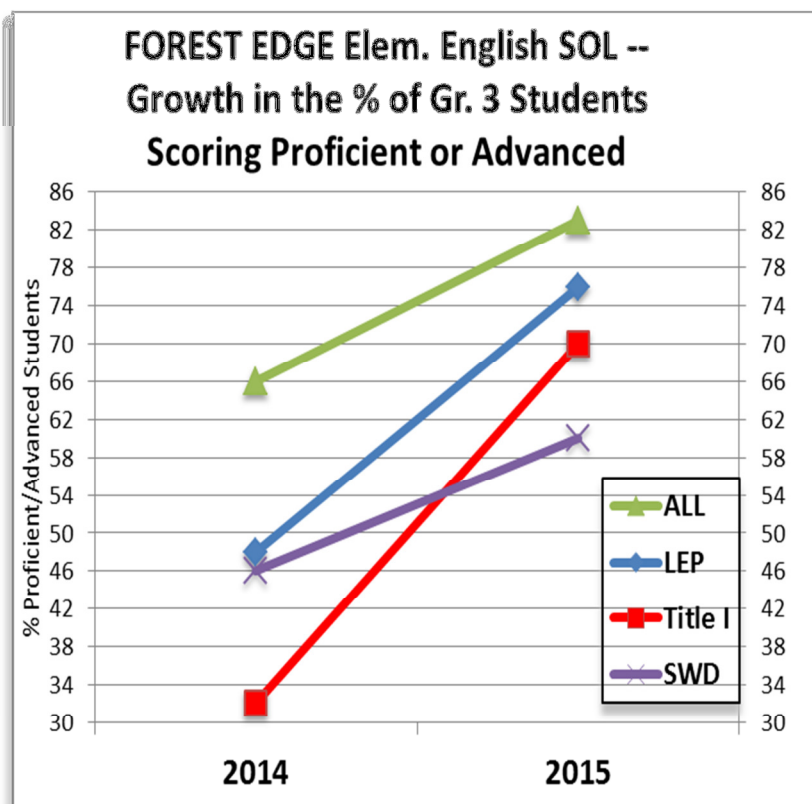
Finally, three Fairfax elementary schools (for a total of 11 schools to date) have begun to use *Benchmark Literacy* during the 2015-16 school year: Beech Tree, Cameron, and Hutchinson. We plan to report on these schools’ gains in student literacy achievement in Fall ‘16.

## HIGHLIGHTS — *BENCHMARK LITERACY* Evidence Based Research



Despite not starting to use *Benchmark Literacy* until November 2014, Bucknell students in Grades 3-6 achieved increases of over 16% in Proficiency on the 2015 SOLs compared to the prior year when they used other literacy materials.

Title I and Black students led the way with 18% gains in Proficient and Advanced readers.

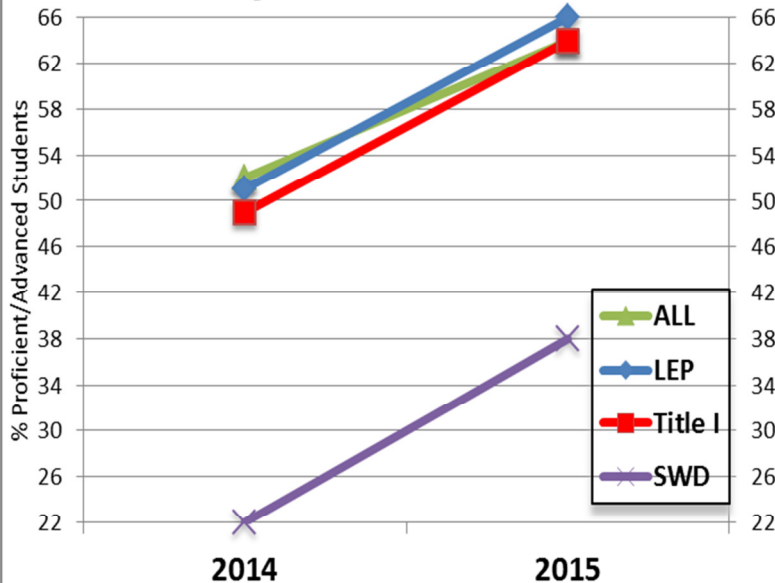


Forest Edge introduced *Benchmark Literacy* into the lower grades in 2014-15. After one year, 17% more Grade 3 students scored Proficient or better on the SOL.

The highest achievers were the LEP and Title I students who showed Proficiency gains of 28% and 38%, including a quantum jump in Title I Advanced readers from 3% the prior year to 30% after using *Benchmark Literacy*. These increases significantly narrowed the literacy gap between the two subgroups and their classmates.

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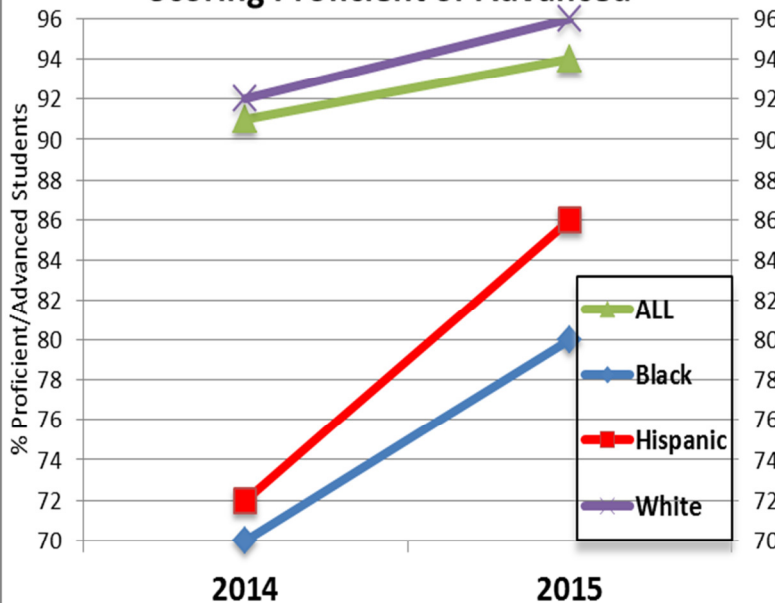
**MT. VERNON WOODS English SOL --  
Growth in the % of Gr. 3-6 Students  
Scoring Proficient or Advanced**



64% of Mt. Vernon Woods Gr. 3-6 students achieved Proficient or Advanced levels on the SOL after using *Benchmark Literacy*, up 12% from just 52% the previous year using other literacy programs.

All 3 traditionally "at-risk" subgroups achieved even higher 15-16% gains in Proficiency.

**OAKTON Elem. English SOL --  
Growth in the % of Gr. 3-6 Students  
Scoring Proficient or Advanced**

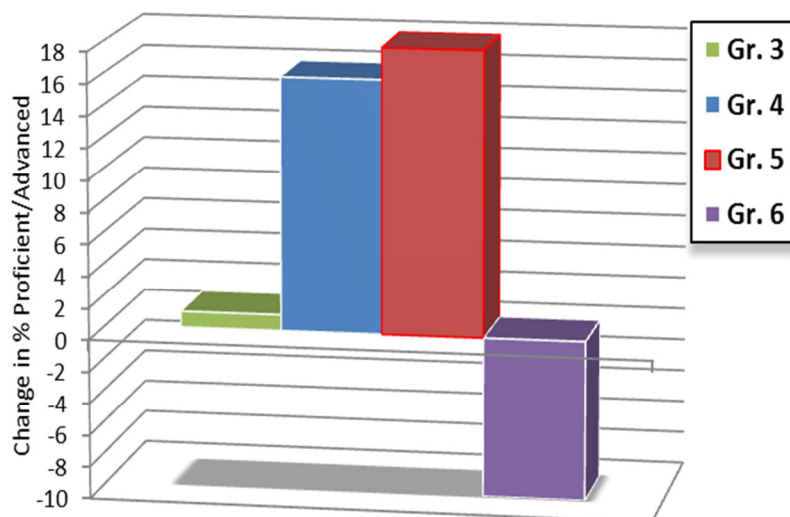


At Oakton, all ethnic subgroups showed strong gains after using *Benchmark Literacy*, pushing the already high 91% schoolwide Proficiency score up to 94%.

Blacks and Hispanics achieved the highest gains with 10% and 14% more Proficient or Advanced students than the prior year without *Benchmark Literacy*, substantially reducing the gap with their classmates.

## HIGHLIGHTS — *BENCHMARK LITERACY* Evidence Based Research

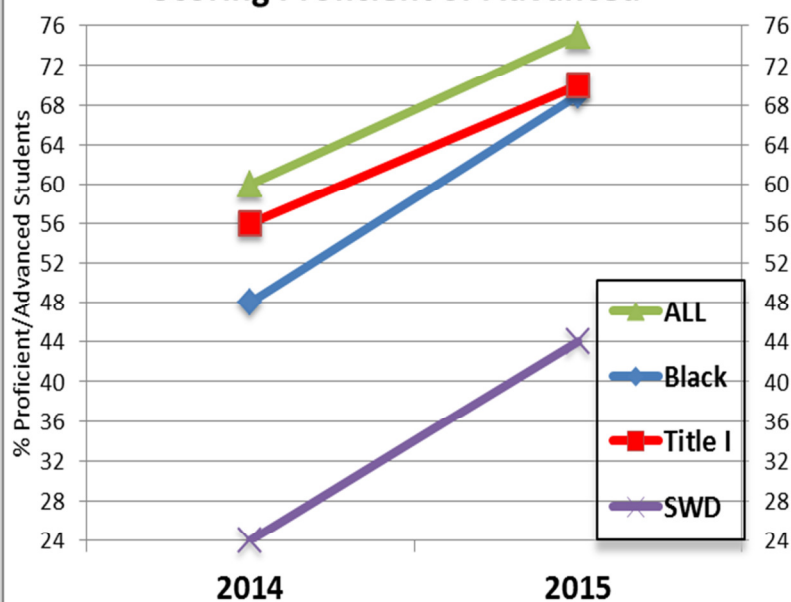
**WASHINGTON MILL Elem. English SOL --  
Change in % of Gr. 3-6 Students Scoring  
Proficient or Advanced vs. Prior Year**



Washington Mill Elementary began using *Benchmark Literacy* in Grades 4 and 5 in Fall '14, while Grades 3 and 6 used other literacy resources.

The 2015 SOLs reveal contrasting outcomes: While Grade 3 had only 1% more Proficient and Advanced students, and Grade 6 experienced a 10% drop vs. the prior year, Grades 4 and 5 with *Benchmark Literacy* achieved significant jumps in Proficient and Advanced students of 16% and 18%.

**WOODLAWN Elem. English SOL --  
Growth in the % of Gr. 3-6 Students  
Scoring Proficient or Advanced**

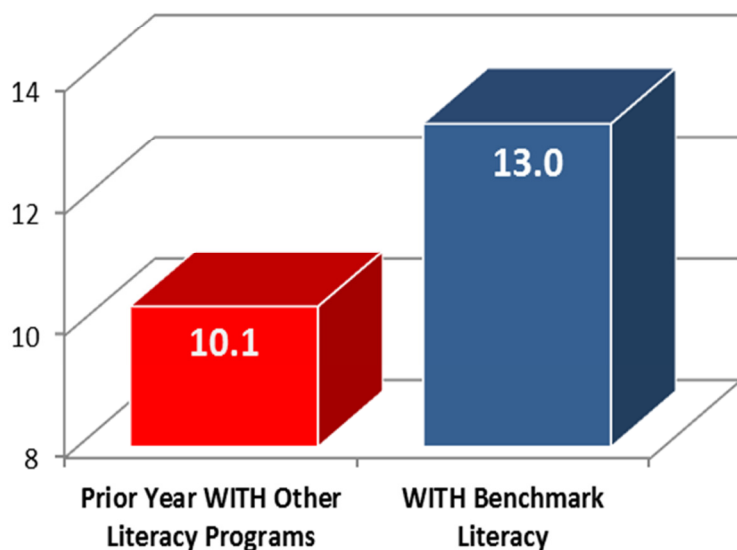


After using *Benchmark Literacy* with long-term PD, 15% more Woodlawn students scored Proficient or Advanced compared to the previous year using other literacy programs.

The Title I, SWD, and Black students showed substantial increases in Proficiency of 14%, 20%, and 21%, respectively.

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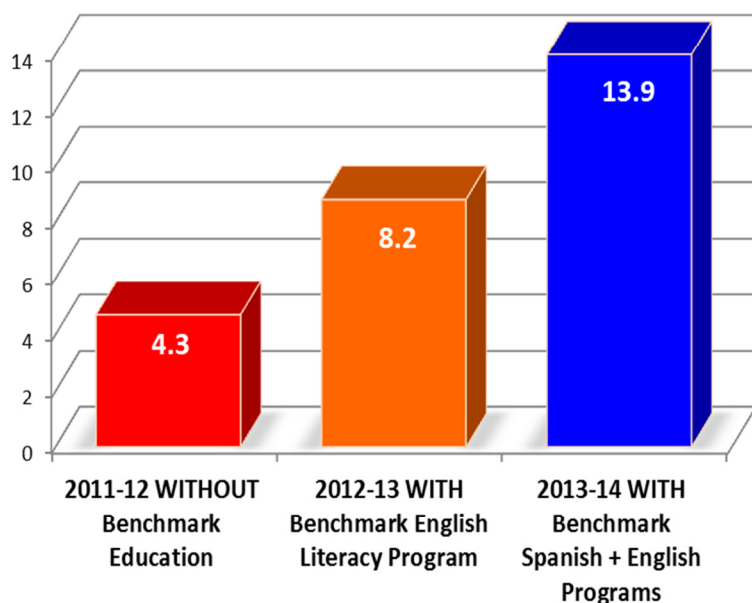
### LAKE ANNE Change in Gr. 1-2 Males DRA Levels (Fall-Spring)



In an independent, university-based research study, Lake Anne male students in Grades 1–2 using *Benchmark Literacy* achieved DRA level gains of 13.0 vs. only 10.1 the previous year using other literacy programs.

Unlike the previous year where male reading growth lagged female DRA reading growth by 10.1 to 11.0, after using *Benchmark Literacy* the boys' reading gains accelerated to virtually equal the girls' gains: 13.0 vs. 13.1.

### DRA Level Gains Gr. 5 (Fall-Spring)



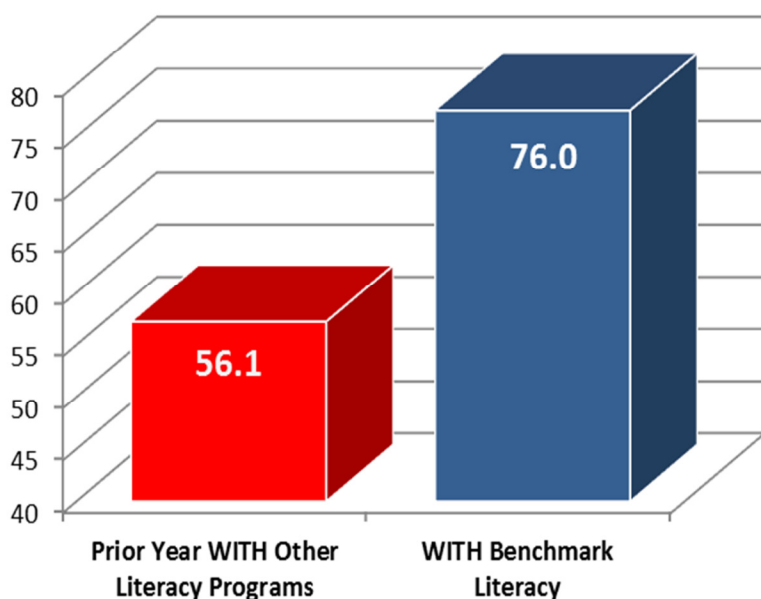
Grade 5 Lake Anne students using the Benchmark Spanish Literacy Program achieved average English DRA level gains of 13.9 vs. only 4.3 by grade 5 students using other literacy programs school-wide before *Benchmark Literacy* and Spanish materials with Professional Development were introduced.

The researchers summarized: "The grades 5 and 6 Spanish literacy students in 2013-2014 performed significantly better than the school's 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders in 2011-2012."



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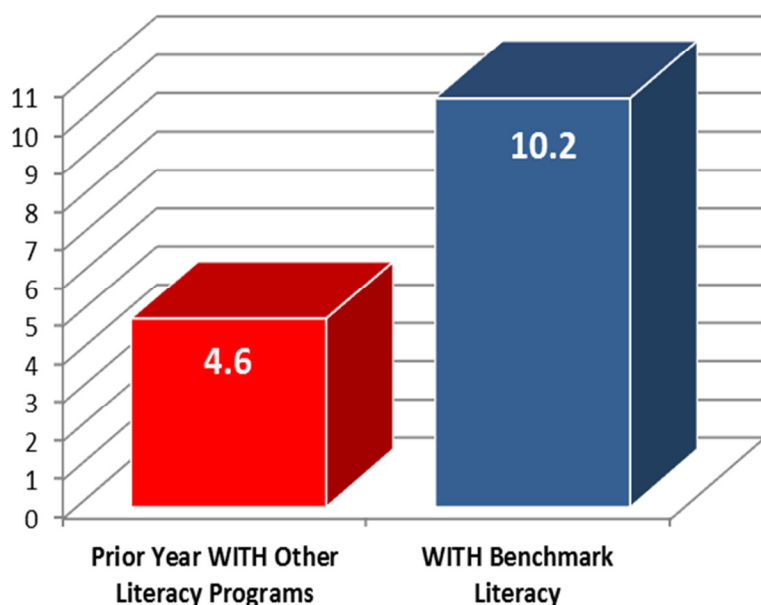
### LONDON TOWNE Change in Gr. K DRA-WA Scores (Fall-Spring)



In an independent, university-based research study, London Towne Elementary students in Grade K using *Benchmark Literacy* showed 35% greater literacy growth, an average gain of 76 DRA-WA points, vs. only 56 points by control students using other literacy programs.

The researchers noted: "While the [Gr. K] experimental students scored considerably lower than the control students in the fall, they caught up to and even surpassed the control students on the spring test."

### LONDON TOWNE Change in ELL Gr. 4-6 DRA Scores (Fall-Spring)



London Towne ELLs using *Benchmark Literacy* gained an average of 10.2 DRA levels vs. only 4.6 levels by control school ELLs using other literacy programs.

This represents a 122% greater improvement in reading level by ELLs in schools receiving *Benchmark Literacy* with long-term, on-site Professional Development.

## HIGHLIGHTS — *BENCHMARK LITERACY* Evidence Based Research

### What Fairfax Teachers had to say:

I like the different strategies and how they are taught explicitly. I don't think I have ever taught inferencing specifically. It was good to expose students to it and show them that there is a deeper way to read. On the end-of-year assessments, a lot of kids wanted to infer which was good.

Kindergarten Teacher

The program is heavy on nonfiction which I love and we really need it in our classrooms. I have seen comprehension go up in my classroom and I think *Benchmark Literacy* is a reason.

1<sup>st</sup> Grade Teacher

I really like the writing. The writing that the kids produced was really high quality, so I thought it was excellent. The other thing I really loved about the writing was the mentor texts.

2<sup>nd</sup> Grade Teacher

The reading books are amazing; the kids love them. The books are a little harder than what we use for testing them with the DRA. I like that because when we test them they feel like it is easy.

3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Teacher

I really like the guided reading books and the plans that come with it. It tells you the strategy, shows you the level, and gives you everything you could ever want—so much information, it is great!

3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Teacher

They love looking at the smartboards and the resources on there, and they love the guided reading books. They like the names of the characters. We have a diverse population and they sometimes see names of their friends that they have never seen in a book before, and it is exciting to them.

3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Teacher

The books are generally very high interest, especially with boys—they like the nonfiction.

4<sup>th</sup> Grade Teacher

I love the books. I think they are attractive to the eye and they are informative. I love all of the nonfiction text features. I like how they tie in with our social studies and our writing curriculums. The Benchmark books are more attractive than the other books I have used in other schools.

5<sup>th</sup> Grade Teacher

The training has been awesome—a good balance between explaining how it works, demonstrating it, and then putting it into practice. You get immediate feedback which is really helpful.

5<sup>th</sup> Grade Teacher

*Benchmark Literacy*...definitely provides a great framework. The books are appealing—the Reader's Theater definitely. The teacher's guide is very explicit. The consistency is something we did need K through 6. I definitely see us using the overall framework in moving forward.

Reading Specialist

## **HIGHLIGHTS — *BENCHMARK LITERACY* Evidence Based Research**

### **What Fairfax Administrators had to say:**

*Benchmark Literacy* exceeded my expectations. The state reading scores came up significantly in every grade level. The social studies state scores were higher than they have ever been—we believe very much that *Benchmark Literacy* contributed to that. Overall we are thrilled! The teachers embraced it. It really was a wonderful support for our kids.

Thank you, Benchmark Education.

Principal

I am surprised how much I see Benchmark [used] in the upper grades, because that is typically where guided reading just falls off the wagon. But they're very into it. Teachers enjoy the literacy approach. Almost always when I walk in, some kids are using the Benchmark materials.

Principal

I do think having [*Benchmark Literacy*] resources has made an impact. We were really concerned about our LEP reading scores....We are definitely seeing higher scores, especially in our LEP groups.

Assistant Principal

*Benchmark Literacy* has changed the practices in our building. The materials are fresh, relevant, and high interest, even to reluctant readers. Our students enjoy using the materials, whether for guided or independent reading. The teacher's guides, posters, discussion materials, and big books are all popular among our teachers, as is the Website, which lets students read books on their level at home.

The results speak for themselves: With *Benchmark Literacy's* emphasis on nonfiction reading and vocabulary, DRA reading growth more than doubled for our Title I students and ELLs compared to the previous year. This improvement carried over to the state reading test, where the percentage of "Proficient" students in Grades 3–5 exceeded the state average by 11%, compared to only 2% last year. I highly recommend *Benchmark Literacy* to schools.

Principal