

**PAR**

FEATURED PRODUCT

# Go **FAR**-*ther*

A large public school district goes the distance with the **FAR**.



**far**<sup>™</sup>  
feiferassessmentofreading<sup>™</sup>



## THE PROBLEM

A large, diverse school district approached our Clinical Assessment Consultants with a big concern—throughout their schools, they were seeing increasing numbers of students with a variety of reading problems. Unsure if this was fallout from the pandemic, a problem with their reading curriculum, an increase in the number of students needing services, or something else altogether, they turned to PAR to discover a better way to serve the needs of their students.

The district was using traditional achievement tests, but those tests were simply indicating if a student was above, at, or below grade level—they weren't providing insight into a student's problem areas or areas of strength. Even more concerning, these tests were not able to distinguish students with specific learning disabilities from those who may have instructional gaps due to the pandemic.

The district knew they needed to specifically focus on reading skills but they didn't know where to start.



## READING BY THE NUMBERS

According to the [2022 National Assessment of Educational Progress \(NAEP\)](#), **37% of fourth graders** and **30% of eighth graders** scored **below NAEP basic levels** in reading.

## A SOLUTION

"What they were looking to accomplish was results beyond a traditional achievement test," said Terri Sisson, EdS, educational assessment advisor at PAR. "I suggested the Feifer Assessment of Reading (FAR), as it is a comprehensive way to assess all aspects of reading, not simply screening for the most severe problems, but a way to look at the specific strengths and weaknesses of each child and their ability to be proficient readers."

## STARTING SMALL

The district trained a specially selected group of staff on reading disorders, dyslexia, comprehension, and the various cognitive processes that make someone a proficient reader. Because the FAR is a B-level product, teachers and paraprofessionals were able to assist with administration in addition to school psychologists.



## READING BY THE NUMBERS

The [Learning Disabilities Association of America](#) states to **2.3 million students** are diagnosed with a specific learning disability and receive services under IDEA mandates. This represents more than a third of students receiving special education services. Between **75-80%** of special education students identified as having a learning disability say their deficits are in language and reading.

They started by administering the FAR to students in a few randomly chosen classrooms at different age levels throughout the district. It didn't take long to see results—and they were seeing that they had a continuum of reading concerns.

### Gaps in reading skills

Many of the students demonstrated gaps in their reading skills. These students were performing at or moderately below grade level but were lacking specific skills to make them proficient readers. These students were identified and provided with targeted interventions and reading strategies based on the specific aspects of reading they needed additional focus on.

## Evidence of global reading

Some students had results that indicated global reading delays. These students did not show evidence of dyslexia, but their core overall reading skills were below age- and grade-level expectations. These students were placed into targeted reading interventions based on their constellation of scores so they could focus on the reading skills they needed to strengthen to meet the academic demands and rigor of the classroom.

## Assessment of dyslexia

Some students received FAR assessment data that was indicative of the presence of dyslexia. Based on their FAR results, these individuals were showing evidence of problems with the underlying neuropsychological processes needed to be a proficient reader. More than simply determining the evidence of reading impairment, the FAR provided an in-depth look into the specific areas the student was struggling with—helping to identify the specific dyslexic subtype and assist in the selection of the most appropriate intervention strategy. of scores so they could focus on the reading skills they needed to strengthen to meet the academic demands and rigor of the classroom.

The district now had a better idea of the depth of the issue. But if this is what they were seeing in just a few classrooms, what did that mean for the rest of the students they served?

## ROLLING OUT THE FAR DISTRICT-WIDE

Using the pilot program as a guide, the district decided to roll out an ambitious plan—put a FAR kit in the hands of every single school psychologist.



### READING BY THE NUMBERS

In the U.S., about **130 million adults** have low literacy skills, meaning **more than half of Americans** between the ages of 16 and 74 years **read below the equivalent of a sixth-grade level.**

Some of the outcomes the district was able to see included:

- » Identifying struggling readers at earlier ages.
- » Providing pinpoint recommendations focused on each child's particular needs.
- » Streamlining the data throughout the district because all schools were using the same validated approach to reading assessments.
- » Reducing the number of assessments—the FAR was comprehensive enough that it allowed the school psychologists to simplify their testing, no longer needing to cobble together multiple tests to assess reading.

### GOING FORWARD

The district has ambitious plans to continue to assess students using the FAR. Their hope is that by identifying student needs at an earlier age, they will eventually be able to identify students with reading problems significantly earlier—before it becomes an issue districtwide.

By creating more accessibility to testing for all students, the district was able to be sure that no one was “falling through the cracks,” no matter what reading level they were testing at. A true multi-tiered system of support was put into place throughout the district that ensured students at all levels were getting what they needed to succeed.

“A diagnostic achievement test tells you why—that’s a more important question, a more relevant question, and a question that is going to lead to better interventions,” said Steven G. Feifer, DEd, author of the FAR. “And that’s what is really of critical importance.”

Teachers were able to use FAR results to help in lesson planning in their classrooms, as the data was specific enough that they could drill down into specific reading skills that needed more attention.

Could the FAR help your readers go FARther?



**LEARN MORE**



## WHY IT'S IMPORTANT TO LOOK AT READING DISORDERS BEYOND DYSPLEXIA

Though the district was able to identify some students with dyslexia through its FAR pilot program, it was also imperative that students who had other reading disorders or needed specific interventions to improve their skills were addressed, as well.



### READING BY THE NUMBERS

The [percentage of students receiving special education services](#) varies widely depending on what state you live in. New York serves the largest share of special education students (**20.5%** of its overall public school enrollment), followed by Pennsylvania (**20.2%**), Maine (**20.1%**), and Massachusetts (**19.3%**). Texas and Idaho (both **11.7%**) and Hawaii (**11.3%**) serve the lowest number of special education students.

Dyslexia is often used as a catch-all term for reading disorders; however, other lesser-known reading disorders often mimic dyslexia.

Reading difficulties occur on a continuum—there are a wide range of students who need support, ranging from targeted reading assistance to those who are diagnosed with a specific learning disability. It is essential for schools to look at the larger pool of students without diagnoses who still may benefit from additional reading assistance.

Furthermore, many issues present like dyslexia but are not. For example, reading comprehension may be influenced by dyslexia, but it may not be the cause. By using the FAR to tease apart decoding skills from comprehension, schools can be better prepared to accurately diagnose a student's concerns. By clearly investigating the root of why students are struggling with reading, you can be sure they are getting exactly what they need for success.



Creating Connections. Changing Lives.

[parinc.com](http://parinc.com)



Copyright © 2023 by PAR. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in whole or in part in any form or by any means without written permission of PAR.

To cite this document, use:

PAR Staff. (2023). Go FAR-ther: A large public school district goes the distance with the FAR. [white paper]. PAR.