

**SAXON**

# Phonics and Spelling

Grades K–3

How effective is  
***Saxon Phonics  
and Spelling?***



Research Highlights  
Enclosed

# SAXON Phonics and Spelling

## We Know

The five essential areas critical to reading skills are:

- phonemic awareness
- phonics
- fluency
- vocabulary
- text comprehension

At the early primary level (K–2), it is particularly important to emphasize phonics and phonemic awareness.

## What We Did

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt designed the **Saxon Phonics and Spelling** program to specifically meet the needs of K–3 students who struggle with the five major skills essential to reading.

But a program as important as this one needed to work.

## Must Be Effective

In order to determine the effectiveness of the **Saxon Phonics and Spelling** program, Planning, Research and Evaluation Services (PRES) were retained to conduct a randomized control trial.

More than 600 students in six geographically dispersed schools participated in the study.



## Highlights from the study and Executive Summary

### *Does this program work?*

First and 2nd graders who used the **Saxon Phonics and Spelling** program significantly improved over the course of the school year in spelling, phonics, and reading.

### *What about English Language Learners and other groups?*

**Saxon Phonics and Spelling** worked with females and males, students who spoke a language other than English at home, and special education and non-special education students.

### *How about specific skills like word analysis and decoding?*

Perhaps the most revealing evidence: **Saxon Phonics** students did better than the control group on word analysis skills, spelling, and decoding.

### *Different teachers implement programs in different ways. How does this affect the effectiveness of Saxon Phonics and Spelling?*

Results showed that there was no significant relationship between overall **Saxon Phonics and Spelling** implementation levels and improved performance on the outcome measures. That is, students whose teachers used the **Saxon Phonics and Spelling** program improved on these measures, regardless of their level of overall implementation.





# Executive Summary

According to the National Reading Panel (2000), in order for students to read well, they need explicit, systematic instruction in five essential areas, including: 1) phonemic awareness; 2) phonics; 3) fluency; 4) vocabulary; and 5) text comprehension. At the early primary level (K–2), it is particularly important to emphasize phonics and phonemic awareness. Given the need to help students' with the skills they need to become successful readers, Saxon Publishers released **Saxon Phonics and Spelling**, a K–3 program designed to supplement existing classroom reading programs. In order to determine the effectiveness of the **Saxon Phonics and Spelling** program in helping students attain critical reading and spelling skills, Planning, Research, and Evaluation Services (PRES) Associates conducted a year-long study at the 1st and 2nd grades. This randomized control trial (RCT), which commenced in the fall of 2006, was designed to fully address the quality criteria put forth by the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC).

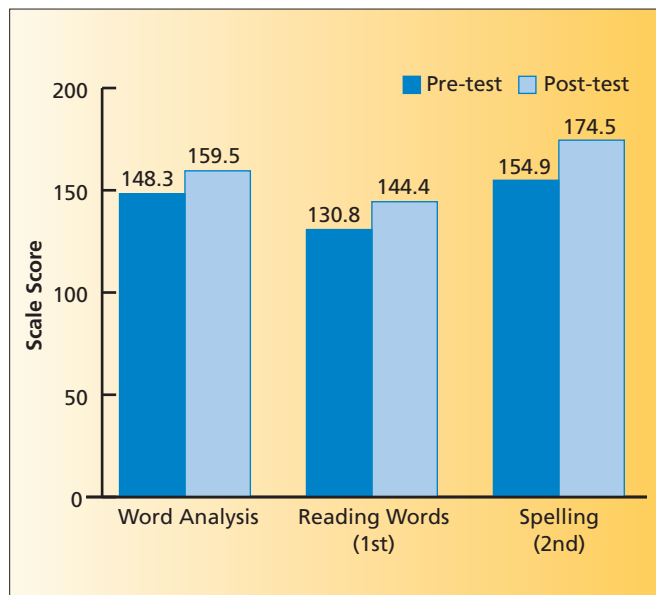
The final sample consisted of 682 students in six geographically dispersed schools. Teachers were randomly assigned to treatment ( $n=18$ ) and control conditions ( $n=17$ ).

Major findings, organized by the key evaluation questions, include:

1. Do phonics, reading words, and spelling skills improve over the course of participating in the **Saxon Phonics and Spelling** program? Does this vary across different types of students and levels of implementation?

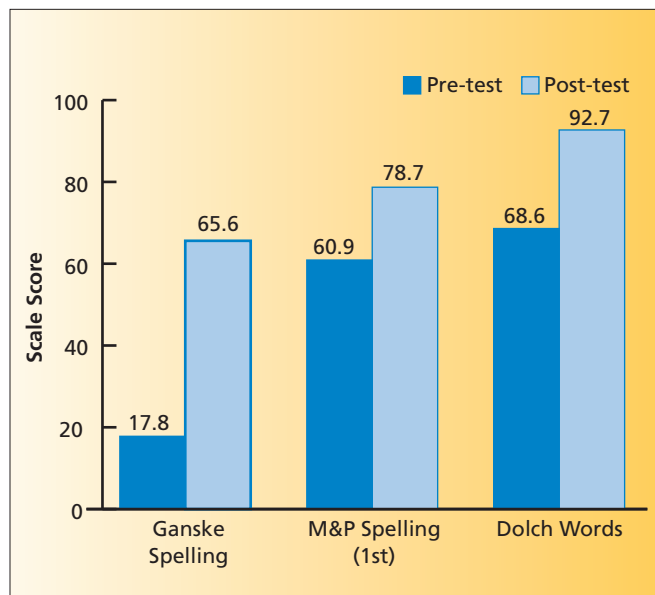
Students using the **Saxon Phonics and Spelling** program significantly improved over the course of the school year in the areas of spelling, phonics, and reading words, including high frequency and sight words. Gains were also observed on developmental spelling stages. In particular, among 1st grade students who took the Morris & Perney Spelling test, results showed that students moved to higher spelling stages from pre- to post-testing.

**Saxon Phonics and Spelling Students' ITBS Performance at Pre- and Post-testing**



There was significant growth on all ITBS subtests.

**Saxon Phonics and Spelling Students' Performance on Dolch Word List, Ganske Spelling, and Morris & Perney (M&P) Spelling at Pre- and Post-testing**



**Saxon Phonics and Spelling** students showed significant growth on the developmental spelling assessments as well as high frequency word reading via the Dolch test.



## Executive Summary

Furthermore, the **Saxon Phonics and Spelling** program worked just as well with females and males, students who spoke a language other than English at home and those that did not, and special education and non-special education students. Among the remaining subgroups, differences in improvement between students were observed. Generally, whites, 2nd graders, students not receiving free and reduced lunch, and lower-performing students showed greater gains than minorities, 1st graders, students receiving free/reduced lunch, and higher-performing students, respectively. Nevertheless, among all subgroups, students using the **Saxon Phonics and Spelling** program showed significant gains in reading, phonics, and spelling.

Since there was some variation observed in overall implementation of the **Saxon Phonics and Spelling** program among treatment teachers, analyses were performed to examine if this affected student performance. Results showed that there was no significant relationship between overall **Saxon Phonics and Spelling** implementation levels and improved performance on the outcome measures. That is, students whose teachers used the **Saxon Phonics and Spelling** program improved on these measures, regardless of their level of overall implementation.

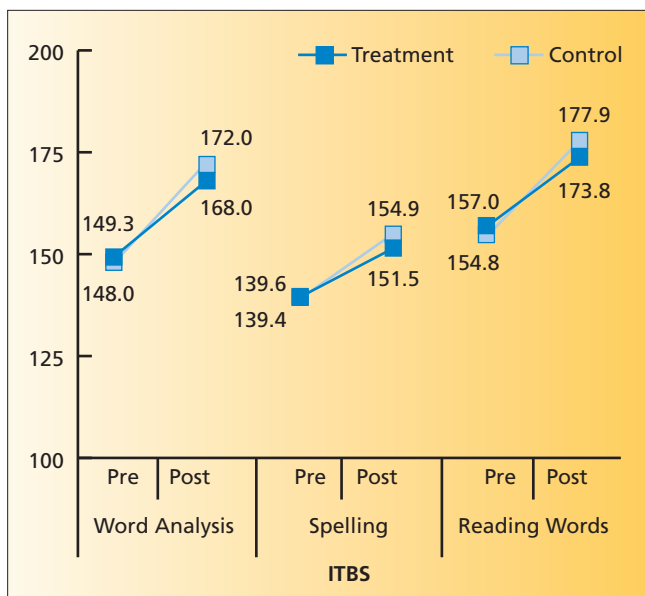
However, preliminary analyses of individual components of the **Saxon Phonics and Spelling** showed that there was a relationship between teacher's use of various **Saxon Phonics and Spelling** program components (e.g., use of worksheets and fluency readers) and gains in student phonics, reading, and spelling performance. Furthermore, the percent of lessons completed in the **Saxon Phonics and Spelling** program was a strong predictor of student gains in performance—the more lessons completed, the greater the improvement.

**“Students using the *Saxon Phonics and Spelling* program showed significant gains in reading, phonics, and spelling.”**

## 2. How does phonics, reading words, and spelling performance differ between students who use **Saxon Phonics and Spelling** as compared to students who do not use this program? Do effects on student achievement differ across types of students or settings?

There were notable differences in treatment and control students' performance. Students using the **Saxon Phonics and Spelling** program showed more improvement than control students on the ITBS Word Analysis (which measures phonics and phonemic awareness skills), Spelling, and Reading Words tests. Most of the effect sizes, which provide an indication of the importance of results, would be considered educationally significant by the research literature.

Pre and Post Performance on ITBS Subtests by Group



Results showed that students who used **Saxon Phonics and Spelling** demonstrated greater growth in phonics, spelling, and reading words as compared to students that did not use the program.

## Executive Summary

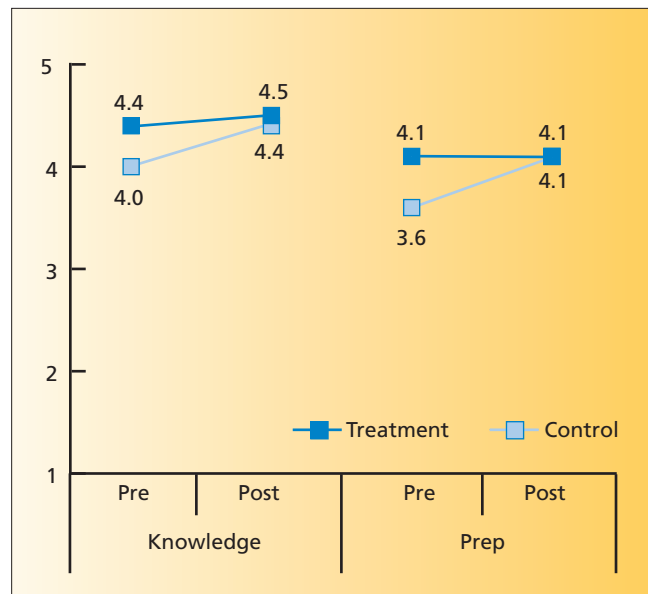
In addition to treatment students outperforming control students on these measures, exploratory subgroup analyses showed a number of significant differences between treatment and control students who were females, whites, African Americans, 2nd graders, receiving free/reduced lunch, attending various schools, and lower-performing. In particular, students in these subgroups that used **Saxon Phonics and Spelling** showed greater growth in performance from pre- to post-testing as compared to students that did not use this supplemental program.

### 3. Does participation in **Saxon Phonics and Spelling** result in other positive student outcomes (e.g., positive attitudes towards reading and so forth)?

While the main focus of the **Saxon Phonics and Spelling** program is to improve upon important reading and spelling skills, other measures were included to explore if **Saxon Phonics and Spelling** was associated with positive impacts on student attitudes towards reading, phonics, and so forth. Results showed that, in general, treatment and control students had similar positive attitudes in regards to phonics, spelling, writing, motivation to do well in school, and perceived reading ability. However, control students had significantly more positive attitudes towards reading as compared to treatment students during the spring.

In terms of the program's effects on teachers, results showed notable increases in treatment teachers' levels of preparation and knowledge to teach the five elements of reading, spelling and writing, and their engagement in effective literacy practices from fall to spring. In addition, the fall control teachers indicated having more knowledge, preparation, and engagement in effective literacy practices. While treatment teachers caught up to control teachers in the areas of preparation and engagement in best practices by spring. Thus, there is evidence that suggests that the **Saxon Phonics and Spelling** program has a positive impact on teacher's level of preparation to teach phonics and spelling, and this in turn can lead to improvement in their pedagogical practices.

Teacher Knowledge and Preparation to Teach Elements of Reading, Spelling, and Writing by Group

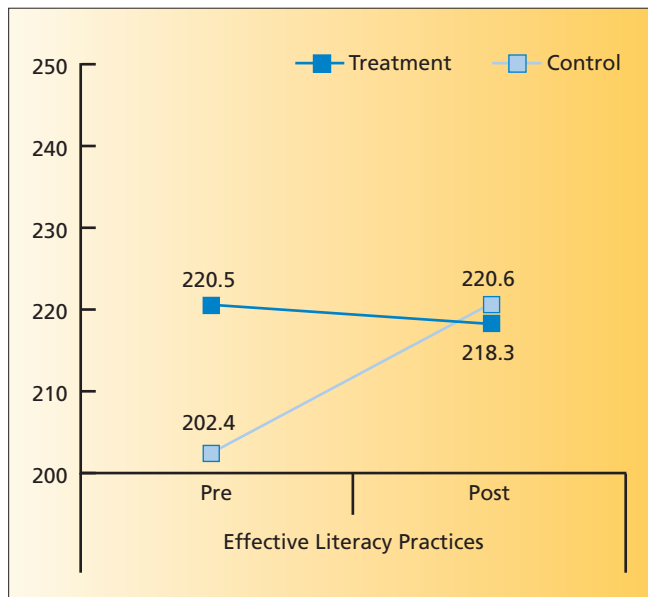


Treatment teachers showed significantly greater improvement in their level of preparation to teach the five elements of reading, spelling, and writing as compared to control teachers. While control teachers indicated greater preparation in the fall, treatment teachers “caught up” in terms of their preparation in the spring.

**“The *Saxon Phonics and Spelling* program has a positive impact on teachers’ level of preparation to teach phonics and spelling.”**

## Executive Summary

Teacher Engagement in Effective Literacy Practices by Group



Treatment teachers showed significantly greater improvement in their engagement in effective literacy practices as compared to control teachers. While control teachers indicated greater engagement in the fall, treatment teachers “caught up” by the spring.

When asked what they felt were the greatest strengths of the **Saxon Phonics and Spelling** program, teachers’ most often cited the Wall Cards, Review Decks, and daily worksheets. Teachers also noted the sight word practice, the explicit phonics instruction, and the incremental approach to teaching phonics rules (i.e., building on student’s knowledge throughout the school year) as being very beneficial to student performance.

In summary, this RCT with its use of quantitative and qualitative methods enabled PRES Associates to determine that the **Saxon Phonics and Spelling** program did produce more positive outcomes relative to classrooms that did not use this program and was associated with improved performance of students. Students who used this program outperformed students that did not in the areas of spelling, phonics, and reading words. Given the limited amount of time that this supplemental program requires (4–5 hours/week) and other factors that may have diminished differences observed, these positive effects are even more noteworthy. Moreover, results suggest that this program can help improve upon teacher’s preparation and engagement in effective literacy practices. Still, further research is needed to build upon the findings from this study.

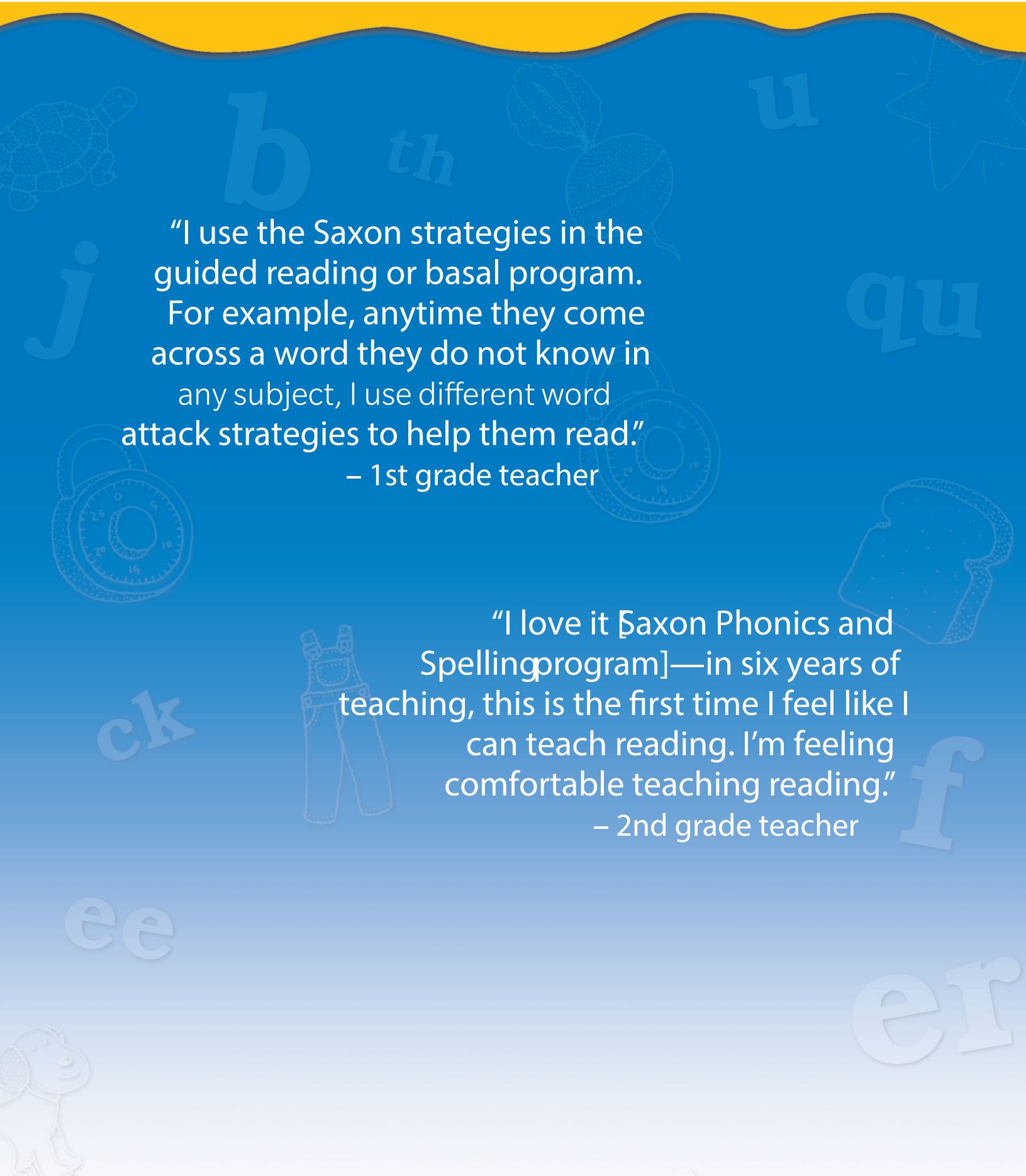
#### 4. What did users of the **Saxon Phonics and Spelling** program think?

The **Saxon Phonics and Spelling** program was also highly regarded by the vast majority of teachers.

A full 94% of treatment teachers surveyed agreed that that the program contributed to improved reading ability and helped their students obtain greater phonics and spelling skills. A majority of teachers reported that the program provided them with the instructional background necessary to teach phonics and overall met their needs for both spelling and phonics instruction. In general, they also reported that the program was helpful in monitoring student progress. Generally, treatment students also liked the program. More than 70% indicated that they enjoyed the board work, and that the Wall Cards and letter/sound cards were helpful to them in learning and remembering phonics rules. The decodable readers was the lowest rated item among students.

“Students who used this program outperformed students who did not in the areas of spelling, phonics, and reading words.”





"I use the Saxon strategies in the guided reading or basal program. For example, anytime they come across a word they do not know in any subject, I use different word attack strategies to help them read."

– 1st grade teacher

"I love it [Saxon Phonics and Spelling program]—in six years of teaching, this is the first time I feel like I can teach reading. I'm feeling comfortable teaching reading."

– 2nd grade teacher



Houghton  
Mifflin  
Harcourt