

Independent Study: Superkids Students Dramatically Outperform Control Group

Rowland Reading Foundation commissioned the Center for Research on Educational Policy (CREP) to conduct an independent evaluation of the kindergarten level of the Superkids reading program during the 2005-06 school year. The sample consisted of 152 children in eight kindergarten classrooms in which Superkids was the core reading program and, as the control group, 120 students in seven kindergarten classrooms using other reading programs. CREP, located at the University of Memphis, is an independent research organization that conducts program evaluations and other research to inform educational practitioners and policy makers.

At the end of the school year, the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test was administered to assess the reading achievement of the two groups. The results were “extremely positive favoring the Superkids students,” according to CREP. The median percentile rank for the Superkids students was 90, while the median percentile rank of the comparison group was 68.¹

Sample Characteristics

Ethnicity

Superkids: 57% white, 43% minority
Control: 57% white, 43% minority

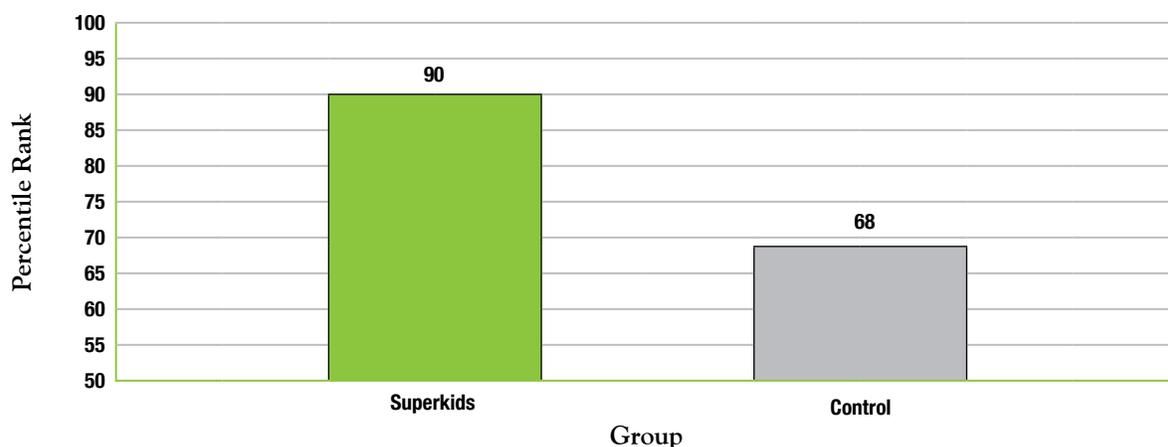
Free or Reduced Lunch

Superkids: 20%
Control: 28%

English Language Learners

Superkids: 15%
Control: 12%

Figure 1: Median percentile rank of Superkids and control groups



¹ This means that the median score for the Superkids students was higher than the score achieved by 90% of the students in the test's national norming sample. The control students scored better than 68% of the national norming sample.

Furthermore, the Superkids students outperformed control-group students on the four subtests of the Gates-MacGinitie, suggesting that Superkids students gained more proficiency than the control students on several important reading subskills.²

CREP wrote:

“When the ... Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test (GMRT) Beginning Reading Assessments were employed, dramatic differences in achievement were detected. Superkids students significantly outperformed their control student counterparts. Based on GMRT results, Superkids students demonstrated more advanced reading skills.”

CREP attributed the success of the Superkids students in part to how motivating the program is:

“The distinct and engaging characters are motivating for both teachers and students to an extent not found in most other reading programs.”

CREP concluded:

“The Superkids program fits well with federal and district mandates concerning early literacy instruction and provides necessary instructional components that comply with scientifically based reading research. Student achievement ... suggests Superkids instruction is having a positive impact on student reading ability.”

Comparisons to National Norms

The test results were also analyzed to see how the Superkids and control groups differed in their distribution of students across national quartiles and deciles of the Gates-MacGinitie test. As Figure 2 shows, far more Superkids students scored in the highest percentiles of the test than control students: 63% of the Superkids students scored above the 80th percentile compared to 37% of the control students.

² Effect sizes ranged from +.27 to +.37.

Figure 2: Percent of students scoring in each national decile of the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test

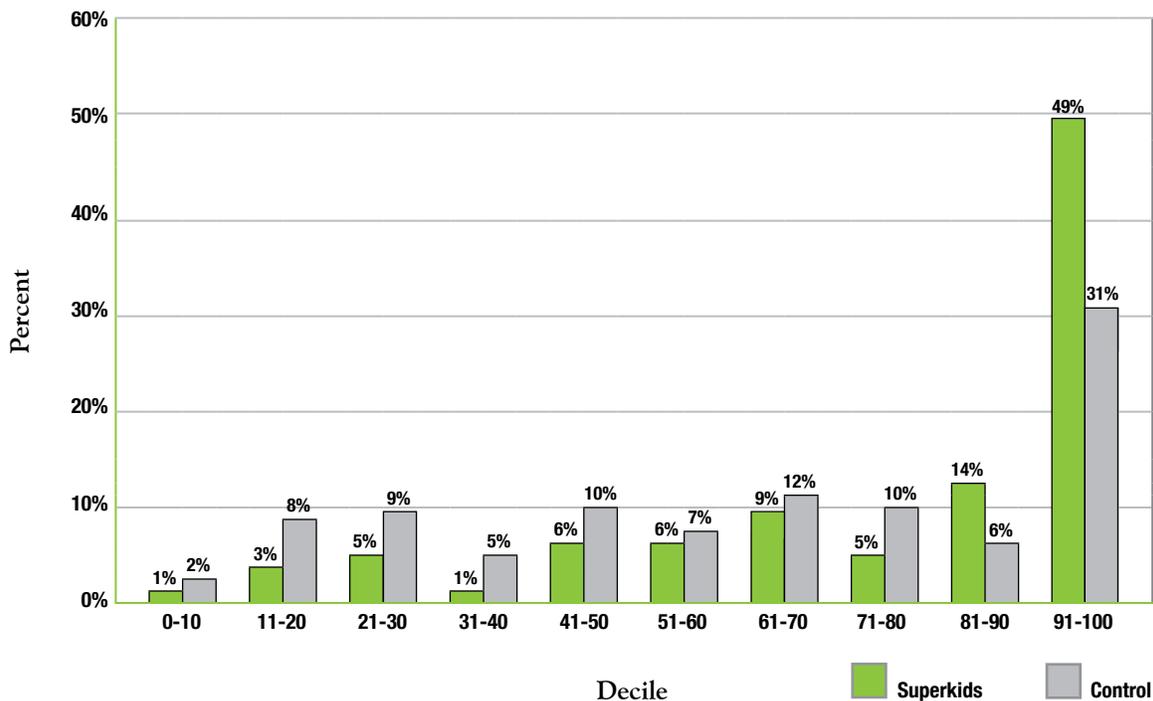
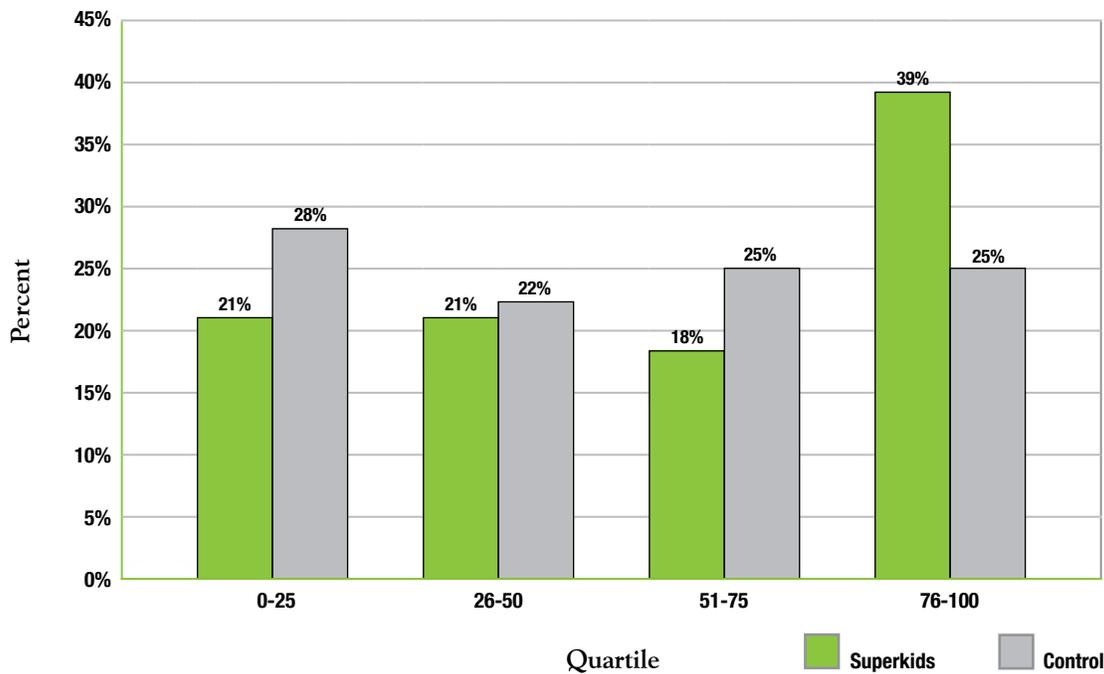


Figure 3: Percent of free- or reduced-lunch students scoring in each national quartile of the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test



At the other end of the decile distribution from the strong performers are the students who are struggling to learn to read. While only 16% of Superkids students scored below the 50th percentile (which can be considered roughly the average for the test), 34% of control students did. In other words, 1 of every 3 control students scored below average while only 1 of every 6 Superkids students did. It is important to note that the Superkids and control students started the year at about the same ability (see below). Clearly, the Superkids program helped more struggling children improve their reading skills than the programs used in control classrooms.

CREP also analyzed results for students receiving free or reduced lunch. Once again, students in Superkids classrooms outperformed those in the control classrooms: 39% of the Superkids children performed in the highest quartile, while only 25% of the control children did (see Figure 3).

Methodology

Students in the CREP study were kindergartners in three public schools, two in Houston and a third in Elkhart, Texas. In Houston, all kindergarten classrooms in one school used Superkids as their core

reading curriculum, while all students in the other school used guided reading supplemented by Open Court and leveled readers. The students in the two Houston schools were demographically similar and the teachers had comparable levels of teaching experience. In the Elkhart school, two classrooms used Superkids as their core reading curriculum and two other classrooms used Harcourt-Brace. The students and teachers in Elkhart were also well-matched in terms of demographic characteristics and levels of experience, respectively.

In all three schools, the Superkids and control classrooms were assessed at the beginning of the year with the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test and found to have similar oral vocabularies. On average, the Superkids and control groups scored at or below the 50th percentile on this test, meaning that neither group of students was particularly advanced at the start of their kindergarten year.

At the end of the school year, the Gates-McGinitie Reading Test (GMRT) was used to measure reading achievement. The GMRT is a valid, reliable, nationally normed, and scientifically based reading test. It is group administered, and students use

pencils to mark responses in a booklet. In this study, the Beginning Reading level of the test was administered. This level is normally given at the end of the kindergarten year or beginning of the first-grade year. The first three subtests – Initial Consonants and Consonant Clusters, Final Consonants and Consonant Clusters, and Vowels – evaluate students’ abilities to decode combinations of consonants and vowels that make up real English words. The last subtest, Basic Story Words, evaluates students’ ability to identify sight words. Answer choices for the Beginning Reading level consist of both pictures and words.

Summary of Qualitative Results

In addition to administering early literacy assessments, CREP also asked each Superkids and control-group teacher to complete a questionnaire about environmental factors that can impact learning, such as administrative support, amount of professional development, and collegiality among teachers. CREP also conducted observations and interviews of Superkids classrooms to gather information on the learning environment in the classrooms and to see how faithfully the teachers were using the program.

Questionnaire responses from both Superkids and control teachers were very positive. There was strong agreement among teachers regarding aspects of school

climate, professional development opportunities, leadership, and student achievement. The questionnaires confirmed that the Superkids and control classrooms were well-matched on environmental factors that can impact learning.

The observations and interviews confirmed that the Superkids teachers were pleased with the program, enjoyed using program components, and believed it was having a positive impact on students’ desire and ability to read. Both students and teachers were clearly engaged with the Superkids characters and this led to increased enthusiasm. CREP recorded the following comments from Superkids teachers:

“It works!”

“Fourth and fifth grade [students in our school] still talk about the Superkids. [Their younger] siblings come to kindergarten already knowing who the characters are. Parents really like the program.”

“I LOVE the Superkids. It has improved me as a teacher and improved my students’ academic abilities 100%. It is a very creative, thorough program. Top of the line!”

“I love the Superkids! It is fun to teach and I get excited watching my students [get] excited about learning.”



ROWLAND READING FOUNDATION

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