

Minnesota STAR Stories of Success

June 2018

These inspiring stories of success were collected from Minnesota ABE program managers and teachers who completed Student Achievement in Reading (STAR) trainings between 2009 and 2018 (across a decade!). They report positive changes in ABE programming, teacher knowledge and confidence, student performance or interest in reading, and new for this year: volunteer engagement.

Note: Some of the contributors' original wording was reduced or revised for clarity or consistency.

Program or Class Successes

- After one year of STAR and other program changes, we are *at or above* state goals for level changes in *every* category – including Low and High Intermediate Basic Education.
- Students are completing ELL classes and moving into ABE classes in greater numbers.
- Our STAR sessions are *always* full and there is *always* a waiting list for the next session.
- As students read more, they come to class more. As they come to class more, their skills improve and they read more outside of class. As their skills improve, their commitment and maturity levels increase. And magically, their TABE Reading scores go up!
- We will restructure our entire program next fall to offer reading, writing, and language groups under managed enrollment.
- Our program has successfully implemented several managed enrollment classes in addition to STAR.
- We have successfully implemented managed enrollment classes – my first time in 15 years of ABE teaching!
- Involvement in STAR has caused our program to look more strategically at managed enrollment and effective reading instruction for Intermediate level students.
- We fully implemented STAR classes for TABE Reading levels 4.0-8.9!
- On a weekly basis, I receive 3-5 requests from offenders who want to be STAR students. They have heard about the reading instruction and want the same opportunities.
- We now have afternoon and evening STAR classes at our site. Both classes have a committed teacher and core group of students working together to improve reading skills.
- STAR has given my class a much more predictable structure.
- Students truly appreciate diagnostic reading assessment. They want to know their weaknesses because they want to improve.
- Our students have been very enthusiastic about the STAR class; attendance is good and there are always people waiting to get in. In planning for next year, we decided to add a second STAR

class focusing on pre-GED students. Our administration is supportive, a co-worker will do STAR training next year. In one year, STAR has become an integral part of our program.

- In the middle of the school year, we had to make staffing changes. Our STAR class became available to a new group of students who normally couldn't attend. After one week of STAR, the class quadrupled in size. Students were talking with each other during breaks, after school, and even outside of school about how relevant the lessons and activities were. Soon students were saying this is their favorite class and there was no way they could miss it. Students changed their schedule just to attend.
- I have been involved with other initiatives during my time in education, but no other program has provided as much information, research-based and practical, as STAR. We are thrilled with the opportunity to fully implement STAR next year.
- We have found a renewed commitment from students to be at our twice-a-week STAR class. They especially enjoy working with vocabulary, alphabetics, and pronunciation.
- My STAR instructors are so excited about the process, instruction, and successes they already see during their training year.
- Being involved in a yearlong PD initiative like STAR has helped me as an administrator understand more about what effective PD looks like, and more effectively advocate for it in budget considerations.
- Our ABE program had a year of upheaval; many changes in leadership and staff at several sites. As a result, mentoring and sharing just did not happen. STAR trainings gave me a framework to build on for next year. As we learned each new technique, I would experiment to see how it played out with my class. I have a long summer of planning, but I feel equipped now to do so.
- A new teacher without any prior ABE classroom experience developed a foundation for reading instruction. This new knowledge will help her move forward.

Teacher or Administrator Successes

- A student asked me to work with her individually in reading. This feels like a success to me because she was comfortable asking for help and confident that I am a good teacher.
- I did not have any formal reading instruction training. Now I have more guidance and confidence to deliver quality reading instruction.
- After I introduced the vocabulary words, one of my students said to me: "You explain everything we do." I took that as affirmation of my explicit instruction.
- I have created a positive learning atmosphere where students are engaged in learning. My students appreciate the comfort of our reading routine and adult-based topics – even though I push them into reading aloud and sharing experiences with words.

- Conducting the STAR assessments has re-energized my volunteers.
- Many students tell me how much [meaningful phrasing] improves their understanding.
- We thoroughly enjoy listening to students read with more voice inflection.
- I now feel confident in introducing and reviewing academic vocabulary in a meaningful way that will benefit my students.
- I overheard a student tell another: “You need to get into this class. The words we learn are the words I hear on the news.”
- Students are very excited and enthusiastic about daily vocabulary lessons. They come back from break more quickly and contribute more openly.
- I enjoy my students telling me where and when they have heard our vocabulary words outside of STAR class.
- I send my STAR students to their next class using a different vocabulary word each day. They won’t leave until I do this!
- My students love doing vocabulary at the start of class. If I have announcements, I have to say “we will do vocabulary shortly, but first...”
- After learning about new methods and materials for teaching vocabulary, I feel 100% more confident in my ability to teach vocabulary effectively. I’ve observed students using the words in both writing and conversations.
- STAR has given me the tools to change my way of teaching - for the better. I can accurately assess student needs and address them with explicit instruction. My students express they enjoy and are benefiting greatly from the new method I’m using. My volunteer is also very impressed with the methods. Students want to buy the materials.
- Although I considered myself to be a good teacher, I realized there were missing pieces to my approach. STAR gave me the explicit instruction structure I needed all along. Because of the “I, We, You” approach, my learners are less confused, more confident, and willing to take risks.
- I feel confident my reading instruction is more effective than it’s ever been. I see students’ enthusiasm for what we’re doing, higher test scores in reading, and more passing scores for the GED reading test!
- STAR gave me the tools I need to raise student motivation. Motivation = more engaged learning.
- While giving a student the fluency test, he declared, “This is what I need, this I need, I need this.” Identifying student weakness helps me get some students unstuck and take off.
- I feel more confident in my skills as a reading teacher because of STAR practices. I really see purpose and focus in what I’m teaching and how I’m teaching. It’s exciting and satisfying to know I am helping each student to improve.

- As a new ABE teacher, STAR has provided me with a concrete way to teach the components of reading to my students. This is something I never received in my ABE licensure classes and always felt was a missing part of my teaching knowledge.
- STAR has improved my overall skills as an ESL teacher. I am particularly more proficient in vocabulary instruction. I use explicit instruction, teach Tier 2 words, and embed vocabulary in questions.
- Before STAR, I taught vocabulary in a very random manner. The explicit method and materials recommend by STAR have provided a framework for me and my students!
- As a new administrator, I am now able to facilitate assessment and support my STAR instructor. [STAR] has been the most comprehensive training yet in my 17 years with ABE.
- I am more aware of explanation, modeling, and guided practice and seek to implement them in all my teaching.
- I have adapted my teaching, planning, and work with volunteers based on diagnostic reading assessment [results].
- My STAR structure and routine encouraged students to ask for what they needed when they were unable to attend class.
- After practicing reading fluency all year, it was very rewarding to have students read with confidence in front of the class.
- Because of my STAR routine, students anticipated instruction and took ownership of learning strategies. This allowed volunteers to step in each week.
- STAR gave me confidence as a teacher. I feel like I have a structure to my classroom that wasn't present before. I now can group students for fluency with confidence and see progress in their abilities.
- Fluency book clubs created strong motivation in students to attend and participate in the STAR classroom.
- I totally redid the way I teach vocabulary. My students love the new direction and are excited and eager to learn and use new words. I feel both relief and confidence that I can offer meaningful vocabulary instruction.
- Diagnostic reading assessment was making me incredibly anxious. However, my students and I became comfortable and the process now goes well (thanks to support from a colleague).

Student Successes

- A fall session STAR student has enrolled in a spring medical terminology class.
- An older student told me how excited he was about STAR class. We were reading a book he really liked and he's never read a book in his life.
- An offender student told me he enjoys reading for the first time in his life.
- A student came to STAR class with a very negative attitude and lots of test anxiety. He began to feel more at ease and worked hard. He was finally able to finish a TABE Reading test, improved his score from GLE 0.4 to 8.0, and moved into an adult diploma program.
- A reluctant and discouraged reader attended a five-day a week STAR class for six weeks. He improved his TABE Reading from 5.2 to 8.4 GLE.
- We have many students on their 3rd to 4th attempt at returning to school, staying [in classes], and progressing in reading skills -- rather than stopping or dropping out.
- A homeless student with poor reading and math scores will take her first GED practice test next week (and now lives in an apartment).
- My ELLs are now testing with TABE Reading. Four have progressed to Form D; this is the first time Form D has been used for this class.
- Alphabetics has made a huge impact on my ESL students. It simplifies English for them and improves their spelling, pronunciation, and reading. Cooperative group reading for fluency has built tightness among my students.
- An Ethiopian student has blossomed during alphabetics instruction and told me it's all together for her – AND – her TABE Reading score has increased!
- Students are hearing short vowel sounds – before they were not.
- At first, students were reluctant and hesitant to read aloud during fluency instruction. Now they want to read aloud each day. They also want to take their books home to catch up or read ahead.
- Many of my offender students were reluctant to read aloud. Now they want to keep reading aloud rather than pass to someone else.
- A student read in a monotone voice and spoke in a run-on way. After fluency instruction, she now chunks words, uses intonation, and has improved her rate.
- During collaborative oral reading, a student tended to rush or read hesitantly. Now he enjoys reading with the group and his fluency has improved greatly.
- My students really enjoy literature excerpts from the *Reading Fluency* series. All areas of fluency (rate, accuracy, and prosody) have improved.
- A student told me she is much more comfortable reading aloud to her son.
- Students are reading more independently for information and pleasure.

- My students pay more attention to commas, periods, and question marks while reading aloud.
- All of my students have been impacted by a stroke. They are slowly re-learning reading skills that they have lost or have difficulty recalling.
- Before our fluency reading time, I remind students that they are working towards improving their accuracy, rate, and prosody. My students understand that reading should sound natural and exciting. Seeing and hearing my students working so hard makes me so happy and proud!
- I've fully implemented vocabulary instruction and the results have been tremendous. Students whose TABE scores had stagnated for months suddenly jumped by several grade levels. During other activities, students stop me and identify a word we've studied. They regularly say the words are "following" them - at work, their children's school conferences, TV, etc. It's rewarding and empowering to finally have the tools that bring my students into the academic world that awaits them.
- An ESL student had been stuck at the same TABE level for over a year. After attending two months of STAR reading, she finally made a level change that qualified her to attend the college prep class she wanted.
- An older student came into STAR class feeling dumb and incapable of reading. Not only is he reading and comprehending at a higher level, but is reading his third book. (He had never read anything except parts of magazines.) Now he's studying for his GED and he's excited about learning new things. His confidence level has skyrocketed!
- I have a student who entered at Low Intermediate ABE. He struggled with some of the STAR large group activities, but is very motivated. On a weekly basis, I could see his improvement and in one month, he progressed to Low Adult Secondary! He is now getting ready to take his first GED test.
- One of my STAR students has been working for 5 years as a CNA. Although loved and accommodated at her job, she could not advance due to her lack of reading [skills]. In just three months, she has jumped so significantly and more confident she will get a better-paying job.
- A "stuck" STAR student – at the same NRS level for two years – made a level change during 3rd quarter!
- In my vocabulary group where I use *Words to Learn By-Building*, I see and hear progress chapter by chapter. I am pleased to observe them using multisyllabic, Tier 2 words.
- A student, who is studying for her GED, so enjoys working with the components of STAR. She feels more comfortable reading and her daughter has commented [on her improvements]. She wants to be a role model for her.
- My students have been very enthusiastic about learning vocabulary with *Words to Learn By*. At the end of each lesson, they are able to use the words [to write] paragraphs, which I post on our blog for commenting.

- My students have gone from being resistant to identifying syllable types [and feeling] comfortable with the process.
- My students really like *Megawords*. As we go through the lessons, they get more confident about decoding words. It's great to see them discover skills they can use to help themselves.
- Students tell me they appreciate syllabication; they find it valuable.
- I used echo reading with an ESL student who has a diploma but low reading skills. She loved it and was confident enough to take the passage home and read it to her family.
- STAR students with good attendance are making level gains based on TABE Reading.
- A STAR student was showing progress on CASAS Listening but not CASAS Reading. Her recent post-test score moved her into Level 6 of our program and this made her very happy.
- Almost all students progressed past needing alphabets. One is now able to read street signs in the community and several progressed 2-3 levels on TABE Reading.

Volunteer Successes

- A faithful volunteer began a STAR phonics group. New students readily join after diagnostic reading assessment is completed. Before STAR, phonics was a need we missed.
- A volunteer really engaged with our STAR program. He worked very diligently and thoughtfully with our highest fluency group. Several of his students made huge leaps in their reading skills. Two of them were able to take my ServSafe Food Manager class.