



## California Learning Center: Innovative Strategies for Reading Intervention



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*Mark Walker, Director of Curriculum,  
Salida Union School District, California*

### Improving state-wide performance

In 1999, the state of California introduced the Public School Accountability Act: an initiative designed to help schools measure and improve the academic achievement of all students. To help track each school’s performance, the state also created the Academic Performance Index (API), and set a minimum state-wide performance target of 800 API points out of a possible 1000.

In the fall of 2003, California’s Salida Union School District met this challenge head on, by setting an ambitious goal that each school throughout the district would work towards meeting this target on the API index by the year 2006.

To realize this goal, district administrators decided to provide students with supplemental, after-school learning opportunities that would help them dramatically improve their performance on API assessment testing—and give them the foundation literacy skills they need to achieve lasting academic success.

### Focus on:

Academy of READING®

### Fast Facts:

Location:

- Salida, CA

District:

- Salida Union School District

Grades:

- K-8

Student Population:

- 3,473

Student Demographics:

- White: 44%
- Hispanic: 41%
- Black: 6%
- Other: 9%

Free and Reduced Lunch:

- 41%



A helping hand for literacy



The Salida Union School District raised its API level by a full 10 points, with 3 out of 5 schools more than doubling their API growth targets.

“We performed two studies to determine the results of the program. In the first, we used the Cloze test to determine gains in students’ reading skills. After just 20 to 25 hours of time on task with the Academy of READING, our students gained an average of 2 to 2.5 grade levels in their foundation reading skills.”

“In the second study, we did a comparison of results on the California English Language Development Test (CELDT) between those students who had participated in the program, and those who did not. We found that 42% of the students who attended Los Arcos showed significant growth in their language skills, compared to only 24% of students who did not.”

### “A perfect fit”

As a result of its strong commitment to improving performance, the Salida Union School District was also able to raise its API levels by a full 10 points, with 3 out of 5 schools more than doubling their API growth targets.

The Academy of READING was a key part of this overall improvement strategy, as well as an important complement to the district's other initiatives. “AutoSkill is a perfect fit for our program because it helps us to maximize our time on task, while helping students to learn their foundation reading skills,” Mr. Walker says. “When students first come into the program, the Academy of READING assesses them to quickly identify their individual placement level, and provide them with the appropriate training required to improve their reading ability.”

Because the Academy of READING is set at each students' individual instructional level, as they progress through the exercises, they become more and more motivated by their own achievements. The

result is higher incentive to work on the software, and even greater long-term results.

### Creative funding – beyond Title I

When it came to funding the program, administrators had to be equally creative to ensure that the program would be open to all struggling students, regardless of their circumstance. By bringing together several federal and state funding sources—including Even Start, Community Based English Tutoring, Title III, the English Language Acquisition Program (ELAP), Community Development Block Grant and Title I— they were able to offer students and their families scholarships to attend the Center without the need to charge an additional fee. “With a program like this, it's absolutely crucial to be creative with our funding strategies,” says Rebecca Cantrell, lead teacher with the Learning Center. “This program literally sells itself!”

“The rate of participation in the after-school program was 95%, which is even more spectacular when you consider that the program runs for a solid one and a half hours after a full school day.” After working on the Academy of READING, our students are more confident, their self-esteem has gone way up, and their reading skills have increased enormously. Students who were falling through the cracks are now reading at or above grade level.”

### Maximizing benefits to the community

Another key component of the Los Arcos approach is its commitment to extending skill-building opportunities into the community at large.

Supported by Even Start, Los Arcos was able to open its program to adult English learners who have children in Salida Union schools. This enabled the

The Academy of READING literacy intervention solution is tailored to students' needs, offers high time on task, and provides feedback that is both timely and appropriate.

### **Achieving the highest gains and greatest impact**

First, the district identified two groups of students who would be most likely to achieve the highest gains, and have the greatest impact on API scores: economically disadvantaged students and English language learners.

Next, they required a program that would meet the needs of those students consistently and reliably, while still emphasizing quality regular education programs, and minimizing the impact on both administrators' and teachers' time, and the district's resources.

The answer was an innovative partnership between the district's Los Arcos Learning Center, and the award-winning Academy of READING literacy intervention software from AutoSkill International.

### **Meeting the needs of students and their families**

Operated by the Salida Union School District, the Los Arcos Learning Center is a community-based education center that offers students between the ages of 5-13 the opportunity to develop their English and reading skills after school.

According to Mark Walker, Director of Curriculum for the Salida Union District, Los Arcos was initially designed by asking, "What would students and parents expect if they were paying for this service? The answer to this question was: a program tailored to the needs of both students and their families, which offered extremely high time on task, and provided feedback that was both timely and appropriate. The Academy of READING met all of these expectations."

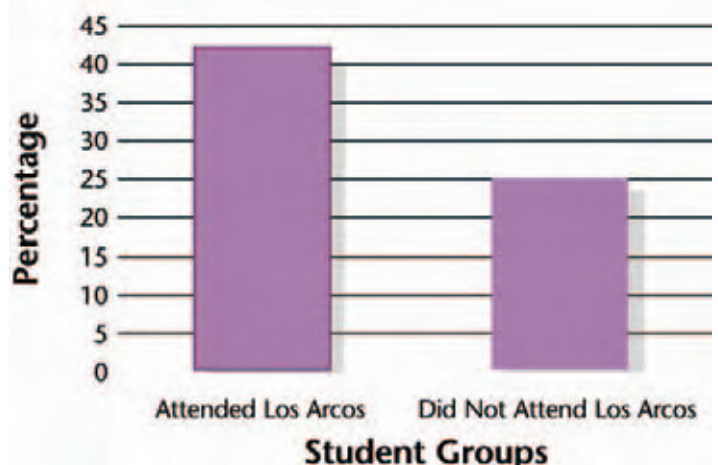
### **Helping struggling students realize fast, permanent gains**

Based on extensive research and customer feedback, the Academy of READING is a complete browser-based literacy intervention solution, designed to help struggling students realize fast, permanent gains in mastering their foundation reading skills.

Combining structured and sequential skill development, high time on task, individualized learning plans and constant motivation, the Academy of READING extends the effectiveness of a reading specialist to every student, allowing them to work independently on those areas where they need help the most.

### **Remarkable results in record time**

The Los Arcos after-school program runs for 12 weeks, and includes two 90-minute sessions five times a week. In these sessions, students spend half an hour training on the Academy of READING, half an hour using Leap Frog School House and another half an hour working with a credentialed teacher on language development skills. The results, as Mr. Walker explains, were "simply remarkable!"



district to help parents succeed with their own educational and employment goals while also supporting the learning habits of their children, thereby maximizing the overall benefits to the community.

"The idea is that, if you educate the entire family, then the children are going to be more successful in school," Mr. Walker notes. "The adults love it just as much as the students—you often can't even get them off the software when their time is up!"

"By educating parents and adults as well as students, the program has helped create a literature-rich environment at home, and improved the life of the community as a whole," Ms. Cantrell adds.

## **A scalable and cost-effective solution**

Based on their experience with the Academy of READING, the Salida Union School District is now in the process of rolling out both the Academy of READING and Academy of MATH literacy intervention software to all of their after-school programs. As Mr. Walker says: "Not only is the Academy of READING an exceptional package, it's also much more affordable than the other software packages we looked at. Its scalability lets you add as much to the program as you can afford." "To my mind, the Academy of READING is a perfect fit, and I wouldn't hesitate to recommend it to any other educator or administrator."

### About AutoSkill®

AutoSkill creates award-winning intervention solutions to help close the proficiency gap in K-12 schools. For over 15 years, its research-based programs have helped at-risk students to build fluency in the foundation skills of reading and math. The company's core products, Academy of READING and Academy of MATH, deliver rapid, permanent gains so students progress in their education and administrators meet AYP targets. For more information, go to [www.autoskill.com](http://www.autoskill.com).

**AutoSkill®**

**A helping hand for literacy ◀**

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