



Adding Explicit Structured Phonics: Evaluation of Reading Skill Development In 17 Schools



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BACKGROUND

Children require explicit instruction to gain strong reading skills (Honig et al., 2018), but many enter kindergarten without essential early literacy skills (Castiglioni-Spalten & Ehri, 2003). More states are mandating curricula be aligned with the science of reading to support literacy proficiency (Schwartz, 2023). Heggerty's Bridge to Reading is based on the science of reading and combines phonemic awareness and phonics instruction to help children learn to read (Ehri et al., 2001). The program's comprehensive Teacher's Editions and daily lessons equip teachers to deliver effective Tier 1 phonics instruction, enhancing teacher knowledge and student skills. It employs the gradual release of responsibility model (I Do, We Do, You Do) to foster student autonomy while providing differentiated instruction to meet diverse learner needs. The curriculum integrates meaningful decodable passages and offers assessments to measure student progress and inform instruction. The current study conducted by LXD Research is a quasi-experimental comparison of K-1 students using Heggerty's Bridge to Reading compared to comparison group students.

METHODS

Sample Description:

- 953 Kindergarteners*, 1004 First graders
- Public, rural school district in Georgia
- 3 Heggerty schools, 14 comparison schools
- Demographics:
 - 56% White | 38% Hispanic | 24% ELL | 8% SPED

Implementation Description:

Teachers used Bridge to Reading every day for their phonics skill instruction during the daily reading block.

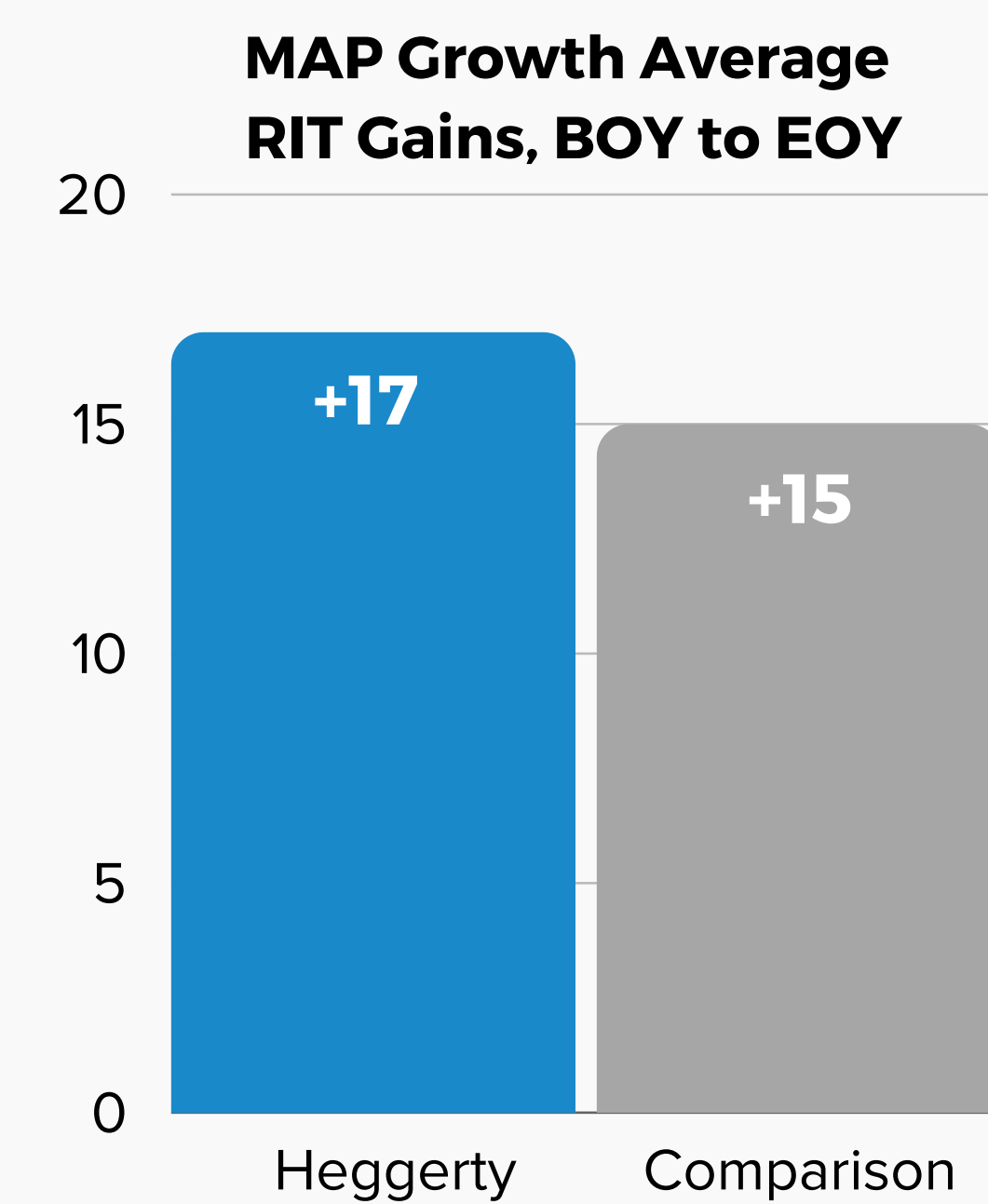
Study Design:

- Conditions:
 - Treatment: Heggerty Bridge to Reading
 - Comparison: Fountas & Pinnell Guided Reading and Word Study
- Students were matched at BOY on MAP Growth RIT scores using Matching Frontier
- Outcomes measured with MOY and EOY MAP Growth RIT scores

KEY FINDINGS

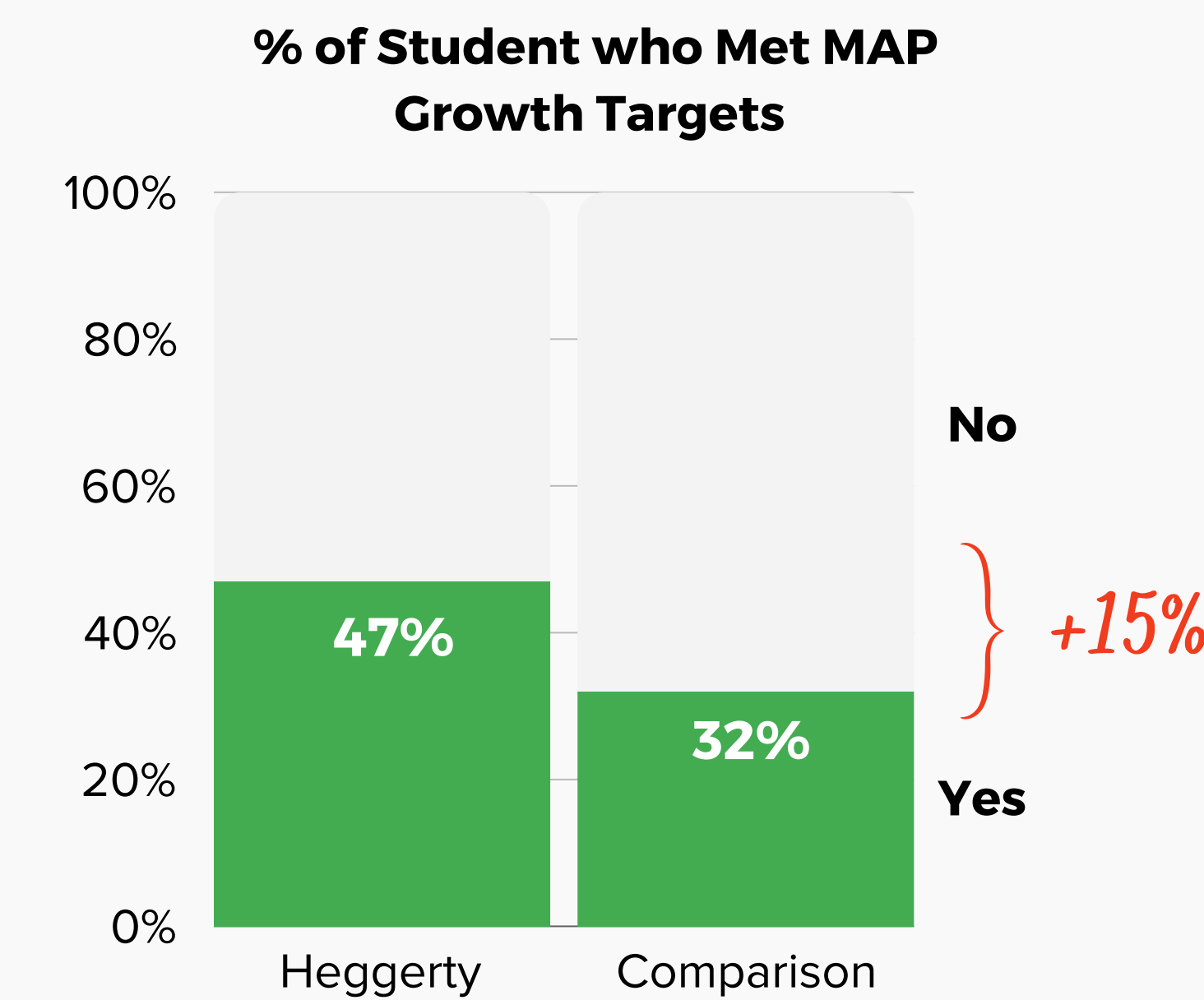
Bridge to Reading
1st Grade
classrooms
showed...

Higher BOY-EOY Gains



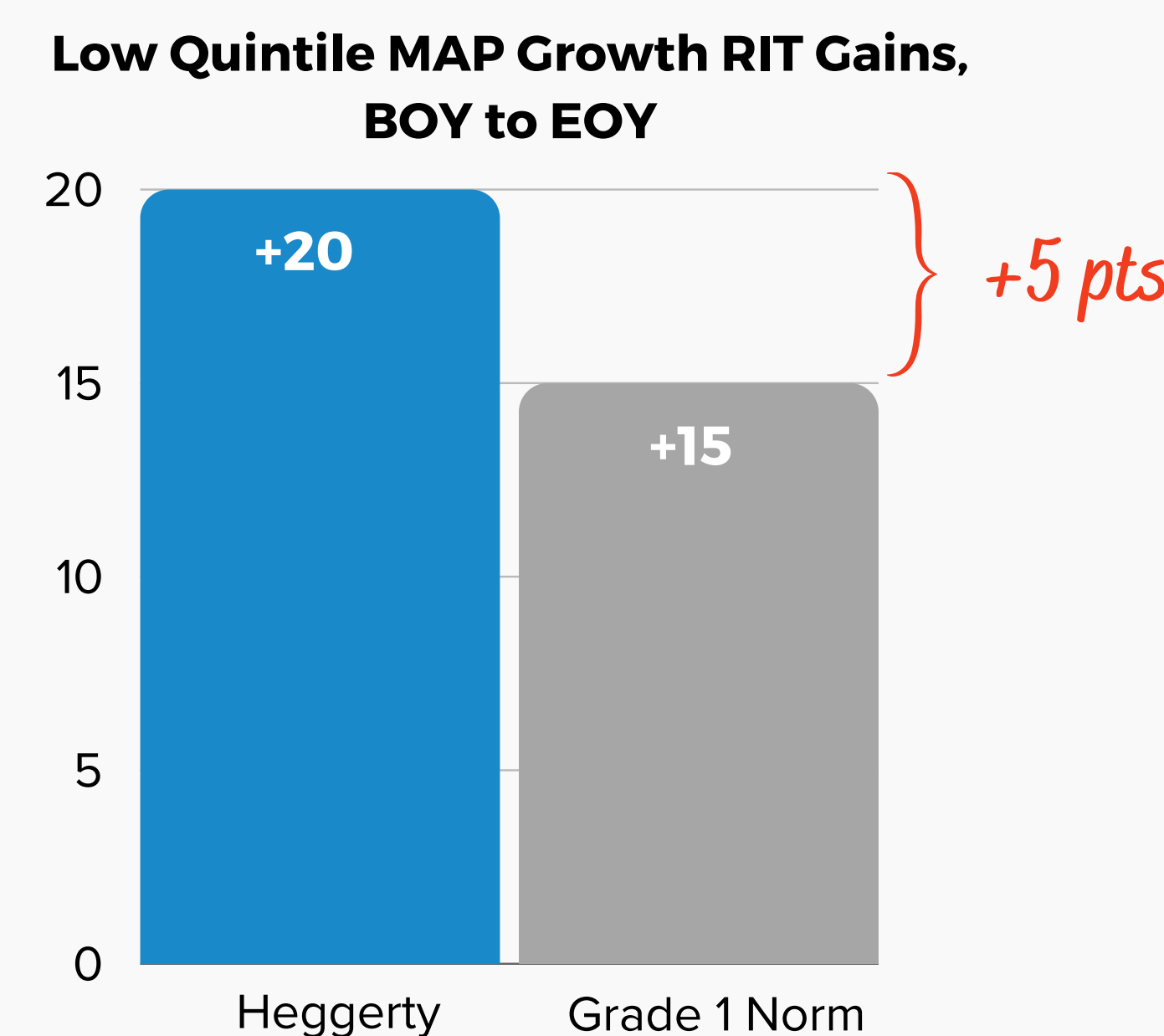
MAP EOY RIT Gains: $t(419) = 2.47, p < .05$, Hedge's g Effect Size = .18, equivalent to 1 additional month of school*
*Months of schooling calculated as Difference in Gains/Comparison Gains*9 months in a school year

More Students Met Projected Growth



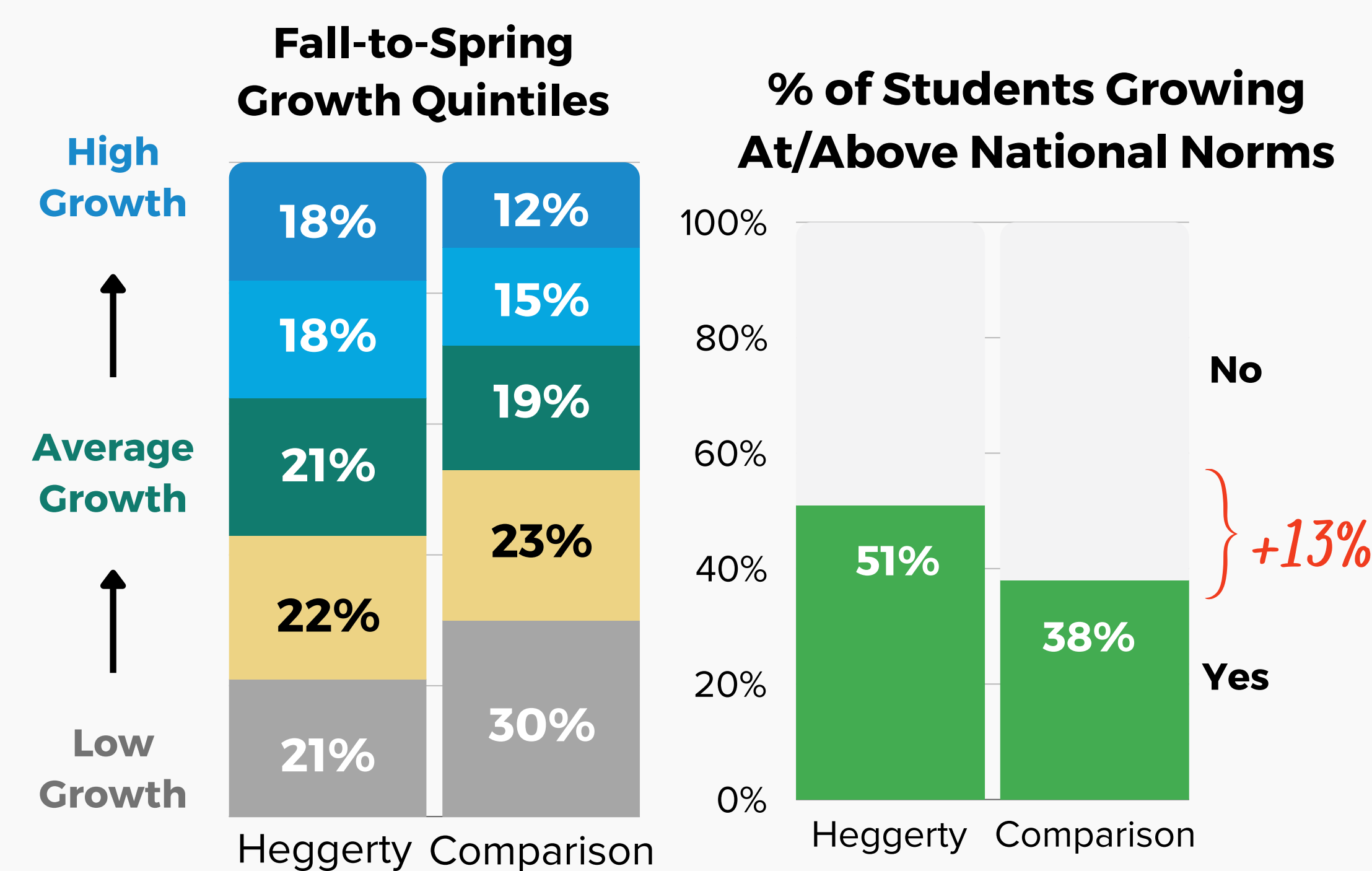
MAP Growth Met Target Yes or No: $\chi^2(1, N=570) = 10.36, p < .01$, Effect Size = .13
Students with Yes* or No* were excluded from this analysis, based on guidance from NWEA, N=570

Lowest Performing Students Closed Gaps



1. BOY Scores vs. EOY Gains: $r(237) = -.26, p < .001$
2. Achievement Quintile RIT Gains: $F(3, 235) = 4.52, p < .01$, partial η^2 Effect Size = .05 (small)
3. National Growth Norms: $p < .01$, Hedge's g Effect Size = .57

More Growth Compared to National Norms



1. At/Above National Norms: $\chi^2(1, N=961) = 11.13, p < .001$, Phi coefficient = .11
2. Growth Quintiles: $\chi^2(4, N=961) = 11.16, p < .05$, Cramer's V (Effect Size) = .11

TEACHER QUOTE

"The Bridge to Reading program has worked wonders in my classroom...The gap in phonemic awareness in other programs is very obvious! I cannot speak Heggerty's praises enough as a parent and a teacher."

*Interviews with administrators in the comparison schools in the fall of 2023 revealed that all comparison schools used Heggerty PA in Kindergarten, which heavily overlaps with the scope and sequence of Bridge to Reading for the first months of school. Therefore, the experiences of the kindergarten students in the fall semester were quite similar between the two study groups.

By the end of the year, all kindergarteners were still performing equally regardless of their assigned program. However, they demonstrated appropriate grade-level growth from Fall to Spring, with Heggerty students averaging 18.33 RIT points (NWEA Growth Norm is 16.45 RITs). In addition, 57% of Heggerty kindergarteners met their projected growth target.

EDUCATOR FEEDBACK

Educator feedback gathered through teacher surveys and interviews with instructional coaches revealed that educators were enthusiastic when talking about the quality of the program.

- Teachers reported seeing growth in students' ability to decode words, transfer reading to writing, and use hand motions while reading.
- 81% of teachers felt they had a better understanding of what was missing in the phonics section of their previous core program after using Bridge to Reading.
- Teachers felt more confident in their knowledge of literacy instruction.
- Teachers used Teacher Guides, Student READ Workbooks, and Red Word Cards daily.
- 80% of teachers reported the overall quality of the Bridge to Reading professional development to be excellent, feeling that the objectives were met and the sessions were engaging.

For more information about Bridge to Reading, visit <https://heggerty.org/programs/bridge-to-reading/>.

CONCLUSION

Students receiving Heggerty's Bridge to Reading program demonstrated greater growth on MAP assessments at the end of the year relative to the comparison group. Remarkably, first graders with lower initial reading skills made significant progress, indicating that the core instruction effectively addressed skill gaps from kindergarten. These findings align with research suggesting that explicit instruction benefits all students, particularly those with skill gaps.

ESSA EVIDENCE: MODERATE

- Well-designed and implemented multi-site, quasi-experimental study
- At least 350 students
- Compares groups of students using the program to a comparison group of similar students
- Statistically significant, positive results, even after accounting for baseline, demographics, and clustering



REFERENCES

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