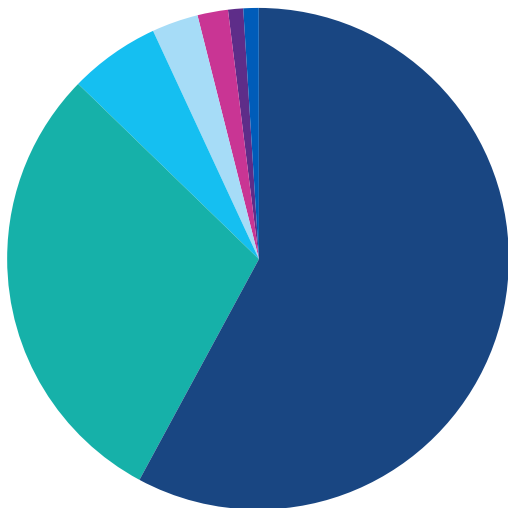


Closing Learning Gaps and Engaging Students With Foundations A-Z

Foundations A-Z is a flexible K-5 foundational skills curriculum designed to teach elementary students essential literacy skills. Teachers use this all-inclusive program with its lesson plans, customizable activities and downloadable resources to improve their students' reading abilities.

Phillis Wheatley Elementary School

Kansas City, Missouri Charter School
 Grades: PK-6
 Enrollment: 418



Student Diversity

| | |
|---|-----|
| African American | 59% |
| Hispanic/Latino | 30% |
| White | 6% |
| Two or more races | 3% |
| Asian/Pacific Islander | 2% |
| Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander | <1% |
| Native American | <1% |

The challenge

Jessica Berry has taught first grade in Kansas City Public Schools for five years and has seen various learning gaps across her students. Some children have memorized the alphabet but can't sound out letters or simple sight words. Other students recognize high-frequency words but struggle with comprehension when they read or are read to. The demographics in Jessica's classroom include recent immigrants and multilingual learners completely unfamiliar with the English alphabet.

To close learning gaps, Jessica must present foundational skills in a way that addresses each student's individual learning needs. Initially, her school used a professional development program requiring two full days of eight-hour teacher training. However, Jessica and some of her colleagues felt overwhelmed because the program was difficult to understand, making it harder to apply the lessons they learned to more effectively reach — and teach — their students.

"In kindergarten, students learn letters and sounds, and by first grade, we start putting books in their hands," said Jessica. "I was very stressed because the pressure was on, and I felt like I wasn't delivering the right program for my students. I could see that they were struggling."

The process

Jessica used Foundations A-Z in her classroom to deliver lessons supported by the Science of Reading and bolster the foundational skills necessary for student literacy. "Foundations A-Z helped me present content to the students more efficiently by focusing on specific skills," she said. "I felt motivated and confident that I could teach in a way that was more engaging and helpful than the programs I used in the past."

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Every Foundations A-Z lesson follows a gradual release model with embedded tips, checks for understanding, and corrective feedback to build pedagogy simultaneously. Teachers remain at the heart of the instruction to discover the best pathway for their classrooms. The Foundations A-Z homepage provides an up-to-date, at-a-glance student dashboard to monitor classroom progress and usage to help differentiate instruction.

Jessica applied an approach suggested in the Foundations A-Z lesson plans. First, she taught a lesson to her whole classroom. Then, she assigned students individual tasks to complete at different stations, such as reading a book at their desks or finishing an individual Learning A-Z lesson on their iPads.

“We used Reading A-Z books to supplement what we learned in Foundations A-Z,” said Jessica. “If we were learning about double consonants, I gave students a book filled with double consonants to tie everything together.”

Foundations A-Z delivers a consistent instructional scope and sequence from kindergarten through fifth grade, which includes a review cycle at each level. Students require multiple exposures to new skills and concepts to gain mastery.

“Before, I found it challenging to pace out a foundational skills program where my students could learn the reading and decoding skills they needed by the end of first grade,” said Jessica. “Foundations A-Z gave me that scope and sequence to pace everything appropriately and help students identify and master areas where they struggled, like long vowels or diphthongs.”

Foundations A-Z’s digitally assignable resources provide many opportunities for students to apply what they’ve learned.

“It was convenient to have technology that allowed students to work independently,” she said. “If students weren’t paying close attention during the group lesson, they could review the lesson on their iPads while they worked through individual tasks. Sometimes, when using pen and paper for individual tasks, skills and lessons get lost in translation. With Foundations A-Z, everything is streamlined to ensure students don’t miss out on vital information.”

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The breakdown

Foundations A-Z is a complete solution that includes units divided into modules and daily lessons, and built-in professional development. Each lesson explains the skill it’s teaching and offers teachers the flexibility to print, present or digitally assign the lesson materials.

The lesson plans include explicit, step-by-step instructions for each section, time estimates for pacing and the standards and objectives it addresses.

The professional development portions include short coaching videos, audio, and articles with best practices and industry research on topics associated with teaching foundational reading skills to help students become more confident, fluent readers and writers.

Weekly Schedule

| Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday |
|--------------------------------------|--|---|--|---|
| Whole Group with FAZ lesson (15 min) | Independent Reading in Raz Plus (20 min) | Small group mini-lessons with FAZ (15 min each) | Independent Reading in Raz Plus (20 min) | Small group mini-lessons with FAZ (15 min each) |

Time savings

Many teachers wish for more time in the day for lesson planning, grading, general administrative work and, of course, teaching their students. Foundations A-Z helps teachers maximize their foundational skills instructional time.

Foundations A-Z empowers educators with the lessons and resources that meet their learning objectives and offers flexibility to accommodate time constraints. All teacher and student materials are provided at point of use and can be assigned digitally. Foundations A-Z offers an additional layer of support with auto-recommended resources within the unit assessment reports for teachers to assign with just one click. "It's convenient when students can complete individual work assigned on their iPads," said Jessica. "I could differentiate instruction to meet the needs of individual students, and I didn't have to make copies or cut anything out for a lesson."

Teachers also get support with clearly defined learning objectives and national standards alignment. From the beginning, it didn't take Jessica long to be able to unlock those resources and implement all Foundations A-Z had to offer. "From a teacher standpoint, learning objectives and lesson overviews were easy to access," Jessica said. "It only took a couple of meetings to learn how to individually plan out which unit we were going to teach and start implementing the lessons."

Learning A-Z also keeps constant communication with teachers in case they ever develop questions about the platform. Teachers using other vendors may not find that type of partnership and might have to spend extra time searching the internet for answers to their questions.

What the students loved

During the pilot, Jessica says the students were more engaged during activities and lessons. "They loved going on the iPad to read Raz-Plus books, build avatars and earn stars because they felt like they were winning something," she said. "They also really liked the characters and got excited to see them as they completed quests and game-based activities."

The program also helped students gain more confidence. "One of my students was a struggling reader at the beginning of the year," said Jessica. "When she got on the iPad, you could hear her participating in the lesson out loud and getting excited about her progress. She even asked me to take a video of her using Foundations A-Z."

Instructional videos help reinforce key concepts from each daily lesson, enabling students to participate in skills practice in a low-risk environment. "The students watch Youtube often at home in their free time, so they like to see video content during the school day," said Jessica. "I think having a video component was great."

How Foundations A-Z works

Foundations A-Z, built on the Science of Reading, includes a research-based scope & sequence for grades K-5 and standards-driven lesson plans organized into three parts: teaching, guided practice and independent practice. The program also includes opportunities and recommendations for reteaching and enrichment.

The program incorporates knowledge-building into the units, modules and lessons. Each lesson also includes guidance on differentiating instruction for multilingual learning students, and social-emotional learning and culturally responsive teaching tips are embedded throughout the curriculum.

Learn more by visiting [FoundationsA-Z.com](https://www.foundationsa-z.com)