

# Superkids engages students in tough times

## A welcome success

The elementary schools in the Diocese of Fresno, California, independently adopt their own curriculum. In 2016, eight started using *The Superkids Reading Program*. Because of their success and outstanding results with students, 17 of the 18 elementary schools in the diocese have now adopted *Superkids*.

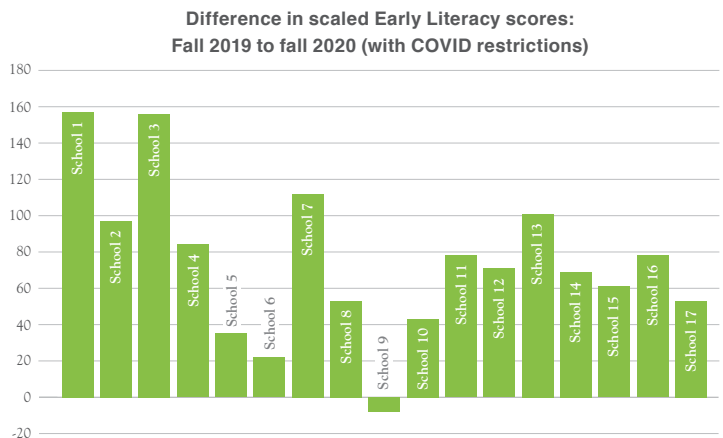
What persuaded the additional schools to invest in *Superkids*? Assistant superintendent Donna Smith explains in one word: results. “We could just see a huge difference in the schools that were using the *Superkids* curriculum, particularly when students got to first and second grade,” says Smith.

The schools in the diocese using *Superkids* witnessed increasing success in early literacy during the past several years—even during the COVID-19 school closures. STAR Early Literacy scaled scores are calculated based on the difficulty of assessment items and correct responses. Administrators were very surprised to see that students’ scores in early 2020 were higher than scores in early 2019—even though

they were engaged in remote learning. Comparing scaled Early Literacy school scores, *Superkids* schools saw a (weighted) average across schools of 78 points’ difference from 2019 to 2020.

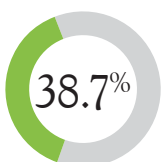
## Diocese of Fresno Superkids schools saw growth even during a pandemic

*Superkids*’ schools scaled scores on STAR Early Literacy assessments generally increased despite remote learning caused by COVID-19.

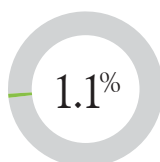


## Diocese of Fresno

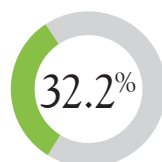
A Catholic-school diocese with 18 elementary schools in urban and suburban neighborhoods in the Southern San Joaquin Valley



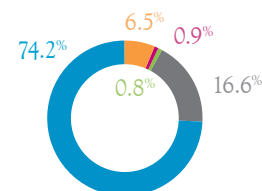
Hispanic students



Students identified to receive special education



Children under age 18 in diocese counties in poverty



Race  
Caucasian: 74.2%  
Asian: 6.5%  
Native Hawaiian/  
Pacific Isl.: 0.9%  
Black: 0.8%  
Other/two or more  
races: 17.6%



*When you talk about pandemic learning loss for children, reading loss is a real fear. But knowing that kindergarten through second grade reading instruction was effective made me feel thankful for the Superkids curriculum and for all the work that our teachers were doing.* ”

—Donna Smith, Assistant Superintendent

## Literacy gains in a pandemic

In the spring of 2020, all diocese schools shut down and transitioned to remote learning. Students started the 2020–2021 school year at home, too, and took their STAR tests remotely. “We were worried that they were at home and they may have had parents’ support to take the assessment. But since then, we’ve had two other tests. We did another test in November and then just recently in March. And both tests showed major gains from last year at the same time,” says Smith. She attributes that success directly to what *Superkids* provides teachers.

First-grade teacher Lorena Martinez, whose school was an early *Superkids* adopter, saw impressive results with *Superkids*. Her class is composed of nearly 100% English language learners, and she was disheartened with their incoming literacy levels before *Superkids*. During her first year using the program, grade 1 students at midyear scored 7 points above the midyear national benchmark for their grade (727 versus 720 scaled score) at her school. “I tried to stay positive and, sure enough, when we got the scores, their literacy scores went up!”

The past years in which more diocese schools adopted *The Superkids Reading Program* provided tangible evidence that students were engaged and learning important early literacy skills. “Over the years, I walked into the classroom and I could immediately tell which schools were using *Superkids* based on the writing samples that were posted on the wall for first and second graders,” says Smith.

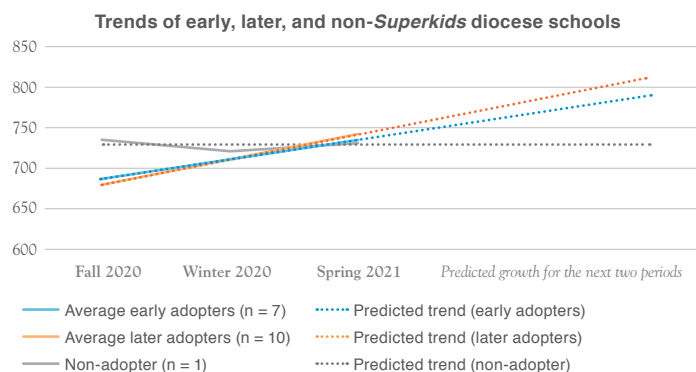
## A foundation for grade 3

Using *Superkids* for five years, the early *Superkids* schools now have a large group of students who learned reading and writing with *Superkids*. Smith says, “Teachers could definitely see a difference in the children that had gone through the program all three years.”

Teachers at all diocese schools are confident that *Superkids* lays a foundation for reading that will carry students to grade 3. Because students who have used *Superkids* come into grade 3 as proficient decoders, says principal Jamie Perkins, “teachers have more time to talk about becoming better readers, work on comprehension strategies and skills, and spend more time writing.”

## Diocese of Fresno Superkids schools have a higher probability of growth

School scaled scores on STAR Early Literacy Assessments



Based on schools’ achievement during COVID-19, trend analysis suggests *Superkids* will continue to increase student literacy. Assistant superintendent Smith worries about the pandemic’s effects on early reading nationally, but she credits *Superkids*’ foundation in phonics and its systematic instruction approach, coupled with the online resources, to her students’ success. “I’m confident that the children in the Diocese of Fresno are ready to move on and have those foundational skills,” she says.

Diocese teachers overall credit the reading foundation and writing practice in *Superkids* with their students’ growth and confidence. An added bonus is *Superkids*’ deep connections to the diocese’s mission. “Our mission is to reach all learners, all humans, in every way they come to us,” says kindergarten teacher Julie Paulsen. Janet Wintz adds that the *Superkids* characters’ diversity and cooperation are important parts of the connection. “Tied in with the Lasting Lessons in each unit, it supports the gospel message.”