

# White Paper

provided for Donna Whyte, author, The Reading Aptitude Continuum Assessment

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## Introduction

Identified Title I District(s)/School(s) are challenged with meeting the needs of at-risk, low-income students. The Glossary of Education Reform considers at-risk students those “who are considered to have a higher probability of failing academically (specifically in



reading and mathematics) or dropping out of school”. Donna Whyte is an internationally known speaker presenting keynotes and workshops at the state, national, and international level; education consultant; and author for over 24 years, beginning her career as a certified teacher in New York State. Her experience includes work in elementary classrooms and support for struggling readers and writers at all levels. Her positive attitude, high energy, and her many practical ideas make her presentations exciting and valuable to

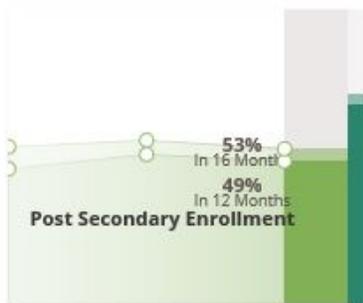
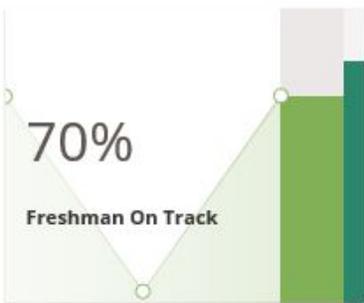
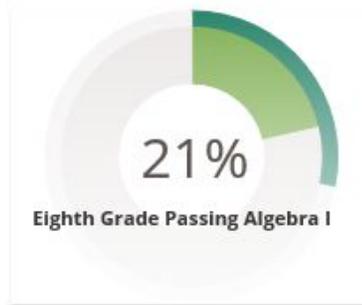
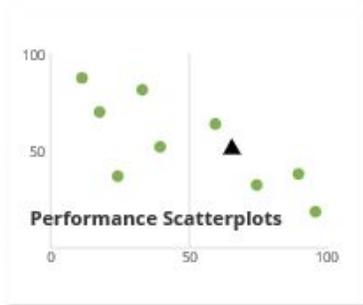
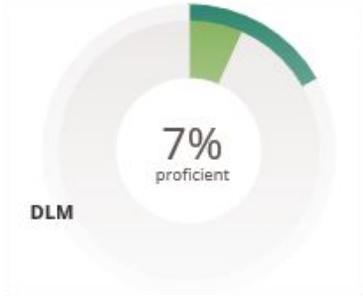
educators. Her work includes the development of administrative summits on Student Centered Classrooms and Management. Donna also works with some of the lowest performing public schools in Illinois with at-risk youth as a reading, classroom management and Daily 5 consultant to assess, diagnose and address the various needs of the students in these high-need, Title I Districts. For the purposes of this paper, we will refer to the district she created the Reading Aptitude Continuum assessment for as “District A” in efforts to achieve success with at-risk readers. The United States Department of Education states, “nearly two-thirds of Title I funded students are enrolled in grades Pre-K through 6, serving roughly 260,000 preschool children. Donna Whyte’s experience and expertise resides in grades Pre-K through sixth. This white paper was written to engage educators serving students impacted by economic, social, emotional, and cognitive barriers to learning by understanding how this assessment was used by Donna Whyte to provide relief to these educators with research and resources proven effective with students in the Title I Districts she serves.

## Problems in District A

According to the United States Department of Education, the purpose of Title I funding is “to ensure all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain high quality education and reach, at minimum, proficiency on challenging state academic achievement standards and state academic assessments” specifically in reading and mathematics. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, has been and will be amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act by September 18, 2017. This legislation requires comprehensive support for Title I school districts by respective state agencies. This paper will focus on the progress of at-risk students in reading in Illinois Title I School District A. The district serves approximately 6,000 children in Pre-K through twelfth grades of four cities, and other unincorporated areas of Southwest Illinois. The major city District A serves is a city in the Metro-East region of Southern Illinois severely impacted by loss of jobs due to the deindustrialization declining in population from 82,366 in 1950 to nearly 30,000 today, of which 98% are Black or African American with over 40% living below the poverty line and 100% low income student population according to the 2015 General State Aid Claim. According to the Federal Bureau of Investigators, this major city ranks among the world’s most dangerous cities with a murder rate in 2014 of 101.8 per 100,000 people, surpassing Honduras as the country with the highest murder rate in the world. District A has had School Improvement Grants in both middle schools, the high school, and one elementary school for being amongst the lowest performing schools in their state. The academic progress for the district is extremely poor, as shown in the chart below. Without essential literacy skills and the foundations of reading, these students have little chance to succeed beyond high school, hence the increased involvement in crime.

## Academic Progress

■ District ■ State



Source <https://www.illinoisreportcard.com/>

# Understanding the Reading Aptitude Continuum Assessment

Reading Aptitude Continuum

**What is the Reading Aptitude Continuum?**

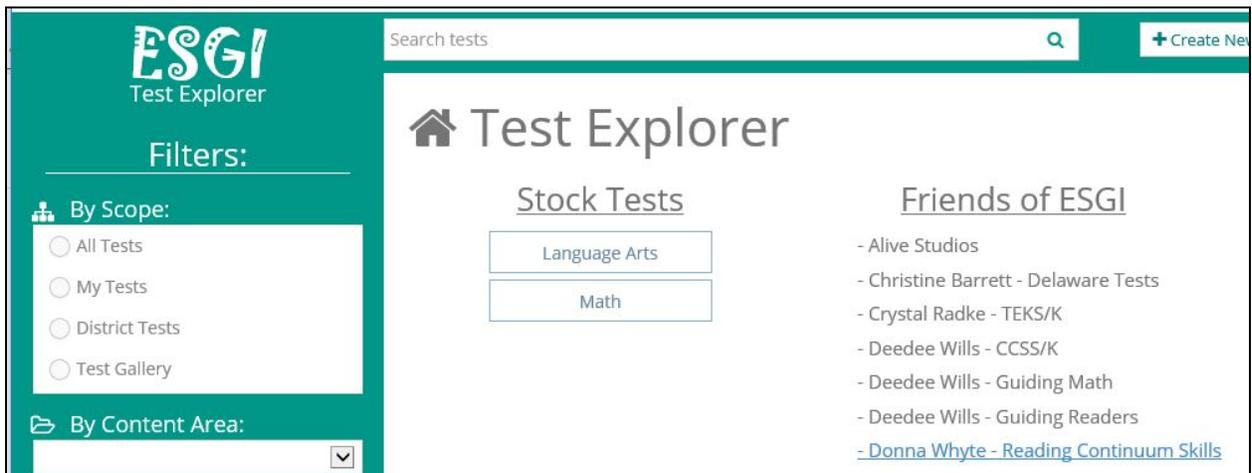


As Donna presents around the country addressing reading, she is often asked, “What do you use to assess students and is there a more purposeful assessment available?” To answer that question, it is important to understand that reading occurs on a continuum and at times, our biggest enemy is our belief that assessments which are grade specific, as opposed to skill specific can help us determine what our students need. The assessments that Donna created are based upon skills, not grade level. They can be utilized with any student in the process of learning to decode for reading. This can be a child that happens to be at the Pre-K level, a struggling intermediate reader, an English Language Learner student, a student with disabilities or any other student in the process of learning to read.

Reading equals decoding plus comprehension. It is impossible to comprehend text that you cannot decode. Therefore, the immediate need in District A was to determine student's level of decoding. The assessments were created and administered to ensure that decoding skills were present at early literacy levels to provide the foundation for comprehensive reading.

As teachers, each of us needs to determine what is a student's skill level, what needs to be taught and what skills comes next. **The purpose of the *Reading Aptitude Continuum* is to provide teachers with a framework that allows them to see skills in a progression that will aide students in becoming successful readers.** Every time we test a skill and find the student unsuccessful, we have to look to the prior skills and then determine what to teach. When the student has successfully mastered the skill, we then move to the next skill assessment. **Targeted assessments should drive our instruction.** Foundation skills embedded with fluency and comprehension strategies can lead to creating successful readers.

The Reading Aptitude Continuum is available in paper form at [www.thesmartiezone.com](http://www.thesmartiezone.com). Due to the depth and variations of assessments needed in District A to utilize the Reading Aptitude Continuum, Donna sought a software program that would effectively and easily make the assessments available electronically. Donna Whyte partnered with the Educational Software for Guiding Instruction (ESGI), a company that created and provides a web-based assessment and reporting system to manage and track student progress. The ESGI software was used to streamline classroom processes that allowed teachers to effectively assess elementary students in the 2016-2017 school year.



## Overview of ESGI

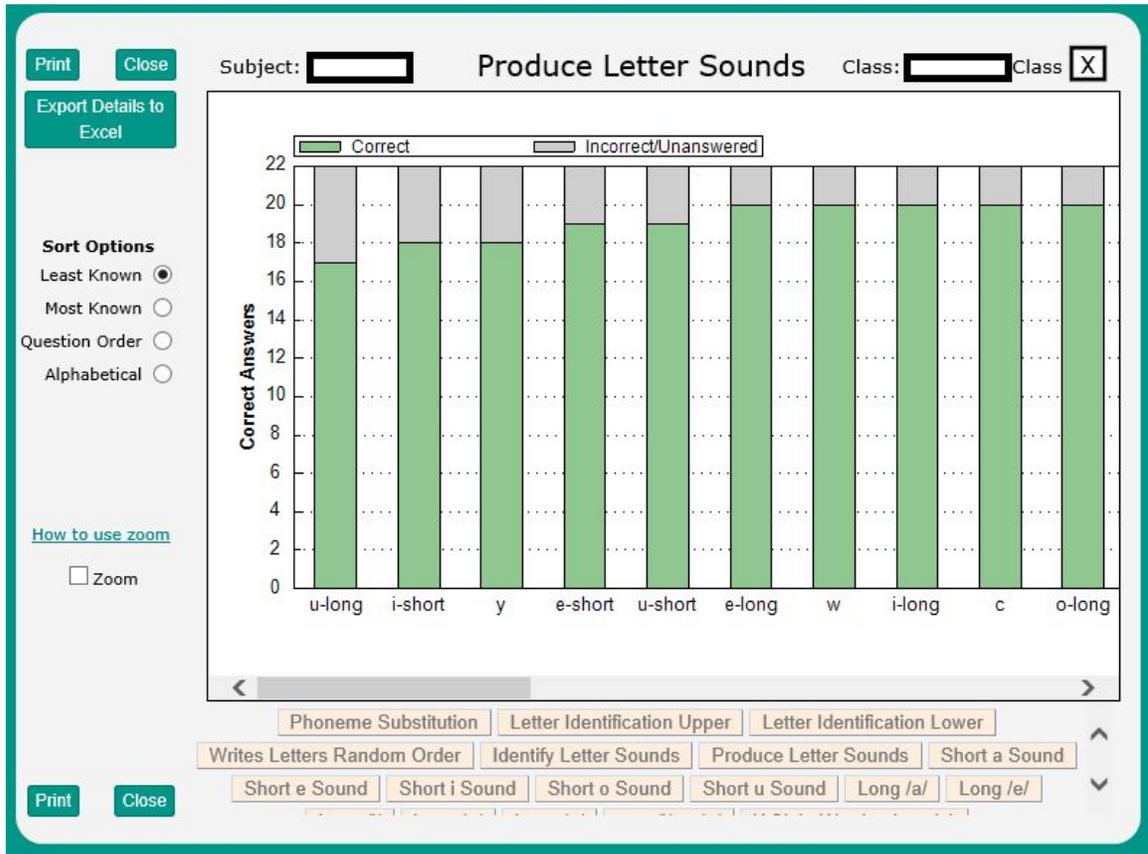
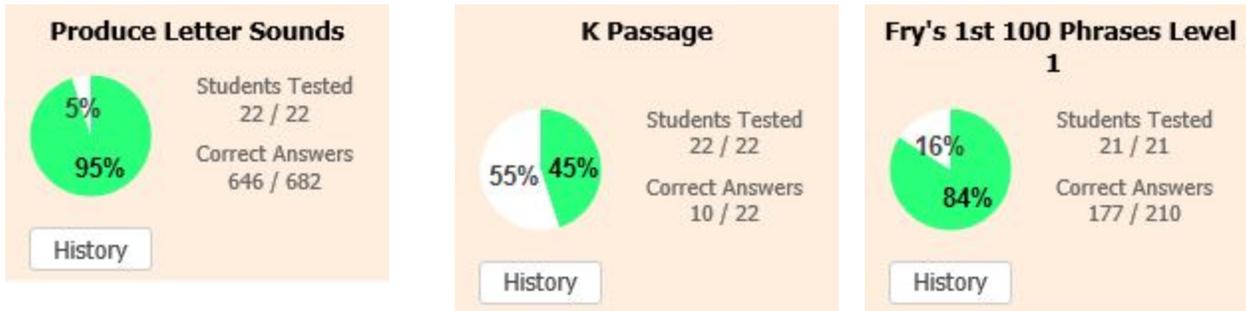
### What is ESGI?

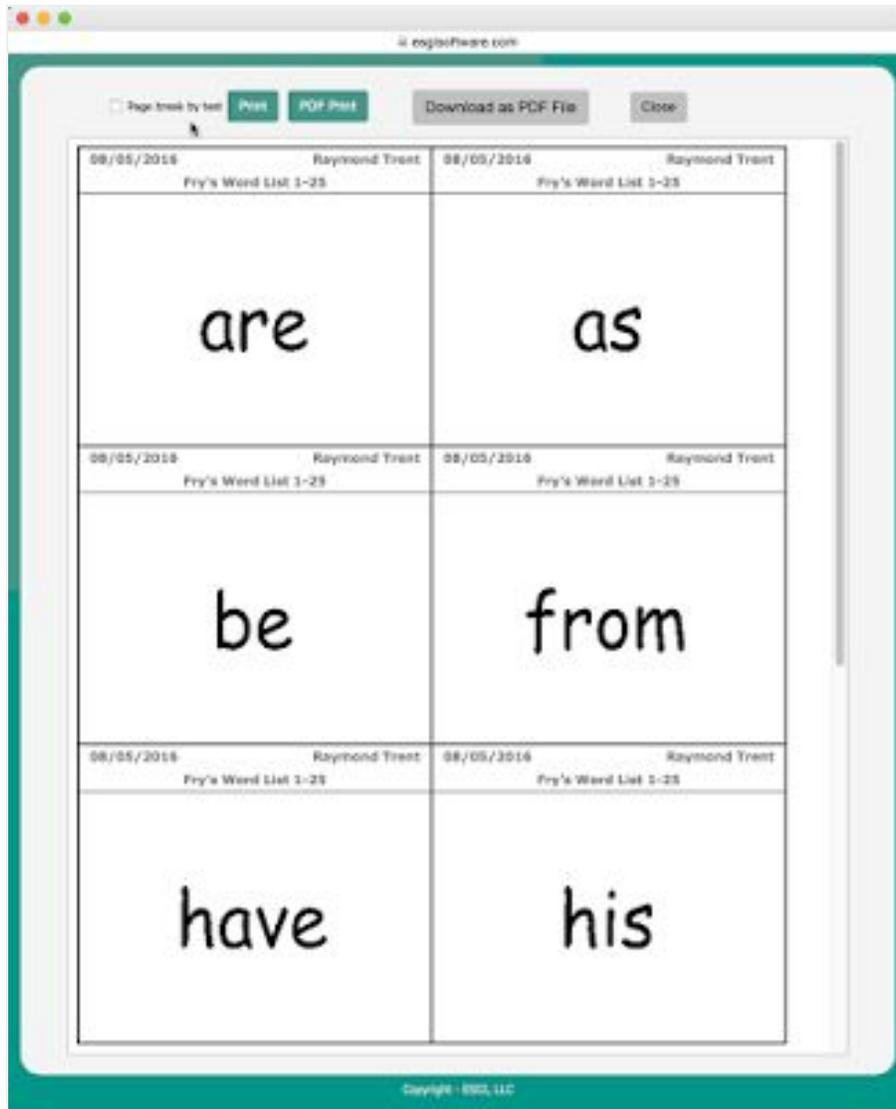
**ESGI, Educational Software for Guiding Instruction, is a simple, online assessment platform for conducting one-on-one assessments.** Donna Whyte partnered with ESGI because it is ideal for testing non-readers, emergent readers and struggling readers. The Reading Aptitude Continuum tests are all available on the software —additionally, you can create your own. After assessing students with the yes/no format, choose from charts, graphs and reports to guide instruction. ESGI eliminates the paper, saving you hours on assessments and providing you hours for instruction.

### How does ESGI help to effectively use the Assessment?

ESGI provides a platform to administer, collect and report data from the Reading Continuum Assessments. This provides teachers and schools with quicker and more effective analysis of student growth. With ESGI, teachers can give one-on-one assessments, instantly visualize student performance, analyze areas of weakness or growth, and quickly target instruction. **With an ESGI subscription, a teacher has access**

to all 112 of the tests in the **Reading Aptitude Continuum**. Once the assessments are given, the teachers can target their instruction based on the data in the Pie Charts, Bar Graphs Analysis, Class Totals Report, and Test History. Teachers can also print customized parent report letters and flashcards to support reading instruction.





ESGI software will generate flashcards for individual students based upon assessment results

Dear Parent(s) / Guardian(s) of JAZMYNE,

This letter contains some information I would like to share with you. Below are the results from the last time I tested JAZMYNE. The left side shows all of the correct answers! Please use the right side as a check-list of things to work on with JAZMYNE. This one-on-one time you spend with your child is essential and greatly appreciated.

Thanks for your support,

Ms. \_\_\_\_\_

Phoneme Blending  
(9 out of 10)

Correct	Incorrect
big, black, clip, dog, hut, jet, map, shark, tree	desk

Phoneme Segmentation  
(6 out of 10)

Correct	Incorrect
at, bed, blend, brown, dirt, knee	first, go, gum, win

Fry's Word List 1-25  
(22 out of 25)

Correct	Incorrect
a, and, as, be, for, have, he, his, I, in, is, it, of, on, that, the, they, this, to, was, with, you	are, at, from

Fry's Word List 26-50  
(23 out of 25)

Correct	Incorrect
all, an, but, by, can, do, had, how, if, not, one, or, said, she, their, there, use, we, were, what, when, which, your	each, words

Sight Words in Paragraphs  
(76 out of 100)

Correct	Incorrect
a, all, am, and, as, at, be, been, but, called, can, come, could, day, did, do, down, each, find, for, from, get, go, had, has, have, he, her, him, his, how, I, if, in, into, is, it, its, like, look, make, my, not, number, of, on, one, or, out, people, said, see, she, so, some, than, that, the, their, them, then, these, they, this, to, two, up, use, was, way, we, were, what, which, you, your	about, an, are, by, first, long, made, many, may, more, no, now, other, part, there, time, water, when, who, will, with, words, would, write

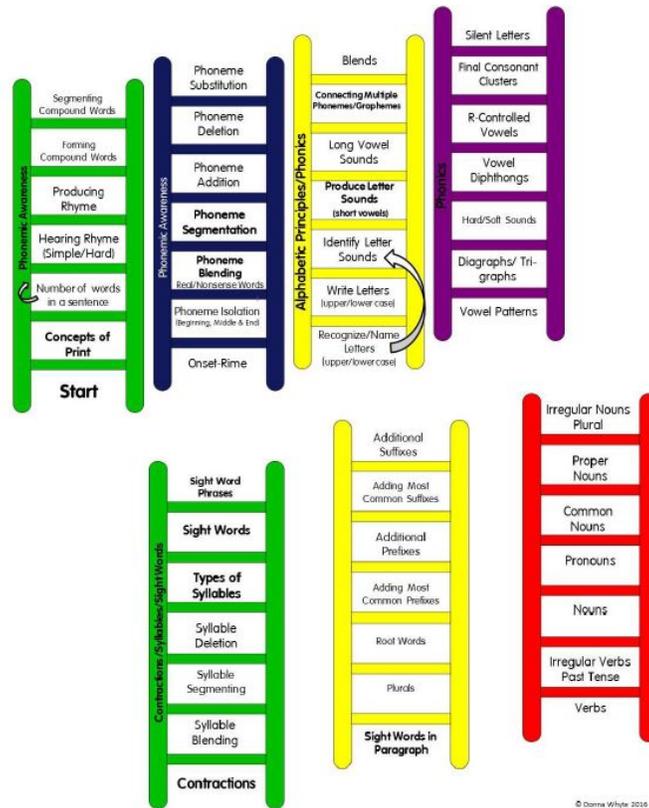
2nd Grade Passage  
(0 out of 1)

Correct	Incorrect
	2nd grade passage

Sample of ESGI generated Parent Letter

## How Do I Get Started?

Each ladder in the continuum contains rungs that build decoding skills. While it is certainly possible for a student to miss a couple of rungs and continue to climb the ladder, you wouldn't want a student to have no footings on a ladder. Pick and choose the assessments most valuable to your class or individual students in identifying needs. Your first step will be to determine where to start in your assessments. Based upon your work with the student, look at the ladder and determine where you believe he/she should start. If the assessments are too hard, stop and go back several tests. If they are too easy, jump forward a few. Keep in mind, for the most part, the assessments were created to be easiest at the start of each assessment and to end with hardest level of skill. This will allow you to determine if a high level of mastery is evident. It's important to remember that many skills have a quick assessment and if there is any sense the student hasn't truly mastered the skill, you may want to add to the number of questions.



Each of the 7 ladders in the continuum contains rungs that build decoding skills. Pick and choose the assessments most valuable to your class or individual students in identifying needs. In the paper form that is available, each concept has directions on the sheet, along with the questions, words, letters or phrases listed. Each list then has a corresponding sheet or sheets of the cards that can be used for the assessments. (The exception is the Phonemic Awareness section as all of the concepts are done orally and require no cards) Assessment Recording Sheets (in excel form) are included. There is an individual student recording sheet and a class recording sheet. Each sheet has skills broken up by ladder or concept. Every sheet is customizable and can be modified for the skills you are assessing. See example pages below.

## Phonemic Awareness

### Hearing Rhyme – Level 1

Ask – “Do these words rhyme – do they sound similar or the same?”

pig wig	cat sat	man mat
fed bed	hat goat	well sell
tip pie	bug slug	set den

### Hearing Rhyme – Level 2

Ask – “Do these words rhyme – do they sound similar or the same?”

blue renew	against apply	funny money
alone bone	weight inflate	people little

### Producing Rhyme

Say – “Tell me a word that rhymes with...”

rag	cap	bet	bell	mug
look	boot	bake	king	seek

Example of directions and word utilized in assessment.

### Long

Ask student to read the words:

/a/	baby	hay	make	break	they
	pail	vein	neighbor	straight	
/e/	me	see	leaf	these	lady
	key	brief	ski	receive	people
/i/	ice	fly	night	pie	buy
	bye	aisle	island	height	
/o/	oval	bone	float	toe	soul
	sew	blow			
/u/	use	blue	view	cube	glue
	unicorn				
y as /i/ or /e/	my	funny	cry	spy	money
	July				

### Blends

#### Level 1

Ask student to read the words:

<i>gl</i>	glove	glad
<i>cl</i>	clap	clothes
<i>pl</i>	play	please
<i>fl</i>	fly	flap

Example of directions and word utilized in assessment.

Long Vowels Sheet 1

baby	hay
make	break
they	pail
vein	neighbor
straight	me

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Example of long vowel word cards.

## Fry's First 100 Words - Phrases

**Random Sampling** based upon Fry's Phrases and Short Sentences

Ask the student to read each word from the assessment cards.

### Level 1

You and I  
What did he say?  
More than the other  
How many words?  
But not me  
Then we will go.  
I like him.  
Out of the water  
We were here  
Could you go?

### Level 2

Look for some people.  
So there you are.  
Have you seen it?  
It's about time.  
Which way?

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Example of high-frequency list.

You and I

What did he say?

More than the other

How many words?

But not me

Cards that can be used by teachers that do not subscribe to ESGI



## How the Assessment Solved the Problems in District A

The data progression from 2016 to 2017 school year for all students assessed on ESGI in School B in District A is as follows:

Skill Assessed	2015-2016 Percent of Total Students Correct	2016-2017 Percent of Total Students Correct	Percentage Growth(+)/Regression(-) Rounded to Whole %
Hearing Letter Sounds	77%	83%	7.8%
Letter Identification Upper	88%	97.5%	10.8%
Producing Letter Sounds	71%	89%	+25%
1 <sup>st</sup> 100 Phrases Level 1	57%	79%	+39%
1 <sup>st</sup> 100 Phrases Level 2	57%	84%	+47%
1 <sup>st</sup> 100 Phrases Level 3	74%	94%	+27%
Fry's Word List 1-25	58%	85%	+47%
Fry's Word List 26-60	49%	82%	+67%
Fry's Word List 51-75	73%	86%	+18%
Fry's Word List 76-100	70%	84%	+20%
Fry's Word List 101-125	31%	78%	+152%
Segmenting Compound Words	41%	73%	+78%
Forming Compound Words	72%	83%	+15%

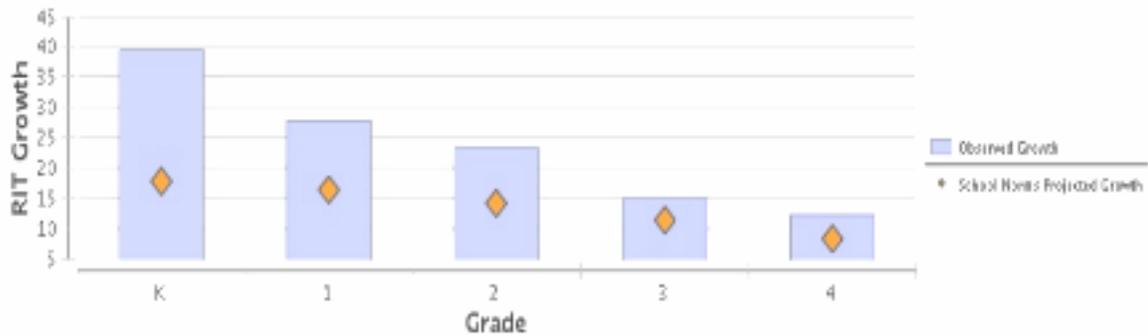
Words in Sentence	46%	50%	+9%
Hearing Rhyme	54%	65%	+20%
Producing Rhyme	28%	52%	+86%
Concepts About Print	62%	73%	+18%
K Sight Words Level 1	61%	73%	+20%
K Sight Words Level 2	29%	56%	+93%
K Passage	24%	51%	+112%
K Comprehension	60%	79%	+32%
1 <sup>st</sup> Grade Passage	69%	80%	+16%
1 <sup>st</sup> Grade Comprehension	58%	80%	+38%
2 <sup>nd</sup> Grade Passage	74%	81%	+9%
2 <sup>nd</sup> Grade Comprehension	60%	94%	+57%

District A has a particular K-4 elementary school who received a School Improvement Grant for being the lowest performing elementary school in Illinois. For the purposes of this paper we will call this school “School B”. All schools in District A assess students three times per year using the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) evaluating skills likely to appear on PARCC. The chart below shows the student growth summary of School B in Reading, surpassing all other elementary schools in District A and allowing School B to take the title of School of the Year. Additionally preliminary PARCC assessment data shows significant growth in reading.

Reading

Grade (Spring 2017)	Growth Count	Compare Periods						Growth Evaluated Against								
		Fall 2016			Spring 2017			Growth		School Norms			Student Norms			
		Mean RIT	SD	Percentile	Mean RIT	SD	Percentile	Observed Growth	Observed Growth SE	Projected Growth	School Conditional Growth Index	School Conditional Growth Percentile	Count with Projection	Count Met Projection	Percent Met Projection	Student Median Conditional Growth Percentile
K	64	125.9	8.5	26	175.4	11.4	95	23.6	1.4	17.5	7.52	95	64	54	100	99
1	77	150.3	11.8	4	178.1	15.2	53	27.8	2.6	18.4	4.11	95	77	57	74	75
2	81	159.0	11.8	1	182.3	15.2	17	23.3	1.5	14.3	3.81	95	81	49	66	69
3	86	171.9	14.5	1	186.8	15.8	4	14.9	1.5	11.3	1.89	95	66	38	58	62
4	79	179.9	16.6	1	192.1	16.1	2	12.2	1.6	8.4	3.29	95	70	43	61	65

Reading



From the ESGI data analyzed in the first year (2015-2016), Donna created a Literacy Island oasis filled with literacy rich materials where students attending School B needing intensive intervention on skills lacking would receive small group instruction with no more than 5 students in a group with a reading specialist/reading paraprofessional. She created a myriad of center activities utilizing manipulatives and reproducibles to enhance skill deficiencies identified through ESGI. With the use of the Reading Aptitude Continuum, Donna Whyte has improved learning conditions in five elementary schools; one Early Childhood Center, and two Middle Schools in Illinois District A.

## Conclusion

Through the implementation and data analysis of the Reading Aptitude Continuum created by Donna Whyte, District A is experiencing great achievement in literacy. The overall Illinois Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) scores for District A have generously increased, due to the implementation of Daily 5 and focus on literacy with the help of Donna Whyte. District A's Middle School went from 2.6% to 13.1% meeting targets in English Language Arts on PARCC and surpassed 68 schools according to schooldigger.com's rankings of Illinois schools, becoming the highest growth ranking of any middle school in the state. One elementary school in District A surpassed 27 schools, one 53, and another 29 schools on the ranking report. The District moved up 21 rankings in comparison to all Illinois schools on the same report. Through the partnership of Donna Whyte and ESGI, districts across the country can utilize Donna's targeted instruction model and use ESGI's software to see vast improvement in achievement for students and teachers can experience their hard work paying off.