



# Research in Action:

English Language Arts

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## Research in Action: English Language Arts

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**INTRODUCTION**

Sylvan Learning offers a variety of English language arts programs to remediate skill gaps, provide enrichment, and help pre–K through high school students meet the challenges of a rigorous language arts curriculum. The programs include the Ace it! small-group instructional program, camps, and Sylvan’s new digital teaching platform, SylvanSync. This highly personalized program uses tablet computers to deliver and manage digital content, which teachers then use to tailor instruction to students’ individual needs and learning arcs. All of Sylvan’s programs can be delivered at Sylvan Learning Centers or at schools or community sites.

Like all of Sylvan’s instructional programs, the language arts programs are based on scientifically based evidence and widely accepted theories of teaching and learning. They

**Sylvan Learning maximizes the instructional effectiveness of each student’s program by:**

- Creating an instructional plan for each student;
- Using a curriculum that is aligned to national and state education standards;
- Providing ongoing evaluation and daily monitoring to track achievement;
- Promoting academic self-confidence, perseverance, and a positive mindset;
- Involving parents in their child’s educational program; and
- Involving classroom teachers, when appropriate, in students’ educational programs

also draw on reports that have synthesized the trends and research on effective language arts and literacy instruction, including the National Research Council’s *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children* (1998); the National Reading Panel’s 2000 report, *Teaching Children to Read*; the Alliance for Educational Excellence’s *Reading Next* report (2006); the U.S. Department of Education’s Institute of Education Science’s (IES) What Works Clearinghouse; the IES-funded Best Evidence Encyclopedia reports from the Johns Hopkins University School of Education’s Center for Data-Driven Reform in Education (CDDRE); as well as other studies from the National Institute for Literacy, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), the National Governors Association (NGA) and Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO).

This report reviews that research and the various ways in which Sylvan incorporates it into its instructional programs. The report begins with a discussion of the theoretical views on the language and literacy skills that students need in order to become effective readers, and describes how researchers and policymakers have

most recently reframed those skills to reflect what students will be required to know and do to be ready for college and careers and, more broadly, the demands of the 21st-century workplace and global, information-based economy. The report also reviews the established research on effective literacy instruction, including the shifts brought about by the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), such as the emphasis on foundational skills, text complexity, and the progressive development of reading comprehension skills. The instructional strategies proposed to address the new standards include learning progressions and ongoing assessment, both a key part of SylvanSync’s digital platform, and both discussed in this report.

Readying students for college and careers is a tall order, often beyond what classroom teachers can provide during the school day; thus, Sylvan's programs are based not only on literacy research but also on the latest research on effective out-of-school programs. A number of studies have highlighted the attributes of high-quality programs and learning opportunities (see, for example, Rockman & Fontana, 2009; Vandell et al., 2004; Beckett et al., 2009; Lauer et al., 2006). According to these studies, programs that are likely to be effective in reaching the goals set for their students include individualized instruction and engaging content aligned with that from the student's school day. Research on the impact of out-of-school strategies, including a meta-analysis of two decades of rigorous research conducted by the Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning, also points to positive effects on reading achievement for low-performing students, including statistically significant effects among students in the lower elementary grades (Miller, Snow, & Lauer, 2004; see also Pashler & Bain, 2007).

Sylvan also supports the development of non-cognitive skills, because research suggests that participation in after-school programs not only improves students' academic performance but also builds self-confidence, self-esteem, and positive attitudes toward school (Durlak & Weissberg, 2007). Increasingly, the research on non-cognitive factors such as these has come to focus on a cluster skills and dispositions related to academic success. For example, Stankov and Lee (2013) found that levels of confidence were the best predictors of cognitive performance, and that self-concept and self-efficacy were also linked to academic performance (Stankov & Lee 2014). West et al. (2016) found positive correlations between measures of conscientiousness, self-control, and grit and elementary and middle school students' attendance rates and test-score gains. They also found that attendance and test scores were associated with "growth mindset," a term coined by Carol Dweck to distinguish between two types of learners: those who see intelligence as unchangeable or fixed, and those who see it as malleable, something that can be increased through effort. Students who see intelligence as fixed may doubt their skills and avoid challenging tasks, whereas those who believe intelligence can change tend to respond to roadblocks with increased effort (Dweck, 2010). Numerous studies conducted by Dweck and colleagues have shown that this mindset is strongly related to academic growth (Blackwell, Trzesniewski, & Dweck, 2007; Dweck, 2006, 2010).

For decades Sylvan Learning's instructional methods have incorporated student motivation techniques and parental involvement. Starting in 2011, Sylvan began systematically measuring elements of student motivation and their relation to the Sylvan program. Based on the non-cognitive research and large body of research on the importance of motivation and other factors that affect students' academic performance, some of which was referenced above, Sylvan partnered with Rockman et al to create the Student Outlook Survey (Rockman et al, 2013) and monitor this data in relationship to the academic achievement of the students it serves. The Sylvan Outlook Survey (SOS) is a proprietary assessment of what Farrington et al. (2012) have called "academic mindset." As part of Sylvan's assessment suite, the SOS results have been used to guide discussions with parents and to provide yet another way to personalize the Sylvan experience for students.

**Drawing on studies of effective out-of-school learning, Sylvan programs encourage student success by providing:**

- Experienced, highly trained **staff** who know how to work with children with diverse learning preferences and those who thrive with a more individualized approach
- Quality **curriculum** that is (a) aligned to school curriculum and to local, state, and national standards; (b) age- and grade-level appropriate; and (c) delivered with effective **instructional techniques**, including varied pedagogical styles, personalized instruction, and engaging, interactive learning experiences

- Programs that provide adequate **structure** but also **flexibility** in session length and program duration
- **Motivational techniques** that promote academic self-confidence, perseverance, and a positive mindset
- Strong and positive **partnerships** with classroom instructors, parents, and schools
- Quality **resources**, including technology and facilities that foster sustained involvement in a safe, healthy environment
- Well-aligned **evaluation** and research components to provide feedback on the programs.

## SYLVAN LANGUAGE ARTS PROGRAMS

As mentioned earlier, Sylvan offers different programs, each of which has different features. **SylvanSync Reading** is Sylvan’s most individualized language arts program. Using an integrated technology platform, SylvanSync provides digital education resources to support teachers and students, and resources that adapt to students’ individual needs, based on their performance. The platform helps teachers scaffold instruction and motivate and instruct students in a highly individualized manner. The platform tracks student progress and identifies the most appropriate learning resources to be delivered to the student.

**SylvanSync Reading** provides instruction to students in levels 1–12 in phonics, oral fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension skills, from the most basic topics to more sophisticated analysis and evaluation of texts across the curriculum. Students also have many opportunities to practice writing in response to texts.

The **Ace it! Reading** curriculum is a customized, proprietary small-group reading curriculum developed in collaboration with Harcourt Achieve, Inc., for students in levels K–8. The program addresses the five essential components of reading instruction—alphabetic knowledge and phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary development, and comprehension instruction—as identified by the National Reading Panel (NRP, 2000) and supported by the 2006 NRP report, *Teaching Children to Read*. Additional research indicates that students who are struggling to succeed academically need to receive comprehensive, systematic, explicit, and intensive instruction. Sylvan’s reading program is built on these foundations and uses a balanced approach for building the student’s overall reading knowledge and skills. Delivered in groups of 8–10 students, Ace it! provides opportunities for collaboration and communication throughout the learning process.

The **Sylvan Language Arts camps** are small-group programs that focus on literacy skills as well as writing development. These camps are designed to enrich a student’s academic experience through engaging, creative, and collaborative activities.























































































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