

## Understanding how MNPS's tiered and special education interventions are working to improve students' literacy and numeracy

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In the Fall of 2023, PEER launched one of its first [rapid response projects](#) - quick turnaround research studies designed to answer priority questions for MNPS within six months or less - to better understand the implementation and outcomes of its [tiered intervention programs](#) for literacy and math. As a result of the learning and subsequent discussions from the findings, MNPS leaders generated new questions they wanted to pursue in the next school year to further deepen their understanding of the efficacy of the interventions and how best to support them.

### From Research to Action: The Rapid Response Process

Unlike traditional research timelines where studies may be ongoing for several years, PEER rapid response projects operate on a short cycle and are designed to produce actionable insights for MNPS leaders to make use of immediately. The studies are co-designed with a research lead on the Vanderbilt side and a project sponsor from MNPS. At the end of the project, the research team delivers a presentation with its key findings and ideas for action.



PEER first created the rapid response studies to help ease the tension between the quick timelines needed at the district to make key decisions and larger scale research studies that often do not produce results in such a timely manner. These projects represent an innovative approach to addressing pressing needs and questions in the district through the research partnership and serve as a complement to PEER's more rigorous, longer-term studies derived from the cross-institutional working groups.

## **The Initial Study: Laying the Groundwork**

In 2023, an [initial study](#) examined outcomes from MNPS' tiered intervention programs across 72 elementary and 32 middle schools. Major findings revealed:

- All intervention programs implemented within the district contributed positively to student growth in the 2022-23 school year.
- On average, the intervention programs had a stronger impact in early grades and showed more substantial gains in literacy compared to math.
- The multiple literacy intervention programs offered in the district led to similar overall student growth.

While the initial results were encouraging and showed that MNPS' intervention programs were having desired effects on student outcomes, the findings did not point to any specific type of school where the intervention programs were working best. For example, characteristics among schools with the highest growth included reward schools, priority schools, and Title 1 schools. With these findings, our MNPS partners recognized that constraints within schools likely contribute to a wide variation of implementation practices and quality across different schools leading to some schools having more success with the programs than others. This new understanding would soon become a key focus of the requested follow-up study.

## **Follow-up Study: A Focus on Implementation**

The follow-up study (taking place during the 2024-25 school year) will first seek to replicate the program outcome trends found in the initial study, and confirm that they are consistent across academic years. The research team will also identify schools that appear to be having the most success implementing these programs for a qualitative study. Key questions include:

- Who's teaching the intervention(s), how were they trained, and how are they delivering the intervention(s)?
- How are schools supporting and staffing interventions?
- What interventions are schools using and why?

By combining the quantitative data with on-the-ground qualitative insights, PEER researchers aim to develop clear guidelines and best practices for effective program implementation across all MNPS schools.

## **Driving Change Through Research**

One of the most exciting aspects of the rapid response projects is their potential to empower MNPS leaders to make changes within a current school year or in preparation for the next school year. For example, had the initial study shown that a particular intervention program was not having a positive impact on students, MNPS could make the decision to cut that program from their list of offerings. Since all programs showed positive effects, however, the

follow up study will soon best position MNPS leaders to understand more about what is working in certain schools that are getting the best results, and provide best practice recommendations for schools that are not seeing as much success. As one PEER research partner noted, “

*There are things in systems that sometimes feel really hard to change. But using this research-practice partnership approach, [you feel like you can].”*

This tiered interventions follow up study is one of three PEER rapid response projects launching this school year. Stay connected with PEER via [LinkedIn](#) and our [website](#) for more information and updates.