

The *F.A.S.T. Reading System* Intervention Program is putting struggling readers at Denver's Wyatt-Edison Charter School on the fast-track to reading proficiency

## A Look at *F.A.S.T.* in Action

A mid-January snowstorm has unexpectedly hit Denver, Colorado, but it's nothing compared to the flurry of activity that's taking place inside Andre Bachelet's first period reading class. Here, third and fourth grade remedial reading students are participating in *F.A.S.T.*, an intervention program designed to help them learn the phonics skills and concepts they need to read at grade level.

The class is intense and moves quickly. Today Bachelet is working with students on open syllables, closed syllables and the silent 'e' — and he moves energetically around the room, first saying a sound and having the students echo it, and then working with letters and phrases on a magnetic board at the front of the room. The students then get out their own individual magnetic boards, Bachelet dictates a series of syllables and makes one sound change each time, and the students track the change and replace the appropriate letters on their boards, for example, moving from 'ra' to 'rat' to 'rate.' After the board work, they move on to reading, where they discuss an article on the Wright Brother's first flight.

"At the beginning of the year, many of these students were reading at the kindergarten or first grade level," says Bachelet, "some couldn't even say their alphabet past the letter 'O.'" In addition, 60% of the kids in his class are ELL (English Language Learners).

"It's a tough environment for students and teachers alike," he notes. "We have to do our best to show them that the academics are much more powerful than getting dragged into some street corner gang.

"These kids have been testing BR (below reading) on the SRI (Scholastic Reading Inventory) for three years. It's my job to get them out of BR and get them understanding the wonders and the beauty of reading ... of life.

## Wyatt-Edison Charter School Denver, Colorado



"I measure my success by how many students I get OUT of my classroom. I've already had five students exit this *F.A.S.T.* class since the beginning of the year, and I'll probably have three more moving on at the end of this quarter. So we're off to a good start — and I want them to continue reading."

Bachelet is one of four instructors trained to teach *F.A.S.T.* during the school day at Wyatt-Edison. Joe Taylor teaches the older 5th-8th graders, and two others join Bachelet and Taylor for hour-long after-school tutoring sessions for 40-48 kids.

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- K-8
- 600 students
- Title 1
- 56% Hispanic
- 43% African American
- 1% White
- 35%-40% ELL
- 97% Poverty Level
- 30%-40% Mobility Rate



Students are empowered by fun-to-use magnetic boards and letter sets that make abstract concepts tangible.

## Unlocking the Code

“*F.A.S.T.*’s biggest strength, in a nutshell,” says Bachelet, “is that it has allowed kids to understand the code. If you know the code to a locker room, you can unlock anything. It’s the same thing with this. If you understand the code about reading, you can open the door to everything. And that’s where *F.A.S.T.*’s strength is — it breaks reading down to where it’s kid friendly, teacher friendly, user friendly. It’s just a matter of having a teacher to implement it and get the kids excited about it.”

Principal Kay Frunzi agrees. “*F.A.S.T.* offers children the tool of decoding in a very systematic way, and it’s been very effective in bridging the success of our other reading programs, like SFA (Success for All).”

Wyatt-Edison began piloting *F.A.S.T.* in February 2004 as a tutoring program, after many teachers at the school expressed concerns about poor reading skills among the students. According to Reading Program Coordinator Nicole Quintanilla, it has since proven helpful in determining reading placement, which she reviews every 10 weeks.

At the beginning of each quarter, students are placed in *F.A.S.T.* based upon their CSAP, SRI and Woodcock Johnson Word Attack scores. At the end of each quarter, SRI and Woodcock Johnson Word Attack scores are reviewed again, and if the exit criterion is met, the student may test out of *F.A.S.T.*

“Many times, we have a borderline kid. For example, say we have a 3rd grader who is reading just below grade level. We’ll put him in a *F.A.S.T.* class for a quarter and we’ll really see him bump up — he’ll increase his reading comp, his fluency. So now he’s in a regular grade level SFA class. We’ll continue to monitor his progress and reconsider *F.A.S.T.* placement if he doesn’t sustain forward progress.”

## Looking at the Numbers and the Future

Quintanilla cites numerous examples like the one above. “Here’s another child that was BR all last year, and now look, 436 on the SRI. I mean these are kids who were unsatisfactory on the CSAPs last year, and now they’re in the 600s. I could show you numbers after numbers. These are all success stories, to be quite honest. Here’s another one, BR for years and now they’re scoring. Obviously, *F.A.S.T.* is working.

“I would absolutely recommend *F.A.S.T.* hands down — especially if you have older kids who are coming in or out as non-readers, are having trouble decoding, and you need them to come up quickly. It’s not the only reading program you want in place, but it’s a great supplement.”

“We will continue to work with Edison Schools Inc. to pilot the program and, hopefully, expand the program to other Edison schools,” states Principal Frunzi. “We believe in the program.”

“Next year,” continues Quintanilla, “I want to see a *F.A.S.T./SFA* program at 2nd grade. I want to hit the kids that need help right away. I think that’s where we can get the most impact. I’d love to see the program expanded.

“One other thing, which I think is good for other schools to know, is that with *F.A.S.T.* you don’t have to replenish your materials. It’s not like SFA where you have consumables and you have to re-order every year. It’s an investment, but it’s not necessarily an ongoing one. Once you have the initial materials, you’re good to go.”

“*F.A.S.T.* has absolutely changed the way I teach unsatisfactory and partially proficient students,” says Bachelet. “One, it’s certainly more efficient; two, it’s more effective; and three, it’s more fun for me and my students.

“The layout, the format is right there for you. You don’t need to spend hours of planning. If you’ve gone through the training, you have your syllabus and you read it and you say, ‘Oh yes, I know how to do that.’ You can have a look at your DVD, your CD, refresh your mind, go in there, teach it and you’re done.”

“*F.A.S.T. breaks reading down to where it’s kid friendly, teacher friendly, user friendly. . . . It has absolutely changed the way I teach reading to unsatisfactory and partially proficient students.*”

— Andre Bachelet,  
Program Director/Lead  
*F.A.S.T.* Teacher  
Wyatt-Edison  
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