



Sal's Story Perfect Score!



Sal

Age: 9

Location: FL

Diagnosis: Down Syndrome



Protocol

Sal worked for 30 minutes per day, 5 days per week, for one year. He completed Fast ForWord Language, Language to Reading, and is currently working on the Reading Series.



Results

Sal's ability to focus and stay on task has improved. Not only has he made a breakthrough with phonics, he is scoring 10 out of 10 on reading tests. Most noteworthy, Sal achieved a perfect score on the state alternate assessment.

Sal has Down Syndrome. He is fully included in a mainstream classroom with modified curriculum and the support of a paraprofessional. His mother lovingly describes her 10 year old as "having his foot in both worlds". He is very sociable and often has play dates or attends birthday parties with school peers. Keeping up with grade level sports has become more challenging in recent years. It was important to his mother that Sal also have friends within the Down Syndrome community, so he currently plays for a Special Olympics baseball and basketball team.

While he thrives socially, reading and stamina have long been concerns. Sal's mother was told early on that phonics was not how her son would learn to read. Students with Down Syndrome "don't do phonics", she recalls being told repeatedly. Sight words, instead, were the main focus of support classes they attended. Although Sal made gains over the years, comprehension was a constant challenge, and he was reading below grade level. He would often give up when tired or frustrated, laying his head on the desk or even becoming disruptive on occasion.

Sal's mother worked for Gemm Learning as a coach when he was just a baby. She was familiar with the software and always believed he might benefit from it at the appropriate time. She decided to have him start over the summer at the end of his third grade year. While improving reading was her main goal, she was excited to see what other impact the program might have.

"I had this preconceived notion that he wasn't going to be able to sit there and do the programs for as long as he did. But that was not an issue at all. He's really risen to the occasion. I'm really proud and grateful that we allowed him the opportunity to do this."

—Sal's Mother

Sal is very technologically inclined and enjoys working on the iPad. He was enthusiastic when he learned about the computer program with games that would help him learn. Routine is very important for Sal, and his mother worried that incorporating the games might be a challenge. But Sal took to them right away. He became familiar with the number of games to expect each session and understood that he needed to keep working until the visible timers in each exercise were done. He found the exercises engaging and could work independently most of the time. At times, a familiar sigh or grunt from the next room would alert his mother to a challenging exercise, and she would join her son. They'd use strategies shared by the Gemm staff. Some worked. Some didn't. But, most days they would power through.

When Sal started fourth grade this fall, his mother noticed that she was no longer hearing from the school about her son giving up or quitting tasks. "He was able to tolerate work for longer than ever before." She was surprised to also find him listening intently, breaking down multi-step directions, and really getting the steps. He made gains in reading as well, increasing his reading level between the start of the year and the November parent conference. Sal is very proud of his accomplishments and enjoys sharing that he's scored 9 out of 10 or 10 out of 10 on a reading test, something his mother doesn't recall him doing in years past. While they are still working on furthering his comprehension, Sal has also shown progress in an unexpected area. He is starting to sound out words, instead of relying solely on memorization! "I'm crediting the program for that." His mother shared. "I didn't think he would learn that way. But he's doing it now." Although it's a challenge, it's yet another door that has opened.

Sal recently took the state alternate assessment and earned a perfect score! "He didn't miss a step with the reading comprehension piece, writing, and math."