

# HillRAP

## Research-Based Program in the Context of Coker-Wimberly Elementary School

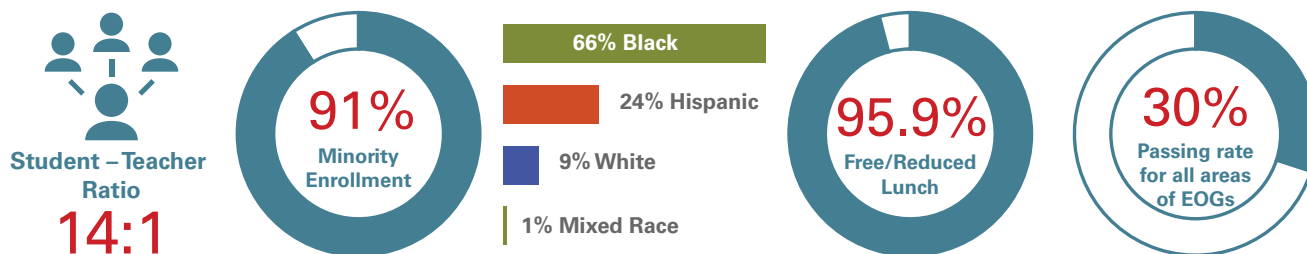
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**H**ill Learning Center, an educational non-profit serving academically struggling students, uses research-based, individualized programs designed to help students reach their full potential. HillRAP is a copyrighted, structured reading intervention program delivered on a 4:1 basis by HillRAP tutors, school-based teachers, or Teacher's Assistants (TAs) who have received extensive training from Hill Learning Center in multisensory structured language development. HillRAP provides teachers with leveled support, monitoring, and coaching from Hill reading specialists throughout the school year.

### School Overview

Coker-Wimberly Elementary School is a pre-K through 5th Grade school serving 368 students located in Battleboro, North Carolina, part of the Edgecombe County Public School System. Edgecombe County started using HillRAP in 2014. During the 2017-18 school year, six HillRAP teachers served 143 students on HillRAP, deepening the partnership between Edgecombe County and Hill Learning Center.



Principal Katelin Row, who finished her second year as Coker-Wimberly principal in the spring of 2018, selected a 16-member cohort from a range of Coker-Wimberly educators and staff members to be trained by Hill Learning Center in phonics, phonemic awareness and strategies for reading and writing. The goal of this training was to improve literacy instruction through an increased school-wide understanding of key research-based pedagogical strategies and interventions. When the Edgecombe School District originally implemented HillRAP, the district targeted 3rd-5th grade students who struggled in their End-of-Grade tests. At the end of the 2016-2017 school year, the first year using the HillRAP program, Ms. Row and her teachers determined that intervening in the 3rd-5th grades was too late in the schooling process for most of their students. Wanting more time with HillRAP as an intervention strategy for her students, Ms. Row decided to focus on 1st-2nd grades during the 2017-2018 school year, while continuing to serve the older students who had participated in HillRAP in the first year. Ms. Row is an advocate of the HillRAP program when implemented with fidelity.



***It works for kids who are intervention resistant. It's explicit and systematic and direct in nature – specific, bite-sized, and differentiated.***

–Katelin Row



### School Highlight: Teacher Leadership at Coker-Wimberly

One key to the success of HillRAP at Coker-Wimberly Elementary School has been the presence of an energetic teacher whose enthusiasm and commitment to HillRAP is evident in her classroom and throughout the school. This teacher, Zina Pittman, appears to be the driving force behind much of the success of HillRAP in her school. After 24 years of classroom teaching and three years of instructional coaching, Mrs. Pittman has dedicated herself

to both HillRAP and her students. She conducts eight, 45-minute HillRAP sessions each day, with each student benefiting from her high expectations and consistent engagement. She manages her group with intensity, making constant eye contact with them across the horseshoe-shaped table, giving practical instructions and reminders. "It's Monday," she reminded the students during the early morning session, "and you know on Monday we get new word lists." She dispenses practical optimism. "You've got nonsense words, which are a little bit tough, but we know how to decode them." She talks the students through each part of the lesson. "We're changing the medial phoneme today. That's our skill for the day. That means you're changing the middle sound. Can you see it in your head?" She challenges the students, encourages them to support and cheer for one another, and she rewards them for their hard work and accomplishments.

Because of Mrs. Pittman's level of engagement and enthusiasm, the students in her fourth grade HillRAP class are genuinely excited about the program. Travonte likes how the program allows him to set concrete goals and meet them. "I feel like I'm getting better," he said with confidence. He's also able to see his progress in real time on the iPad. Jaden feels that the skills he learned from HillRAP carry over to his other classes. All of the students in the HillRAP class have learned from Mrs. Pittman to support and cheer on each other's progress. The four students who are in a class together - Travonte, Jaden, Miguel, and Marlivia - are enthusiastic about each other's successes. They expressed a desire to spend more time engaged in the HillRAP program each day, because it's in this more intimate environment that they receive attention from an experienced, truly extraordinary teacher-leader.

## Recommendations for The Hill Learning Center and HillRAP Schools

1

**Include principal or school leadership in the HillRAP training.** A deeply connected and committed lead person plays an essential role in developing a culture in which HillRAP is not only accepted but embraced. As HillRAP is established as a program in the school, we would encourage other leaders to step forward. This can help HillRAP become more embedded in the school as well as become better understood by other stakeholders, including parents and community members.

2

**Engage everyone in the building.** While all teachers implementing HillRAP must be adequately trained, it's also important that all teachers who have students in HillRAP understand what the data means, the language being used, and how students progress. Schools should consider school-wide trainings as an introduction to HillRAP to facilitate an understanding of the program. At Coker-Wimberly, a cohort of teachers - including the PE teacher - was provided with additional training in the strategies used in the program. We would like to see these types of ideas built out and shared systemically. And because HillRAP is one intervention of many likely being used in a school, each school should have an intentional plan of how HillRAP teachers communicate with classroom teachers.

3

**Move towards a competency-based training program.** While HillRAP training was valued by participants, we recommend a more graduated process where participants would get temporary certification for a specific period of time and then gain their full certification by meeting specific qualifications. These qualifications might include multiple observations, reflections, and/or the successful completion of a micro-credential. Hill Learning Center developed five stacks of micro-credentials around the pillars of reading instruction, and we recommend developing a stack that is associated with the training. This would allow the training to be more personalized, with participants "placing out" of certain components if they've demonstrated that they are able to complete them successfully. This same concept would apply to the implementation of the program itself. There are numerous possibilities to integrate this type of competency-based training and follow-up to ensure the quality of preparation and the fidelity of implementation.

4

**Emphasize the importance of consistent coaching.** HillRAP teachers and tutors implementing the program for the first time need systematic and differentiated coaching. This should not be "as needed" or just when a teacher reaches out with a question or asks for help. Hill offers a structured, internationally-accredited approach to coaching and certifying instructors that includes additional training, 90 hours of implementation, 5 observations and coaching sessions with a mentor, and a case study. Teachers develop a close relationship with their mentor through this approach. While this model was implemented at Coker-Wimberly, it is not required or universal. Hill Learning Center can work with schools to develop a coaching plan tailored to each school or teacher, emphasizing the unique needs of each school and incorporating the individual needs of the teachers. This approach will help ensure successful implementation of the program.