

# Florida Center for Reading Research

Saxon Phonics and Spelling K-3

## What is Saxon Phonics and Spelling?

*Saxon Phonics and Spelling* is a K-3 supplemental phonics program to be used in conjunction with any core reading program. It is a structured, systematic, multi-sensory program based on a philosophy of incremental development of new skills and continual review throughout the year. The K, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> grade programs focus on phonemic awareness, phonics, spelling, alphabetizing, handwriting and fluency. For students who have had at least one year of a *Saxon Phonics program*, there is a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade program to help students maintain current skills and develop more advanced spelling strategies. This program includes explicit comprehension strategies in addition to the components of the programs for the younger ages. Grade specific teacher's manuals consist of binders that include a detailed scope and sequence, a list of support material, handwriting instructions for all the alphabet letters, and information about spelling rules. These binders have removable lesson booklets for the daily whole group lessons. A resource binder provides materials such as parent letters, a variety of masters, and recording forms for assessments. For classroom use there are review card decks for: letters, pictures, spelling, sight words, affixes and alphabet/accents. These materials are used to provide continual review of previously taught skills. Individual student materials consist of worksheets, decodable readers, leveled fluency readers, alphabet handwriting strips, a spelling dictionary, a reference booklet and depending of the grade level, tile sets.



The daily lessons for the *Saxon Phonics and Spelling* program are comprised of three main parts: lesson warm-up, new increment, and application and continual review. The first part is for reviewing skills, the second is for introducing new concepts, and the third part rotates through different activities. While the last part always previews the worksheets for class and home, it includes a fluency reader and assessments one day a week, a decodable reader on another day and small group practice activities three days a week. All parts to the lessons have a format that allows teachers a choice between using a model dialogue or summaries of the lesson to deliver their own presentation. Materials necessary for the lesson are clearly outlined.

Each lesson begins with a warm-up section that has various kinesthetic activities to practice alphabetizing with additional background information on the English language provided in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. This section also includes appropriately sequenced activities in phonemic awareness and a time to use the *Saxon* cards for reviewing letter recognition, letter sounds with pictures, sight words and spelling. The lesson activities are interactive and often require the students to 'echo' their response or use manipulatives such as the letter tiles to represent letter sounds or words.

The next part of the lesson is called new increment. It includes phonics activities, handwriting and spelling rules. Students learn the letter sound then skywrite the letter in preparation for later handwriting activities. Additional aids in remembering a letter sound come from picture cards with a keyword, letter cards denoting letters as vowels or consonants and spelling cards showing the sound made by a letter or group of letters. Phrases are often memorized as a guide to decoding or spelling words. Students learn phrases to explain the different ways to spell a sound. For example, the

long sound of the letter e can be: ee, e, or y so they learn to say “digraph ee comma e final digraph ee comma vowel y”. Sight words are also taught in this section.

The third part of each lesson is for application and continual review of skills. There are a variety of activities during this part of the lesson. One activity involves demonstrating the exercises on the blackboard to explain the worksheet for class and homework. The daily homework sheet strengthens the home-school connection by explaining what the child is learning in school and asking the parent to review these skills at home. Another activity to review skills involves small group practice using the student game cards. For application of skills, a decodable reader using controlled text is introduced twice a week in 1<sup>st</sup> and once a week in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. Fluency readers with a common theme but varying levels of difficulty are also introduced weekly. The average level set is included; easy and challenging levels are available for purchase. Questioning techniques are used to teach print awareness, preview vocabulary and monitor comprehension. This is a whole group activity so the program recommends a daily time for students to read individually to an adult or peer. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade program, reading from the decodable and fluency readers is a scheduled part of the daily lesson. Comprehension strategies are also included at this level. Every fifth lesson has a written and oral assessment component in this part of the lesson. These are designed to be diagnostic tests with suggestions for extra practice to use in remediation of specific problems.

### Is Saxon Phonics and Spelling aligned with Reading First?

Reading First specifies five essential components to be included in a comprehensive reading program: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. *Saxon Phonics and Spelling* is intended to be a supplemental phonics program that includes phonemic awareness, phonics and fluency. They recommend including children’s literature outside of the lesson time.

In the *Saxon* program, phonological awareness is taught through identifying sounds in words, rhyming, and syllables with the greatest emphasis on manipulating phonemes in a word. In terms of phonics, activities center on the use of auditory, visual and kinesthetic modalities. Students may play a game of bingo by covering the appropriate sound (initial or final consonant or middle vowel) in a given word. Within each lesson the activities are linked so that students may hear the sound, learn the letter-sound correspondence then practice decoding words that incorporate the new sound. Later in the lesson students read connected text with the targeted letter. Finally, the students code new words using the appropriate marks. This coding process is used as a tool to help with reading and spelling until the phonetic principles become automatic. Learning to spell new words is a major component of this program and it stresses the connection between decoding and spelling.

There are explicit strategies for teaching vocabulary through affixes and definitions. Story vocabulary is pre-taught for the fluency readers. Automaticity in reading high frequency words is developed through the use of leveled fluency readers, fluency masters and worksheets in grades K-2. However, this skill is not practiced daily with connected text and is considered an optional activity to be done independently or in small groups. Modeling or feedback on student reading is not specified. While the emphasis on spelling and decoding words continues in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, each of the 36 weekly lessons includes one decodable and one fluency reader with instructions for teaching new vocabulary and specific comprehension strategies. At this grade level students are taught explicit strategies to understand point of view,

inferences, sequencing, summarizing and theme. Opportunities to apply these strategies are limited to the one weekly story. All instruction is directed to the whole class but frequent built-in assessment lessons provide for differentiated instruction. Teachers are directed to use the Individualized Practice and Remediation Booklet to help the struggling student.

Professional development can involve a 45-minute introduction to the program and a half-day training prior to implementation. Teacher support via telephone or e-mail is also available.

### Research Support for Saxon Phonics and Spelling



The *Saxon Phonics and Spelling* program was developed based on information gained from scientific reading research. Specific examples of this cited by *Saxon* are its use of small, incremental instructional steps, continual practice and review, and cumulative assessment frequently given. The research presented describing the efficacy of *Saxon Phonics and Spelling* is primarily testimonial in nature; additionally, there are some examples of pre-/posttest scores on state or nationally normed tests that have been given in some schools across the nation. A few of those examples will be reviewed here.

At J.A. Maxwell Elementary School in Georgia, the second grade class's pre-*Saxon* scores in 1998 on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills were at the 48<sup>th</sup> percentile. *Saxon Phonics* was implemented in 1999, and the percentile rank of the students' performance gradually increased to 71 in 2001. No information is given about the reading program the children were engaged in before *Saxon* was implemented, nor if there were other changes in the school or grade level which may have contributed to the change in scores.

In Idaho, students in Bonneville Joint School District 93 were taught in grades 1-3 using *Saxon Phonics*. Reading scores were measured in the winter of 2001 using the Idaho Reading Indicator, and were compared with statewide scores. In each of the three grades, students in the district scored at a higher percentile rank than did the students in the state as a whole. In first grade, it was 65 vs. 75%, in second, 55 vs 62%, and in third, 53 vs. 66%. No information is given about district vs. state demographics, which is vitally important in deriving an interpretation of these score comparisons. Furthermore, the skills assessed by the Idaho Reading Inventory are not specified.

In sum, *Saxon Phonics and Spelling* is founded on research principles that have been shown repeatedly to be effective in the development of young readers. Although there is indication from a number of informal evaluations that *Saxon Phonics and Spelling* may be an effective program in teaching early reading skills, studies with more complete information and higher research standards (e.g., use of appropriate control groups) are needed to confirm this efficacy.

## Strengths & Weaknesses

### Strengths of *Saxon Phonics and Spelling*:

- The multi-sensory approach and use of manipulatives (letter tiles, cards, decodable books to color) are engaging for students. It may also be helpful for students who require multiple modes of input for maximal learning.
- The built-in assessment every 5<sup>th</sup> lesson helps to monitor student progress and guide instruction.
- Learning objectives are clearly stated for every activity.
- Instruction across components is clearly linked.

### Weaknesses of *Saxon Phonics and Spelling*:

- When they introduce a new sound in a lesson, they also teach the capital and lower case form of the letter, whether it is a voiced or unvoiced sound, a consonant or vowel, a long or short vowel sound with coding and if it is accented. This may be too much information in one lesson for some students.
- It is not clear that research would support the heavy emphasis and time commitment to coding words as recommended in the program.

## Which Florida counties have schools that implement Saxon Phonics and Spelling?

Broward County	954-765-6000	Monroe County	305-293-1400
Calhoun County	850-674-5927	Okaloosa County	850-833-3100
Collier County	239-643-2700	Orange County	407-317-3200
Columbia County	386-755-8000	Osceola County	407-870-4008
Dade County	305-995-1000	Palm Beach County	561-434-8000
Duval County	904-390-2115	Pasco County	813-794-2651
Escambia County	850-469-6130	Polk County	863-534-0500
Hardee County	863-773-9058	Santa Rosa County	850-983-5000
Hendry County	863-674-4550	Seminole County	407-320-0000
Lee County	239-334-1102	Volusia County	386-734-7190

## For More Information

[www.saxonpublishers.com](http://www.saxonpublishers.com)

## References

The 2002 Saxon Report Card. (2002). Norman, OK: Saxon Publishers.



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