

## David Gregory School, Paramus, NJ

# HEADSPROUT TEACHES CHILDREN WITH AUTISM TO READ

At David Gregory School, Headsprout builds on the primary teaching methodology for children with autism, and “the kids love it.”

### A unique academic offering

David Gregory School is a small, private suburban school located in Paramus, New Jersey. It was founded in 1993 to serve children with developmental disabilities, including autism and Pervasive Developmental Disorder (PDD). With just 35 students, a full-day, 11.5-month program, and a 1:1 student/teacher ratio, the students at David Gregory School get the individualized attention they need. But teaching them to read is a challenge.

David Gregory School is not divided into grades the way traditional schools are. Instead, each child is assessed individually, an educational plan is developed based on his or her needs, and progress is monitored daily. The school welcomes students from preschool (age 3) through the elementary years (age 14), but is able to accept children up to age 21. Attracting students from many school districts in New Jersey and New York, the school is ethnically diverse but predominantly male. To take advantage of such a unique academic offering, some parents are willing to have their children travel more than an hour and a half each way.

“Our program is research-based and utilizes principles of Applied Behavior Analysis,” explains Stephen Wuensch, a behaviorist at David Gregory since 2003. “Our purpose is to provide the most effective education based on



the findings and practice of the science of behavior.” David Gregory School was created specifically to meet the needs of students with multiple disabilities, but today it primarily serves students who are on the autism spectrum.

### Headsprout fulfills a specific need at David Gregory

A few years ago, Wuensch read about an online reading program for new readers – Headsprout Early Reading – in Dr. Douglas Greer’s *Verbal Behavior Analysis: Inducing and Expanding New Verbal Capabilities in Children with Language Delays*. Greer, who teaches at Columbia University, is on the forefront of Verbal Behavior Analysis. He referred in his book to the Headsprout program as “a valuable resource.”

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In 2014, Learning A-Z merged Headsprout’s two elementary reading products — Headsprout Early Reading and Headsprout Reading Comprehension — into one adaptive, effective, and fun K-5 online reading program. From introducing early readers to key reading fundamentals to growing reading comprehension skills for more established readers, Headsprout is the perfect resource to help children become capable and confident readers.

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In 2012, Wuensch decided to see for himself what Headsprout Early Reading was all about. The school purchased ten licenses of Headsprout Early Reading and five licenses of Headsprout Reading Comprehension. The programs quickly became an inspiration for David Gregory School’s approach to education.

“While we have multiple strategies for teaching phonics and comprehension, Headsprout fulfilled a specific need for our students,” explains Wuensch. “It’s fun. It’s well designed. And our kids respond positively to being on a computer. There are certain prerequisites to follow the program, and it’s designed to be an independent tool that lets kids sit and click.”

David Gregory School is very data-driven, and the Headsprout program supports that philosophy. The program is repetitive, so students who complete the first few lessons can move through it quickly.

“The predictable nature of MimoSprout works well with our students,” Wuensch notes, “because it builds in multiple exposures to the same kind of tasks, and encourages them to approach problems from different angles. I really like the systematic nature of the program.”

Additionally, both David Gregory School and the Headsprout program are built on a positive reinforcement model. If a student answers a question correctly, the program rewards them. “Headsprout not only builds on our primary teaching methodology for children with autism,” explains Wuensch, “but the kids love it.”

### **The kids are getting the maximum benefit**

While progress with the Headsprout program depends on the individual child, Wuensch says they have seen increases in reading scores since implementing the program two years ago. “Since our kids are required to read aloud as part of the program, we know they’re getting the maximum benefit.”

Today, David Gregory School students use the Headsprout program every three to four days in the classroom. Students as young as 6 and as old as 14 are using the program, depending on their level of development. But regardless of age or level, the children are genuinely excited about the progress they’re making with the Headsprout program.

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