



Bringing Clarity, Consistency and Collaboration to Literacy Instruction

The Kennewick School District in Kennewick, Washington, has made their commitment to literacy clear.



The district has set a high literacy standard, expecting 90 percent of third graders across its 15 elementary schools to read at grade level by the end of every school year. For those who fall below, the district expects at least 75 percent to catch up within three years.

Every elementary school has a support team in place to help students reach literacy goals. “Each building has a team of reading specialists and interventionists,” says Liz Dale, district language arts and literacy specialist. These teams range from one to five educators; there are more than 50 employed district-wide.

The district also has made a promise to provide professional learning, training and growth opportunities to its teachers on a continual basis. During the 2017-2018 school year, 34 K-5 reading specialists and interventionists attended CORE’s [Online Elementary Reading Academy \(OERA\)](#) — an experience that has brought the large literacy team together, helping define a common vision and establish a common foundation for reading instruction.

Defining a district-wide literacy goal

This is not the district’s first interaction with CORE English Language Arts professional learning. “In the '90s, our school board set into motion the 90 percent reading goal,” Ms. Dale says. Since then, the district has been striving to achieve it and has worked with CORE consultants to select a standards-aligned curriculum and provide teacher training.

When the goal was first established, the district took a site-based approach to literacy instruction. “We went to true RTI models within the buildings that were tailored to their needs and customized for specific school demographics,” explains Ms. Dale.

Since then, the district has experienced significant growth. In fact, two more elementary schools will open next year. “More students are moving into the district, and new reading specialists are being brought on board to serve the larger student body,” Ms. Dale says. “With that, we’ve moved from site-based to district-based, and our need has been to document who we are in terms of K-5 literacy.”

Establishing a common literacy foundation

K-5 reading specialists and interventionists began the OERA course in October 2017 and participated through December. This has resulted in the development of a common language and common experience around literacy instruction, and has helped with the move to district oversight and documenting literacy goals. “The bigger we get, the more alike we need to be,” she says. “OERA gave our teachers a common foundation.”

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That foundation is strong. Ms. Dale says that OERA provided teachers with an in-depth diagnostic tool for their students and effective, standards-aligned strategies for teaching literacy. Those strategies are backed by clear evidence so teachers know that what they are teaching is impactful.

Essential to the district’s success with OERA, according to Ms. Dale, was the oversight provided through a CORE course facilitator. “Her oversight in online discussion was helpful,” Ms. Dale explains. “She was able to redirect the conversation or bring to light things we overlooked or missed. Her oversight was key to the whole thing.” In addition, OERA’s variety of learning strategies, videos, textbook reading, online discussion, modeling, and more kept educators engaged throughout the seven-session course.

OERA participants have expressed positive feedback about their experience in the course, and Ms. Dale says many immediately implemented what they learned. She routinely receives updates like the one in this email from a reading specialist:

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Sharing OERA knowledge

For the first time, Ms. Dale says Kennewick School District has a district-wide vision for literacy instruction, thanks in large part to the common literacy foundations taught and practiced in OERA. And now, reading teams are ready to share what they learned. "In the midst of taking the course, many of us felt that teachers need this information, too," Ms. Dale remarks. "It's not just for interventionists, but also for Tier 1 instruction."

Ms. Dale plans to invite CORE facilitators back to Kennewick to conduct training for teacher leaders. Those teacher leaders will then go on to share best practices with ELA teachers in their schools.

The next session of CORE's Online Elementary Reading Academy starts soon. [Visit our site](#) to review the syllabus, preview a course and register.