



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 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](#) — an experience that 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’s 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 re-engaged 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 which has resulted in new elementary schools opening. “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 Online Elementary Reading Academy 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,” Ms. Dale says. “The Online Elementary Reading Academy gave our teachers a common foundation.”

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

Essential to the district’s success with the Online Elementary Reading Academy, 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, the Online Elementary Reading Academy’s variety of learning practices, videos, textbook readings, online discussion, modeling, and more kept educators engaged throughout the 10-session course.

Online Elementary Reading Academy 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 Online Elementary Reading Academy 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 the Online Elementary Reading Academy. And now, reading teams are ready to share what they learned. "In the midst of taking the course, many of the reading specialists recognized that teachers need this information, too," Ms. Dale remarks. "It's not just for interventionists, but also for Tier 1 instruction."

During the 2018-19 school year, Ms. Dale invited CORE facilitators back to Kennewick to conduct an in-person five-day Reading Academy for 34 reading specialists. Seventeen of those reading specialists went on to receive CORE's Train the Trainers certification and are now equipped with the tools to be in-district trainers and spread the use of the evidence-based instructional practices to ELA teachers in their schools. CORE also conducted a Reading Leader course with 17 of the district's administrators so that they also have a solid understanding of effective reading instruction. Additionally, another 167 educators participated in CORE's Online Elementary Reading Academy during the 2018-19 school year.

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