Jackson County Raises Confidence, Scores With *Wonders*® and *SRA Open Court Reading*

Jackson County Public School District, located in northwestern Florida, includes six elementary schools with a diverse PreK through Grade 3 student population. On average, 65 percent of its young students are eligible for free or reduced lunch.

For the last two years, Jackson County has used *SRA Open Court Reading* foundational skills kits in tandem with *Wonders*® to provide its students with a solid reading foundation.

The district's strong partnership with McGraw Hill Education includes having its director of early childhood & elementary education/ professional development serve as a contributing member on the company's internal advisory board.

DISTRICT INFORMATION



Name:
Jackson County Schools

Location:
Marianna, Florida

Grades:
K–3



Implementation

Three years ago, Jackson County Public Schools had low reading scores and a lack of consensus on how to address the problem. Teachers in the district's lower grades wanted to adopt *Open Court Reading* as a solution, but they were outvoted by their peers in the higher grades. Then in 2014, the district's reading scores came back so low, it had to act.

The first step the district took was to introduce *Wonders*® in grades K—3. As the teaching staff became proficient with the program, *Open Court Reading* was introduced to support it. *Open Court Reading* is a classroom-proven, systematic, explicit instruction program that includes foundational skills kits. These kits are designed to engage K—3 students while delivering the basics of reading and writing one step at a time.

First-grade teacher Marla White learned to read using *Open Court Reading* and she was happy to see it introduced into her classroom. "I began my teaching career in the upper grades, where kids had big, open gaps in their learning that I didn't understand," she said. She decided to teach younger students in the hope that she could close those learning gaps with early reading instruction.

"When *Open Court Reading* was implemented for K—3 in Jackson Schools, it was refreshing to start with a blank canvas," she said. "I like that the program is structured purposefully, so I can see the foundation being laid like the stacking of blocks. That makes me more confident and it makes my instruction more purposeful."

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Student Engagement

Kayla Hyatt is a first-grade teacher at Graceville Elementary in the Jackson County School District. She said she loves *Open Court Reading* because it moves quickly enough that strong readers don't get bored, but leisurely enough to review concepts for slower readers.

"The program regularly revisits concepts we've already learned," she said. "It will throw out words students learned three weeks ago just to review, and make sure no one misses anything."

Hyatt notes the wide and comprehensive variety of activities and resources available in the *Open Court Reading* foundational skills kit.

"It looks like a lot at first, but ensures the kids will be engaged," she said. "My first-graders love all of the activities: learning consonants by colors, singing songs that go with letter sounds,

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White shared Hyatt's enthusiasm. "You will see amazing progress. It's phenomenal," she said. "The kids may come in knowing some letters and sounds. Before long they move from letters and sounds to whole words, then to sentences, then paragraphs and full text. No other grade sees students make jumps of that magnitude. With *Open Court Reading*, all of our kids are success stories. They have all grown in significant leaps and bounds."

Results

Casey Caynor, first-grade teacher at Golson Elementary, was not trained in phonics and had never taught phonics before. She said *Open Court Reading* not only improved student comprehension, it changed the way she taught.

"I thought I was teaching with fidelity, but I wasn't. My kids were struggling with cold reads because of it," she said. "Now we break it apart, talk about blends, diagrams, and picking out parts of the word. My kids can do it on their own without guidance by the end of the year."

Caynor reported that the first year they implemented *Open Court Reading* with *Wonders*®, grades immediately improved. They only retained seven students that year. By the second year the improvements were even more dramatic—they didn't hold a single student back.

Hyatt has also seen a difference at Graceville Elementary. "When we combined *Open Court Reading* with *Wonders*®, we went from a C school to a B school. That was amazing."

She attributes the change to a clear focus on phonics.

"When we taught comprehension without phonics, we saw third and fourth graders who could not yet read," she said. "Now, with the routines of sounding and blending, all our kids

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move up with the skills to succeed. I can write a very difficult word on the board, and within four seconds, my first-graders are sounding and blending it. They get it."

She added that parents have been excited about the more structured approach as well. "I was in an early parent-teacher conference with a mom whose child was struggling. So, I taught her how to do sounding and blending at home," said Hyatt. "Before this happened, her daughter would never raise her hand. Now she has the confidence that she knows how to do it, and she wants to answer."

The Future

It's not just the parents that are pleased with the progress Jackson County Schools has made. Students also have more confidence and they are learning the skills that lead to a life-long love of reading.

White said, "I grew up with *Open Court Reading* and I have always been an avid reader. I'm starting to see the connection. This program fosters that love of reading."

Caynor thinks that the clear success and across-the-board buy-in they have seen will help them expand on what they are doing in the district.

"We are talking about full-force *Open Court Reading*," she said. "Our goal is to find new ways to blend *Wonders*® and Open Court Reading to focus more on skills."

Caynor offered advice for schools that are thinking about implementing these programs. "Take it one step at a time, and don't skip steps," she said. "If you do exactly what the book says, you will see amazing results."

About the Programs

SRA Open Court Reading

Open Court Reading provides schools with the tools to build strong readers, writers, and thinkers. The curriculum offers a legacy of success that spans over 50 years. It supports all students learning to read with explicit, systematic, research–based instruction. The program's resources support best teaching practices to build a foundation for lifelong learning.

Wonders

Wonders® (grades PreK—6) is a comprehensive literacy program that connects classrooms to core standards and inspiring literature. *Wonders*® is uniquely designed to move students ahead seamlessly, whether they are in the core classroom, participating in English language development instruction, or benefiting from intervention support.

Discover more about the benefits of these McGraw Hill Literacy programs at: **mheonline.com/Literacy**

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