The Township of Ocean School District Builds Reading Skills with *SRA Open Court Reading*

Eleanor Hughes, Supervisor of K—5 Language Arts for the Township of Ocean School District, is a seasoned veteran in teaching young students grammar, spelling, vocabulary, writing, and all things Language Arts related. Language Arts, according to Hughes, is the most important content area for students. In her estimation, students without a solid background in Language Arts will be less prepared to compete in the global market.

Her career in education began in 1971, when she took a job as a teacher for grades 3 and 4 in Colts Neck, New Jersey. During her time as a first grade teacher in Point Pleasant Borough, New Jersey, she was introduced to a Language Arts program that she would use throughout the remainder of her career–the *SRA Open Court Reading* program. "I piloted Open Court for the Point Pleasant Borough School District in 1996," she says. "I found it to be extremely effective in producing capable readers."



DISTRICT INFORMATION



Name:
Township of Ocean School District

Location:
Oakhurst, New Jersey

Hughes endorses *Open Court Reading* and is a proponent of the *Open Court* program, *Imagine It!* She explained her devotion to *Open Court Reading*, saying, "Aside from the outstanding reading foundation it creates, it is fully aligned with the Common Core State Standards and has many characteristics that meet Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) expectations."

Hughes' belief in *Open Court Reading* is shared by her current employer, the Township of Ocean School District. During interviews for her current position, she learned the district had been using *Open Court Reading* for decades with great results. After so many years of student success, it was no surprise that the district and Hughes adopted *SRA Imagine It!*, a current McGraw Hill Education *Open Court Reading* program.

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Implementation

"When Imagine It! was put on the market, my reading specialists and I examined the program and found it to be a better *Open Court Reading* program in many respects," says Hughes, referring to the Township of Ocean School District's implementation of the program. According to Hughes, the implementation met with no opposition and did not need to be piloted because of the district's previous excellent results with *Open Court Reading* programs. Implementing Imagine It! took place over a few years, and it was incorporated into a few grade levels at a time to maximize cost efficiency. Training sessions and professional development were provided by McGraw Hill Education.

Having used the program since it was first introduced in 2008, the Township of Ocean School District was pleased to find added value as they approached their Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers measurement—a set of expectations that measure whether students are on track to be successful in college and their careers. *Imagine It!*, according to Hughes, meets many of the PARCC expectations while also fulfilling CCSS demands. "The ratio of fiction to non-fiction is exactly what the CCSS recommends," she says.

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Reaction

In a review comparing *Imagine It!* with similar programs, Hughes says, "*Imagine It!* is by far the best program on the market for beginning reading." She feels the most effective aspect of the program is the combination of the phonics program and phonemic awareness exercises. Noting that her teachers have experienced great results and that the feedback from parents has been very favorable, Hughes says, "I would recommend this program wholeheartedly for K—2 teachers." She believes any district can replicate the Township of Ocean School District's success, saying, "Follow the K—2 Teacher Editions faithfully and you will see great results."

Results

After *Imagine It!* was implemented in the Township of Ocean School District, Hughes says students did well on the New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge. "Our writing scores have improved slightly over the course of the last few years," she says, attributing this success to the combination of Writer's Workshop and the Six Traits of Writing in the *Imagine It!* program. "We are above the state mean and on par with districts identified as sharing similar socioeconomic characteristics," she says.

The Future

Looking forward, the Township of Ocean School District's most immediate challenge is taking the PARCC assessment. Hughes expects the Township of Ocean School District to do well on the assessment as a direct result of implementing *Imagine It!* "There are times when

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I wonder whether the writers of *Imagine It!* wrote the PARCC," she says. Hughes proves her point as she details how *Open Court Reading* content provides the three types of writing required by PARCC—narrative, literary analysis, and research simulation. "*Imagine It!* incorporates many of the expectations that are required by the PARCC," she says. "If a teacher reasonably adheres to the program, students should do well."

Hughes also favorably compared *Imagine It*! to a popular methodology in Language Arts—close reading. She points out that the program promotes the development of close reading by helping students examine vocabulary in context, determine the author's point of view, cite textual evidence to support opinions and responses, and compare and contrast texts.

As a long-term advocate of *Open Court Reading* programs, Hughes looks forward to the program retaining its original premise of "giving children the tools they need to decipher the English language as quickly as possible so they don't invent their own methods of decoding." Based on her review of the content in *Imagine It!*, she believes the program is continuing its tradition of being a recognized leader in Language Arts instruction.

SRA Open Court Reading

To learn more about *Open Court Reading*, visit: **opencourtreading.com**

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