

SRA Open Court Reading Launches Dillsboro Elementary K–6 Students to New Levels of Reading Success

Dillsboro Elementary is located in Dillsboro—a charming small town in southeastern Indiana on the outskirts of the Cincinnati metropolitan area. It is the South Dearborn Community School Corporation’s only K-6 school and serves fewer than 300 students.

The Dillsboro school community is devoted to fostering a culture of growth. It promotes an inclusive, differentiated learning environment where all students can thrive academically, socially, and emotionally. Minority enrollment at the school represents 4% of the student body, and 53% of its students are eligible to participate in the federal free and reduced-price meal plan.

In a recent interview, Principal Kyle Miller discussed the challenges Dillsboro Elementary faced with its former ELA program. She noted that the program wasn’t working for K–6 readers because it wasn’t challenging enough. She chose to adopt *SRA Open Court Reading* for the 2024-25 school year to provide a results-driven solution

DISTRICT INFORMATION



Name:

Dillsboro Elementary

Location:

Dillsboro, Indiana

Grade:

K–6

Challenge

One of the issues Principal Miller noticed with the school’s previous ELA program was that students recognized words, but they didn’t always understand what those words meant or how to properly use them. To her, this meant their foundational knowledge was not firm enough to build on. She knew instructors needed a solution that would build a strong foundation based on the Science of Reading; one that would bring together all critical areas of literacy, including phonics and phonemic awareness, decoding, and sight reading.

“We wanted a proven, results-driven program where everything we needed to teach literacy was there, so instructors could spend less time gathering supplemental learning resources that may not be vetted.”

— **Principal Kyle Miller**
Dillsboro Elementary School

Solution

Principal Miller knew she needed a systematic and explicit ELA program. She chose *Open Court Reading* because it addresses all critical areas of literacy through systematic, explicit instruction grounded in the Science of Reading. The program follows a carefully designed

scope and sequence that builds skills step by step. Teachers model each part of the learning process and then guide students as they practice and apply what they’ve learned.

“When I was looking for a solution, I noticed that one program might be strong on phonics and phonemic awareness but not decoding. Or it might support sight recognition but not reading comprehension. I chose *Open Court Reading* because it offers all critical elements of the Science of Reading in one program.”

— **Principal Kyle Miller**
Dillsboro Elementary School

Because *Open Court Reading* includes clear, well-structured lessons, even new teachers felt supported from day one. The built-in teacher guidance made it easier to focus on student progress, not on assembling or supplementing materials.

When asked if her team was worried about losing creativity, Miller said, “I don’t remember when or why structured programs started getting a bad rap. We have plenty of places in our day where we can be creative as teachers—but we need something focused on

results and building that foundation. Having a clear roadmap helps our teachers stay focused on those goals.”

Miller acknowledges that implementing a more rigorous, fast-paced program was an adjustment for her team. She credits the teachers’ dedication and trust for making the shift possible. Early on, some teachers spent more time in guided practice to help students grow comfortable with the structure and expectations.

She recalls one experienced teacher—a 17-year literacy veteran—who shared that her students were feeling overwhelmed. Miller suggested reviewing the previous week’s letter-sound correspondences before moving on. That small adjustment gave the students the confidence they needed to keep progressing.

Results

During the first year implementing *Open Court Reading*, Principal Miller remembers lying awake at night, staring at the ceiling and wondering if they had taken on too much.

Her concerns were put to rest when one of her teachers came to her excited to share the results from a mid-year ‘iLearn’ checkpoint. In just a few months, his students had grown from 28% passing to 59%—a remarkable gain in the program’s first year.

Principal Miller notes that these checkpoints empower both students and teachers by showing exactly where they are—and how much progress they’re making. As students adjusted to the rigor of *Open Court Reading*, they began to see their own growth, and their confidence grew with it. The results speak for themselves. By spring of the 2024-2025 school year—their first year of using *Open Court Reading*—NWEA assessments for all grades at Dillsboro Elementary showed that 31% of students were at or above the 60th percentile, and another 18% were at or above the 80th percentile.

Compared to the previous school year, Dillsboro saw reading scores improve across all grades, Kindergarten to fifth grade, as well as gains for students who were well-below Benchmark in their respective grades.

NWEA State Assessment | Dillsboro Elementary Reading Achievement | Spring 2024–25

	Year over Year (YoY) improvement
Kindergarten (Below benchmark improvement)	42%
1st grade	28%
2nd grade	17%
3rd grade	15%
4th grade	32%
5th grade	3%

In the 2024-25 school year, 1st-grade through 5th-grade students made strong improvements with the help of *SRA Open Court Reading*. Though implementation was more challenging for the 5th-graders who had been using the previous solution for years, the results show a 3% improvement in their reading scores.

Principal Miller also pointed to significant gains in math, which she directly connects to the success of *Open Court Reading*. She believes that stronger reading skills—particularly in vocabulary, comprehension, and following multi-step directions—are helping students perform better across subjects.

This progress has made believers out of Dillsboro Elementary’s ELA teachers, who credit *Open Court Reading* for the gains they’re seeing—and they’re more excited about the results every day.

Moving Forward

When asked what advice she’d give to other schools exploring a K–6 ELA program, Principal Miller highlights the importance of embracing the rigor of *Open Court Reading*. She recalls that it was an adjustment for some students—particularly in fifth grade—but with the right support, they rose to the challenge. “This program has more rigor, so you have to support them through it,” she explains. That extra challenge encourages students to think more deeply and develop stronger skills—building a solid foundation that prepares them for success in later grades and beyond.

What made the difference at Dillsboro was a committed staff, data-informed instruction, and a classroom culture focused on growth. That combination helped teachers unlock the full potential of *Open Court Reading* and helped students build confidence along the way. Even parents have noticed their children working harder, and Principal Miller has had many

conversations celebrating this growth. Miller explains that *Open Court Reading* focuses on mastering the critical areas of reading. This approach gives a clearer and more meaningful picture of each child’s progress, making their achievements all the more exciting and worth celebrating.

“*Open Court Reading* has been truly transformational in our building,” Principal Miller shared, adding, “Compared to this time last year, the progress is remarkable—wow! We’re genuinely excited about our reading growth!”

— **Principal Kyle Miller**
Dillsboro Elementary School

In the coming year, Dillsboro Elementary will continue partnering with McGraw Hill to expand *Open Court Reading* implementation, including support for Special Education students. Dillsboro Elementary has already made remarkable gains with its reading program and is committed to continuing *Open Court Reading* for the foreseeable future. Now Principal Miller can rest easy, knowing her vision for a transformative ELA program has become a reality.

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