

Mathews Elementary Sees Dramatic Literacy Gains with *SRA Open Court Reading*

Mathews Elementary School is part of Greenwood School District 50 in Greenwood, South Carolina. Out of nine elementary schools in the district, Mathews was the first to implement *SRA Open Court Reading*, a program grounded in more than 60 years of research in the Science of Reading.

In a recent interview, Mathews Principal Debbie Leonard and K–2 Academic Coach Sandra Bosler described their experience implementing *Open Court Reading* to improve student literacy at their school. “We’ve used *Open Court Reading* for the past three years, and the reading confidence our students have now is amazing,” Leonard said. “And we saw that improvement within the very first semester.”

Challenge

Mathews has historically been the poorest performing elementary school in the district, with the highest poverty level. Before implementing *Open Court Reading*, the school was using the Lucy Calkins reading curriculum—a guided literacy approach that focuses less on phonics and more on story themes, characters and plots.

Mathews had incorporated the recently added phonics component of Lucy Calkins into its curriculum, after realizing that key element was missing. But there were still areas that were lacking. “We were missing the crucial foundational piece that fosters phonemic awareness, and our students weren’t being taught how to decode words or sound them out,” Leonard said. They realized they needed a proven

DISTRICT INFORMATION



Name:

Mathews Elementary School

Location:

Greenwood, South Carolina

Grade:

K–5

research-backed program that helped build those essential skills—one that would establish a strong foundation for lifelong literacy.

Solution

Mathews implemented McGraw Hill’s K–5 *SRA Open Court Reading* program during the 2020–2021 academic year. “Our main goal was to shore up our Tier 1 instruction, and we believed *Open Court Reading* was the answer,” Bosler said. For grades 1 and 2, Mathews started with the phonics element of the program. Bosler emphasized that

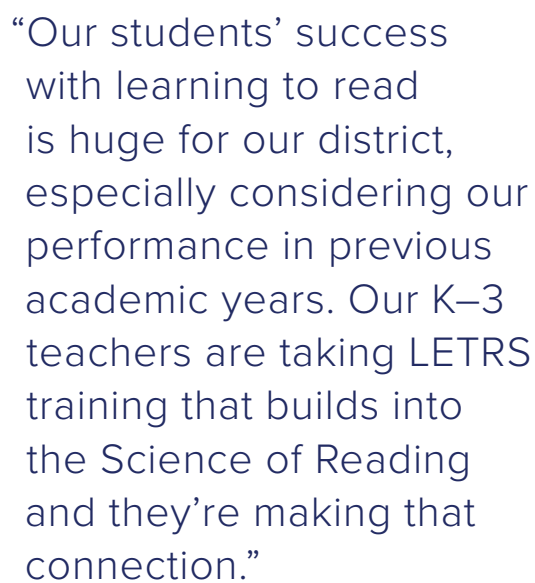
“it was important that our change in curriculum wasn’t overwhelming for the students, so we began with phonics instead of trying to implement the entire program at once.” She said they wanted the students to have at least a year to master that critical foundational piece.

It was equally as important that the new curriculum wasn’t overwhelming for Mathews teachers, which is why they were provided with a lot of support along the way. Leonard said, “We were basically having to retrain our teachers, because this was a totally different approach than what they were used to.” McGraw Hill addressed that need by sending *Open Court Reading* specialists to the school to model lessons for Mathews teachers and academic coaches. “It really was a ‘we’re in this together’ experience, with everyone working side by side and engaging in hands-on program training,” Bosler added.

Results

Leonard and Bosler are thrilled with the eye-opening results Mathews has achieved from implementing *Open Court Reading*. “Our

students’ success with learning to read is huge for our district, especially considering our performance in previous academic years,” Leonard said. “Our K–3 teachers are taking LETRS training that builds into the Science of Reading and they’re making that connection.”



“Our students’ success with learning to read is huge for our district, especially considering our performance in previous academic years. Our K–3 teachers are taking LETRS training that builds into the Science of Reading and they’re making that connection.”

—Debbie Leonard
Principal
Mathews Elementary School

Mathews’ latest test scores speak volumes. In the spring of 2019, the school’s Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) ELA assessment revealed that its kindergarten students were in the 38th percentile. **In the spring of 2023, they were in the 97th percentile.** Similarly, the MAP ELA achievement percentile for Mathews first graders was 24 in 2019, and **in 2023 that percentile shot to 95.** Mathews also received an Excellent rating on the SC State Report Card in 2022—yet another impressive accomplishment.

Mathews Elementary MAP ELA achievement percentiles have improved dramatically in just a few years with the support of *SRA Open Court Reading*

Grade Level	2019 Achievement Percentile Spring MAP ELA	2023 Achievement Percentile Spring MAP ELA
K5	38	97
1st	24	95
2nd	29	70
3rd	7	53
4th	28	70
5th	25	60

Grade Level	2019 Achievement Percentile Spring MAP MATH	2023 Achievement Percentile Spring MAP MATH
K5	39	99
1st	29	99
2nd	23	78
3rd	5	71
4th	7	53
5th	15	42

Leonard said the students’ enthusiasm for reading has been the most inspiring aspect of all. “So many of our students are reading at or above grade level, and I’ve seen them in the halls talking about reading to each other,” she said. “We’ve also had parents tell us how much they appreciate their kiddos being excited about bringing books home to read.”

Bosler noted that another rewarding discovery about *Open Court Reading* has been that it not only enriches literacy development—but classroom management as well. “Our new teachers have especially benefited from the instructional continuity and systematic format of the program,” she said. Reducing class size has also accelerated success at Mathews. After rearranging Title I funds and placing

interventionists in the classroom with teachers, they now average 15 to 18 students for each class, compared to the previous average of 28 students per classroom.

Moving Forward

Well-versed in the Science of Reading, Bosler was initially hired to help implement *Open Court Reading* at Mathews. Because of the school’s dramatic literacy gains, she is now helping to implement the program districtwide, by modeling lessons in the classroom and coaching teachers at other schools. “We saw such incredible growth at Mathews, especially with K–2, that now all of our elementary schools in District 50 use it,” Bosler said.

About *SRA Open Court Reading* K–5 Literacy Program

Grounded in decades of literacy research and a proven history of efficacy in the classroom, *SRA Open Court Reading* has been building strong readers, writers, and thinkers for more than 60 years.

Underpinned by findings from learning theory and cognitive science—also known as the Science of Reading—and proven to achieve reading gains in a diverse range of readers from beginning to fluent, *Open Court Reading* is research-validated as well as research-based. A carefully crafted instructional plan and a purposeful progression of skills empower teachers and help make research actionable. By recognizing foundational skills as critical building blocks, *Open Court Reading* prepares students for a lifetime of literacy and learning.

We understand that class performance can improve due to a number of factors, including the innate ability and prior education of the students participating, as well as differences among educators and their pedagogies. We believe that, even taking these factors into account, Open Court Reading can contribute to improvements in student outcomes.

To learn more about our programs, visit:

Science of Reading Curriculum | *Open Court Reading* for K–5 | McGraw Hill

