



CASE STUDY

Open Court Reading Helps Students Catch up in Reading Proficiency

ABOUT THE DISTRICT

Name

Bradley County Schools

Location

Cleveland, Tennessee

Grades

K-5



Overview

Educators at Bradley County Schools in Cleveland, Tennessee were faced with some staggering numbers: 48 percent of third-grade students were reading on grade level. That meant five out of every 10 were not.

“We were above the state average of 43 percent,” says Terri Murray, supervisor of Federal Programs/Media Services for the district where 10 of 11 K-5 schools are Title I. “But still, 48 percent proficiency was not good enough for us.”

Murray and her district colleagues set a goal for 90 percent of third graders to be reading at grade level by 2021. They investigated programs to help get them there, and chose *Open Court Reading* from McGraw-Hill Education, which had proven successful for a Washington State district they had contacted.

Implementation

“After one full year of using *Open Court Reading* in all K–2 classrooms, Bradley County has seen gains in those three grades,” says Traci Blackburn, the district’s ELA coordinator of K–12 education. Third grade was added to the district this year, and fourth and fifth grades are scheduled to follow, to ultimately cover all 4,300 students in K–5.

“We chose *Open Court Reading* because we needed consistency,” Blackburn says. “When students go from one classroom to another, they know the routines and procedures. And the foundational skills and the rigor of the text have been key.”

The systematic instruction routines in *Open Court Reading* are taught and modeled using predictable patterns that students can identify and remember. The K–5 reading, writing, and language arts curriculum includes differentiated instruction, English language learner support, and an inquiry/higher-order thinking strand and writing strand.

“*Open Court Reading* starts with phonemic awareness and foundational skills and then goes right into letter names and letter sounds,” Murray says.

“We’re actually teaching kids spelling patterns and sound spellings and how to spell different patterns of words,” adds Blackburn. “And they use them in their reading and writing. The text is very challenging. The vocabulary is very challenging.”

Results

Following the first full year of implementation, the district looked at the percentage of students at or above the 50th percentile, the district’s indicator of reading proficiency. “We had gains at all grade levels except for third grade, which had not yet implemented *Open Court Reading* as its core instruction,” Blackburn says.

ABOUT OPEN COURT READING:

Open Court Reading is a comprehensive K–5 reading, writing, and language art curriculum. The explicit and systematic instruction aligns with how young students learn and process new information. With strong foundational skills—along with comprehension, writing, and inquiry—students are well-prepared for a lifetime of literacy.

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Traci Blackburn,
ELA Coordinator,
Bradley County School District

One example of gains can be seen in kindergarten, where, in the fall of 2016, 64 percent of students were at or above the 50th percentile. In the spring, that number grew to 71 percent, according to Measures of Academic Progress (MAP), which is a nationally normed assessment. RIT scores also showed growth, ranging from 15.5 points in second grade to 23.9 points in kindergarten—exceeding district expectations.

“Trying to keep everyone on board was the biggest hurdle last year,” Blackburn says. “But once teachers saw the growth we were getting—according to midyear data—they could see the benefit of what we were doing.”

“The district also involved parents, community and the state education commissioner, inviting them to a celebratory program highlighting student leadership and introducing the district’s new reading goal,” says Sheena Newman, supervisor of elementary education and creator of the district leadership program. “One of the most important things we do is teach our students to read, because all other skills rest on this skill.”