



CASE STUDY

Marysville Creates a Strong Foundation With *SRA Open Court Reading*

ABOUT THE DISTRICT

Name

Marysville District Schools

Location

Marysville, MI

Grades

K–3



Introduction

Marysville, Michigan is located on the western shore of the St. Clair River, across from Corunna, Ontario. The district serves five public schools, including three elementary schools: Gardens, Washington, and Morton Elementary.

For nearly a decade, the K–3 Language Arts teachers in all three Marysville elementary schools taught reading with MacMillan textbooks published in 2005—four years before the Common Core State Standards were released. So, when the district had the opportunity to participate in a 2016 case study for a new edition of *SRA Open Court Reading*®, they accepted enthusiastically.

“Our teachers were doing their best to teach to the new standards by supplementing the numerous print program resources and materials, but it was clear that we needed a rigorous Tier I program,” said Superintendent Dr. Shawn Wightman. “I was familiar with *Open Court Reading* after having taught it in other districts. I knew the benefits of its routines; i.e., sound-by-sound blending, dictation, and comprehension strategies. From my perspective, it made sense to bring the program to Marysville.”

Implementation

From January through June of 2016, three first-grade teachers volunteered to participate in the case study: Mrs. Karnan from Washington Elementary, Mrs. Rankin from Morton Elementary, and Mrs. Dobson from Gardens Elementary.

The teachers had to adjust to the transition quickly, in part because the study began halfway through the school year.

“We had to start fresh with *Open Court Reading* midyear, and we had already established our routines,” said Karnan. “Initially we felt overwhelmed, but when we started to see the value to the students, we loved it.”

Dobson recalled the transition to *Open Court Reading* as eye-opening: “We were doing the best we could with the old textbooks until midyear,” she said. “When we switched, we noticed that even our really good readers had holes in their phonemic awareness. It was challenging to suddenly be teaching such a comprehensive program, but it was immediately clear that all of our students needed it.”

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Manjana Karnan,
1st Grade Teacher
Washington Elementary,
Marysville District Schools

Open Court Reading was created for just that purpose. It is a research-proven program focused on teaching phonemic awareness, phonics, and fluency skills through explicit, systematic instruction.

All of the teachers saw results right away, but they agree it would have been more effective to begin at the start of the school year. “My advice to anyone who might want to use *Open Court Reading* is to begin teacher training at the end of a school year and implement the program in classrooms in the fall,” said Wightman. “Teachers need time to plan over the summer. They need time to prepare.”

Engagement

Teachers who are being introduced to an explicit program, such as *Open Court Reading*, often have the same concerns: they wonder if following a script will prevent them from teaching in the dynamic and engaging ways they normally do.

Karnan said that it’s fine to follow the script. “The script takes away wasted time,” she said. *Open Court Reading* lessons are delivered in small doses so, by the time you are done, the students are reading independently.”

Karnan particularly enjoyed the online lessons. “I am a tech person, so I love the online component. I am able to teach to the way kids learn in today’s world,” she said. “For instance, I model the lesson, they read it, and then I put it up on the SmartBoard and use my iPad to guide the lesson. That way, the students engage with the information several different ways.”

Karnan added that the technology helped address disconnects between how students learned at home and in school: “Parents can log on at home and have access to the same thing we are doing in school. It’s so nice when they know how we are pronouncing the “D” sound or the “K” sound. We’re all on the same page.”

Dobson said one of her favorite things in *Open Court Reading* is the vocabulary. “I love, love, love the green band with foundational skills and vocabulary,” she said. “The kids think they are so smart because they know all of the words and know them well.”

As a veteran reading teacher with over 25 years of experience, Dobson was surprised that teaching from a script made her a better teacher. “I don’t do things halfway, and I am open to change,” she said.



“Open Court Reading has made me love my job again because I can see the results. I’m excited to come to school to see how the kids progress.”

Results

Toward the end of the initial efficacy study of *Open Court Reading*, Superintendent Wightman received an email from a student’s parent that assured him Marysville schools were on the right track. Part of the email read:

Dear Dr. Wightman,

I am writing on behalf of Leanne Dobson at Gardens Elementary and the reading program she is piloting with my son’s first-grade class. I have three boys in your district, and I am a teacher of 18 years. In January, I received a note about the Open Court Reading program Mrs. Dobson was planning to start in my son’s room. He is my youngest, and although his brothers are very strong readers, I felt that he was not progressing at the same rate. By March, I was amazed at his reading skills, including decoding strategies that seemed to develop overnight. Today, we visited the library, and he was excited to check out chapter books instead of picture books! He enjoys reading the books sent home for practice, and his confidence has increased

greatly. I appreciate that my son had the opportunity to be part of this program. It has given him strategies and skills that will last a lifetime.

Wightman attributed this type of success to the strong foundational skills offered in *Open Court Reading*. “At an early age, students learn to read. As they get older, they read to learn. Consequently, being able to read serves as the foundation for all other learning.”

He added that the proof is not just in the numbers. “Results are results,” said Wightman, “but when my top-notch teachers are all in support of *Open Court Reading*, for me, that’s the real validation that it works.”

Karnan said that even though they were a little overwhelmed during the pilot, she was definitely a fan of the program. “Our intensive kids had never been that high,” she said. “The foundational skills are so powerful, they help everyone.” Karnan explained that if you follow the routines closely, every day’s lesson builds easily onto the previous day. “Every day we introduce a letter sound, and every sound in that day’s story is one they’ve heard. There are no surprises. The kids know what to do, and before you know it, they can read!”

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Leanne Dobson,
1st Grade Teacher
Gardens Elementary,
Marysville District Schools

Adding to these successful results was the assessment strand. Rankin explains that, “*Open Court Reading* provides assessments throughout each unit, as well as at the end of the unit and three times a year to allow teachers to constantly monitor data and drive their instruction. This data helps teachers pinpoint which skills need to be retaught because they were not mastered the first time around. Teachers see results because they are able to keep close tabs on how the students are doing throughout the entire program.” Assessments are available in print, as well as online.

The Future

Today, *Open Court Reading* has been rolled out to every K–1 classroom in the Marysville school district, and the three piloting teachers are helping a new group of educators become comfortable with the concept of scripted lessons.

“It can be challenging when you’re not used to being in front of the class all day long,” said Dobson. “I just tell those who are learning the program to stick with it and keep at the modeling and practice. You’ll get through it, and you’ll see amazing results.”

Dr. Wightman said the district is committed to the program going forward, and that also means committing to ongoing professional development.

“Teachers need a coach to become comfortable with the routines before they teach them in front of kids.” He went on to explain, “If you can’t provide job-embedded professional development and support, they will get discouraged, shut the door, and go back to the way they were teaching before. Building principals also need to know what good instruction looks like, and teachers need to feel confident they can succeed.”

Marysville teachers were pleased to see the results of their transition right away. “I’ve seen amazing gains in all of my students, even after half a year,” said Karnan. “This year, we have the whole

year. We’re taking baby steps, but I know we’ll run soon, and I can’t wait to get there. I’ve loved every bit of it.”

About SRA Open Court Reading

Open Court Reading is a comprehensive K–5 reading, writing, and language arts curriculum. With an explicit, systematic approach to teaching, learning is exciting and engaging for all students.

To learn more about *Open Court Reading*, visit mheonline.com/ExploreOCR or contact a McGraw-Hill Education representative.



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