



## CASE STUDY

### *SRA Open Court Reading/Imagine It!* Creates Proficient Readers at Ralph Witters Elementary

#### ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Name

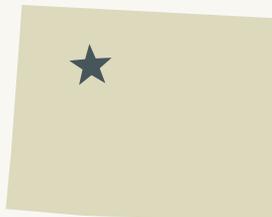
Ralph Witters  
Elementary

Name of district

Hot Springs County  
School District

Location

Thermopolis,  
Wyoming



#### Overview

Ralph Witters Elementary School serves kindergarten through grade 4 students in the small town of Thermopolis, Wyoming. Sixteen percent of the school’s students are in special education and 44 percent of its students are eligible for free or reduced price lunch.

Principal Deborah Brown first came to Ralph Witters as a reading coach in 2008—the same year *SRA Open Court Reading/Imagine It!* was implemented by the school. Brown’s hiring and the implementation of the program were undertaken because reading proficiency scores were unsatisfactory. Only 48 percent of students in 2007 achieved or exceeded expected Rauch Unit (RIT) scores, which measure progress toward reading mastery. But in 2014, after seven years of using the program, the school’s cohort five-year average showed that 82 percent of students were at or above their expected RIT reading level.

“We’ve experienced measurable progress for our students in reading and writing,” said Brown.

Since the implementation of *Open Court Reading/Imagine It!*, the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) scores at Ralph Witters have risen. The percentage of students meeting or exceeding DIBELS benchmark results rose from 68 percent during 2007-2009 to 87 percent during 2012-2014. Eighty-eight percent of students met or exceeded the DIBELS benchmark in 2014.

“We’ve seen excellent growth in literacy skills, going from very low proficiency to very, very high,” said Brown. “And *Open Court Reading/Imagine It!* is the key reason.”

# SRA Open Court Reading, K–5

## Rationale

The decision to use *Open Court Reading/Imagine It!* was made prior to Brown’s hire as the school’s reading coach, but she welcomed the program and knew why the administration selected it. “One reason was that it had a very good assessment program—something that would help identify at-risk students and understand where the previous instruction was falling short.”

The problem prior to 2008, according to Brown, was a lack of consistency in how reading instruction was approached and delivered across different classes and grades. A consistent plan for moving forward from one reading skill component to the next was lacking.

“The teachers just didn’t have the shared scope and sequence of instruction that *Open Court Reading/Imagine It!* provides,” said Brown. “They needed a road map, something that would ensure the building of skills from phonemic awareness to vocabulary and on to comprehension. They also needed a solid

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Deborah Brown, Principal

structure—something that would allow them to assess a new student joining the class late in the school year and bring him or her quickly up to speed.”

In Brown’s analysis, the teachers were dedicated and hard-working professionals, but their energy and hard work needed effective instructional tools and structure to make a difference. “*Open Court Reading/Imagine It!* gave them those tools and that structure,” she said.

## Implementation

During her first two years as the Ralph Witters Elementary reading coach, Brown supported teachers as they participated in *Open Court Reading/Imagine It!* training. She also used the tools provided by the program to generate excitement in the students who were learning to read.

“Every week I selected an Open Court Sound Spelling Card and posted it in the hallway,” she said. “It might be the ‘A’ card with a lamb on it, or the ‘ir/er/ur’ card with a picture of a bird. Then I’d email the teachers to let them know which card would be the ‘Card of the Week,’ and I’d post the card on the bulletin board in the hallway.”

After Brown posted the Open Court Sound Spelling Card, students submitted poems or stories to their teachers using the sound and word highlighted on the card. At the end of the week, Brown selected a winner from the entries and posted it in the hallway.



“The kids really enjoyed it,” she said.

In addition to engaging the students, Brown stressed the importance of training the teachers.

“We did almost a week’s worth of training in Laramie at the beginning, and since then then we’ve had instructional facilitators come in to keep everyone current,” she said, noting that the program is only as effective as the skills and knowledge of the people presenting it.

Brown pointed out that *Open Court Reading/Imagine It!* follows the sequence of the “Big Five” core learning components of early reading instruction, which are Phonetic Awareness, Alphabetic Principle, Fluency with Text, Vocabulary, and Comprehension.

“These are separate, very clear components that must be taught and then blended properly to be truly effective,” Brown said. “Open Court does an excellent job of delineating and articulating the ‘Big Five.’”

## Response

Asked to evaluate the response to the program, Brown said, “Everyone really does seem to like *Open Court Reading/Imagine It!*—the children, the teachers, and the parents.” She particularly likes the robust phonetic component of the program, and noted that, “It’s much stronger than other things we’ve looked at.”



Brown also appreciates how the pre-K version of *Open Court Reading/Imagine It!* prepares students for kindergarten by giving them consistent cueing and instruction. “They know that the ‘A’ is the lamb sound,” she said. “We don’t have to re-teach those things.”

Because of her overwhelmingly positive experience with *Open Court Reading/Imagine It!* and the numerous successes of her students, Brown plans to continually update her instruction with new versions of the program as soon as they become available.

## About McGraw-Hill Open Court Reading/Imagine It!

*SRA Open Court Reading/Imagine It!* enables children to begin reading and comprehending at an early age using explicit, systematic, and research-based instruction across crucial reading areas including, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, phonics, fluency, comprehension, and writing. This systematic instruction is key to helping students access complex literature and informational text, master foundational skills, research and write different text types for different purposes, attain listening comprehension skills, collaborate with peers, understand the conventions of English, and build their vocabulary. Features include easy-to-use lesson plans, support for English Language Learners, instructional technology, and assessment.