

Spotlight Washington state: Professional learning brings literacy improvement

After years of continued growth in the number of students requiring literacy intervention, educators at Edmonds School District in Washington state determined that their community's needs exceeded basic intervention strategies.

"We were heavily focused on intervention, but we weren't moving the needle," said Megan McCarthy, Title I/LAP specialist.

They needed to transform their Tier 1 and Tier 2 instruction, but they knew they needed the support of the teachers—and they got it. By providing increased access to professional learning, including coaching and consulting, classroom teachers and interventionists came together to advocate for a districtwide, unified curriculum. Learn about the district's challenges, what ultimately brought teachers and interventionists together, and their successes (note: the noticeable shift in student attitudes toward reading).

SNAPSHOT

Edmonds School District

- South Snohomish County – 30 miles North of Seattle
- 35 schools
- Total enrollment: 20,933
- Faculty: 1,289
- English learners: 15%
- Students with free or reduced lunch: 36%
- Students with disabilities: 16.3%
- Average daily attendance: 91%

Despite a multiyear focus on expanding their intervention resources, educators at Edmonds School District in Washington weren't seeing measurable gains in student learning. Title I/Learning Assistance Program specialists enlisted the support of 95 Percent Group's Professional Learning Team to assess their understanding of the challenges they were facing and help pave the path ahead.

With access to professional development services, classroom teachers and interventionists came together to advocate for the implementation of a districtwide, streamlined curriculum, one that is inclusive of both whole-group Tier 1 (Core) materials, and a Tier 2 and 3 intervention system.

Learn about their process of implementation, challenges, successes, and how knowledge of the [science of reading](#) fueled the adoption of a district-wide literacy program.

Intervention alone wasn't enough

Despite working with the [Multisyllable Routine Card Package](#) and the [95 Phonics Chip Kit™](#) in conjunction with various other literacy resources, data from the Acadience assessments, [95 Phonemic Awareness Screener for Intervention™](#) (PASI™) and [95 Phonics Screener for Intervention™](#) (PSI™) showed there continued to be gaps in student learning and understanding at Edmonds School District in Washington state.

District Title I/LAP specialists Megan McCarthy and Tory Amos began introducing [95 Phonics Lesson Library™](#) to reading interventionists in their Learning Assistance Program (LAP) High Poverty elementary schools, and encouraged classroom teachers in those schools to utilize the resources to support their students. But there was still more work to do.

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MEGAN MCCARTHY

Title I/LAP Specialist
Edmonds School District, Washington

What was missing? One critical element they needed was high-quality professional learning support to ensure their teachers received the best training possible and could implement the new literacy instruction with fidelity. Under the guidance of Judie Caroleo, 95 Percent Group's director of training and development, McCarthy and Amos began to understand that this was “bigger than intervention.” They realized that the gaps in student learning and understanding extended to their instructional practices. They needed to provide a core curriculum that explicitly addressed phonics and they needed to teach their teachers how to use it.

Edmonds School District began to embrace a structured literacy program that featured additional, key products from the [One95™ Literacy Ecosystem™](#), including [95 Phonics Core Program®](#). Change was coming.

Professional learning gives structured literacy a foothold

Caroleo began by introducing McCarthy, Amos, and district interventionists to the concepts behind the science of reading, which is the body of evidence containing scientifically-based research about how children learn and become proficient at reading and writing. The research reveals where there might be challenges, and how to best support learning and intervention to improve student outcomes.

They were deepening their understanding of “the why” behind the strategies they were using.



Schools within the district that identified as being eligible for LAP (Learning Assistance Program) High Poverty funding under Washington state law received additional coaching with 95 Percent Group. Kindergarten through second grade classroom teachers and interventionists at the eligible schools received training and support, and for the first time, they had access to [Tier 1](#) phonemic awareness and phonics and instruction for all of their general education classrooms. And it fit seamlessly with their [Tier 2](#) intervention programs, providing teachers and students with consistent instructional routines across all learning experiences.

As part of the coaching cycle, Caroleo supported the literacy teams at eligible schools directly through professional development sessions several times per school year, including access to [95 Percent Group's Foundational courses](#).

Teachers started to see glimmers of improvement in their students, mainly in their excitement toward learning.

“Students’ attitudes shifted. They went from complaining that they were doing [phonics] *again*, to reminding me that we still had to get to our phonics lesson.”

RYNAE MCKINNEY

First Grade Teacher | Edmonds School District, Washington

McKinney credits this to their increased confidence in their ability to learn to read. When you know how to read, you can enjoy it.

Teachers were finding that fewer and fewer kids were qualifying for intervention, based on the data from PASI™ and PSI™ assessments. Teachers district-wide began noticing improvements in the LAP High Poverty schools and wanted to know about the changes they were implementing.

Access to professional learning expands



McCarthy and Amos started receiving an influx of interest in 95 Percent Group's resources and professional development services and learning opportunities. They opened the foundational knowledge courses to any classroom teacher interested in deepening their understanding of literacy acquisition and phonics instruction. That summer, 60 teachers, alongside most of the district interventionists, participated in the open sessions.

Slowly, more and more interventionists and teachers began using the 95 Phonics Lesson Library with their students, and when 95 Phonics Core Program began rolling out, several of the LAP High Poverty funds eligible schools implemented the program at the K-1 level. Access then continued to expand through third grade, as many teachers asked their respective principals to purchase the 95 Phonics Core Program for their classrooms.

As more 95 Percent Group products took hold at Edmonds School District, across tiers and grade levels, McCarthy and Amos began to "hear the voice" of the science of reading language abuzz in their classrooms and hallways. Everyone was starting to speak a common language, even the students, especially in the primary level classrooms.

Teachers were getting excited about the progress their students were making.

"This has been very empowering for the classroom teachers because they realize that they can do these things, and they can carry on the lessons that we (interventionists) are teaching throughout the day," said Onorina Huffman, a Title I/LAP Reading Specialist.

McKinney also felt her own confidence grow from the benefits of the 95 Phonics Core Program.

"Seeing this amazing product in action and seeing the results from the data dives gave me confidence that I knew what each student needed," McKinney said. "The data showed me exactly where students were, what they needed, and what should come next."

"95 Percent Group helped us to build the foundation and the rest of the structure we needed for literacy success," Huffman added.

Professional learning brings teachers and interventionists to the same table

As access to professional learning expanded throughout the district, classroom teachers were efficiently and effectively able to implement what they had learned within their own classrooms. And this ultimately brought intervention teachers and classroom teachers together.

“Individual teachers, specifically our Kindergarten teachers, were implementing the concepts on their own and having their principals buy the programs or materials because of all the foundational knowledge they were gaining from the consulting.”

TORY AMOS

Title I/LAP Specialist | Edmonds School District, Washington

The language and foundational knowledge of the science of reading, as provided through professional learning and the foundational courses, allowed teachers and interventionists to “bridge the divide between their respective approaches to literacy,” McCarthy said. “Teachers’ literacy knowledge grew tremendously, and they were the ones advocating for intervention and core [curricula] to be aligned,” Amos added.

During the 2022-23 school year, Edmonds School District also made the decision to pilot the full 95 Phonics Core Program for Kindergarten through fifth grade. In late spring 2023, Edmonds School District Adoption Committee voted to adopt 95 Phonics Core Program, including the new [95 Phonics Core Program Word Study®, Grades 4-5](#), to help provide their older students with ongoing reading instruction. This adoption was districtwide and across grades K-5.

A full-fledged implementation began in the 2023-24 school year, which was a validating experience for teachers following their positive experiences to date with 95 Percent Group professional learning and literacy resources.

Teachers see the reading improvement, clearly

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There is no doubt in my mind that the greatest success is the fact that we have the Phonics Core Program and that it was adopted.”

MEGAN MCCARTHY

Title I/LAP Specialist
Edmonds School District, Washington

As a result of classroom teachers and interventionists coming together to adopt a “consistent curriculum” systemwide, Edmonds School District has been able to expand [Tier 2](#) and [Tier 3](#) access to include every student who demonstrates a need on the K-3 level, and are beginning to expand access into 4th grade.

“In the past, our intervention services were only at K-2 because of the sheer number of students that were qualifying [for intervention],” Amos said.

“We are absolutely seeing growth.”

While there is not yet data available since the full implementation is in early stages, McCarthy and Amos, along with the interventionists and classroom teachers, are anecdotally seeing improvements in [foundational reading skills](#).

Students have become familiar with the routines and hand symbols and hear the same language and instructional routines from classroom to classroom. Above all, students are showing an increase in confidence and excitement to read and share their knowledge.

Teachers also explained that they feel more camaraderie. “Since we’ve adopted the 95 Phonics Core Program, we are all on the same page with these foundational skills. There is so much power behind that,” Huffman said.

Finally, teachers are beginning to see a transfer of skills into other curriculum areas, specifically within student writing. “Where I saw the growth the most was when we did writing,” McKinney reports. “They are becoming such independent writers. They know how to stretch out the sounds, and I am seeing less ‘kid-writing’ and more accurate spelling because as they learned these skills, they were able to put them to use,” she continued.

This then affords classroom teachers more time to focus on deepening skills in other content areas, creating more well-rounded students.

“

We meet the students where they are and help them to make gains, and the classroom teachers are a part of it. It very much feels like we are all in this together working to support the students.”

ONORINA HUFFMAN

Title I/LAP Reading Specialist
Edmonds School District, Washington



Tips from teachers learning to implement 95 Phonics Core Program®

Patience and grace.

You and your students are each learning something new. Give yourself a little more time than the lesson says when first starting out, and be patient as you learn the routines.

Use the resources provided.

Use the manual and the lesson resources with each lesson as intended, and allow the unit assessments to guide your instruction.

Persevere.

It takes time to settle into a new curriculum. Even when it feels clunky and like it isn't working, trust the process, and stick to it. It'll come together.

“How I teach the routine will impact next year's teacher, because they are picking up where I left off with the student and the routines. Fidelity is important and it will help the student to succeed more.”

RYNAE MCKINNEY

First Grade Teacher | Edmonds School District, Washington

Five recommended strategies to jumpstart professional learning

From Megan McCarthy and Tory Amos, Title I/LAP Specialists, Edmonds School District, Washington.

1. Offer It!

Teachers are eager to learn best practices and effective strategies to teach reading, even if it takes extra time and effort.

2. When we know better, we do better.

Most teachers don't learn everything they need to learn in their teacher preparation programs, especially when it comes to reading instruction. When you have an opportunity to learn more effective ways, take advantage of it—and then work to implement what you have learned.

3. Let the data guide your work.

Use the assessments available to you and really do a deep dive into the data. You will have a clear picture of where your students are academically, and how you can best support their growth.

4. Start small.

Change takes time. Start with a small group of teachers or specialists, and allow the work to naturally expand.

5. Provide ongoing support.

Even if you are starting with a handful of teachers or specialists, providing access to ongoing training and professional development is important. You want what is being implemented to be successful, and that will happen when you provide the right support.

Student Spotlight

Two years ago, once I was fully trained on how to effectively use 95 Percent Group's products, I took over working with a second grade student I had not had prior experience working with; she wasn't passing Skill 1 on the Phonics Screener for Intervention. She came to me every morning hiding behind her hair, rarely smiling, and getting visibly angry when I helped her correct errors.

She had difficulty with working memory, and couldn't retain words she was working on with 95 Phonics Chip Kit—she struggled all year long. I worried she was showing signs of dyslexia, but we kept at it with the 95 Percent Group intervention materials.

I intentionally kept her in my group last year to give her consistency. I knew she needed a trusting relationship, which took a while to establish, and she couldn't afford to start over with someone new. I was determined to see her through all the skills.

We made it through Skill 15 by June and throughout the year she came to my class outside of What I Need (WIN) time to read with a 6th grade buddy. By the end of 3rd grade, she was reading *Magic Tree House* and almost at grade level. I was in awe of the confidence she gained over time; smiles and hugs were overflowing. I loaded her up with books to read over the summer and felt beyond proud of her progress.

The best part: I just found out her middle-of-the-year Acadience scores are through the roof!



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