



SCIENCE OF READING: IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS



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A stack of three books is shown from a side-on perspective. The top book has a light blue cover, the middle one has a red cover, and the bottom one has a dark blue cover. A dark green rectangular overlay is positioned in the center of the image, containing the text 'EXECUTIVE SUMMARY' in white, bold, uppercase letters.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PROJECT OBJECTIVE

The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) Center for Literacy Research and Reading Success developed a list of approved K-3 reading curriculum models or programs aligned with the Science of Reading (SoR). CSDE seeks to explore school districts' experiences with the implementation of reading programs from its approved list. Specific aims are to:



- ✓ Explore how school districts across the nation are supporting the implementation of SoR-aligned PreK-3 programs



- ✓ Understand administrators' perspectives of challenges and benefits of implementing SoR-aligned PreK-3 programs



- ✓ Identify evidence of programs' impacts on students' literacy skills and academic outcomes

METHODOLOGY

Hanover Research conducted **nine (9) interviews** with Language Arts experts from **six** districts.

District	State	Enrollment	% Non-White	%EL*	% EC*	% Poverty
Charleston County Schools	SC	48,330	51%	7%	11%	16%
Los Angeles Unified School District	CA	460,633	89%	20%	16%	19%
Oak Harbor Public Schools	WA	5,767	42%	4%	17%	8%
Public Schools of Robeson County	NC	21,083	89%	8%	17%	36%
South Bend Community School Corp.	IN	16,297	73%	10%	24%	19%
West Springfield Public Schools	MA	3,913	37%	10%	19%	17%

*EL: English Learners; EC: Exceptional Children

To protect participant confidentiality, no attributions will accompany interview excerpts, and case study subjects will remain anonymous.

Note: Qualitative research is exploratory and designed to add insight and a depth of understanding to a particular question or topic. Qualitative findings provide commonalities and trends but are not intended to be statistically significant or to provide generalizable conclusions.

RECOMMENDATIONS (1/2)

Based on interview responses, Hanover proposes the following recommendations:



Support districts in organizing accessible and affordable training and professional development (PD) for districts and their schools. CSDE can utilize its Center for Literacy Research and Reading Success to design accessible experiences that will support schools planning for and implementing new reading programs. Conceptualizing training and PD as events can inspire teacher-buy and create excitement around a complicated and challenging process. To enhance buy-in, training and coaching should encompass program-specific knowledge and skills as well as education on the research informing the Science of Reading.

Creative ways CSDE can support professional development include:

- Providing funding for training and other resources provided by vendors or nationally recognized experts;
- Developing online asynchronous training and lesson demonstrations; and
- Encouraging districts to record or live-stream events to standardize training for new teachers.

RECOMMENDATIONS (2/2)



Identify and provide districts with complementary tools. Encourage districts to standardize the use of diagnostic, formative, and summative assessment tools to identify students' learning needs and corresponding instructional goals and interventions as well as regularly measure progress. Develop resource banks with instructional strategies and supplementary readings that align with the chosen curriculum programs. Several experts emphasize the usefulness of SoR-aligned programs for enhancing MTSS (multi-tiered systems of support) work, as they are well-adapted to the use of differentiated, small-group instruction to target learning needs identified in reading assessments. Providing districts with strategies for MTSS integration can help reduce higher tier referrals.



Encourage districts to regularly assess teachers' and school leaders' perceptions and expectations. Identifying educators' views at various stages of program implementation will help districts to effectively coordinate initial transitions and address concerns and other challenges. CSDE can utilize various methods to evaluate current attitudes, including:

- Climate surveys for all district teachers and administration;
- In-depth interviews with teachers and district leaders about program roll-out and implementation; and
- Focus groups on implementation strategies and challenges with teachers across districts.

KEY FINDINGS (1/3)



Participants appreciate that adopting new curricula has increased standardization in their districts. Participants describe previous reading curricula as “piecemeal” or “Wild West,” whereby individual schools or teachers interpreted state standards and tried to design curricula in alignment with them. The resulting instructional variations led to differences in student outcomes. Having a standardized curriculum enhances consistency; all teachers—and therefore their students—have access to and can therefore benefit from an evidence-based, high-quality education. Standardization also fosters collaboration across classes and even schools.



Experts are unanimous in emphasizing the importance of ongoing professional development opportunities. Such learning includes program-specific knowledge and skills as well as broader discussions to educate staff and administrators on the Science of Reading. Experts stress that initial professional development should focus on the ‘whys’ of program adoption as well as the ‘hows.’ They also recommend a multi-pronged approach that incorporates synchronous and asynchronous resources as well as both school- and district-level supports. Such supports include:

- Academic coaches
- Teacher-led trainings
- Resource banks
- Exemplar lessons
- Prominent literacy experts
- Professional learning communities
- Vendor-supplied experts

KEY FINDINGS (2/3)



Experts use a variety of tools to complement reading programs. One district employs several reading programs to reduce perceived pedagogical gaps in individual programs. Others describe training teachers in instructional approaches that complement their flagship programs. Participants also mention using assessment tools such as [iReady](#), [Amplify-mCLASS DIBELS](#), and [Classworks](#) to identify students' learning needs. Assessment results are used to guide student learning paths and identify effective interventions.



Resistance to change is the number one challenge cited by experts. Participants note that teachers who have become accustomed to utilizing popular approaches such as Guided Reading or Balanced Literacy are disconcerted by the shift to Science of Reading-aligned programs, which they perceive as less intuitive and more rigorous. Teachers are also reluctant to abandon unstructured instructional strategies that enabled them to utilize an assortment of materials collected from various sources. However, experts stress that teachers' resistance is often overcome when they observe academic growth in their students.

KEY FINDINGS (3/3)



Experts highlight the effect of SoR-aligned programs on increasing student engagement. According to participants, anecdotal and observational evidence show that students are more involved in classroom discourse around reading. Students discuss their learning more often with each other and with their teachers, and they express interest and excitement about the literature they are reading together. Teachers also note that students have become more deeply engaged with writing assignments. Overall, these shifts have fostered greater instructional rigor and more collaborative learning, even among struggling readers.



Districts implementing SoR-aligned programs are seeing improved reading performance. Participants stress that even districts in the early stages of adoption are noting gains in foundational skills such as phonemic and phonological awareness and narrowing academic gaps between demographic groups. Teachers have highlighted improvements in students' speaking and listening skills, including using academic vocabulary and following appropriate classroom discussion norms. Experts also describe an increased number of students reading at or above grade level. Districts that have been implementing SoR-aligned curricula for more than one year are also reporting higher scores on state assessments.

A stack of three books is shown from a side-on perspective. The top book has a light blue cover, the middle one is dark green, and the bottom one is dark blue. The pages are visible and appear aged. A semi-transparent teal rectangular box is overlaid on the middle book, containing the text 'DISTRICT PROFILES' in white, bold, sans-serif capital letters. The background is a soft, out-of-focus teal gradient.

DISTRICT PROFILES

CHARLESTON COUNTY SCHOOLS

The second largest school system in South Carolina, [Charleston County Schools](#) (CCS) serves over 48,000 students in 86 schools.

Encompassing a blend of urban, suburban, and rural areas, CCS schools represent a racially, ethnically, and economically diverse population and a wide spectrum of academic performance.

According to this district's experts, CCS initially adopted the module portion of EL Education in the 2020-21 school year as a pilot program in eight low-performing elementary schools that are part of its Acceleration Schools initiative. Teacher reports of high student engagement with the modules inspired several principals in non-acceleration schools to begin implementing EL Education, albeit not school-wide. CCS experts also highlight a lack of COVID-related declines and even improved reading performance in acceleration schools.

It was ultimately determined that students in all CCS elementary schools would benefit from EL Education, and district-wide implementation began in the 2022-23 school year. CCS has allowed teachers some flexibility in determining what elements will be adopted, such that whereas some schools are using both the modules and the skills block, others are only using the modules or using some skills blocks along with modules. CCS recently established a Literacy Department to coordinate its efforts and increase consistency in instructional approaches.

Curriculum	Implementation Year
Open Up-EL Education	2020-2021 (pilot)

LOS ANGELES UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

The second largest school system in the nation, [Los Angeles Unified School District](#) (LAUSD) serves over 460,000 students in 782 schools.

Curriculum	Implementation Year
Amplify-CKLA	2020-2021 (pilot)

LAUSD schools represent a heavily Hispanic/Latino population, and approximately 20 percent of its students are English language learners.

LAUSD initially adopted Amplify-CKLA in the 2020-21 school year as an opt-in pilot program in 75 elementary schools. According to the participant, positive feedback led another 25 schools to adopt the curriculum in Year 2 of the pilot.

Currently, although the choice to implement the program remains optional, over half of the district's 520 elementary schools are currently implementing Amplify-CKLA. LAUSD's ultimately aims for all elementary schools to adopt the curriculum. Notably, although the LAUSD website also mentions the use of [Benchmark Advance](#) and [Wonders](#), this district's expert suggests that CKLA is more closely aligned with the Science of Reading.

The district's expert highlights emerging positive trends in early literacy data in schools using CKLA, including improvements in foundational skills.

OAK HARBOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

A small school district located in Washington State, [Oak Harbor Public Schools](#) (OHPS) serves nearly 5,800 students in eight schools.

Curriculum	Implementation Year
Amplify-CKLA	2020-2021 (pilot)

Approximately 50 percent of OHPS students are affiliated with the U.S. Navy, resulting in high mobility rates.

OHPS recently transitioned from a Balanced Reading approach to one grounded in the Science of Reading. The district initially adopted Amplify-CKLA in the 2020-21 school year as a pilot program for grades K-4 in its five elementary schools. Based on input collected from students, teachers, and families' input, OHPS formally adopted CKLA in the beginning of the 2022-23 school year.

OHPS has partnered with Core Reading to offer professional learning, and it has extensively consulted with literacy expert Dr. Jan Hasbrouck. OHPS has also integrated CKLA into its Multi-tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) work with the aim of reducing Tier-2, Tier-3, and Special Education referrals. According to this district's expert, OHPS has experienced substantial increases in the proportion of students who are reading at or above grade level since introducing CKLA.

PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF ROBESON COUNTY

Located in Lumberton, North Carolina, [Public Schools of Robeson County](#) (PSRC) serves over 21,000 students in 36 schools.

Curriculum	Implementation Year
Open UP- EL Education	2022-2023

PSRC adopted Open UP- EL Education in the 2022-23 school year. This district's expert cites EL Education's embrace of cultural diversity as a strong rationale for adopting the program, as 60 percent of PSRC's student population identifies as Indigenous/Native American, and 10 percent of students are multilingual.

EL Education is being implemented district-wide in PSRC. Like OHPS, the district's expert notes that the program is closely integrated with its MTSS work. As required by the North Carolina Department of Education, PSRC uses [Amplify-mCLASS DIBELS](#) for K-3 literacy assessment and [Lexia-LETRS](#) to enhance professional learning. [Leverage Leadership](#) principles are also employed to encourage Principals to be active instructional leaders. PSRC also keeps parents engaged by presenting curriculum information in parent newsletters and at parent night meetings.

Early successes reported by PSRC's expert include high student engagement with EL education reading materials, as demonstrated by extensive student interaction and discussion as well as increased writing activity.

SOUTH BEND COMMUNITY SCHOOL CORPORATION

The fourth largest school district in Indiana, [South Bend Community School Corporation](#) (SBCSC) serves over 16,000 students in 30 schools.

Curriculum	Implementation Year
myView Literacy	2019-2020

SBCSC adopted myView Literacy in the 2019-20 school year to address concerns regarding academic inequities between schools and actuate an emerging focus on the Science of Reading. However, myView Literacy is part of a comprehensive district-wide reading curriculum that also encompasses a variety of other program, including [Wilson Foundations](#), [Heggerty Phonemic Awareness](#), and [Read 180: System 44](#).

Notably, SBCSC’s experts report that unlike many districts that remained stagnant or experienced declines, they recorded an average gain of 4-5 percent on post-COVID-19 state assessments. Among other factors, these experts attribute improved performance on an intentional vision that emphasizes linkages between foundational and higher-order reading skills, strong buy-in from teachers and principals, and differentiated, small group instruction. SBCSC experts also emphasize the incorporation of authentic text to help students see the connection between “real world” documents and the core reading skills.

WEST SPRINGFIELD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

A small district located in western Massachusetts, West Springfield Public Schools (WSPS) serves approximately 3,900 students in seven schools.

Curriculum	Implementation Year
Into Reading	2020-2021

WSPS adopted Into Reading in the 2020-21 school year to address concerns that curricula were not standardized. One of the district's experts served on the Massachusetts Department of Education's [CURATE project](#), in which teachers collaborated to assign ratings to a variety of English Language Arts and STEM curricula.

The district has partnered with [HILL for Literacy](#) to enhance professional learning. In addition, the district benefitted from state grant funds for districts that choose evidence-based programs that meet expectations of both the CURATE panel and [EdReports](#).

In addition to anecdotal and observational evidence of strong student engagement with Into Reading, WSPS experts also report gains in phonemic awareness, phonics skills, and fluency in recent winter benchmark data.

A stack of three books is shown from a side-on perspective, slightly out of focus. The top book has a light blue cover, the middle one has a red cover, and the bottom one has a dark blue cover. The pages are a light cream color. A dark green horizontal bar is overlaid across the middle of the books, containing the title text in white.

RATIONALES FOR ADOPTION

OUTDATED OR NON-STANDARD CURRICULA

Outdated Curricula: Several administrators mention that previous reading programs used in their districts were not aligned with best practices. They sought programs grounded in research-based strategies that promote effective pedagogy. Administrators stress the importance of reading programs that foster explicit and systematic literacy instruction.

Non-standardized Curricula: Some participants note that their districts lacked a core curriculum that was used by all teachers. They describe this situation as an unstructured “free for all” that favored classrooms with more experienced teachers, whereas novice teachers lacked formal guidance.

*“The district was very grounded in guided reading. Going away from guided reading into a more research-based strategy, we had to explain to teachers that there is **an art and a science to teaching** and that you have to blend both of those together to provide a quality education for our students.”*

*“We didn't have a specific curriculum that was being used before. The teachers were **utilizing various resources** to deliver their instruction. It was really **time to get some consistency** in the district and identify something very high quality that they could use.”*

POOR OR INEQUITABLE ACADEMIC OUTCOMES

Poor Reading Outcomes: Some participants highlight low or uneven district reading scores as an impetus for adopting SoR-grounded programs. They note that poor outcomes have disproportionately affected students of color and lower-income students of all races and ethnicities.

Inequitable Outcomes: Several administrators mention previous inequities in curricular materials and resources. Such imbalances were observed across school buildings as well as between individual teachers. Participants emphasize that adopting a standard curriculum ensures that all students have access to quality materials, and related resources and supports help reduce gaps in instructional quality.

“When I looked at our data—I’ll just use third-grade reading as a marker. Our third-grade data prior to COVID, we had about a five-to-six year trend of flatline data of approximately 50% of our students meeting standards. To me, that was not okay.”

*“There was definitely some **inequity in access to the resources and the materials** for all students. So one of our initial goals was just to ensure that **all students have access to high-quality, effective materials and instruction**. Now we’re working on making sure authentic text is equitable in all classrooms, no matter what building we walk into.”*

A stack of three books is shown from a side-on perspective. The top book has a light blue cover, the middle one has a red cover, and the bottom one has a dark blue cover. The pages are visible and appear aged. A dark green rectangular box is overlaid on the middle of the stack, containing the text 'CURRICULUM SUPPORTS' in white, bold, uppercase letters.

CURRICULUM SUPPORTS

ROLL-OUT SUPPORTS

De-centralized Distribution: Some participants mention that curriculum providers assisted with distributing materials and resources to schools. One expert highlighted the role of media experts in scanning the materials and creating a tracking system.

Lengthy Initial Training: All interviewed experts recount extensive training sessions to provide teachers, coaches, and principals with an overview of the adopted programs. In several cases, these initial trainings were provided or supported by curriculum vendors. The duration of introductory trainings ranged from one to four days.

*“The company delivered the main materials to each of our schools. Specialists helped with unpacking, and we also had a core of **media specialists that came to scan everything in** so that they'd have a system. So **when it got to the school, they could scan those materials in**. Once everybody got started, we started working together here, going to the district office and distributing additional materials.”*

*“We **contracted with EL to have some professional development** with our teachers and coaches to get them an overview of the curriculum. It started out with one or two days of service before the school year started and then at the beginning of the school year.”*

*“We had a large rollout of professional development, because **otherwise it's going to be a waste of money**. So we scheduled **two full days of initial trainings** of 12 hours of training through the vendor to get them started with the program and understanding it.”*

ONGOING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Experts are unanimous in emphasizing the importance of year-round professional development opportunities. Such learning includes program-specific knowledge and skills as well as broader discussions to educate staff and administrators on the Science of Reading.

Experts stress that professional development should focus on the 'whys' of program adoption as well as the 'hows'. They also recommend a multi-pronged approach that incorporates synchronous and asynchronous resources as well as both school- and district-level supports:

- **Literacy coaches:** building-based and district-wide observers and advisors
- **Curriculum experts:** vendor-supplied coaches and self-paced lessons
- **Teacher ambassadors:** incentivizing selected teachers to share knowledge
- **Leverage leadership:** empowering principals as instructional leaders
- **Literacy experts:** renowned academics and practitioners teach SoR principles
- **Professional learning communities (PLCs):** grade- or school-level knowledge-sharing
- **Resource banks:** organized collections of lesson plans, research, and other tools
- **Exemplar lessons:** video-recorded or in-person modelling

*“Don't just hand over a new curriculum and hope that schools are going to figure it out. There needs to be **not only that initial training, but ongoing support.** Implementing a new curriculum is always challenging, especially if you're coming from a whole different approach. Professional development is key, so that it really **empowers teachers and administrators to understand** what it is they're doing and why they're doing it.”*

VENDOR SUPPORTS

Several experts mention receiving ongoing support from curriculum vendors. Vendors support districts by facilitating initial and ongoing professional learning sessions as well as providing coaching and 24/7 customer service. Some districts have also purchased vendor-developed self-paced online professional learning courses.

One participant notes that EL Education providers have offered additional support by tailoring their professional development to district-identified gaps in teachers' understanding.

However, participants stress that most vendor supports must be purchased at an additional cost that may exceed district budget allocations.

“All of our schools have a reading coach. Those reading coaches have been meeting with the EL professionals, provide direct work with those folks. In addition, EL coaches will come directly down to our district and spend a day or half a day in the schools that are implementing it. A school is getting three to four in-person visits from EL experts every year. We also have three district-level coaches that work directly with the EL implementation.”

“What EL has done really well is any time I said, ‘Hey, this is not working in the schools’, or, ‘This is not clear understanding’, they have tailored their PD and created professional development tailored to what we see as gaps when we're observing at schools.”

COMPLEMENTARY STRATEGIES

Experts describe using a variety of tools to complement reading programs. One district employs several reading programs to reduce perceived pedagogical gaps in individual programs. Others describe training teachers in instructional approaches that complement their flagship programs.

Several experts mention using assessment tools such as [iReady](#), [Amplify-mCLASS DIBELS](#), and [Classworks](#) to identify students' learning needs. Assessment results are used to guide student learning paths and identify effective interventions.

*“One thing that we've done across the district is we've done a lot of **training with the Orton-Gillingham approach**, which does very much align with the CKLA. We have about 3,500 teachers who have been trained so far. So using a lot of those approaches, multisensory approaches, doing visual drills and auditory drills and all of that. So **it's not just about reading out of teacher guide.**”*

*“We have tremendous gaps in our students' learning. We had to look at how can we help fill in those gaps and not stress out the teachers. What we did is purchase **Classworks so that we have a clear picture** where students are. It also provides **individual learning paths based on that and tools for the teacher to provide interventions.**”*

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CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES

ACCEPTING CHANGE

Resistance to change is the number one challenge cited by experts. Expert participants note that many teachers who have become accustomed to utilizing popular approaches such as Guided Reading or Balanced Literacy are disconcerted by the shift to Science of Reading programs, which they perceive as less intuitive and more rigorous. Other teachers resist abandoning unstructured instructional strategies that enabled them to utilize an assortment of materials collected from various sources.

However, experts stress that teachers' resistance is often overcome when they observe academic growth in their students.

*“**Change is a challenge.** Staff members who are using Teachers Pay Teachers or a curriculum or materials that are not rated as highly qualified. **We were a heavy Reading Recovery district.** Up until the beginning of this year, we still had some of our staff had been utilizing Reading Recovery as an intervention. We had a lot of **change in leadership and structures and scheduling** in some places also.”*

*“There are always some people that are resistant to change. With EL Education, it is difficult for some of them because it's not a traditional textbook. They were **accustomed to being able to choose what they wanted to do.** But what we've seen is, **as teachers see success, that mindset slowly shifts.** But we still have those out there that we constantly are tackling because they're just **set in their ways and they're not ready to let go of old practices.**”*

THE SCIENCE OF READING

Experts explain that the Science of Reading represents a substantial pedagogical shift for many teachers.

Expert participants emphasize that increasing teacher buy-in and ensuring instructional fidelity requires educating them on the research underlying SoR approaches.

Experts also stress the importance of linking theory to action by showing teachers how SoR is manifested in lesson plans and what it looks like in the classroom.

*“When the teachers are really educated about the science and they understand the reason for a structured literacy approach, they get it. The ones who have **the most resistance that I've seen are the ones that don't really have that background.** So they don't really understand why we're not doing it the same way that we did [before]. I think **teachers need to understand the science** behind it. So that when you actually see the way the lessons are laid out, you say ‘aha, I see it. I understand why it looks this way.’”*

*“There was a continuum of understanding around what is Science of Reading? **What is explicit systematic instruction? Why is it necessary?** So we have had to do that work around beliefs around **understanding the research and the why** related to Science of Reading, and what that actually looks like in action in a classroom. So it's taking that research and **taking it from theory to action, and that is challenging work.**”*

ENSURING FIDELITY

Most participating districts strive for strong fidelity of implementation. However, experts stress that experienced staff may bristle at being subjected to greater accountability to program instructions.

In addition to introducing complementary strategies, participating districts have addressed resistance to program fidelity by permitting limited flexibility. In a few cases, flexibility may mean strictly implementing modules while making other elements optional. In other cases, flexibility refers to the discretion to condense lesson length for advanced readers or the ability to choose complementary resources.

*“We have [several] elementary schools that **used to be the Wild Wild West**, do whatever you want. So we're working on **fidelity of implementation and integrity of the curriculum** while still understanding that it is our responsibility as educators to **make the learning come to life for our students** through culturally responsive pedagogy and instructional strategies and knowledge of our students.”*

*“We've addressed the staff like, ‘Okay, everybody's doing this. It's a non-negotiable.’ However, we've pulled back on certain pieces to **make the learning curve manageable**. We're **flexible with their timing, the development of their small groups, and the resources that they use** for them. I feel like that is important for any type of implementation or project because **otherwise, people are a little bit scattered** or they maybe feel overwhelmed. **They can't do everything, so they kind of give up.**”*

OVERWHELMING TIME COMMITMENT

Most experts cite the amount of required materials that accompany SoR-based programs as a challenge. Participants highlight the time needed to understand the curricula, learn how to identify and access related resources, and plan lessons. During the early months of implementation, lesson duration often far exceeds vendor-recommended times.

Some districts have addressed concerns about time constraints by offering additional implementation meetings, coaching, and PLCs. Others have relaxed or postponed requirements for program fidelity. An additional strategy is to create user-friendly guides to help teachers locate specific resources.

*“The **amount of materials** was a challenge. One of the ways that we've been trying to work towards that is **through implementation meetings**, looking at different components and different pieces. We also made the whole writing piece optional for this year. They have to do some writing, but it may not necessarily be using the [program] materials. We had to **push that to our year two in terms of our non-negotiables.**”*

*“**People were overwhelmed** and also didn't know how to access all of the resources. Therefore, there was frustration in terms of **planning and the amount of time it takes** to plan. Our literacy coaches and literacy TOSA took the lead on creating resources as a response to that need. So we created **one-page click sheets that had active links** to where people could find certain things.”*

A stack of three books is shown from a side-on perspective. The top book has a light blue cover and a thick, aged, yellowish page block. The middle book has a dark green cover and a thinner, white page block. The bottom book has a dark blue cover and a thick, aged, yellowish page block. A dark green rectangular banner is overlaid across the middle of the stack, containing the text 'PROGRAM OUTCOMES' in white, bold, sans-serif capital letters.

PROGRAM OUTCOMES

A LEVEL PLAYING FIELD FOR TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

Participants appreciate that adopting district-wide curricula has brought standardization to their districts.

Experts note that prior to the introduction of the new curriculum, individual schools or teachers interpreted state standards and tried to design curricula in alignment with them; the resulting instructional variations led to drastic variations in student outcomes both within and between buildings.

As participants explain, having a standardized curriculum enhances consistency; all teachers—and therefore their students—have access to and can benefit from an evidence-based, high-quality education. Standardization also promotes collaboration across classes and even schools, which in turn fosters professional growth.



*“Previously, sometimes **teachers were floundering** because nobody in the district was using the same thing. Now there's some collaboration in the district because **in every building, everybody's doing the same thing**. They're pretty much on the same pace. **We don't have students missing the beat**. Academic coaches are able to have that **great conversations back and forth**. And we have our own PLC with our academic coaches. So really having a **strong framework of support** for everybody has allowed this change to start happening for our district.”*

STRONGER LINKS TO TIERED SUPPORTS

Several experts emphasize the usefulness of SoR-aligned programs for enhancing MTSS work.

One participating expert describes a situation whereby previously inadequate tier one literacy instruction led to a disproportionate number of higher tier referrals.

Experts stress that most SoR-aligned curricula are well-adapted to the use of differentiated, small-group instruction to target learning needs identified in reading assessments. As a result, they can provide additional background information as well as scaffolds for targeted skills among struggling readers.

*“We did not have a robust or effective tier one instruction in literacy, and we were—to be point-blank—blaming students and disproportionately providing tier two, tier three, and special education referrals in our system. Now, we've been using **reading as a vehicle to further our MTSS work**. And in doing so, ensure that we not only have an effective Science of Reading-aligned research and evidence-based tier one curriculum, but also **high-quality tier two materials that are aligned to a multisensory approach**. We are also working on **decision-making matrix** around ‘when do we have kids access tier two? How do we know that's what they need?’ And then also reflective questions around ensuring that we are **critically examining our tier one environment** to ensure that kids are having access to and getting what they need in the tier-one environment and that **we're not just blindly moving kids to tier two** without critically examining our own practices.”*

IMPACTS ON STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Experts highlight the effect of SoR-aligned programs on increasing student engagement.

Anecdotal and observational evidence show that students are more involved in classroom discourse around reading. According to participants, students appear to discuss their learning more often with each other and with their teachers, and they express interest and excitement about the literature they are reading together.

Teachers also note that students have become more deeply engaged with writing assignments. Overall, these shifts have fostered greater instructional rigor and more collaborative learning, even among struggling readers.

*“When we walk into the classrooms, it's a different type of discourse. **There's actual discourse.** Students are actually interacting with text. **There's lots of writing going on.** We see them having great discussions. So we see a **shift in the rigor and what students are excited to do** in the classrooms. There was very little of that going on last year when we kind of came back from the pandemic. We see students that are excited to read the books. We see really an opportunity where **students want to be engaged and have discussions** in class now, whereas previously it was more of like the teacher was the ‘sage on the stage’ instead of **true collaboration in opportunities** for students to interact and really **get into all those literacy practices** by having an opportunity to actually do them, not just hear about them.”*

IMPACTS ON ACADEMIC OUTCOMES

Districts implementing SoR-aligned programs are seeing improved reading performance.

Even districts that have only recently adopted a program are noting gains in foundational skills such as phonemic and phonological awareness and narrowing academic gaps between demographic groups. Teachers have highlighted improvements in students' speaking and listening skills, including using academic vocabulary and following appropriate classroom discussion norms. Experts also mention an increased number of students reading at or above grade level. Districts that have been implementing SoR-aligned curricula for more than one year are also reporting higher scores on state assessments.

*"We're seeing some **promising results in the schools** that begun using it, especially those who are in their second year of implementation. Obviously, the schools that started this year, it's really hard to know the data quite yet. But we're seeing definitely **positive trends in the early literacy data**. We are definitely seeing improvement in the students' **foundational literacy skills** and reading, so I think we're seeing a positive trend."*

*"**More quickly than I anticipated, we are seeing academic growth** and significant changes in our academic outcomes. We are **closing gaps with some of our populations**. We are also increasing our positive outcomes. At the beginning of the year, the majority of students were below grade level. [We have moved] to having the **majority of kids performing at or above grade level** standards. Whereas before we were seeing, again, flatline and where you came into our system was kind of where you ended up."*

A stack of three books is shown from a side-on perspective. The top book has a light blue cover, the middle one has a red cover, and the bottom one has a dark blue cover. The pages are visible and appear aged. A dark green rectangular box is overlaid on the middle book, containing the text 'APPENDIX: PARTICIPANTS' in white, bold, uppercase letters.

APPENDIX: PARTICIPANTS

PARTICIPANTS*

Name	District	Title
Liz Ritz	Oak Harbor Public Schools	Director of Teaching & Learning
Terri Nichols	Charleston County Schools	Executive Associate Superintendent of Literacy and Certified Staff Development
Adrienne Lauder	Charleston County Schools	Director of Literacy Interventions and Support
Anonymous	Public Schools of Robeson County	Anonymous
Susan Spillane	Los Angeles Unified School District	Elementary Literacy Coordinator, Division of Instruction
Valerie Fenn	West Springfield Public Schools	Interim Director of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment
Susan Kazeroid	West Springfield Public Schools	Elementary Literacy Coordinator
Brandon White	South Bend Community School Corporation	Assistant Superintendent of Academics
Rachel Anders	South Bend Community School Corporation	Director of Curriculum and Literacy

**Note: Participants who chose to be identified in the Appendix welcome inquiries from CSDE and state school districts.*



Thank you.

CONTACT

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