

CASE STUDY

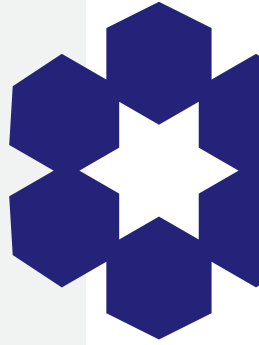
# Systematic Literacy Change in 2 Years

Implementing a Successful Science of Reading  
Remodel Districtwide



## Contents

About the District	2
Strategic Literacy Goal	2
Building a Foundation for Literacy Success	3
Implementing Lexia LETRS for Literacy Improvement	4
The LETRS Rollout Gains Momentum	4
A 5-Year Vision for Literacy	5
<i>Enhancing Secondary Literacy Instruction With PowerUp</i>	5
<i>Elementary Literacy Solution: Revamped Curriculum + Core5 + LETRS</i>	6
Promising Student Growth	8
Recommendations for Successful Implementation	10
Recommendations for Supporting Teachers Through Professional Learning	11
Excitement for the Future	12
Meet the District's Mission-Driven Leaders	13



## About the District\*

Large suburban district in Washington

**21,000** students

- 80.1% Ethnicity other than white
- 66.4% Free and reduced
- 30.4% Multilingual learners (107 languages spoken)
- 14.2% Special education

**37** schools

**2,917** staff members

**1,634** teachers

\*data from district website

## Strategic Literacy Goal

Build teacher and system capacity by scaling effective literacy instruction and resources for more than 20,000 students.

This ambitious and transformative literacy initiative directly supports the district's Strategic Plan (2021–2025) by aligning with its core beliefs and four pillars:

1. Standards-Aligned, Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning
2. Safe Climate and Strong Relationships With Families and Community
3. Effective, Caring, Culturally Competent Teachers, Leaders, and Staff
4. Data-Informed Continuous Improvement

“ Changing literacy instruction is complex. This is not a quick fix. You have to do the deep work and make it the priority.”

—Dr. Rudnicki, Executive Director of Scholar Learning, Academic Programs, and Staff Development

## Building a Foundation for Literacy Success

When reflecting on the state of literacy in her district in spring 2022, Dr. Erika Rudnicki, executive director of Scholar Learning, Academic Programs, and Staff Development, recognized the potential to enact meaningful change.

“We knew we had some emergencies to address,” she said.

Most pressing was improvements to curriculum and literacy instruction. District leaders saw the need to align their approaches to evidence-based literacy instruction, moving away from balanced literacy practices. “We understood the importance of empowering teachers with effective strategies,” said Alyssa Johnson, pre-K–5 English Language Arts/Social Studies facilitator. “We felt a strong commitment to elevate our reading outcomes and strengthen our system.”

At the secondary level, Tami Smith, Secondary English Language Arts facilitator, highlighted the need to support striving readers not yet at grade level. “We recognized that targeted systems are essential to ensure our secondary students receive what they need to succeed,” she said.

As they looked to make improvements, district leaders knew supporting Emergent Bilingual students in a culturally responsive way was also crucial. The district’s educators celebrate the multilingual community, with more than 100 languages represented. “At our district, we strongly believe that multilingualism and biliteracy is such an asset,” Alyssa said. “We aim to integrate reading development with English language development.”

Erika, Tami, and Alyssa ultimately realized they needed literacy instruction grounded in research as the key to transformative change.

“As a team, we cultivated meaningful conversations about the specific changes needed to enhance our literacy practices,” Erika said. “Our collective focus on empowering teachers is the cornerstone of our literacy improvement plan. The science of reading and Structured Literacy have become key frameworks that we believe will drive significant improvements for our students.” She highlighted how Tami and Alyssa participated in Lexia® LETRS® Professional Learning and Lexia Aspire® Professional Learning, collaboratively engaging in the deep work of literacy research, theory, pedagogy, and instruction.



Tami gives Erika’s literacy vision more credit. “With Erika at the helm and her big visionary ideas—that’s where we started,” she said.

Erika, Tami, and Alyssa’s efforts align with the district’s larger strategic plan, by ensuring action starts at the top with equity-driven and evidence-based leadership from central office team members.

## Implementing Lexia LETRS for Literacy Improvement

Change arrived in the district in spring 2022, when a kindergarten and first grade teacher brought LETRS to district leaders for consideration.

Alyssa and Tami engaged with the first cohort to go through LETRS training, starting in October 2022. The cohort included the K–3 literacy development teachers (who function like reading coaches), a handful of interventionists, the two teachers who prompted bringing LETRS to the district, and Tami and Alyssa themselves. The training was built into their schedule with two hours per week devoted to it.

As they worked through LETRS, Tami and Alyssa realized the magnitude of their responsibility to get this training rolled out across the board to implement evidence-based reading instruction.

“I realized that my teacher-prep program didn’t teach me how kids actually learn to read,” Alyssa said. “After LETRS, we felt like we were shot out of a cannon, motivated to rightsize some of the misguided direction we’ve been following for too long.”

## The LETRS Rollout Gains Momentum

“Our rollout of LETRS has gone above and beyond my wildest dreams,” Alyssa said.

The excitement from the first cohort bled into the next one, which included instructional coaches and the rest of the reading interventionists. Alyssa tracked each teacher and their progress—and encouraged them to push the system forward and ask questions, preparing them to adjust the plan for future cohorts as needed.

Next, they opened LETRS up to teachers for the first time, with 13 opting in. “Many expressed a strong interest, but there were some financial

barriers that needed to be navigated,” Alyssa said. Excitement about LETRS continued to grow. Thanks to Erika’s advocacy, the district allocated dedicated funding for the initiative. With budget concerns alleviated, more than 100 teachers opted into the newest cohort.\*

“The excitement for LETRS really came authentically from the ground level. I’m not sure that I would change anything about the way that we have rolled out LETRS to get such high buy-in,” Alyssa said.

“Our engagement in and expansion of LETRS reflects a commitment to invest in our teachers and improve literacy instruction across the district,” Alyssa concluded.

“The enthusiasm and collaboration we’ve witnessed in each cohort reaffirm that we are on the right path. As we continue to gather feedback and adjust our approach, we are confident that this initiative will lead to lasting positive change for our students, empowering educators and transforming reading outcomes for years to come,” Erika added.

### Maintaining Accountability

For the current cohort, Alyssa sends weekly emails with a pacing reminder and the bridge to practice checklist to better support a larger group and keep everyone on track. She continually adjusts the level of support as needed.



\*LETRS enrollment data provided by district



## A 5-Year Vision for Literacy

Figuring out how to revamp literacy instruction for a district of more than 20,000 students was a complex job—but one that brought immediate positive results.

With the LETRS cohorts underway, Alyssa, Tami, and Erika engaged in collaborative planning to develop solutions for immediate challenges while also setting a strong foundation for long-term goals.

“One of the biggest gaps that Lexia® is filling for us, with LETRS and Aspire, is equipping us with the professional development needed to support teachers to support students in learning to read. That’s the number one,” Erika said.

The trio worked with one of Lexia’s national literacy consultants to develop a five-year plan, making it concrete, and ensuring it had actionable steps. They also ensured it aligned with the district’s larger strategic plan, and outlined how Lexia programs and professional learning would strengthen instructional effectiveness and sustain an empowering infrastructure. Their literacy plan helped district leaders prioritize what needed to be immediately solved and what could wait a year.

“The next pressing need was to enhance intervention support at the middle school level,” Erika said. “We identified effective tools, such as PowerUp, that support evidence based intervention practices.”

### Enhancing Secondary Literacy Instruction With PowerUp

As a research-proven program designed to accelerate literacy growth, Lexia® PowerUp Literacy® immerses students in an age-appropriate learning experience that is tailored to their individual strengths and weaknesses. Tami set custom usage goals based on students’ needs.

PowerUp is also helping secondary teachers to make that shift to small-group instruction, in line with a recent district initiative. PowerUp uses Lexia's Adaptive Blended Learning model, which provides timely teacher-directed lessons to complement student's independent learning. Tami helped her teachers see that if they were pulling a teacher-directed lesson for a student, and there are three other students close to the same level, they could provide the instruction as a small group.

In many ways, teachers were learning as much as the students. "Bringing PowerUp on as a resource for our teachers sparked a lot of interest in learning more about the science of reading," Tami said. She offered a professional development session about PowerUp for teachers, presenting what she was learning about the science of reading from LETRS and sharing related resources, podcasts, and articles.

"Many of our secondary teachers are not comfortable with phonics instruction. I didn't know how to teach phonics effectively, and I taught reading intervention for seven years," Tami said. "I never had a resource that was so specific to the exact skill gaps that my kids had. PowerUp enables teachers to know our kids so well as readers."

"The biggest literacy challenge is the learning curve for our teachers," Tami said, it's a challenge she hopes to address in the future with Aspire.

"We had a small group of teachers do Aspire last year, and the ones that finished already raved about it. I had a teacher say, 'This changed my instruction forever.'"

### **Elementary Literacy Solution: Revamped Curriculum + Core5 + LETRS**

"Thinking about Core5 and curriculum adoption, we moved very quickly and really reshaped ELA instruction," Erika said. "While it is a push on the system, the sense of urgency is what's driving change. Teachers want the tools, and want to improve outcomes for students."

Building the foundation for early learning is part of the district's strategic plan, with one goal of every student meeting or exceeding ELA grade-level standards by the end of third grade. To move toward this goal, district leaders adopted a new core ELA curriculum and implemented Lexia® Core5® Reading. This combination was chosen to ensure all instruction was explicit, systematic, and robust enough to meet the needs of all students. "We've made some big pedagogical shifts in our system," Alyssa said.

District leaders initially implemented Core5 for K-2 for the 2023-2024 school year, then expanded it as a resource for all K-5 students during the 2024-2025 school year.\* Built on the science of reading, Core5 is a research-proven program that accelerates the development of literacy skills for students of all abilities, helping them make the critical shift from learning to read to reading to learn.

"Core5 is doing a great job right now of providing teachers with teacher-directed lessons when a student is struggling with a specific skill in the personalized learning environment," Alyssa said. "One of our key goals is to enhance teacher capacity through LETRS training, enabling educators to leverage the teacher-directed lessons in Core5 and build upon them, as they understand both their students and the science of reading."

For the LETRS cohorts, connecting what they were learning in LETRS to these shifts in curriculum prompted a much larger conversation as more educators understood the power of the science of reading. "Starting in the smaller groups and connecting what they had learned through LETRS to some of the systematic changes we'd made in our curriculum, the teachers understood why we were adding Core5 and removing previous resources," Alyssa said.

\*Implementation data provided by district

Implementing Core5 presented valuable opportunities for growth and understanding. “Many of our upper-elementary students had missed out on consistent phonics instruction, which resulted in their initial placement below grade level due to those skill gaps. This situation created an opportunity for both teachers and students to engage in meaningful discussions about their learning experiences,” Alyssa said. “We emphasized that students should be viewed through the lens of the skills they are working on, rather than just their levels. Shifting our pedagogy and approach was an important step in fostering a more supportive learning environment.”

Erika also highlighted that one of the most valuable aspects of Core5 is the emphasis on the teacher as a critical component of literacy instruction, marking an important instructional shift. “In previous digital platforms, students primarily worked independently without the necessary teacher involvement,” she said. “However, the teacher component is essential in Core5, and we must provide the systems of support needed for educators to be successful.”

Part of that support came from the program’s real-time data. “Teachers can see immediate results. They can track student progress, and don’t have to wait for someone to send them a report. It’s an easy platform to use, and that is also a motivating factor,” Erika said.

**Strategic Partnerships for Literacy Improvement**

“ We have made rapid progress, but to achieve this, we had to allocate significant time and determine what could be postponed to facilitate this essential work. That’s where Lexia came into play. We identified our needs, and Lexia provided the effective solutions we were looking for.”

—**Dr. Rudnicki**,  
Executive Director of Scholar Learning, Academic Programs, and Staff Development

**District Science of Reading Timeline**



- First Cohort: fall 2022–spring 2024
- Second Cohort: Began winter 2023–winter 2024
- Third Cohort: Began fall 2023
- Fourth Cohort (100 teachers and new interventionists): fall 2024



- K–2 Implementation (optional in grades 3–5): 2023–2024
- K–5 Implementation (required resource during the intervention block): 2024–2025



- Piloted in early 2023
- Rolled out to all middle schools and limited license at high schools: 2023–2024



- First cohort (primarily secondary coaches): 2023–2024
- Second cohort: Started fall 2024



## Promising Student Growth

Across the district’s middle schools, Tami is seeing the impact of district leaders’ efforts, and so are the teachers. “It has been super motivating for the teachers, seeing these kids increase in the levels. That’s been huge,” Tami said. “We had better middle school iReady growth on the spring test than we had the previous year, and several teachers voiced to me that they feel it’s thanks to PowerUp, and what they’re learning through the teacher-delivered lessons.”

Tami especially loves the lightbulb moments with students during PowerUp lessons. The students themselves are also seeing the impact. When she asked some students how they felt about PowerUp, they agreed it was making a difference, saying, “This is teaching me how to do big words,” “This is helping me learn to read.”

Student results in the Lexia programs have also been outstanding:

- When using the program with fidelity, **92%** of students using Core5 have advanced at least one grade level.
- **76%** of those students ended the year in or above grade-level material.
- **74%** of students using PowerUp ended the year with immediate or advanced skills in the comprehension zone
- When used with fidelity, the number of students working on advanced skills **more than tripled** since the beginning of the year across Word Study and Grammar and Comprehension.

### Skill Levels

- Above Student Grade
- At Student Grade
- 1 Grade Below
- 2+ Grades Below

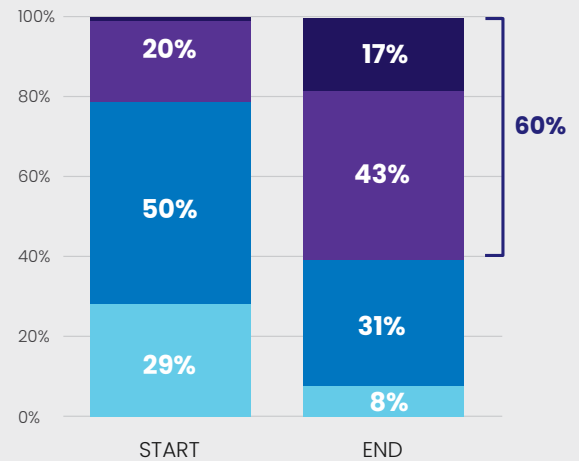
Bar charts may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

All program progress data are from Lexia Analytics Hub, 2023–2024.

2023–2024 Student Progress in Core5: K–2 Focus

All K–2 Students, regardless of usage

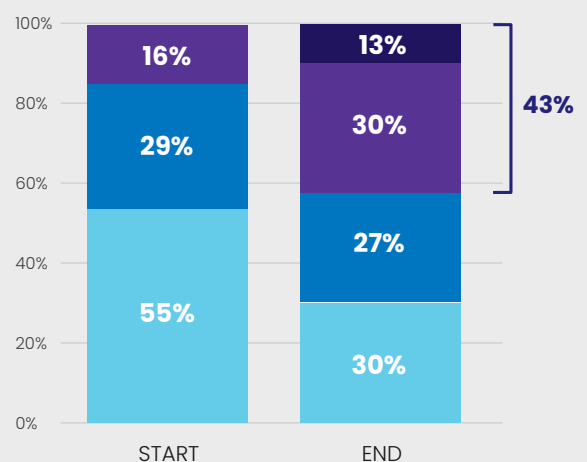
(n=4,989)



2023–2024 Student Progress in Core5: K–5

All K–5 Students, regardless of usage

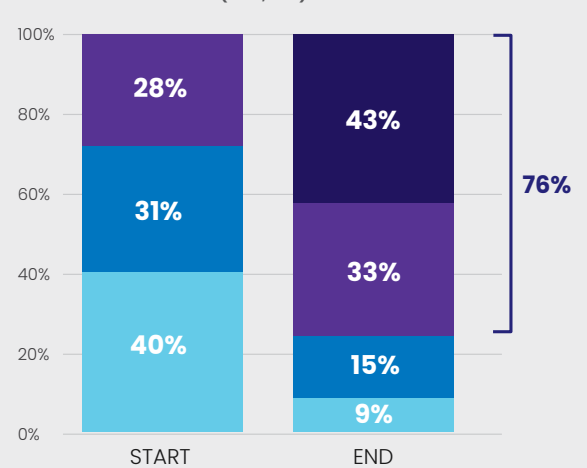
(n=9,897)



2023–2024 Student Progress in Core5: K–5

K–5 Students, meeting usage targets

(n=2,963)





“The data is really promising,” Erika said. “It’s the fuel that keeps us moving forward.”

Grade-level reading is often used as a correlating factor for student success and graduation rates, and Erika believes that the proactive literacy support they are providing students with Lexia will help educators achieve additional goals from the district’s strategic plan, such as improved graduation rates and career and college readiness.

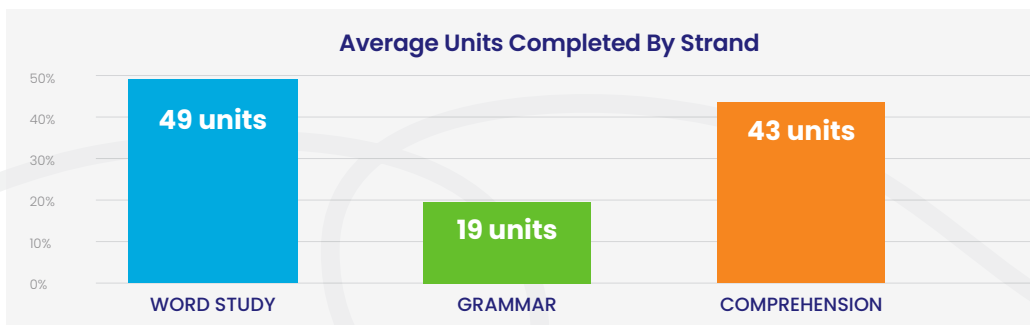
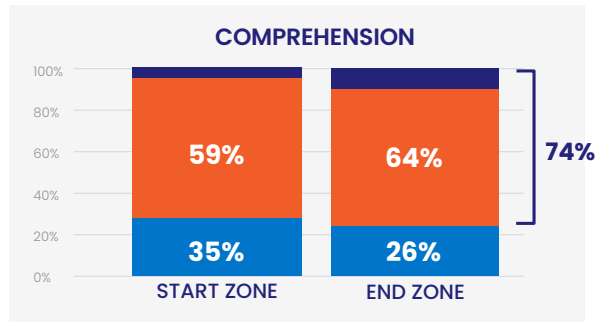
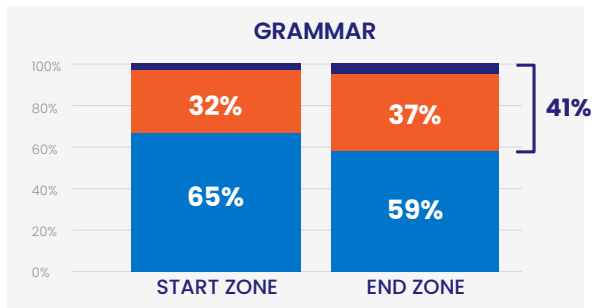
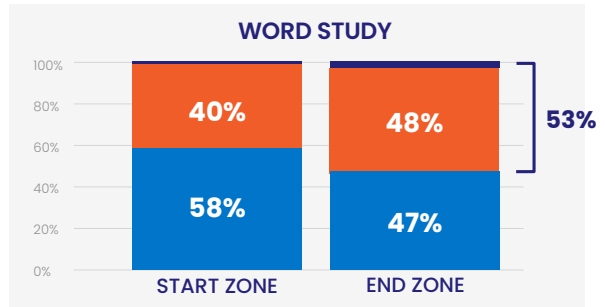
### LETRS and Teacher Motivation

Erika has been conducting research about teacher knowledge, motivation, and organizational factors on student outcomes and her data shows 100% of her study participants going through LETRS are highly motivated and view the cost-benefit as a success.

Supporting that data are results from LETRS professional learning session surveys, where 99% of educators say they’ll be able to better identify and target the literacy needs of their students (n=76), and apply research-based practices in their roles (n=78).

### 2023–2024 PowerUp Zone Progress by strand for all students, regardless of usage (n=5,030)

■ Foundational ■ Intermediate ■ Advanced



All program progress data and LETRS survey data are from Lexia Analytics Hub, 2023–2024.



## Recommendations for Successful Implementation

Erika, Alyssa, and Tami have succeeded as a trio of literacy leaders in forging a path for literacy in their district. For leaders contemplating making changes in their districts, here's what they recommend:

### Create a literacy improvement plan

- Identify the gaps and the long-term goals and make a phased plan with actions in priority order.

### Involve key stakeholders

- Let teachers and literacy coaches ask questions and share their needs. Bring educators in early, those who can provide constructive feedback to refine the process.

### Build your content knowledge

- Leaders need to go through the training themselves to have a better understanding of how to support educators.

### Carve out significant time for planning

- Leading a district through sweeping changes requires intensive work and collaboration and regular sessions with key stakeholders.

### Stay engaged

- Send regular check-ins, set up space and time for teachers to collaborate, and let teachers know, "We're in this together" to maintain motivation.

### Support administrators

- Principals, assistant principals, and other administrators also need tools to better support their teachers and students.

## District Recommendations for Supporting Teachers Through Professional Learning

- Implement evidence-based professional learning for all elementary teachers of reading.
- Provide structured opportunities to implement and apply evidence-based practices.
- Foster teacher expectancy for success through collaborative feedback.
- Implement a structured approach of in-person quarterly professional learning days.
- Provide continuous feedback on professional learning progress to enhance teaching practices.
- Schedule a professional learning launch for each cohort to communicate the “why” behind the initiative and build collective efficacy.
- Provide dedicated time during the work day for teachers to engage in evidence-based professional learning.
- Offer incentives such as stipends and professional development credits.
- Establish a clear vision framework for professional learning.
- Foster regular communication among all participants engaged in professional learning.
- Establish clear accountability metrics for participants and student learning outcomes.
- Establish transparent and regular data collection and analysis.
- Establish feedback mechanisms to support continuous improvement.
- Allocate dedicated time within the school schedule for collaborative learning.
- Invest in literacy leadership development.
- Ensure continuous and sustained professional learning opportunities.

“Change isn’t going to happen overnight,” Alyssa said. “But one of the biggest components for us were the literacy coaches who pushed us, so we could push the system.”

Tami emphasized the importance of committed leaders who will remain steadfast in their efforts, even when new challenges arise. “It’s essential to have literacy leaders in the district who are dedicated to advocating for a comprehensive plan, actively working to implement it, and serving as passionate champions for literacy across the district,” she said.



## Excitement for the Future

“With Lexia, I am confident that we can make a meaningful difference for our students. We have the right conditions, tools, and knowledge in place,” Erika said. “Lexia is research-based, and we know that the resources we provide to our teachers are aligned with best practices.”

Following the completion of their first LETRS cohort earlier in 2024, district educators are now focused on refining their instructional strategies. “We are integrating the knowledge gained from LETRS with Core5 for use during intervention periods,” Erika said. “We want teachers to fully utilize all the features of Core5, as they will understand the reasoning behind it, thanks to LETRS.”

At the secondary level, Tami aims to enhance the utilization of PowerUp even further. “When students reached our customized target of 30 minutes of PowerUp usage, their growth significantly outpaced that of students who didn’t meet the usage requirement. This year, I am particularly focused on maximizing usage,” Tami said. “The excitement generated last year has highlighted the importance of implementing effective intervention strategies at the secondary level.”

With their next Aspire cohort, Tami hopes to be more strategic as well. “Aspire is rigorous. So, this year, I’ll be more hands-on. We’ll have that PLC component, and have the coaches really work with the teachers in their buildings as they go through Aspire,” she said.

Erika is most excited for the current cohort of teachers in LETRS. After training coaches, literacy development teachers, and interventionists, they finally have a cohort that will bring the science of reading to the classroom holistically. With 100 teachers now going through the course, she thinks the impact on classroom instruction will accelerate the student outcomes they are already seeing. “I am just excited about what is to come in the next year, two years, three years, as we really go in deep into the work into our five-year literacy plan,” Erika said.

“Every single teacher wants to help their students read,” she added. “Having the tools, like Lexia, to help them succeed is the motivating factor. One teacher shared, ‘For the first time in 33 years, I finally know how to teach reading.’”



## Meet the District’s Mission-Driven Leaders

**ERIKA** Erika vividly remembers the moment literacy instruction became deeply personal for her. As a first-year teacher walking through the middle school hallway, she observed students in a classroom struggling to read a book that was significantly below their grade level. Their frustration was evident, and one student shouted, “I don’t care about this book!” as he threw it across the room. That moment highlighted the urgent need for a transformation in the approach to literacy education, emphasizing the importance of equipping teachers with resources and support they need to effectively engage all students.

Now as the executive director of Scholar Learning, Academic Programs, and Staff Development, Erika embraces her role with a vision dedicated to forging a new path for literacy instruction that addresses the needs of all students. Erika believes that high-quality literacy instruction is the foundation for student success and equity. A comprehensive literacy plan provides a clear path forward by outlining the support structures and resources necessary for transformative literacy reform, ensuring research-based instruction for all.

**ALYSSA** Alyssa’s science of reading journey is a deeply personal one, that resonates with educators across the country. “I taught kindergarten, second, and third grade in this district, before moving into an instructional coach role, and now I’m the pre-K5 ELA/SS facilitator,” she said, reflecting on her tenure in education.

Participating in LETRS was a revelation for Alyssa. “This is something I had never learned in college, and I wish I would have known this as a kindergarten teacher,” she said. “It’s an emotional realization—knowing there was so much more I could have done for my students.”

Now, Alyssa is focused on the change she can make. “When you know better, you do better. My greatest hope is that all of our teachers will gain the knowledge and skills in evidence-based instructional strategies provided by LETRS professional learning to strengthen reading instruction for every student.”

**TAMI** Tami’s story is one of equity. First as a middle school teacher, and now as a secondary English Language Arts facilitator, she saw many students struggle with reading and writing. Students who had early intervention and support often did just fine. But others did not have opportunities for intervention.

“I remember my first class of sixth- and seventh-graders, and many of them were reading below grade level. And I did not know what to do. I tried to find resources, but I never found anything I was confident in,” she said. “I’ve always been passionate about intervention for secondary students. But the first introduction I had to the science of reading was when I listened to Emily Hanford’s podcast, and I just wanted to learn more.”

Tami emphasized, “Literacy is such a powerful tool. Equipping our students to be college and career ready is one of our top priorities in this district. I see incredible potential in our students, and I believe we can help more of them reach proficiency.”



# Lexia®

Lexia®, a Cambium Learning® Group brand, is transforming literacy education, driving change in 1 of every 3 school districts across the United States. For more than 40 years, Lexia has been a thought leader in literacy education, delivering award-winning, research-based solutions grounded in the science of reading. With a full spectrum of offerings, including professional learning, curriculum, and embedded assessment tools, Lexia provides educators with Structured Literacy solutions that are proven effective and designed to drive meaningful literacy outcomes. By empowering educators with unparalleled ease of use and the knowledge and tools they need, Lexia helps more students unlock their potential to read, write, and speak with confidence. For more information, visit [lexialearning.com](https://lexialearning.com).



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