

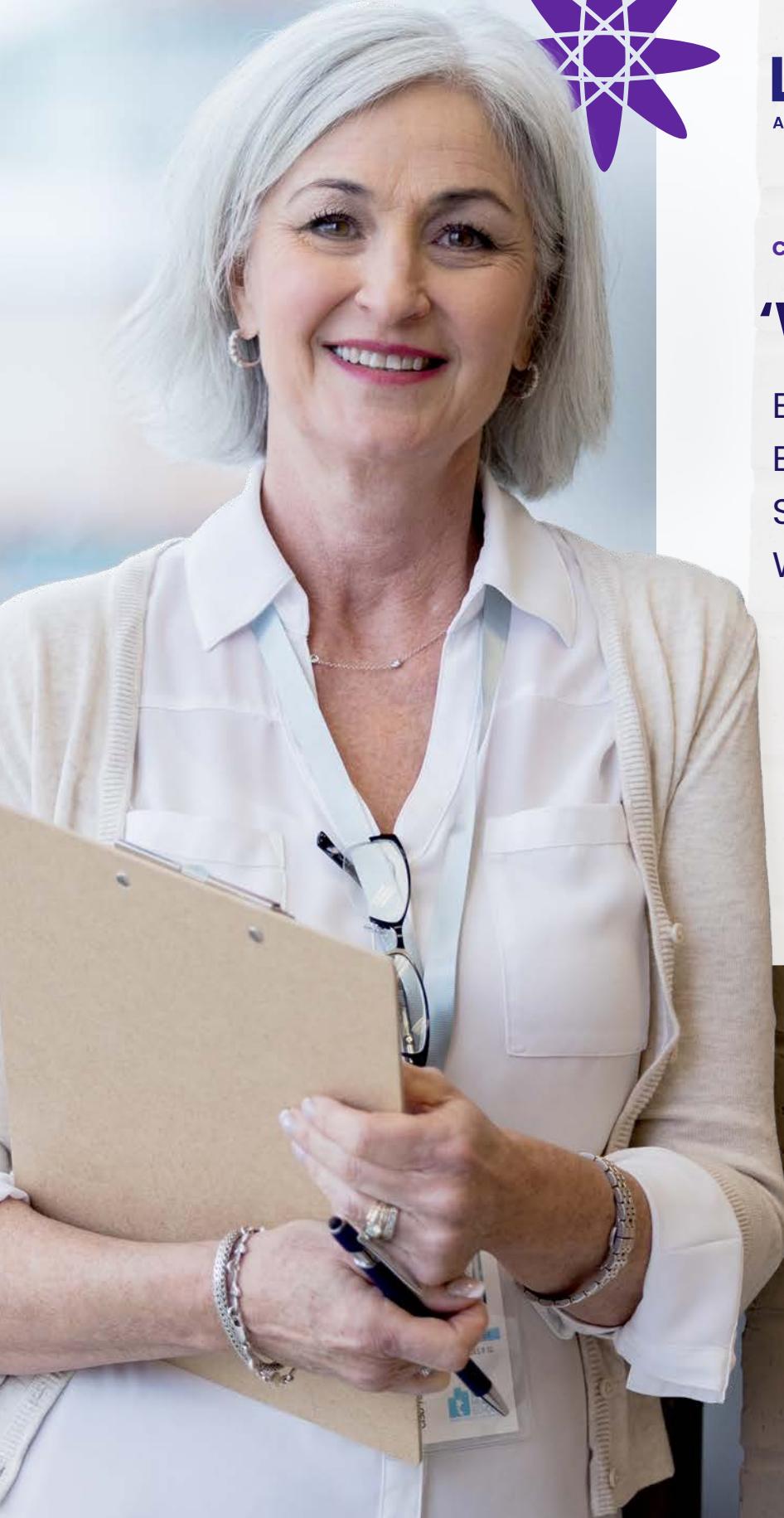
**Lexia®**

ALL FOR LITERACY™

CASE STUDY

## 'What About Us?'

Empowering Upper  
Elementary and Middle  
School Educators  
With Aspire





In a large school district serving 30,000 students across 44 sites, elementary teachers were seeing literacy growth.

Foundational reading instruction in the district had taken a significant leap forward thanks to Lexia® LETRS® Professional Learning for K–3 educators, partnered with a science of reading-aligned curriculum in the early grades.

But a clear need remained: “Reading challenges don’t suddenly disappear in fourth grade,”

Catherine Guillory, the district’s elementary ELA and library science specialist for grades K–5, said. Teachers in grades 4 and up—who hadn’t traditionally received training in how students learn to read—began asking for their own support.

“Middle school teachers were saying, ‘We have kids in the classroom who can’t read, and they’re in seventh grade. What are we supposed to do?’” Guillory shared. “Fourth and fifth grade teachers saw the LETRS training happening and said, ‘Well, what about us?’”



## Diagnosing the Problem and Identifying Solutions

At the beginning of the 2023–2024 school year, Guillory and her coaches spent the first nine weeks of school observing classrooms full time. During those weeks, they visited 275 classrooms and collected a substantial amount of data for analysis.

“Students were bright, willing, and had a desire to learn to read; but the teachers were missing how to use the correct tools and, more importantly, how to intervene for those children who do struggle, because we know 25%–30% of them are going to need additional practice,” Guillory said.

“Teachers make an assumption that if kids aren’t reading by grades 4–6, then they just can’t,” Guillory added. “That’s obviously not true. When you’re able to build awareness with teachers and their capacity to intervene in the moment, that time is not wasted. You don’t know what you don’t know, but we want to give them the tools to change their mindset. Kids can continue to learn.”

With data in hand, Guillory and Randy Bernard, her middle school counterpart, a secondary ELA and library science specialist, were ready to find professional development that would meet the needs of teachers with students in grades 4–9.

Guillory and Bernard wanted the professional learning to:

- Expand teacher capacity
- Be actionable
- Give educators a solid foundation on which to build
- Align with the language and knowledge base of LETRS

Since LETRS was working well in grades K–3, the district’s Lexia Success Manager recommended **Lexia Aspire® Professional Learning**, a program specifically designed for educators to accelerate literacy skills in older age groups. Like LETRS, Aspire is firmly grounded in the science of reading.

## Educators Volunteer for Aspire

In fall 2024, Guillory and Bernard ran their first volunteer cohort of approximately 50 administrators, coaches, and educators from grades 4–9 to complete Aspire training. They hope to follow this with a second cohort that will result in more than half of their staff being trained.

For the cohort currently in process, Guillory and Bernard had more volunteers than they had licenses because “the word is out.” Educators appreciated the relevant, high-impact content, and many quickly completed all 12 selected modules.

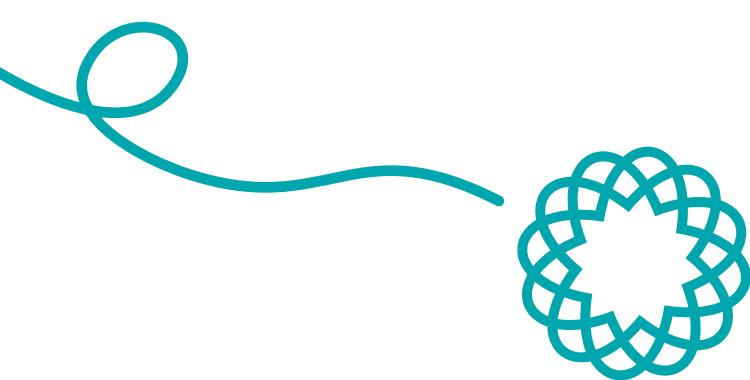
What's working well for participants who have gone through the training? Guillory said:

### Working Well: Aspire Features

- **Manageable chunks.** "The length of the lessons is beautiful: 45 minutes to an hour."
- **An optimal presentation of background information.** "The meat is just the right amount to not overwhelm [participants]."
- **Depth and rigor that invites reflection.** "I've done so much literacy training ... and I sit here with a degree. I'm like, 'OK, this is hard—I've really got to think about this a bit.'"
- **Asynchronous access.** "They could pick the time that they wanted to do it."
- **Alignment with the science of reading.** "LETRS, Core5, Aspire, it's all the same language, the same wording, the same information. It levels the playing field across grade levels."

### Working Well: Implementation Features

- **Open communication.** District leaders shared all expectations and benefits upfront, so participants knew how to plan ahead, which helped with buy-in.
- **Flexible and open access, but limited required courses.** District leaders chose the resources that would be most valuable to their teachers: 12 courses, with access to the whole platform in case they're curious and want to complete more. "They can dig as deep as they want on their own time," Guillory said, noting that some teachers have already completed far more than the 12 original courses.
- **Reasonable pacing.** Participants are expected to complete one course every four to five weeks, although they can set their own pace if they want to work ahead.
- **Providing stipends and rewarding motivated educators.** All participants are told upfront that they will receive a stipend upon completing the 12 courses. Guillory hopes to offer an additional stipend for educators who want to go beyond the required modules to compensate for their additional time.
- **Supporting deeper engagement and peer learning.** Educators were encouraged to complete modules collaboratively, sparking organic professional conversations. "Do it with a friend; talking about it makes it more real. It makes it stick," Guillory said.



The Aspire platform's manageable pacing, high-quality content, and built-in reflection were key to its success. "It's just the right amount—not overwhelming, but deep enough to make you think," Guillory noted. "It's not busy work. I want [educators] to think about the kids. Aspire changes how teachers see the students in front of them."

## Expanding Cohorts

"One of the reasons we've been so successful already with Aspire is because this is an equal-opportunity experience. Everyone's going to get the chance to learn," Guillory said. She and Bernard participated in the first cohort alongside their coaches and educators.

While district leaders hope to offer Aspire to approximately 200 teachers, Guillory noted that she wants future cohorts to include librarians. "We thought about how to branch out using the training to touch every part of the school to influence the culture around literacy," Guillory shared.

Including librarians makes sense, since students often arrive in the library needing help with reading. "Offering them a chicken nugget or a popcorn party isn't going to make them readers," Guillory said. "Some paired reading and coaching with a librarian might make a difference."

District leaders also included administrators in LETRS training and are considering doing the same with Aspire. Principals, for example, are completing the educator version of LETRS so their experience is similar to their teachers' and everyone is able to understand what is happening in the classroom at a deeper level.

## Results: Growing Confidence and Instructional Impact

Although they are still early in their Aspire journey, educators are already seeing shifts in mindset and instruction.

"They get started in Aspire and figure out, wait—this is really beneficial! This is really interesting. This is so cool. I'm glad I know this. Then, they're kind of bitten by the bug, and the rest happens organically," Guillory said.

## Aspire Leads to Teacher Confidence and Impact

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After Aspire, they do feel really confident; you can see it on their faces. They'll say: 'I used this in the classroom. I did this with a student. I felt bad because he couldn't read or he couldn't write, and **I knew I was supposed to fix it, and I could.**'"

— Catherine Guillory

Elementary ELA and Library Science Specialist, Grades K–5

## Evidence of Growth

- Teachers began rethinking assumptions, realizing older students can and do continue to develop foundational reading skills when given the right support.
- Educators started applying their learning immediately: “One teacher emailed me and said, ‘I don’t want to do the guidebooks for the last two weeks—I want to use what I learned in Aspire on morphology and vocabulary to help my students break apart and spell words.’”
- Interest grew beyond the initial requirement. Several educators voluntarily completed all of the Aspire modules, especially those related to writing and dyslexia.

## Aspire and Teaching Writing

Guillory has been “shocked” by how many educators have gravitated toward the writing courses.

Writing is a huge part of the state tests. It’s hard to write well, but it’s also hard to teach writing well. While the district only requires cohort participants to complete one Aspire module on writing, many educators have completed all of them.

“They’re just super interested in it. They want to help their kids who can’t write—and they need more information,” Guillory said. “With Aspire, they can just dig as deep as they want and watch it as many times as they want.”

Educators can learn to give detailed feedback, correct and rewrite, and reinforce frequently, but that instruction is so universal. Aspire helps educators learn how to support individual students with their unique challenges.

## What's Next

With K–3 educators already trained in LETRS, district leaders plan to continue offering Aspire cohorts annually, aiming to reach all grade 4–9 teachers within three years. By also exploring ways to bring the training to librarians and administrators, leaders are ensuring everyone who supports student literacy shares a common understanding of the science of reading.

“We call it a tight circle,” Guillory noted. “When everyone speaks the same language and understands how kids learn to read, the impact is exponential.”

While it’s still too early to pull the data, there is strong anecdotal evidence of Aspire’s success in partnership with their new science of reading-based curriculum. The positive effects of the training are building as all staff members involved are championing a consistent message. They’re actively using data to adjust their instructional approach and align with the science of reading. The vision is consistent; science of reading-based instruction across the district for all students.

“I want the conversation to be as big and ongoing as possible,” Guillory shared. “We’re consistently doing what science of reading says to do. Period. We purchased high-quality professional learning and high-quality products from the beginning. We’re all going to get there—it’s what we have to do.”



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