

CASE STUDY

Training Educators and Administrators in LETRS Professional Learning Improves Literacy Outcomes in Oklahoma's Enid Public Schools

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Introduction

Enid Public Schools (EPS) includes one high school, three middle schools, 11 elementary schools, an adult learning center, and an early childhood center. The district educates more than 7,400 students, and it has seen enrollment increase by 1,600 students during the past decade with similar growth expected in coming years. Located in northwestern Oklahoma, EPS serves students who live at the eastern edge of the Great Plains. The area is known for its rich cultural history, wheat mills, and grain elevators. All EPS schools are committed to promoting lifelong learning through educational excellence with an understanding that students need a strong foundation in literacy skills to achieve this.

The Challenge

Sherri Hendrie is currently principal of Prairie View Elementary School and previously served for four years as the principal of Coolidge Elementary and 10 years previous to that as a districtwide instructional coach for EPS. When she realized her fourth- and fifth-grade students were struggling with reading—despite data showing they had mastered their foundational reading skills—she suspected there must be an issue with the lack of systematic, explicit instruction in foundational literacy skills. Her experience set her into investigative mode, where she discovered teachers were doing what they were taught even though they lacked the deep understanding and pedagogical knowledge of the science of reading. She was determined to tackle this challenge.

“Teachers were doing what they knew how to do depending on their own educational experiences and the curriculum that was offered to them, but that had to change,” Hendrie said. “We started by creating curriculum maps and pacing guides to align our instruction horizontally and vertically. This was a great start, but still wasn’t enough.”

Hendrie and her colleagues set out to find a respected, proven standardized professional learning program to help teachers improve their instruction and confidence while positioning all students on the road to literacy success. This is where LETRS® (Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling) came in.



The Solution

Research shows that teachers are the most powerful factor in student academic success, and Hendrie knew professional learning could bolster her best resource. After review and research, Enid Public Schools leaders offered LETRS, a professional learning course, to its teachers. Developed by literacy experts Dr. Louisa Moats and Dr. Carol Tolman, LETRS is based on the science of reading. More than two decades of literacy research has gone into developing LETRS, with remarkable results. Many state departments of education now offer LETRS training to teachers based on the noted success rates in other states that have used it, such as Mississippi.

Introducing LETRS districtwide was a key goal, which would allow for complete integration throughout Enid's many schools. This was especially helpful, allowing the district to support student mobility between schools since students who switch sites would no longer lose any learning time.

"All of our teachers needed the same professional development and it had to be a systematic approach that we could continue to implement over time," Hendrie said. "We needed something sustainable."

Training in the Science of Reading Is Essential

For EPS leaders, the first step was to educate administrators, leaders, coaches, teachers, and support staff in the science of reading, which is the basic tenet of LETRS. Hendrie said she firmly believes that training administrators and instructional coaches first is vital to success. The district used LETRS® for Administrators to ensure all district personnel understood the program's foundation.

"Administrators must be able to lead discussions revolving around the science of reading and must be willing to implement this way of teaching with fidelity in order to see consistency and improvement," she said.

Hendrie reports that LETRS training has given teachers confidence in the content, scope, and sequence involved with teaching reading, as well as providing a Structured Literacy approach to building oral and written language skills. Educators are given the tools to enrich their lesson plans and positively impact the lives of their students. Additionally, customer service from the Lexia® Learning LETRS team allowed EPS to move quickly and efficiently with training and integration.



"It's not always an easy or smooth experience to work with an external company, but the training team from Lexia Learning has been fantastic to work with. Their instruction of our facilitators and willingness to answer questions has been excellent. For any district in need of trainers, you cannot go wrong with the Lexia team."

—Kristen Jones, Curriculum Director, Enid Public Schools



The Results

Simply “feeling good” about results is not enough. School districts must measure success with verifiable statistics, and EPS leaders are measuring its achievements and results from LETRS in more than one way.

EPS educators administer Unit Assessments from kindergarten to third grade. Additionally, they measure overall reading progress with a computer-based universal screener, and specifically measure phonemic awareness skills with an individually administered assessment. The norm-referenced universal screener is given monthly and provides a snapshot of how students are applying the reading knowledge they have gained.

In just eight weeks, the percentage of first-through third-grade students in remediation decreased from 34% to 23%. Hendrie said this success is attributed to implementing LETRS and the science of reading.

District leaders also reviewed screening data in terms of how students performed compared to the state average. In first-through third-grade students across Oklahoma demonstrated that 48% were proficient in reading, compared to an impressive 73% at EPS.

“We’re proud of the work that our teachers and students have done to achieve these gains,” Hendrie said. “As an entire district, we are so

much more driven to use LETRS and the science of reading because we are seeing it work in our students’ ability to improve in reading, spelling, and writing. Some of our instructional coaches have become LETRS trainers to assist us in the process of training all teachers.”

Success also is evident in the students at EPS, as one teacher said. “Camdyn struggled with letter sounds and letter formation at the beginning of the year,” Alyssa Plummer, a first-grade teacher, said. “In 11 weeks, he has improved. He can now tap sounds and transfer those sounds into letters and words. His handwriting has also progressed. I held his hand in the first few weeks of school to help with letter formation, but now he is independent. His parents have also noticed improvement. He can tap and blend the unit words on fluency lists. On unit tests, he was consistently falling below the 80% passing rate, but he passed his last test.”





“After several years of not seeing significant growth in reading and realizing that we were not going to be able to intervene our way out of the situation we were in, we were looking for a systemic approach to teach the foundational skills, but we also realized we needed to ensure that our teachers had a good understanding of why this was important. LETRS was our solution. Our district decided to ensure that all our teachers, pre-K–fifth grade understood the science of reading. We believe we are well on our way to ensuring a solid foundation of reading across the district.”

—Randall Rader, Assistant Superintendent of Elementary,
Enid Public Schools



Summary

Enid Public Schools teachers have been energized by LETRS professional learning for their literacy education. They recognize that students who have LETRS-trained teachers are more likely to have strong phonological and phonemic awareness, and they agree LETRS professional learning ensures students do not struggle because of a lack of appropriate instruction. Confidence and motivation have improved and, best of all, students are consistently progressing in their literacy achievement. It’s a win-win scenario.

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