

CASE STUDY

Choice Overload: St. Louis Elementary School Chooses Proven Professional Learning to Help All Students Read

Hancock Place Elementary School,
Hancock Place School District, St. Louis, Missouri

Lexia®



Introduction

Hancock Place Elementary School is part of Hancock Place School District, one of the oldest school districts in St. Louis and one of the first districts to earn an “AAA” rating—the highest possible—from the Missouri State Department of Education. The elementary school is home to nearly 1,500 preK-5 students, 100% of whom are on free and reduced lunch.

“Failure Is Certainly Not an Option Here”

Hancock Place Elementary School in St. Louis,

Missouri is part of Hancock Place School District, one of the oldest districts in the city and home to nearly 1,500 pre-K-5 students. When Dr. Jill Wright, principal at Hancock Place Elementary, and her administrators did an in-depth analysis of reading instruction at the elementary school, they recognized there were stark inconsistencies from classroom to classroom because of the myriad ways that literacy was taught.

Without consistent methods of teaching literacy being used, school leaders knew student literacy growth would continue to suffer and





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—Dr. Jill Wright, Principal, Hancock Place Elementary School



chances of improving that growth would be challenging. “We had a history of balanced literacy being used here, but I knew instantly we needed to add phonological awareness and phonics components to what was going on in our classrooms,” said Dr. Jill Wright. “We supplemented for several years with different resources, but we found that teachers kept reverting to how they were originally trained. Failure is certainly not an option here, so we knew we needed to bring in some high-quality professional learning.”

An Inspiration for Change

Inspired by how effective her early career training was as part of the Missouri Reading First initiative, Dr. Wright recalled Lexia® LETRS®

(Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling) literacy professional learning and recommended it to the school. Dr. Wright believed LETRS would work because it is comprehensive professional learning designed to provide early childhood and elementary educators and administrators with deep knowledge to be literacy and language experts in the science of reading. Developed by author Dr. Louisa Moats and leaders in the field of literacy, LETRS teaches educators the skills needed to master foundational components of reading and writing instruction—phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, and written language.

Looking back at Dr. Wright’s recommendation, Assistant Superintendent Dr. Tim McInnis remains grateful. “It was like reaching mecca for a central office administrator,” Dr. McInnis said. “Not only did LETRS offer essential components to the teaching of reading, writing, and spelling, it also allowed our teachers to establish routines to differentiate instruction—all the while teaching the three subjects.”

As educators embraced the new professional learning course of study, it did not take long for LETRS to make a positive impact at Hancock Place Elementary School. Within months, teachers were finding themselves feeling empowered with clear instructional strategies that were working across all classrooms. Meanwhile, students were decoding and spelling significantly better than ever.

“I am amazed at how many teachers have commented on how they feel like they know what to do when a student struggles with reading,” Dr. Wright said. “We also used the skills we gained through LETRS to help select better resources for our students. This has made our teachers all more cohesive in the way they instruct students, with an understanding of where they are, what they need, and how to intervene when they fall behind. It’s been a lifesaver in a time when so many students are behind due to the pandemic.”

Investing in Teacher Preparation

Dr. McInnis said it was imperative that all stakeholders receive LETRS training, including administrators, directors of curriculum, reading

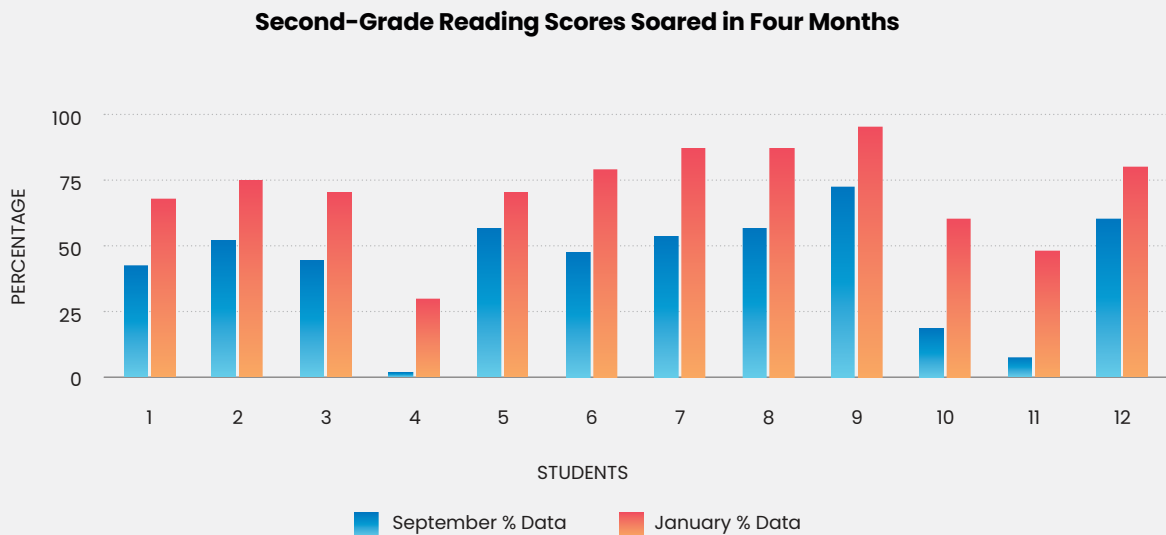


Figure 1: Hancock Place Elementary School Data

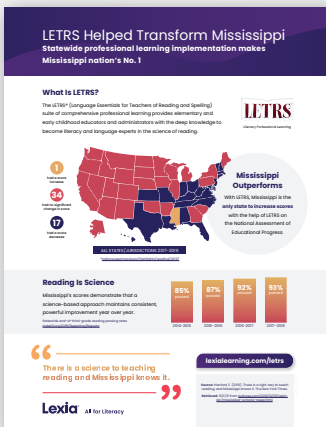
specialists, and others. To date, 51 of 118 staff members districtwide have been trained. “It’s a huge investment to ensure our teachers have the best tools available to make sure our kids are successfully learning to read and are on the way to becoming lifelong learners,” Dr. Wright stressed.

Reading specialist Cheryl Calcaterra confirms LETRS has been instrumental as she works to support students who struggle. “Adding LETRS training to my toolbox has been very helpful to teach my students with explicit and systematic phonics instruction,” said Calcaterra, who was named one of the Missouri Regional Teachers of the Year for 2021. “This has built their confidence and the power they feel when they are looking at words. They are having fun learning.”

Even in the face of the pandemic, when schools and districts had to quickly pivot to accommodate training and schedule shifts, Dr. Wright said Lexia® Learning continues a high

level of customer service that matches the effectiveness of the professional learning. “We were able to start teachers at different times and extend the deadline for a few that had fallen behind in a very tough year,” she said. “I especially appreciate the flexibility with the pandemic and licenses.”

Because of LETRS, Dr. Wright notes Hancock Place teachers are no longer defaulting to their original training. “The majority of all graduates from colleges are not taught the science of reading and still primarily use balanced literacy as a philosophy for teaching. So, they don’t know how to teach any other way. Until you give them something else, they will continue these old practices. The true success of LETRS at our high-needs school is that it has completely transformed our practices. We are committed to ensuring our kids have scientific-based methods to learn to read so they can be successful in school and life.”



What happened when an entire state committed to LETRS?

See how Mississippi became No. 1 in the nation after implementing LETRS: lexialearning.com/letrs-helped-transform-mississippi



Learn more about LETRS: lexialearning.com/letrs

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