

Amplifying Your District Award finalist



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Q: What does the Science of Reading mean to you?

For me, it's really about equity. Thousands of kids are already a step behind because of their skin color, or their neighborhood, or their zip code—all of these things that really shouldn't define their academic ability or their opportunity in life. I've looked at statistics around prison populations and illiteracy rates. There are so many adults that are functionally illiterate and they can't fully understand. They can't even read their prescriptions.

I also work for a district where most of our kids are on the lower end for socioeconomic status. We have a very high ELL population and 63 home languages spoken in my district. And we are the urban center of our area. Historically, we have been a balanced literacy district, but we have watched our test scores decline. Since discovering the Science of Reading and this completely different approach to teaching literacy, I feel like I have unlocked Pandora's box of potential. By addressing our core and aligning our teaching practices, our students can feel success and our teachers will, too. My teachers here have the biggest hearts of any educators I have ever worked with, and they work tirelessly day in and day out to support our students. We try to provide as many enrichment opportunities to all of our kids and

to expose them to the greatest and the best. The ability to read, to me, is the greatest civil right. If we're not providing them that, I can't sleep at night.

Q: Tell us more about your journey with the Science of Reading. How did you get started?

I have been a teacher in this district for pretty much my entire career, since I was 22. I started in kindergarten and took those kids to first grade. I stayed in first grade another year, then I went to third, got my kids back, then I took them to fourth. So I had one group of kids for several years and had seen quite a lot of success with them. But then I went to second grade for my last two years in the classroom with a new group of students, and I started to get really frustrated. I found that they were really falling behind. It happened again the year after, and I started Googling, "Why are my students not reading?" Or, "What's wrong with guided reading?" That is when I discovered the Science of Reading, and it felt like a deep web, a whole other universe of different instructional practices I had never tried before. I started to experiment in the classroom, but honestly it was messy and I felt a little like I was grasping at straws.

After I became a mom, I decided to go to a different district as a reading interventionist to be closer to home, and to join a district that was already a few steps ahead with the Science of Reading. My goal was to learn, absorb, and become a really good reading teacher because I felt like I had never really gotten good at it. I continued ordering book after book after book on Amazon. You name the Science of Reading book, I've probably read it and I've probably read it twice and even led a book study on it. And then this job opened back up at this district—the district where I had started my career. I missed my kids and I missed my community and I missed my people. So when this job opened at the district level to support all buildings with elementary ELA, I said, “The stars have magically aligned for me. This is what I was born to do.”

Now I am in my second year in this position and I've honestly never been happier. I got here just in time to help facilitate the adoption of Amplify CKLA in fourth and fifth grades, district-wide LETRS training, and to support educators who are pursuing their reading specialist professional licenses. We are now up for a full K–5 adoption of Amplify CKLA, and we are also using Amplify Reading, and are seeing our student growth and engagement skyrocket. It's been awesome to take what I've learned and to share it with other people and then just get bombarded by teacher success stories every day. It's incredible.

Q: How did you see the Science of Reading transform student and classroom outcomes?

We are really just getting started and it is still a work in progress. But I have seen such a change this year compared to last. I am overhearing teachers sharing the books they have read, the new instructional approach they've tried—their minds are open and there is this buzz and excitement. They're saying things like “I never really thought my kids could have a discussion about the Renaissance during language arts class, but they are doing it.” It is infectious.

My pilot teachers saw incredible growth in just the first quarter. We only did a seven-to-eight-week pilot of CKLA in K–1, but the data from it is something to really be excited about. And then even teachers who weren't piloting but still wanted to try class-wide interventions, or have adapted their phonics instruction, have seen success and have become so dedicated to the practice.

They're seeing amazing results, like going from completely red to almost all green in a matter of weeks. That success breeds motivation and the proof we need to keep going.

Q: What major obstacles did you overcome during your Science of Reading journey?

For me, the biggest obstacle has been getting 28 buildings on the same page. We have placed a lot of autonomy on teachers and administrators, which can be overwhelming to them at times. It can also be difficult for an educator to pivot to a different way of teaching, when they have been doing the same thing for decades. Sometimes it can be a hard sell. So I have learned to go where I am welcome, to put all of my energy into the places that invite me and the teachers that invite me. And then when they hit the jackpot or find that success or they get those stories, the good news travels fast.

Q: What news, materials, or information do you consume to help you teach?

We use Amplify CKLA and Amplify Reading and those programs are just wonderful. I am also an avid listener of Science of Reading: The Podcast. We actually arranged for Natalie Wexler and Susan Lambert to do a live professional development session in our district, which was so fantastic, especially for our most reluctant coaches and administrators. Our district-wide LETRS training has also been life-changing—we currently have 800 people who are completing the training, which has helped to really align the district and put us all on this path to success.

One thing that has been particularly impactful, and that I rely heavily on for support, is my teacher cadre. Each cadre is about 14 teachers in the district and they represent all of our clusters. We've partnered up with our Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion department to do text bias reviews on materials, which has been really important for our adaptations for cultural responsiveness. Our selection cadre came from that as well, when we landed on Amplify CKLA for K–3. The teacher input and camaraderie I get from my cadre is so instrumental and I am so grateful for them.

Q: What advice do you have for teachers starting out with the Science of Reading?

Find your people, find your community. I remember Margaret Goldberg's presentation during last spring's Science of Reading symposium, and how she said you need to find your dots—you need to seek out like-minded people and go where they are. Find those people who are ready to make the change like you are, or perhaps have already done it, and can be that positive support system you need to make a difference. Don't be afraid to message people on Twitter or Facebook or LinkedIn, and ask about their experiences, and build that community around you. Find the ones who are going to partner with you, who will lead you the right way, who will take your calls. And read all the books!

