

Science of Reading Standout School finalist



Cathy Dorbish

Principal
Austintown Elementary School, Ohio

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

I was introduced to the Science of Reading as I entered a new position in Austintown. I had worked for 32 years in an urban setting, so I have been a part of many reading implementation programs. What is unique about how Austintown went about it, is we gave the teachers the knowledge first. I had never learned or taught through phonics. It is a real eye-opener for me. I see how it makes much more sense than what we had done with leveled reading. Unintentionally, we were enlarging those gaps because we never gave the kids the tools to decode words.

We're in the beginning stages of shifting to the Science of Reading. However, as I'm watching my data, it looks very promising in keeping kids on grade level and getting ready to read for their third-grade test.

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

Our county ESC, Dr. Young, came to our district at the same time I did. I knew that our district did not have a common reading program. They had started a bit of Literacy Collaborative, but it was not implemented well. Dr. Young came with this vision of what the Science of Reading was and the training options. My building leadership team thought it was a great idea, so our first year we had some face-to-face PDs, and

lots of studying on individual modules. We were taking the tests, they were doing their casework. It was a combination, a blended learning experience.

Q: What tools/curriculum do you use to implement the Science of Reading? How did Amplify help?

The unique thing about going through this program was our teachers were getting the Science of Reading knowledge before we were buying the materials. When it came down to making curriculum choices, there were a lot of products out there that say they're Science-of-Reading-based. However, we chose Amplify CKLA and DIBELS® because, as we sat in those presentations, we could identify all of the things we had learned in our training. We are in year one implementation of CKLA, DIBELS, and mCLASS with DIBELS 8th edition. My building's a pre-K-2 building, so we're implementing CKLA in K-2. Then we have tutors who are implementing the Burst lessons through mCLASS. Teachers are using the Amplify Reading program for additional intervention time in their classroom, while they are pulling small groups and using those activities as well. So we're very lucky we have the Cadillac of products. We've got all of them integrated and fitting very well together.

Q: How did you see the Science of Reading change your class dynamics and student outcomes? How long did it take?

We're still in the early implementation stage only because, for reading, we didn't have a common assessment that was showing the fruits of our labor, to be honest. We had something called i-Ready, which is a common assessment, where we could get some information about phonemic awareness and phonics. However, it's always geared toward where a child's ability level was and not necessarily their grade level.

Now we used our DIBELS data to create our Reading Improvement Monitoring Plans (RIMPS). And we probably increased our RIMPS by at least 40%. We've identified those students early and we're getting them the intervention that they need. I'm interested to see where those middle-of-the-year scores are going to fall between what we've learned with the Science of Reading, Amplify CKLA, and Amplify Reading.

Q: What major obstacles did you overcome to implement the Science of Reading in your (classroom/school/district)?

Most of it is buy-in. You have some teachers that were very committed to leveled reading and they knew what they knew. I think not having data, like state tests, was an obstacle, so I'm not able to present to them where the kids fall at the end of the year.

I will say in just a short time of using DIBELS and the progress monitoring, I have heard nothing but good things. They know what pieces are missing for their children right now. The kids' weaknesses are not hidden. They're just getting used to using that Amplify Reading as an intervention and then using those small-group lessons as well.

Q: How did/do you track your student's progress?

For the students who were chosen for intervention, we let the program choose them. Tutors are doing those Burst lessons, progress monitoring, and following that. We progress-monitor all of our kids about every four-to-six weeks because another phenomenon we found was that even our on-grade-level readers through our old i-Ready were slipping back a little bit by the end of the year. That can happen because your good readers don't get as much attention, that's just the name of the game. Now we've got everybody getting grade-level

material, we're still supporting our lower readers with intervention, but during that intervention time, our higher readers are getting enrichment. Amplify Reading just helps us with both ends of that.

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

We're at the beginning stages of this journey, so we have a lot of coaching sessions that have been purchased. I'm utilizing those coaching sessions. Amplify has been so accommodating to either help us through videos, through readings, or face-to-face. It depends on what teachers need to know at this point. I think I have to walk a real careful line of oversaturating teachers as well. Because you have great intentions by giving all this information, and then it ends up backfiring because the teachers are just not ready to receive it. I'm being very watchful to see what the teachers require next.

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

If I was talking to an administrator, I would tell them that you need to participate with your staff through the whole process, you need to learn with your staff. It offers you the knowledge that you're going to need as you go out and evaluate and set your expectations. You now have your feet in their shoes, you're seeing what they're doing, what's hard about it, and what's not hard about it. As an administrator, you have to be hands-on with your staff and learn it with them. I think that's essential.

For teachers, I think my tip or trick for the Science of Reading is finally making an even playing field for all kids. We know our kids come from all different backgrounds, different opportunities, and parents who read or don't. By teaching them in this manner, we're leveling the playing field. Those kids who may be economically disadvantaged, they're going to be readers just like the kids whose parents bought them 100,000 books. And isn't that worth it? That's what we're doing for sure. The kids, being in a K-2 building, just love everything about it. They love the sounds, the hand motions, using the boxes. They don't know any better right now, but they're learning what they're learning for sure.