ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Name
Paterson Public Schools

Location
Paterson, New Jersey

Name of District
Paterson Public Schools

Overview

Paterson Public Schools is one of New Jersey’s most diverse districts. This urban district has nearly 25,000 students enrolled in grades K-12 and an additional 2,900 PreK students with community providers. More than 90 percent of district students receive free or reduced priced lunches. Fifteen percent, or 3,500 students, receive special education services, and 13 percent are English Language Learners who receive bilingual/ESL services. Nearly 50 percent of all students in Paterson speak a primary language other than English, with more than 40 different languages spoken in district schools. The district adopted SRA Open Court Reading/Imagine It! phonics kits in 2012-13.
Implementation

Wanda Kopic, the district’s English Language Arts and Literacy Supervisor, says Paterson students face many challenges to reading at their grade level. Many also struggle with speaking and writing English, and expressing ideas in complete sentences. “At the time of adoption, the biggest challenge facing the district was that a majority of students were either struggling readers or non-readers,” said Kopic.

The district adopted SRA Open Court Reading/Imagine It! phonics kits in 2012-13 and implemented them in grades K-2 after researching several phonics programs. Kopic said the curriculum’s advantages over other options are its explicit lessons and its compatibility with the district’s workshop model approach to teaching. “It’s a research-based, systematic, scaffolded ‘I Do, We Do, You Do’ approach,” she explained.

As part of implementing the program, McGraw-Hill Education representatives provided in-depth training to all K-2 teachers and the district’s English Language Arts supervisors. Training included demo lessons conducted in classrooms with students and teachers, teacher visitation to each others’ classrooms, and video instruction examples. The district also provided teachers with resources and references on its English and Language Arts (ELA) website.

“If teachers are struggling or need assistance, then the ELA supervisors provide teachers with individual help,” Kopic said. “Professional development has been very helpful, and our teachers are confident in and committed to implementing the program in their classrooms.

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Wanda Kopic
English Language Arts and Literacy Supervisor

In addition, each building has a master-teacher trained in the program so that he or she is able to assist colleagues.”

Student Engagement

Since implementation, Kopic says the district has been extremely pleased by the ability of SRA Open Court Reading/Imagine It! to engage students through interactive activities that help them build confidence.

“The children love the phonics program,” she said. “Some students are reading with teacher assistance, and others are starting to develop reading skills to the point that they are reading the decodable books fluently. The children love the puppet Leo. When teachers bring Leo out, our students can’t hold back their excitement. This motivates the teacher as well as the students in the classroom.”

To learn more about Open Court Reading, visit opencourtreading.com
According to Kopic, the phonics kits were the right solution for Paterson Public Schools because they start at the beginning, which is where many students, including English Language Learners, need the most help.

“Phonics is imperative in our district because we have children who are not readers and it is important to teach them the basic phonetic concepts so they are able to grow into fluent readers,” Kopic explained. “Teaching phonics will help them to improve their reading skills and efficiency.”

Teachers now begin each day instructing students in phonics and then transition into reading. Kopic notes that SRA Open Court Reading/Imagine It! aligns well with the New Jersey model curriculum, which includes five units paced to begin in September and end in June.

She said the program would bring value to other districts looking for a curriculum that helps students become familiar with the overall components of phonics and apply those skills in other content areas. The key is not to skip any part of the curriculum and to use the lesson cards sequentially. According to Kopic, it’s also important that teachers continue with the daily routine that the program recommends and continue to reinforce the vital skills that will assist the student in becoming a more proficient reader.

**Increased Student Confidence and Enthusiasm**

Kopic is impressed with the benefits teachers and students have experienced from the adoption of SRA Open Court Reading/Imagine It!

“Teachers are really engaged and enthusiastic about teaching phonics,” she explained. “They see the difference in their students, which drives them to want to teach phonics even more. Students are more confident and comfortable to pick up a book to read. And, they are excited when teachers teach phonics, because the instruction is the fun part of their day.”

Parents are pleased as well.

“They are excited because they are able to assist their children with homework, from helping them with the skills practice workbook or reading the decodable books,” Kopic says. “The parents always say that they are noticing a difference in the way their child is reading and how they are able to identify sounds. To hear parents’ positive feedback shows us that, as a district, we are moving in the right direction.”

**Increased Test Scores**

Paterson students are assessed three times a year with the computer-based Renaissance Star Reading assessment and test scores on the reading assessment are rising, according to Kopic.

“Students have to read short stories and respond to questions that align with the story,” she explained. “This would not be possible for students to do independently if they did not receive in-depth and rigorous phonics instruction. Students also are improving in all disciplines because every subject expects students to read directions or to read in general. With the phonics program in place, we
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are noticing students taking their time to respond to questions and making sure that they fully understand what they are doing and reading.”

During the 2012-13 school year, Kopic started the first annual district spelling bee for first and second graders.

“I wanted to test and see if the phonics program worked and whether our students were able to spell by hearing the word and analyzing the sounds of the word,” Kopic said. “This was a wonderful success story. I was amazed to see how many of our students were able to spell difficult words that were on a second- and third-grade level by just using the phonetic skills that they learned in their classrooms.”

Kopic called adoption of SRA Open Court Reading/Imagine It! a clear success.

About McGraw-Hill Open Court Reading/Imagine It! Phonics Kits

SRA Open Court Reading/Imagine It! enables children to begin reading and comprehending at an early age using explicit, systematic and research-based instruction across crucial reading areas. It promotes phonemic awareness through lessons that scaffold and support students as they develop. It provides phonics instruction using seven steps to teach decoding and encoding skills.

Phonics kit lessons include phonological and phonemic awareness, systematic, explicit phonics and fluency instruction that complement other reading and language arts programs. Features include easy-to-use lesson plans, support for English Language Learners, instructional technology and assessment.

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