

# Making the shift to the Science of Reading

Oak Harbor School District in Washington achieves “exceptional results and astronomical growth” in literacy with Amplify Core Knowledge Language Arts.



# Background

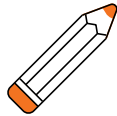
Oak Harbor School District in Washington state serves over 5,400 students in nine schools, a virtual school, and a homeschooling program. Roughly 38% of Oak Harbor students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, and 44.4% are people of color. Just under 5% of students are homeless, and 4.5% of students are multilingual learners. Over 21% receive special services.

With over 40% of Oak Harbor students having a parent in the military, many come from an international background after living on-base abroad.



9

**schools**



5,400

**students**



38%

**eligible for free or  
reduced price lunches**

# Challenge

Liz Ritz, Oak Harbor’s Director of Teaching and Learning, joined the district in July 2019 and immediately saw opportunities. The district had not adopted a new literacy curriculum in over 15 years, and only 50% of elementary students were meeting grade-level standards in reading proficiency. The district’s scores showed no growth in five years.

“What we were doing was not working,” Ritz said about the former curriculum and balanced literacy approach.

With the sudden pivot to remote learning caused by the Covid pandemic in the spring of 2020, the district recognized the need for a digital-ready curriculum. The superintendent approved money to allow Ritz to pilot a new literacy program, conduct research, and recommend a solution.

Ritz’s research pointed away from balanced literacy. It became abundantly clear, she said, that Oak Harbor needed to shift to the Science of Reading to meet its goals of 95% of students achieving reading proficiency and 100% experiencing growth.

# Solution

Committed to finding a Science of Reading-aligned program, Ritz and her team conducted a rigorous review. Of the four programs Oak Harbor examined, Amplify Core Knowledge Language Arts® (CKLA) stood out as the best aligned to the Science of Reading and the most proven to achieve strong results.

During the review process, Oak Harbor's Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) team also recognized that the multiple perspectives represented in CKLA's knowledge-building units offered students ample room for critical thinking and laid the groundwork for engaged classroom discussion. Amplify's commitment to DEI aligned with Oak Harbor's values, helping district leaders "latch on to Amplify and agree that, 'yes, this is the right way to go,'" Ritz said.

Oak Harbor decided to pilot Amplify CKLA for two years starting in the fall of 2020.

Ritz and her team conducted a rigorous review. Of the four programs Oak Harbor reviewed, Amplify CKLA clearly stood out to Ritz as the most proven and the best aligned to the Science of Reading.

Understanding that a shift in both literacy approach and curriculum can be challenging, Ritz developed a team of district community members to meet each month during the two-year pilot. The team established the vision and mission for the district and tracked progress, engaging additional teachers and students to ensure that every voice was heard.

Oak Harbor placed a literacy coach at each elementary school, liaising districtwide to collaborate and overcome challenges and share successes. A Teaching and Learning Hub was also developed to educate teachers about the Science of Reading and effective curriculum implementation.

Partnerships with Amplify coaches further supported teachers in implementing CKLA with integrity, and additional professional development opportunities with education experts such as Dr. Jan Hasbrouck equipped district leaders with the knowledge needed to succeed.

By the end of the two-year pilot, there was a strong case for continuing with Amplify CKLA—students were progressing, as were educators' comfort levels and confidence in the program and the Science of Reading. The program was approved unanimously by Oak Harbor's curriculum review team, instructional materials committee, and school board.

**Oak Harbor officially adopted Amplify CKLA for K–4 ahead of the 2022–2023 school year.**

# Results

With the shift to the Science of Reading and Amplify CKLA, Oak Harbor achieved its goal of high growth across all elementary schools and is well on the way to having 95% of students meet grade-level reading proficiency.

By the end of the 2022–2023 school year, three kindergarten classes and one third-grade class reached 100% proficiency, the third-grade class having started the year with only 50% of students proficient. Those elementary school classes are among twelve now demonstrating 90%+ proficiency, higher than any gains the district has seen in the past decade.

Longitudinal data (factoring in Oak Harbor's two-year pilot) showed each elementary school experiencing up to 23% growth in reading proficiency, with especially significant improvements in K–1. Kindergarteners' reading proficiency improved by 19%, and first graders by 31%.

“When teachers fully embrace the Science of Reading approach and implement Amplify materials with integrity, we see exceptional results and astronomical growth,” said Ritz, who expressed gratitude for those who worked tirelessly to bring the new curriculum to life.

One Oak Harbor teacher said, “We’ve seen so much improvement this year!” Throughout the district, teachers feel that the learning is sticking.

“When reviewing the CKLA fluency reads,” one teacher said, “I realized that most of my students have at least doubled in words per minute and their vocabulary increased substantially since the start of the year. Students are really enjoying reading, and I consider that a HUGE success.”

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**Liz Ritz**

Director of Teaching and Learning,  
Oak Harbor School District

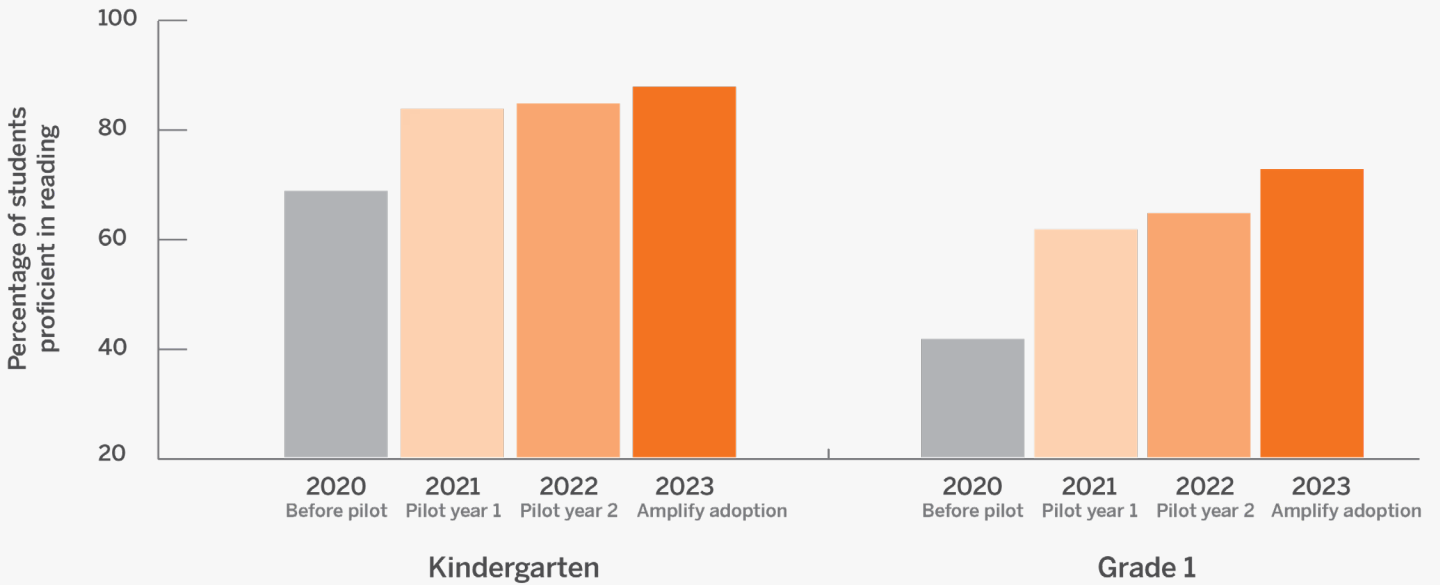
An Oak Harbor teacher said a third of their students started Kindergarten knowing only two or fewer letter sounds. “Now, 96% of the class knows them all and they are applying this knowledge to reading,” the teacher said. “That is so exciting!”

Families are also experiencing a positive impact. Over 91% of 157 Oak Harbor family members surveyed said they've seen growth in their child's reading this year. One parent said their child has “gone from a reluctant reader to an inspired reader” since beginning Amplify CKLA lessons.

“He made huge progress from his first-of-the-year assessment to mid-year, and his teacher said he showed significant growth,” the parent said. “He has more confidence when reading now and isn't afraid to try sounding out 'big words.'”

The state quickly recognized Oak Harbor as it outperformed state literacy trends across Grades 1–4. Ritz was asked to share success stories with neighboring districts, and “the news of the gains spread quickly across the state,” she said.

## Oak Harbor School District's Grades K-1 reading growth



### Overall percent change in reading proficiency from 2020–2023:

Kindergarten

**+19%**

First Grade

**+31%**

Many districts also visited Oak Harbor schools to see Amplify CKLA in action, and five have since adopted the program, along with a Science of Reading approach. These districts are now advocating for legislation to ensure that all districts in Washington align to the Science of Reading.

While celebrating these wins, Ritz recognizes room for further improvement.

“Reading is a civil right and a matter of equity, and it is our moral imperative to ensure that every student has a high-quality educational experience where they feel affirmed and valued and are able to become strong readers, writers, and critical thinkers,” Ritz said. “That is the gateway to all other academic areas. Until 100% of our kids are reading proficiently, we still have work to do.”

For more information about Amplify's  
Science of Reading-based complete  
early literacy suite, visit **[amplify.com](https://www.amplify.com)**.

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