

# Making the shift to the Science of Reading

West Jefferson Hills School District in Pennsylvania achieves reading gains and lasting impact with Amplify Core Knowledge Language Arts.



● West Jefferson Hills

# Background

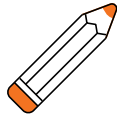
West Jefferson Hills School District in Pennsylvania serves 3,300 students across five campuses. Situated about ten miles outside Pittsburgh, it's considered a suburban school district. The student body is 88% white, 5.1% Asian or Asian/Pacific Islander, 2.4% Black, 1.8% Hispanic/Latino, and 0.2% American Indian or Alaska Native. Approximately 20% of the students served by West Jefferson Hills qualify for free or reduced-price lunch.

After piloting, Amplify Core Knowledge Language Arts® (CKLA) in grades K–5 and Amplify ELA in grades 6–8 were adopted districtwide at the beginning of the 2021–2022 school year.



5

campuses



3,300

students



20%

eligible for free or reduced price lunches

# Challenge

During the 2019–2020 school year, educators from West Jefferson Hills recognized the need for a change in their elementary and middle level literacy instruction. While they were not yet familiar with the Science of Reading, they desired a curriculum that offered something distinctly different from the various elementary literacy curricula they were using.

There were inconsistencies in students' experiences building literacy skills, which varied greatly from classroom to classroom and school to school. Aiming to enhance the educational experience for their student body, they sought a curriculum with strong phonics instruction—a vision that later expanded to include the other essential components illustrated in Scarborough's Reading Rope.

“The challenge was coming to the point where we realized that what we were doing was not working for a large population of students, and we were trying to intervene our way out.”

**Matthew Patterson**

Assistant Superintendent, K–12,  
West Jefferson Hills School District

# Solution

West Jefferson Hills started the review process with a goal of finding solutions to the following issues: inconsistent practices and implementation, students struggling with reading, and teachers lacking the resources to provide high-quality reading instruction. West Jefferson Hills Assistant Superintendent Matthew Patterson and McClellan Elementary Principal Justin Liberatore shared, respectively, that teachers “wanted us to move forward with a program that worked” and forgo their previous strategy of “piecing things together.”

The district simultaneously started training educators in both best practices and early literacy foundational skills instruction. Around this time, the team at West Jefferson Hills also discovered research on the Science of Reading, including *The Knowledge Gap* by Natalie Wexler, Amplify’s Science of Reading: The Podcast, and other resources.

“The other programs we were evaluating were just a repeat of everything that we had been doing with our old basal reading program. And we didn’t want to do that again.”

## **Kimberly Ross**

Second-grade teacher and literacy coach,  
West Jefferson Hills School District

The review process included visits to schools in other districts to see curricular resources in action and a pilot of both Amplify Core Knowledge Language Arts® (CKLA) and a traditional basal program in West Jefferson Hills classrooms. After visiting Erie’s Public Schools, which had been using Amplify CKLA, Principal Liberatore and other Jefferson Hills stakeholders found that all the elements they were searching for were present in the classrooms they observed. “What they were doing was all of what we had just been trained on. It had knowledge building; it had foundational skills,” he said. “There’s nothing we would have to piece together, because it’s all right there.”

During West Jefferson Hills’ curriculum pilot, kindergarten teachers in Liberatore’s building who were piloting the traditional basal program asked if they could switch to the Amplify CKLA pilot. “That sounds like what I want to do,” one teacher said. “Why am I not doing that pilot with them?” According to Kimberly Ross, a second-grade teacher and literacy coach at Liberatore’s school, these teachers saw the difference Amplify CKLA was making in pilot classrooms. “The other programs we were evaluating were just a repeat of everything that we had been doing with our old basal reading program,” she said. “And we didn’t want to do that again.”

After their thorough review process, West Jefferson Hills educators’ choice was clear: Amplify CKLA was implemented in K–5 classrooms across the district and paired with the mCLASS® assessment and Boost Reading personalized learning programs.

# Results

Assistant Superintendent Patterson reported that the implementation of Amplify CKLA resulted in students scoring in the 98th and 99th percentile among their peers nationwide, and more students reading on grade level. “The data clearly says these gains are not by chance,” he said. “The approach works, because it is grounded in science.”

Equally powerful is his report that students are “reading more and are more interested in the topics; they’re engaging more in literature.” And it isn’t just the students who’ve been inspired by their work with Amplify CKLA, mCLASS assessment, and Boost Reading. “Our teachers are more confident. They’re more willing to share. They’re seeing results in their classrooms,” Patterson said. “It’s great to hear teachers say ‘I love teaching reading again. I delayed my retirement because I wanted to see this project through.’”

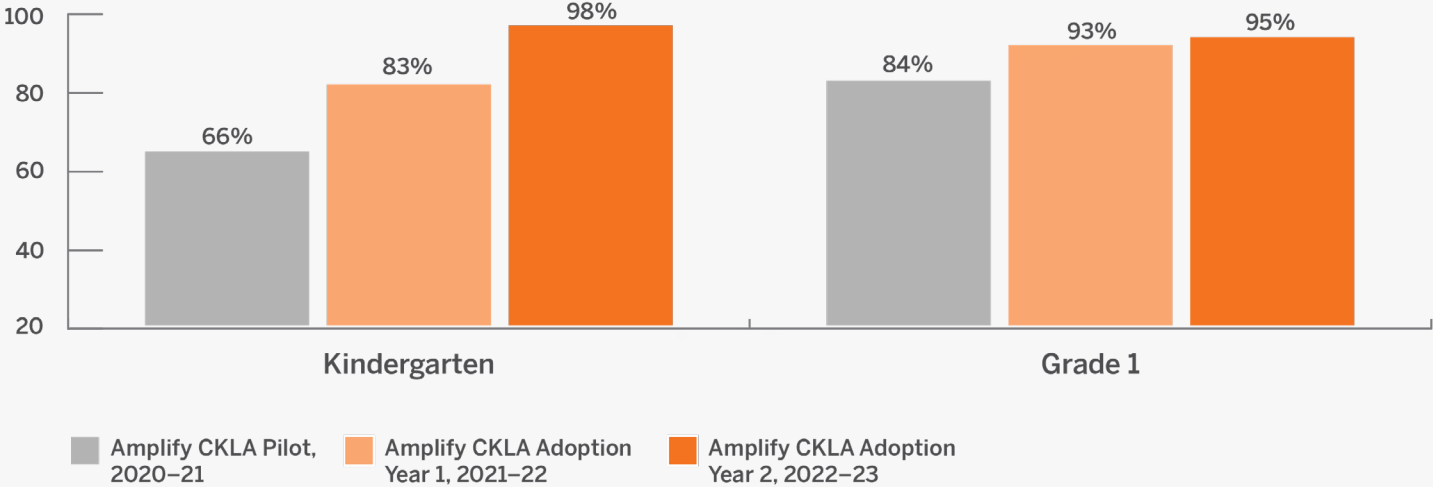
Ross noted the personal impact CKLA has had in her classroom: “I had one little boy who cried every single day because he was struggling. But when we did the knowledge portions [of CKLA], he was a shining star and that was the best part of his day. He had a smile on his face. His hand was up and he was like a completely different child.”

“[With Amplify CKLA] ... we saw every change we were hoping to see and more. Faster than we ever expected to see change like that happen. It has sustained all the way from those pilot classrooms to where we are now. Where we had previously said, ‘Kids aren’t ready; it’s not appropriate; they can’t do it,’ we now stand in awe of what they are learning and doing. They can do every bit of it and more when we give them the chance to do it.”

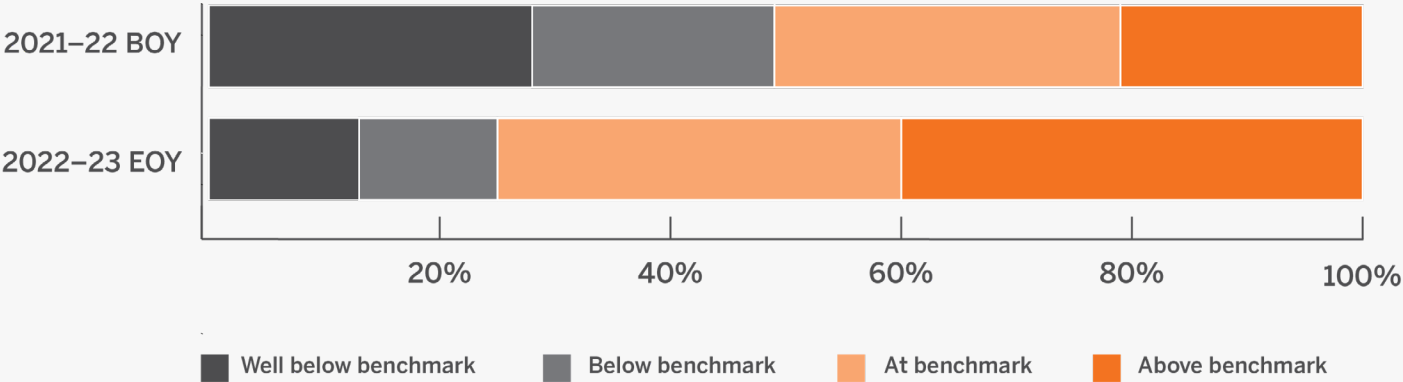
## **Matthew Patterson**

Assistant Superintendent,  
West Jefferson Hills School District

### West Jefferson Hills' national achievement percentiles on NWEA Measures of Academic Performance (MAP)



### West Jefferson Hills' student proficiency growth after adopting Amplify CKLA



mCLASS with DIBELS® 8th Edition data, Grades K-5

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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