

An illustration of a spotlight shining from the top left towards the center of the page. The spotlight is dark blue with a white lens and a bright white beam of light.

Alaska School SPOTLIGHT

Annette Island School District / Richard Johnson Elementary

November 2022

Background

At the end of the 2019-2020 school year, the Annette Island School District was considering the purchase of a new curriculum to increase student's ability to read on grade level based on years of test scores demonstrating students not making the academic progress they should be making. Annette Island School District began the process with a committee of 5 teachers in June of 2020. The committee included a high school, middle school, and three elementary school teachers brought together to discuss what was the district's greatest need and which curriculum could provide the best outcome for students. The team considered several options which included EL-Education-ReadyGen, Fountas & Pinnell, ReadingGen, Book Worms, Foundations, Heggerty-Phonological Awareness, Geodes, and Wit & Wisdom.

The intent of the committee was to find a curriculum that could be administered with fidelity which would take a concerted effort and on-going training. The key considerations for the new curriculum was to reach a wide grade range and ability span and contain multiple opportunities for students to demonstrate their mastery of the standards. The curriculum must be engaging, developmentally appropriate, and address the standards in the lower grades as well as in the upper grades.

The committee began by reading the reviews and the research on every curriculum they considered. They came up with a multi-step approach to consider two different English Language Arts (ELA) programs. They went through the pros-cons of a full comprehensive ELA program as opposed to ELA programs using multiple components to allow for all learning needs, learning styles and making sure the material meets the needs of a variety of student abilities.

The committee took into consideration the National Reading Panel's identification of reading as it is broken down into five key concepts that are at the core of every effective reading instructional program. Those concepts are phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. These concepts guided the committee's approach to narrowing down the options. The Annette Island School District's ELA committee ultimately recommended to the school board an ELA program consisting of multiple components: Heggerty, Foundations, Geodes, and Wit & Wisdom.

ELA Curriculum Implementation

In grades PreK through 2nd, daily phonological awareness instruction is provided using the Heggerty Phonological Awareness program, which was implemented in September 2020. The lessons are between 10-12 minutes in length and skills are taught in an explicit and systematic way. Weekly progress monitoring allows teachers to identify students who may need additional support in phonological awareness.



Our Mission: An excellent education for every student every day.

Heggerty's Bridge the Gap program, implemented in 2021, is an intervention program that provides phonemic awareness lessons for students in grades 3rd through 5th. Students who need additional support in phonemic awareness will receive daily targeted instruction to ensure proficiency in this area. Student data is collected and updated through frequent progress monitoring and that data is used to further guide instruction.

The Wilson Foundations Phonics program was implemented in grades PreK-3 in September 2020. It is a research based, Tier 1 and Tier 2 instructional program designed to explicitly and systematically teach phonics skills necessary for reading, writing, and spelling. This program is considered a proactive approach, using a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS). The daily lessons are 30-40 minutes with an additional 30 minutes, 3-5 times a week for those students who need additional support. Progress monitoring of phonics skills is ongoing and used to guide instruction.

Geodes, published by Great Minds, was implemented in grades K-2 in September 2020. The program aligns with the scope and sequence of the Wilson Foundations phonics program and the module topics in Wit & Wisdom, also published by Great Minds. These knowledge building books are geared towards emerging and developing readers and are at least 80% decodable. Geodes focuses on phonics, fluency, comprehension and vocabulary development and provides students an opportunity to learn about ideas in the areas of science, history and the arts. Teachers use Foundations data to assist in creating small groups and use Geodes within those small groups as an instructional tool to strengthen and enhance phonics skills.

The final part of the comprehensive reading program was found in the use of Wit & Wisdom. Implemented in September 2020 in grades K-5, the curriculum is intended to build necessary ELA skills while at the same time cultivate students' knowledge around history, art, science, and other topics. Wit & Wisdom is a high-quality, research based curriculum that aligns with the science of reading, state standards, and also pairs with Geodes and Foundations. Geodes and Foundations are aimed at strengthening the lower strands of Scarborough's rope (phonological awareness, decoding, sight word recognition) while Wit & Wisdom is intended to strengthen the upper strands (background knowledge, vocabulary, literacy knowledge, etc.).

This ELA curriculum is designed to address the five essential components of reading (phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension) making the curriculum accessible for students at all levels of learning.

Our school district has a keen focus on culture. This ELA curriculum can be tailored to fit our cultural commitment to our students.

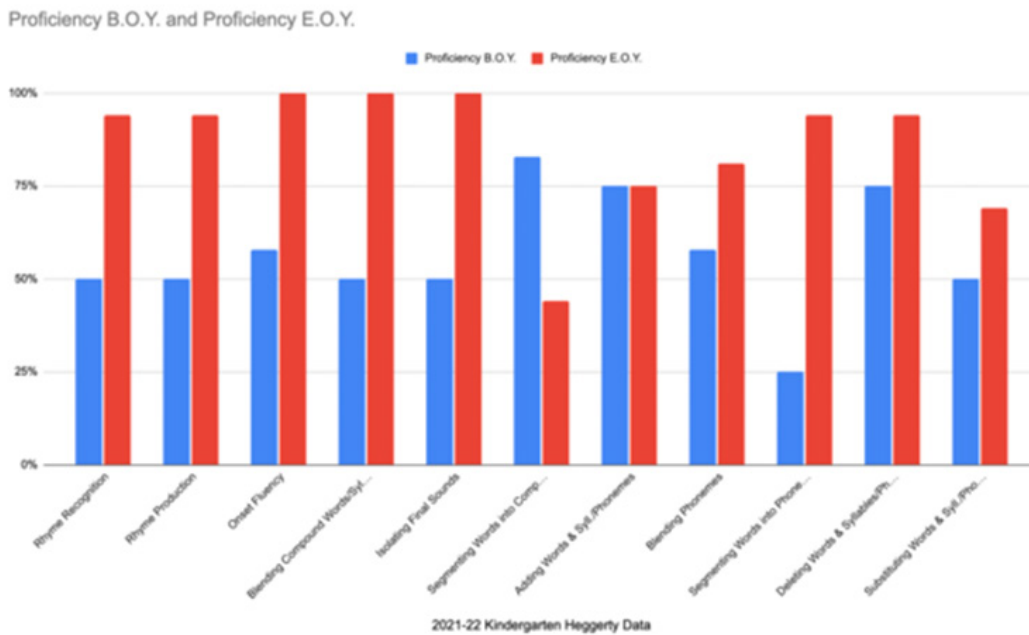
Additional Supports

The Annette Island School District did not stop with simply adopting a new curriculum, it also provides ongoing training for teachers, paraprofessionals and administrators to ensure all staff have a solid understanding of the curriculum. The district continues to monitor and adjust their use and understanding of the various components of the ELA curriculum.

In addition to professional development, Annette Island School District has hired a reading specialist to assist with the implementation of the ELA curriculum. The reading specialist serves as an instructional coach as well as provides one-to-one support for students with reading challenges. The reading specialist also assists in the coordination of professional development, conducts observations, provides feedback for teachers, and supports data collection and analysis.

Example of progress

Since the implementation of the ELA curriculum, one area that our students have experienced growth in is phonological awareness. The chart below shows the gains that our kindergarten students have made over the course of a school year.



Phonological awareness is an essential foundational skill in which other reading skills are built, so it is vital that our students develop and become proficient in this area.

*Please note, phonological awareness skills continue to become more complex grade level to grade level and as the school year progresses. For instance, the students move from syllable work to phoneme work. An example of this you can find when looking at the chart and see the beginning of the year data in the area of 'Segmenting Words into Compound Words', the skill changes from words that are not as complex to words that require a more advanced reading skill such as segmenting words into phonemes.