

Westwood Elementary Reaches for the Stars with *SRA Open Court Reading*

Westwood Elementary School is part of the Wellington Exempted Village School District in Wellington, Ohio. On a quest to boost their students' average scores on the State Report Card, curriculum leaders at the K–3 school turned to *SRA Open Court Reading*—a research-backed program based on the Science of Reading and proven to deliver undeniable results for learners at every level.

In a recent interview, Westwood Principal Dr. Janet Kubasak and Kindergarten Teacher Jill Stone described their experience implementing *Open Court Reading*. “When we first started using the program, my main goal was to cover the standards in the classroom,” Stone said. “*Open Court Reading* covers the standards and beyond. Halfway through the first year we were already seeing significant improvement in reading skills and phonemic awareness.”

The Challenge

When Kubasak became principal four years ago, Westwood had straight Cs across the board on the Ohio State Report Card, including a C in Reading and a C in Achievement. Armed with a Doctorate in Reading and Literacy and previous experience as Educational Consultant for the State Support Team Region 2, Kubasak said she was eager to put her passion for the Science of Reading to work in her new role.

“For our reading curriculum, it was basically a hodge-podge of educational practices, with teachers designing their own programs using a variety of outsource sites,” Kubasak explained. “There were so many pieces lacking—with no strong scope and sequence and no alignment to the standards—and we knew it was important to find a solution that had the most comprehensive, high-quality educational rigor.”

The Solution

Westwood implemented McGraw Hill’s K-5 SRA *Open Court Reading* program during the 2020-2021 academic year, choosing it over other programs because it was research-validated and based on the Science of Reading in five essential areas: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. Kubasak emphasized that the curriculum spoke for itself and it was the “star pick” over all the other programs the school explored.

“Students learn in so many different modalities, and we needed something that had every single component mixed into the batter,” Kubasak said. “*Open Court Reading* delivered on every level. It has the decodables. It has the strong routines. It has the engaging online program and the fun educational games that go with it. It has the picture cards and the sound cards. There wasn’t anything that I would push to the side. And when I say we used our entire box of materials, I mean we used our entire box.”

As Kubasak described, *Open Court Reading*’s comprehensive approach makes this program particularly unique. The critical building blocks for lifelong literacy are established through a systematic format and instructional continuity—leveraging a scope and sequence that follows a purposeful progression of skills in three focus areas: Foundational Skills, Reading and Responding, and Language Arts.

“This program covers all the areas students need to have a strong foundation and uses a variety of activities to meet all styles of learning,”



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Stone pointed out. “I especially like the Green Band (Foundational Skills) and the Red Band (Reading and Responding), as well as the story selections, vocabulary and decodables.”

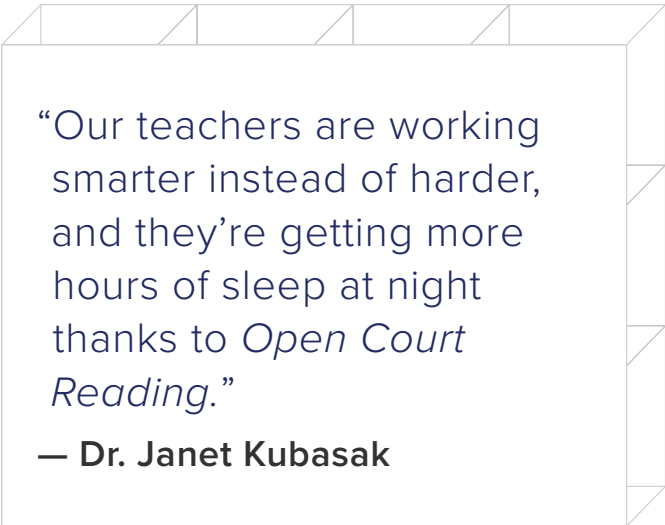
Yet another valued benefit of *Open Court Reading* is the dedicated curriculum consultant who provides support every step of the way. “The small group meetings with our program representative were great,” Stone said. “She not only gave us feedback, she also modeled lessons for us in the classroom. That was so helpful.”

The Results

The results Westwood has achieved from implementing *Open Court Reading* have been inspiring. In fact, as of last year **the school is now at an overall 4.5 star rating out of 5 on the State Report Card—and their Reading score is up to a 4.** “We’ve seen growth of a grade and a half in a short amount of time, and I think this year will be even higher,” Kubasak said.

Kubasak and Stone believe that a big part of Westwood’s success has been because of how easily their students have embraced the structured routines. They especially appreciate the fact that students know exactly what’s coming next and what they’re expected to do, and are given plenty of encouragement to think for themselves.

Perhaps the most surprising discovery was how quickly Westwood’s teachers embraced the new curriculum, Kubasak noted. “When I was on the State Support Team and we would pick a new curriculum, the teacher buy-in would usually take quite a bit of time, so I had prepared myself for the push-back,” she said.



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But the buy-in with *Open Court Reading* was immediate, Kubasak emphasized, because teachers saw how quickly the routines fell into place and how much time they saved planning lessons. “Our teachers are working smarter instead of harder, and they’re getting more hours of sleep at night thanks to *Open Court Reading*.”

Moving Forward

“I love that we now have such a strong *Open Court* family, with all of us doing each and every component, and I’m looking forward to seeing our students’ state test scores increase even more in the future,” Kubasak said. Other district leaders have even come in to observe Westwood teachers in the classroom, and Kubasak and Stone said they welcome the opportunity to share the school’s strategies for success with them.

“I really like that *Open Court Reading* is science-based and very easy to use—with all students getting the same high-quality curriculum.” Stone said. Kubasak added that “it’s especially beneficial for students who come in with a deficit in language or vocabulary because it gives them consistent repetitive practice and the opportunity to receive personalized attention. We truly couldn’t be more happy with *Open Court Reading*”

About Open Court Reading K–5 Literacy Program

Grounded in decades of literacy research and a proven history of efficacy in the classroom, *SRA Open Court Reading* has been building strong readers, writers, and thinkers for more than 60 years.

Underpinned by findings from learning theory and cognitive science—also known as the Science of Reading—and proven to achieve reading gains in a diverse range of readers from beginning to fluent, *Open Court Reading* is research-validated as well as research-based. A carefully crafted instructional plan and a purposeful progression of skills empower

teachers and help make research actionable. By recognizing foundational skills as critical building blocks, *Open Court Reading* prepares students for a lifetime of literacy and learning.

We understand that class performance can improve due to a number of factors, including the innate ability and prior education of the students participating, as well as differences among educators and their pedagogies. We believe that, even taking these factors into account, Open Court Reading can contribute to improvements in student outcomes.

To learn more about our programs, visit:

Science of Reading Curriculum | *Open Court Reading* for K–5 | McGraw Hill

