



Helping Palliser Regional Schools in Alberta with its diversity

Pearson CASE STUDY

“
Words are used to think with, to write with, to dream with, to hope and pray with.
”

— Andrew Clements Frindle

District Profile

Palliser Regional Schools in Alberta is a tremendously diverse district. The district includes 14 community schools, 17 Hutterian colony schools, 10 faith-based alternative schools, nine of which are in Calgary on eight different campuses, five outreach schools, three Low German Mennonite schools and one virtual school.

This widespread district has a mix of small rural schools and larger urban schools serving 8,100 students from early learning through grade 12.

Student Profile

The district has a high percentage of students who are English Language Learners. In fact, twenty of Palliser's schools are essentially ELL schools, many others have a large population of ELL students.

In 2013, Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Assessment results showed that students needed further intervention and enhanced classroom instruction to ensure they were progressing with their reading.

Understanding that students who don't read proficiently by third grade are four times more likely to leave high school without a diploma than proficient readers¹, Palliser leaders increased their focus on literacy growth in their schools.

Cynthia Gietz, Director of Learning for Palliser Regional Schools says this includes a goal for district leaders and staff to work toward have **95 per cent of grade three students reading at grade level by March 2019.**

Background

Palliser Regional schools serves 8,100 students – many of which are English Language Learners. The district has a mix of rural and urban schools that are widespread and tremendously diverse.

Goals

District leaders and staff are working to have **95 per cent of grade three students reading at grade level by March 2019.** Their plan to achieve this goal includes using programs like Pearson's Levelled Literacy Intervention (LLI) program.

Implementation

The district implemented LLI in a slow and focused way in 2014. In the first year of using LLI, in combination with a strong focus on literacy in the classroom, Palliser saw a 10 per cent increase in reading levels among grade three students.



Implementation

Palliser's implementation of the Levelled Literacy Intervention system has been gradual and focused. Teachers were introduced to the program in 2014 and schools were encouraged to purchase systems if they had funds. The district's central office also provided funding to schools who needed help purchasing LLI and accessing the PD. "We operate on a centralized philosophy of budgeting to avoid 'have' and 'have-not' schools, explains Gietz."

"Now, all but six of our schools, not including the Hutterian Schools, have LLI systems specific to their grade levels and needs. The movement is to have it in all our schools," says Gietz

Depending on the school, teachers complete 20 to 30 minute LLI lessons three or four times a week with students who are reading below grade level or at risk of falling below grade level. Teachers sometimes have a colleague cover for them and pull small groups of

two or three students out of class to work on LLI lessons. More commonly, teachers set up centers where students can work independently while LLI students receive instruction in the classroom.

Key Findings

The district reports that LLI is contributing to impressive growth in student literacy.

Promising district-wide data shows growth in grade three students reading at grade level for each of the last three years. Spring testing shows the **percentage of grade three students reading at grade level district-wide grew from 65 per cent in 2014 to 75 per cent in 2015** and then to 76 per cent in 2016.

Additional data that followed a cohort of students from grade 1 to grade 3 shows similar growth. "When this class was in grade one, only 56 per cent were at grade level; that grew to

70 per cent in grade two and 76 per cent in grade three," reports Gietz. "This is outstanding data."

"Both the Levelled Literacy program and a shift to more of a guided or workshop approach to reading made the difference," explains Gietz. "Teachers built their capacity to know and understand students and their capabilities. They now know how to help them and have the resources to help them."

At the individual school level, teachers and principals are also reporting impressive reading gains for students.

SCHOOL EXAMPLES

Barons School and Carmangay Outreach

Fred Jack is principal of both Barons School and Carmangay Outreach which serve a population of 100 per cent Low German Mennonite students.

"These students come from Mexico and join us having minimal understanding of the English language," explains Jack. **"For 100 per cent of our students English is a second language,** so there was a real need for reading help."

Some students in grades five and six are reading between levels C, D, E and F – far below levels U to Y which is considered grade level for these students.

All nine of the schools' teachers have had access to the LLI system since September of 2014. The schools have all levels of LLI except for two, which they hope to have soon.

"Currently, **thirty per cent of the students in our school are utilizing LLI,**" says Jack. "Last year LLI was in part responsible for **moving 23 students from below reading level to at-level.**"

"We're very pleased with the reading level growth we're seeing from our students using the LLI program. We don't have all kids at level yet, but we've certainly closed the gap in recent years and we're seeing significant leaps from students in their reading levels."

Dorothy Dalgliesh School

Shari Rogerson, Principal of Dorothy Dalgliesh School says 14 per cent of the 175 students in her school participate in LLI. Of these students, 30 per cent are ELL and 26 per cent are special education students.

During the 2015/2016 school year Rogerson says the LLI system helped **23 grade two to grade four students increase their reading levels between three and ten levels.**

Rogerson says along with helping raise reading levels, LLI helped increase student engagement levels.

"Kids are beginning to see themselves as readers and they see themselves improving. They're also more engaged in the reading process. When they sit down to read, they're reading, not just looking at pictures or flipping through pages," explains Rogerson.

Rogerson says LLI also doesn't require a lot of prep work – something busy teachers appreciate. "It's spelled out, the books are engaging, we love that

it comes with take-home books and even the nylon folders for kids to use. All these little things make a difference and make it that much more engaging for the kids."

The school currently has enough LLI systems to effectively address any student that is struggling up to grade five, with plans to purchase a system

for grade six students during the 2016/2017 school year.

Moving Forward

Gietz says her district plans to continue sharing results and success stories with teachers and principals, and continuing to help schools purchase LLI systems and receive training as they show interest.

She's optimistic the district will achieve the goal of having 95 per cent of grade three students reading at grade level by 2019 – especially with support from the LLI program.

"What I like about LLI is that everything is there, and it's what my kids need."

—Jodi Gurr
Teacher

Dorothy Dalgliesh School

"Every student that went through the LLI program increased in their levels."

—Carol Gibson
Teacher

Dorothy Dalgliesh School

"We made leaps and bounds using LLI with a little guy who wasn't a reader. He is now a reader and is also writing as well."

—Carol Gibson
Teacher

Dorothy Dalgliesh School



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