

A three-year process leads to *Superkids*

A review of balanced literacy

When elementary reading test scores remained flat, Wausau School District staff embarked on a three-year process to review curriculum and learn about the science of reading. What they discovered was that *The Superkids Reading Program* checked all the boxes for research-based reading instruction.

Several factors led school leaders in 2013 to review alternatives to the district's balanced literacy approach: new teachers joining the growing district, professional training on the science of reading, and stagnant reading test scores. School leaders sought input from teachers across the district to review what might need to be changed.

Using the science of reading

Two years before the curriculum vetting process began, Amy McGovern, Wausau district reading specialist, and another staff member attended training in Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS®), a professional development program that focuses on the scientific evidence behind literacy



We were only at about 35% proficient or advanced districtwide, and we hadn't moved.

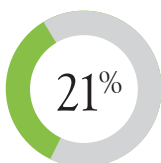
—Amy McGovern, Wausau District Reading Specialist

instruction. This training was the inspiration for an abbreviated version of LETRS offered to all K–5 staff during the curriculum vetting school year 2014–15.

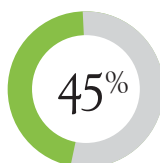
“Through our studies in the science of reading, we realized that there was a lack of decodable text for our K–2 population,” McGovern says of the balanced literacy curriculum. Based on information learned in LETRS, McGovern and the vetting team members recognized that the *Superkids* approach aligned seamlessly with the reading research learned in LETRS.

District Profile: Wausau Elementary Schools

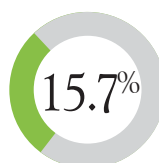
Encompasses Marathon County and the city of Wausau, small city and rural areas



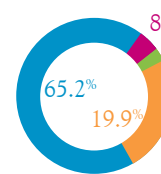
English Language learners K–5



Students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, K–5



Children in the district under age 17 in poverty



Ethnicity
Caucasian: 65.2%
Asian: 19.9%
Hispanic: 6.1%
Other Ethnicities: 8.8%

Motivating students to read

Making instruction in foundational skills like phonemic awareness consistent across the district was a primary goal for the language arts team. But the team determined that a solid reading program for kindergarten through second grade must also be filled with motivating and engaging literature that students would want to read.

“We had determined, prior to vetting anything, that we needed a curriculum that the kids and teachers would be excited about. And that’s hard to find,” says McGovern.

“Once we saw *Superkids*, the other programs were good but paled in comparison.”

—Amy McGovern, Wausau District Reading Specialist

Choosing *Superkids*

“In K–2, we saw some well-designed curricula from the other companies, but the difference with *Superkids* was the excitement level. The kids and teachers had such glowing and gushing things to say,” Lynne Strehlow, the district’s Title I reading specialist, says.

When Strehlow visited another *Superkids* district, she witnessed the deep connection students made with the program. “One teacher stopped her class, and she said to the kids, ‘Okay, let’s tell our guest who our favorite *Superkid* is,’” remembers Strehlow, “and every hand just shot up, even the boys’, and some of the boys were picking the girl characters as their favorites! That right there swung me for sure toward *Superkids*.”

Wausau’s high transiency rates between schools was another factor in the choice. “For our students to go from one school to another and have those same little characters . . . it’s sort of like coming into a classroom with some friends that you already have,” Strehlow points out.

“The investment has been well worth it.”

—Amy McGovern, Wausau District Reading Specialist

Implementing *Superkids*

Wausau teachers implemented *Superkids* in all three grades during the 2015–2016 school year. McGovern admits there were challenges: “Initially, I think there was some anxiety and some questions because we put up a pretty firm stance on ‘we’re going to run this [program] with fidelity.’” McGovern credits the support of *Superkids* trainers and coaches to teachers’ successful fidelity to the program. “It’s just such a steep learning curve for the teachers to move from differentiating by materials to differentiating by instruction, and it’s really a process to learn that,” McGovern says. She advises other districts to opt for coaching packages to set teachers up for success with *Superkids*.

Seeing immediate results

“We’re really seeing the tighter we keep to *Superkids*, the more success the kids are seeing, in a variety of ways,” says McGovern. Wausau administrators already see *Superkids*’ impact after the first year of implementation. “We do have data already indicating that it’s making a positive impact,” says McGovern.

McGovern believes *Superkids* is invaluable. “To have something that’s so comprehensive and thinks of all the details and is developmentally appropriate at every stage of the game, it’s wonderful. I would say our whole team feels the same.”

AIMSweb Reading Curriculum-based Measurement

First-grade students scoring at benchmark (at or above the 40th percentile), first year of using *Superkids* (2015–2016 school year)

