

Putting all the pieces together
for reading success

IN JUST FOUR MONTHS, TITLE I FOCUS SCHOOL SEES EXPONENTIAL LITERACY GAINS


In the fall of 2014, Lincoln Elementary School in the Bethlehem Area School District (Pennsylvania) engaged Step By Step Learning® to help improve the literacy skills for students in Kindergarten through 2nd grade. The Bethlehem Area School District is the sixth largest in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania with 16 neighborhood elementary schools serving grades K-5. Step By Step Learning® and in partnership with the Colonial Intermediate Unit (I.U. 20), the collaborative team designed and implemented an innovative, evidence-supported methodology that significantly and permanently improves teacher effectiveness and student performance for even the most at-risk children.

Lincoln Elementary was designated a Focus School by the Pennsylvania Department of Education. As a Title I school, Lincoln Elementary received the Focus School designation based on the objective of “closing the achievement gap of historically underperforming students; economically disadvantaged, and English language learners who score below proficient on the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) exams, Keystone exams, and the PASA by 50% over a six-year period.”

With nearly 15 years of in-classroom experience with teachers, Step By Step Learning® is recognized as the preeminent educational and literacy organization that achieves positive sustainable results in schools, benefitting every child. Utilizing proven evidence-based methodologies, the joint Step By Step Learning® and Colonial I.U. team was tasked to:

- Design and implement a data review process that includes collection, analysis, evaluation, and interpretation of student data to identify students at risk for reading failure, and
- Plan the instructional support that is needed to improve students’ reading skills.
- Provide professional development to teachers that would deepen their knowledge in the science of teaching reading and enhance teachers’ instructional techniques to promote more active student learning.

Since September of the 2014 school-year, the team has been working with Kindergarten, first grade, and second grade teachers to increase their knowledge and understanding surrounding the science of teaching reading to young children, and how to collect, interpret, and understand student data. Teachers are benefitting from customized lesson plans and classroom engagement techniques that help strengthen their instruction and effectiveness, as well as from consistent and frequent in-person, side-by-side follow-up support. After just four months of program implementation with K-1, which includes personalized in-classroom modeling and coaching, LETRS® content training, Connecting to the Classroom® sessions, and multi-tier system and support (MTSS) protocols, there already has been unprecedented improvements in students’ reading skills.



Putting all the pieces together
for reading success

Grade	Before Step By Step Learning		After Step By Step Learning	
	% Fall 2013	% Winter 2014	% Fall 2014	% Winter 2015
Kindergarten	35	54	29	79
First Grade	81	78	60	82


Comparing the winter of 2014 to the winter 2015, there was a 46% improvement in the number of students meeting the overall benchmark goals and the students began the year 6 percentage points more at risk in Fall of 2014 than in the comparison year of 2013. No other previous year has ever seen anywhere near that increase. In the past two years only 54% of children reached the Winter benchmark. Seventy-nine percent (79%) of Kindergarten students met the Winter benchmark goals this year. What an increase! Thank you Bethlehem teachers!

Lincoln Elementary, with a large minority and poor student population of struggling English language learners, has exceeded its mid-year goals for K-1, which happened through the integration of a highly collaborative, structured, and a customized intervention response program. With approximately 215 students in the school, the student population is predominantly Hispanic (54%) compared to other schools in the district that average around 30%. Over 60% of Lincoln Elementary's students are eligible for free or reduced lunch.

Achieving such impressive results in such a short time is not easy, particularly with the demographic make-up of the school's youngest students. Such achievement requires dedication and commitment and a willingness to think and act differently in the classroom. Pam Hill, a consultant with Step By Step Learning®, said, "The teachers at Lincoln Elementary have been open to possibility of positive change from the first day we met. They have a strong desire to help improve their students' literacy skills and trusted that we could help them. Their willingness to learn new information about how to teach reading, take risks in trying new (and sometimes uncomfortable) unfamiliar instructional strategies, and be open to constructive feedback has been the key to early and significant success for their students. "

Teachers can sometimes be nervous about trying new things in their classrooms because they don't want the kids to fail, but they soon learned that by making slight modifications to their teaching approaches, they can achieve significant quantifiable improvements in their students' understanding and retention. The methodologies taught by the in-classroom Step By Step Learning® consultants allow teachers to actively use the data they collect for each child and focus on the academic growth of all students.

Some challenges that were specific to Lincoln Elementary included the use of multiple literacy programs during classroom instruction that were detached from each other. Phonics instruction was isolated from text reading, and text reading was not supported by the vocabulary lessons, for example. The Step By Step Learning team reviewed these programs and recommended ways to make them more cohesive and complimentary instead of uncoordinated. Additionally, a science-based approach was



Putting all the pieces together
for reading success

presented to the teachers that outlined the significant milestones that each student should master by mid-year and end-of-year, enabling them to adjust the timing or techniques in their teaching to help each student reach his/her literacy goals. Ms. Hill commented, “We are teaching with the end in mind. Our teachers are now asking themselves, ‘what do I need to teach in November to meet these goals in January?’ They are realigning their pacing to meet the program stretch-goals and surpass the general grade-level standards.”

The Bethlehem Area School District partnered with Step By Step Learning® specifically for the company’s expertise in school improvement. Many Focus Schools are spending money on their reading and literacy programs, but not improving at this pace. Step By Step Learning® teamed with the district, performed systems and processes audit (Gap Analysis), and focused on building a collaborative culture. In its first year of implementation, the teachers are seeing real improvement in their students’ reading and comprehension. Lincoln Elementary K-1 results speak for themselves.