

READING REVIEW



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Bethlehem Area Schools Make Stunning Strides In Reading Gains

Bethlehem Area School District (BASD), the sixth largest in Pennsylvania, knew they needed help to improve literacy skills and close the achievement gap for students at Lincoln Elementary, a Title I Focus School. Enter Step By Step Learning®, an organization dedicated to using evidence-based methodology to improve teacher effectiveness and student performance for even the most at-risk children.

The results? Today 90% of kindergarten students at Lincoln meet the end of year benchmark goals, up from 54% a few years ago.

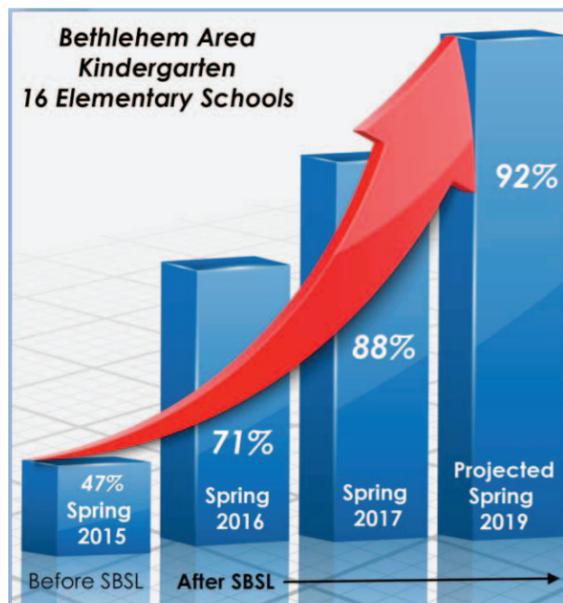
“Lincoln, a school with significant challenges, was performing better than other schools in our district. So here was our proof. We knew we were on the right track,” says Kim Harper, District Supervisor of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment.

The uptick was so impressive, the next year BASD engaged Step By Step Learning® to work with kindergarten teachers and students in all of the district’s 16 elementary schools.

The reason is that, with nearly 20 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, benefiting every child. The plan for BASD included:

- *Design and implementation of a data review process -- collection, analysis, evaluation, and interpretation of student data to identify students at-risk for reading failure*



See BETHLEHEM STUNNING STRIDES, page 7

Q&A with Dr. Roland Good, co-author of DIBELS® Next and Pathways of Progress®

What is Pathways of Progress®, and why did you create it?

Pathways of Progress® is a tool that enables us to set an individual student learning goal, customized to each student’s level of initial skills at the beginning of the year.

We designed Pathways of Progress® to be able to assist in setting goals for students. It answers the question, “How much progress should you expect? How much would be typical?” This is the first step in differentiating instruction and setting realistic goals.

How does Pathways of Progress® help with goal-setting?

We want to create an individualized goal for each student that will be ambitious, where they are going to struggle to achieve that goal -- you don’t want a trivial goal. But we want it to be attainable, something that we can actually get to -- not a pie in the sky goal. And we want it to be meaningful. We’re in this business to make a difference for our children, and that’s what I mean when I say meaningful. So it has to do with all three of those things: Meaningful, attainable, and yet ambitious for that individual student.

See Q&A DR. ROLAND GOOD, page 3

90% Benchmarked in a Half Day Kindergarten

In 2006 Carole Geary, former Superintendent at the Pleasant Valley School District recognized a problem with potentially devastating effects in regards to the levels of benchmark literacy she was witnessing in her kindergarten classes. From 2002 through 2006 only 50% of the students at that early age were reaching the benchmark levels needed to support them through the rest of their schooling. Knowing that this deficiency would follow the students through the rest of their school careers Carole Geary decided to make a change for the betterment of all students.

Beginning with the 2006 school year, Pleasant Valley began working with Step By Step Learning® with the goal of increasing the number of students in each grade to reach the academic benchmarks for literacy. Professional development for the teachers and administrators was one of the first steps taken toward this goal. A development process was crafted that would deepen the teaching staff’s knowledge in the science of teaching reading and enhance the teacher’s instructional techniques to promote a more active student learning environment. A data review process was also implemented to collect, analyze, evaluate and interpret student data helping to identify the level of risk for reading failure of each student. With this information it would be easier to plan the path for instructional support in order to improve each student’s reading skills.

From 2007 – 2017 the implementation of the Step By Step Learning® process resulted in 93% of kindergarten students achieving the benchmark for literacy standards. These results were noted in an independent study conducted at Lehigh University. The late, Dr. Ed Shapiro of the Lehigh University’s Center for Promoting Research to Practice found “that the training process offered by Step By Step Learning®

to teachers in Pleasant Valley during the 2006 – 2017 school years significantly and substantially improved student outcomes above the instructional process evident in the previous school years (2002 – 2006).”

Mike Grabarits, the founder and CEO of Step By Step Learning® had this to say about the improvement. “The increase can be directly attributed to Step By Step Learning’s 20 years of in classroom experience with teachers and students. The professional development and continuing instructional support combined with our side by side coaching in every classroom enabled teachers to identify students that were at high risk for reading failure and created the perfect solution for improved academic results. Thank you to the teachers of Pleasant Valley for trusting the process. They deserve all of the credit.”

Another notable and positive improvement in the Pleasant Valley School District was the drop in special education referrals. Carole Geary, former Superintendent of Pleasant Valley School District explains. “We had a pretty high referral rate, around 17 – 18%, when we began. One of the first things we saw within the first two years was that number drop to about 5%.”

Step By Step Learning® uses a “slow release” technique that begins with training teachers and administrators in a classroom setting followed by their participation in smaller groups to practice key points and evidence proven methods. The participation in these smaller groups enables easier understanding while providing a setting in which the techniques can be safely mastered. The process then continues with real time in-class modeling and coaching for every teacher.

“The academics improve,” Mike Grabarits says, “because we train the teachers in and out of the

classroom first hand. We do not let them sail with just a lesson and a few notes in a one day in-service. Step By Step Learning® has proven that they are effective at developing experts in every classroom.”

“One of the biggest changes we saw was in the confidence level of our kids and our teachers,” said Carole Geary, former Superintendent of Pleasant Valley School District. “The kids felt confident to

See HALF DAY KINDERGARTEN, page 7

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Connecting to the Classroom®: Why it benefits our kids.

Step By Step Learning® has developed courses that are...Connecting to the Classroom® - a series of training sessions that have been carefully designed to help teachers connect their previous training (LETRS®) and knowledge about how students learn to read and transfer the knowledge into a classroom environment as lessons and interventions. There are five modules in the Connecting to the Classroom® series, which compliment some of the LETRS® modules. These include:

1. *Connecting to the Classroom®: Phonics and Spelling*
2. *Connecting to the Classroom®: Vocabulary*
3. *Connecting to the Classroom®: Phonology*
4. *Connecting to the Classroom®: Routines of a Polished Phonics Lesson*
5. *Connecting to the Classroom®: Planning Meaningful Fun For All Students While I Teach Small Groups*

LETRS® training is very valuable to teachers, giving them insight into the research behind reading and literacy. LETRS® training is the initial presentation of the research, and a vast amount of information and data is presented in a short period of time. It can be challenging for teachers to fully absorb the information as well as its implications for students who have varying levels of reading skills and abilities. Carole Geary, former Superintendent of Pleasant Valley Schools advises, "The LETRS® curricula is very complex. A small percentage of information is

actually retained and implemented by teachers without expert-level coaching support by a knowledgeable expert following the training. Teachers don't have time to investigate and apply the research themselves so we give them the Connecting to the Classroom® support." The Connecting to the Classroom® training developed by Step By Step Learning® facilitates the movement of knowledge from the training to the teaching techniques in the classroom. "We need to support our teachers in ways that impact student performance. Step By Step Learning® bridges the gap between the research and classroom practice", comments Mike Grabarits, President of Step By Step Learning®.

"We are tying-in the support from Step By Step Learning® with our MTSS process involving our first grade teachers. The teachers are receiving training and coaching and instructional strategies for their students. We were missing the coaching piece and this is a key element for us. Step By Step Learning® has on-going professional development that is very targeted and very specific to help our teachers grow, and connect what they know to their classroom work," says Phil Giaquinto, Principal at Plainfield Elementary School in the Pen Argyl School District.

Phil Giaquinto continues, "We brought in Step By Step Learning® after attending several conferences over the years and realizing that all of the "success stories" presented by other schools and school districts all had Step By Step Learning® behind

them. We randomly chose presentations that were of interest to us, and it got our attention that Step By Step Learning® was always involved. We also knew of the successes they had with our neighboring school district, Pleasant Valley. The folks at Pleasant Valley have nothing but good things to say about Step By Step Learning®. In Pen Argyl, we have the same wish for our students to be great. We want our school to be the best and the Step By Step Learning® team can help get us there." He adds, "We're doing things and implementing strategies and targeting what we need to do with students that we've never done before. The Step By Step Learning® team has a very specific plan to follow and it's very helpful for my teachers, who are doing it with fidelity."

The value provided by the Step By Step Learning® team and its Connecting to the Classroom® series is evident in this response from Alisa Willey, the then Assistant Superintendent of Union City Area School District, "Our whole encounter of working with Step By Step Learning® has been a positive experience for several years. We have been treated with respect as our programs were reviewed and suggestions for change were made and implemented. Their staff is a dedicated, knowledgeable and caring group of individuals that have become a part of our District team. The program is research-based, with evidence that provides the effectiveness of strategic best practices. **If I were to give Step By Step Learning® a grade for effort, effectiveness, and dedication, I would give them an A+ !!**"

How do I connect LETRS® to my classroom everyday?

Learn How to Transfer your LETRS® Knowledge Directly to your Students and Connect LETRS® to the Classroom in Small Group Exercises

Step By Step Learning® has developed a very targeted training program that help teachers take the knowledge they learned during LETRS® training and apply it in a real-world classroom setting.

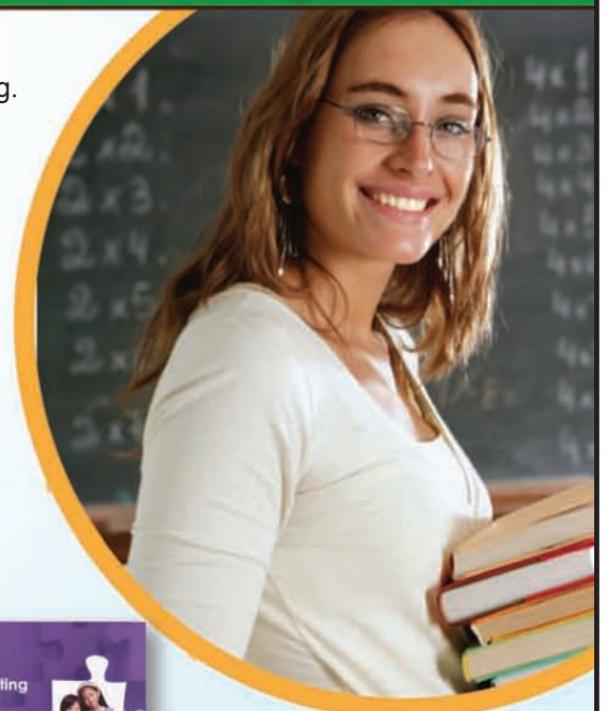
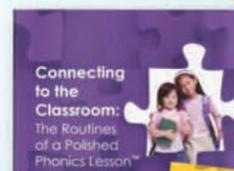
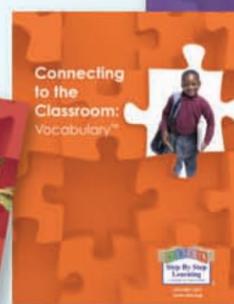
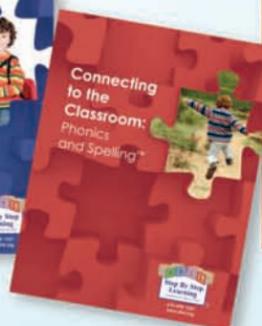
This program - Connecting to the Classroom® - is a series of training sessions that have been carefully designed to help teachers connect their previous knowledge about how students learn to read and transfer that knowledge directly into the classroom.

The Connecting to the Classroom® program includes five modules, which directly correlate to the LETRS® modules:

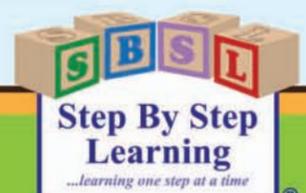
1. **Connecting to the Classroom®: Phonology**
2. **Connecting to the Classroom®: Phonics and Spelling**
3. **Connecting to the Classroom®: Vocabulary**
4. **Connecting to the Classroom®: Routines of a Polished Phonics Lesson**
5. **Connecting to the Classroom®: Planning Meaningful Fun For All Students While I Teach Small Groups**

The Connecting to the Classroom® training developed by Step By Step Learning® facilitates the movement of knowledge from the training to the teaching technique in the classroom. Teachers need to be supported in ways that positively impact students performance. Training is one step, but this Connecting to the Classroom® program bridges the gap between the research and classroom practice.

The LETRS® curricula is very complex. A small percentage of information is actually retained and implemented by teachers without expert-level coaching support they need following the training. Teachers don't have time to investigate and apply the research themselves so we give them the Connecting to the Classroom® support.



Contact a Step By Step Learning® associate to learn more!
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Working Side-by-Side with Teachers in the Classroom, Every Day.

Does your professional development accomplish this?

Some of the most fervent comments we hear back from schools and educators is how impressed they are with the knowledge level of our Step By Step Learning® team. Because our Consultants are former classroom teachers and trained by leading literacy professionals, they are certified and demonstrate a high degree of knowledge and confidence in teaching reading. We are evidence-based in our approach so you won't find us discussing the "flavor of the year." Our Consultants build strong, trusting relationships with our partner schools. The level of support that is provided is outstanding, but the relationship between the Step By Step Learning® Consultant and the teacher is special: a strong bond of mutual trust and respect is created.

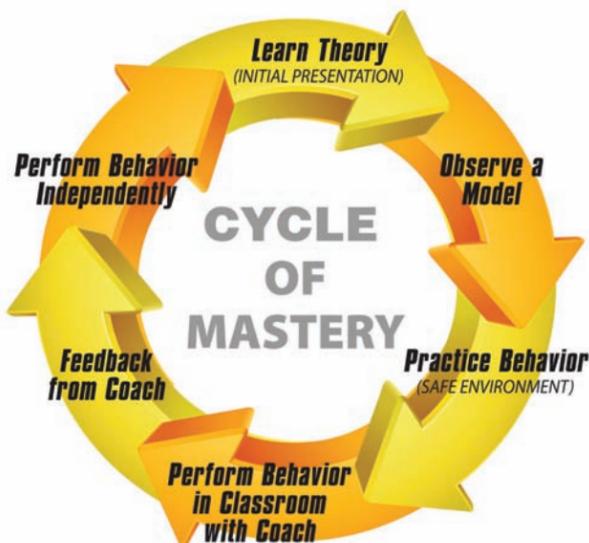
Teachers want to help all children learn to read. Step By Step Learning® wants to help all children learn to read. We take the time to get to know the school, the teachers, and the students so the best approach can be customized.

All schools can benefit from some level of focus on reading, increasing teachers' knowledge and skills about current best practices, then working to bring those hard to reach populations of students up to higher levels of achievement. The United States is currently in a reading crisis. There are so many children who are not learning to read, but should be. Schools and districts are trying anything they can to overcome the reading gaps, but successful outcomes are not realized soon enough. Often, using school level experts alone may not be enough. An outside consultant who complements and shares their vision can offer a unique perspective. It's not that teachers are doing the wrong things, it's oftentimes just a matter of doing things in the right sequence. What schools are finding they need are: 1. Accurate and timely data to help determine where, specifically, a student is struggling; and, 2. Detailed and experiential knowledge of best practices to create an action plan and execution strategy to solve the problem.

It's a team effort

Step By Step Learning® has supported schools in bringing struggling and at-risk students up to reading grade level. And this is done in a very different way from other professional development companies.

Our consultants create trusting partnerships with teachers in their classrooms. As former educators, our team draws on its classroom and administrative experiences to coach school personnel. Coaching and mentoring is embedded into all professional development support. Decades of experience and success teaching struggling students how to read has proven that "what we do with what we know" is a very powerful tool. Knowing how to apply what we learn about our students in the classroom has the most positive effects on their academic performance.



Mary Doe Donecker, Vice President of Step By Step Learning®, comments, "When we are side-by-side with teachers, they can see, hear, and feel the difference in their instruction as we demonstrate and practice together their response to intervention with the students. Other providers don't do this; they teach it

and move on. We take the time – as much time as it takes – to make sure every teacher is comfortable and proficient in the MTSS process."

Dave Wright, Assistant Superintendent with Wilson Area School District, describes SBSL's support in this way, "the in-classroom coaching gives our teachers an opportunity to put themselves out there in a safe and trusted environment, use the new tools and skills, and get immediate feedback as to what is working and what is not."

Step By Step Learning® brought a process and consistency to Wilson Area School District. Teachers assessed students and collected data on their progress, but didn't really know what to do with the data after it was collected. Since Step By Step Learning® has partnered with Wilson, teachers now see more clearly what and where the problems are. Side-by-side training and coaching and learning how to develop effective small groups provided a method for looking at the problem and developing a plan of attack. They could now accurately determine which child needed what intervention, and for how long. Mr. Wright continues, "no one ever complained that a Step By Step Learning® consultant was in their classroom. No one felt like they were being evaluated, but instead they felt like they were partners, equally compassionate about teaching children to read."

Most often, professional development opportunities are simply going to a presentation and then asking teachers to come back and perform what they learned. But Step By Step Learning's approach is so much better. Bill Beattie, Superintendent of Edison Local School District, concurs, "with Step By Step Learning®, it's an on-going process of professional development that they provide to us all school-year long. Our teachers know this support is there, every day, when they need it, regardless of whether that support is in-person, side-by-side with the teacher, via email, or over the phone."

Q&A DR. ROLAND GOOD from page 1

The other thing about a goal – and this is a huge deal to me – I think that a reading goal should represent reading proficiency, not just one aspect of reading. It should be a larger construct that I talk about as reading for meaning, at an adequate rate, with a high degree of accuracy. All three of those parts are critical for reading proficiency. Two out of three isn't sufficient – you have to have all three.

Pathways of Progress® enables us to do that. It allows us to give a fast, efficient report of how each student in a class is progressing toward individual student learning goals. I'm really very excited about Pathways of Progress.

Why is goal-setting so important?

Well, I'm a research geek, so I tend to go to the research. Professor John Hattie did a meta-analysis looking at the impact of different things for reading outcomes. One of the things he found is that setting a goal -- just having a goal that you're aiming at -- is very powerful in making whatever intervention or instruction you're using more effective. You can make it even more effective if you monitor progress toward that goal, and even more effective still if you adjust your instruction based upon the progress toward the goal. So if you're not making adequate progress toward that goal, you might adjust what you're doing, or the way that you're doing it, or ensure that you provide full practice opportunities to respond. Review your instruction to make sure you're making progress toward your goal.

So differentiating instruction is the key?

See Q&A DR. ROLAND GOOD, page 7

If a child memorizes ten words, the child can only read ten words, but if the child learns the sounds of ten letters, the child will be able to read 350 three sound words, 4,320 four sound words and 21,650 five sound words. Imagine that power extended over the forty-four unique and different sounds in our language."

- Michael Grabarits, Founder and CEO of Step By Step Learning®



Small Group Instructional Toolkits: Deliver Consistency in the Classroom

It is well known and documented that teacher effectiveness is one of the major contributors to student achievement. Effective instruction requires consistency in delivery, as inconsistent teaching can lead to varying levels of learning amongst a classroom of students.

To help increase teaching effectiveness and consistency, the Florida Center for Reading Research recommends implementing differentiated instruction in small group settings to help students improve their reading skills. Small group instruction matches instruction to the different needs of students in a given classroom. In order to accommodate the wide range of instructional needs within a single classroom, it is recommended that teachers plan for:

- *Small group, differentiated instruction*
- *Ample student practice opportunities in the form of Reading Centers.*

Schools and teachers realize they cannot meet the challenges of their students' individual needs unless they provide small group instruction that is differentiated yet consistent, based on the specific needs of each child. Ideally, teachers will use assessment data and on-going assessments to fine tune which concepts the students are ready for and what concepts should be taught each day, and provide truly individualized instruction, giving each student precisely what he/she needs at a particular moment. Step By Step Learning's Small Group Instructional Toolkits support teachers in delivering direct, explicit skill lessons to students in small groups. The kits are designed to support the steps

of learning how to teach phonological awareness and phonics, using explicit and systematic methods. Teachers are introduced to the contents through the modeling of its use by Step By Step Learning® coaches or through DVD video lessons. Through this modeling, teachers can observe the teaching of systematic lessons and the application of the kit's materials before doing it themselves in the classroom. Carefully scripted lessons serve as a teaching tool to familiarize teachers with and instruct them on how to teach the most important early reading skills.

Before the Conneaut School District brought in Step By Step Learning®, small group instruction was not as consistent as it is today. "Step By Step Learning® trained us how to form the groups and what to do with the kids once they're in the groups," commented a Title 1 Reading teacher. "They gave us information about what to do in the classroom - sometimes common sense things that you don't think about until someone points it out."

Step By Step Learning's Small Group Instruction Toolkits help make small group instruction more effective with a more consistent delivery. According to Jan Humes, a senior consultant with Step By Step Learning® who helped design and implement small group instruction programs for many schools, "teachers and aides really love the toolkits because everything is all set up for them. They don't have to hunt for pictures or supplies or come up with the materials and lessons or activities themselves. It's all right there."

See CONSISTENCY IN THE CLASSROOM, page 7

Contact our clients to see how we helped put together the 'pieces' for literacy success



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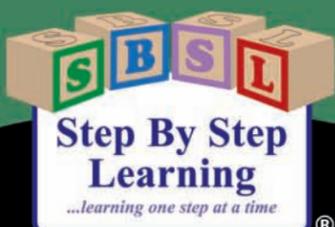
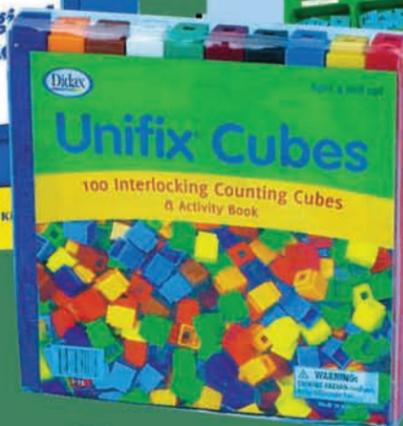
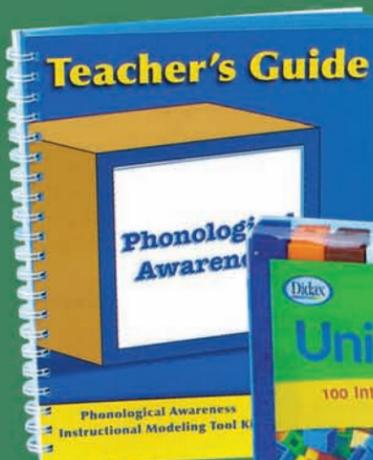
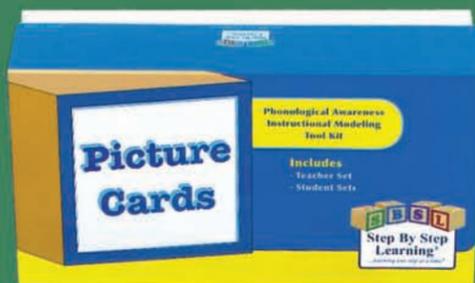
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Help for teachers engaged in small group interventions

Step By Step Learning® has designed evidence-based small group instructional tool kits for teachers who are engaged in interventions to help support the development of students' literacy skills. The three kits -Phonology, Beginning Decoding, and Advanced Decoding - come complete with detailed lessons and materials for small group instruction, and enable teachers skills. Perfect for MTSS small group instruction for pre-K through third grade, each kit contains carefully prepared intervention lessons, which can supplement any reading program, providing a means for learning how to explicitly and systematically teach the most basic, yet important, early reading skills so that every child learns to read.

Get started now and order your small group tool kit today. Small group instructional assistance is only a step away.



Visit us online at www.sbsl.org

Contact us at 610-398-1231 or info@sbsl.org

PIL Approved Courses Teach Evidence-based MTSS implementation to Administrators

Step By Step Learning® is proud to be one of the approved PA providers of Act 45 Continuing education and principal induction programs for school leaders. The two approved courses are titled, Leading Literacy: Data Interpretation in a Tiered Instructional System and Leading Literacy: The Science of Learning to Read. Under PA Act 45, all active school leaders must complete 180 hours of professional and leadership development, offered by a state-approved provider. The educational leaders covered under Act 45 include: Principal, Assistant or Vice Principal, Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, Executive Director and other licensed Administrators.

Step By Step Learning® ACT 45 courses, Leading Literacy: Data Interpretation in a Tiered Instructional System (43 hours) and Leading Literacy: The Science of Learning to Read (49 hours) are dedicated to teaching you exactly what you need to do to produce a comprehensive Multi-Tiered System of Support. “These are hands-on developmental courses designed for every administrator. The Leading Literacy courses are the most comprehensive courses being taught today and can be taken by any administrator, whether for ACT 45 credit or not.

These courses will walk you through, step-by-step, everything you need to consider to be an instructional leader within a comprehensive MTSS framework in your school as it pertains to data driven environments and the Science to teaching reading, writing and spelling instruction.”, says Michael Grabarits, President and founder of Step By Step Learning®.

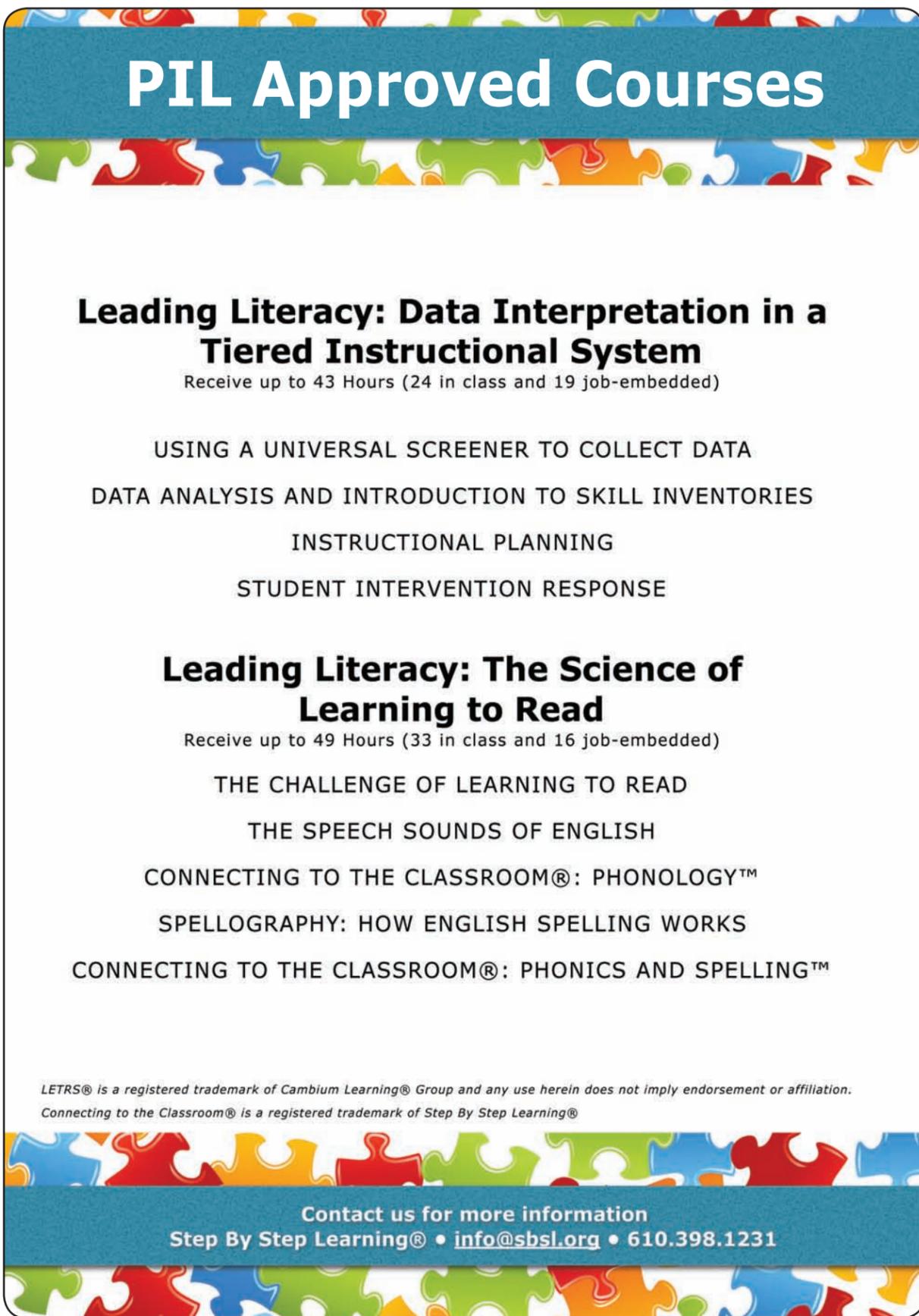
Both during and after the course, participants develop a literacy plan to analyzing data and teaching reading - around these best practices, and it is this research and commitment that focuses their literacy initiative for the school year. Both programs include specific activities and initiatives to support an effective literacy program and greatly assist a leader in improving academic achievement in their building/district.

In the courses we describe the academic achievement goals for every student, and what the administrators and instructional leaders will do to make sure the children reach the goals set for them.

“The two courses survey the evidence-supported best practices for data analysis and evidenced-based instruction to teaching reading that positively affect student literacy and increased academic achievement. During the courses, participants consider these evidenced based best practices and determine the best actions to take when implementing the practices in their respective buildings/districts, based on their local conditions and resources”, further states Michael Grabarits.

“These Act 45 courses help to define what we should be looking for in teachers ability to instruct and intervene appropriately,” comments Annelle Prefontaine, retired Director of Federal Programs and Grants. These Act 45 courses are extremely valuable for principals and building leaders. According to Pam Reagle, Act 45 course developer and trainer, “Aside from the course credits that go toward the Principals’ PIL hours, there are many academic benefits for the children when administrators learn this course content. As leaders, we are so busy every day, when do we have time to sit down and embrace a learning environment constructed with our specific needs in mind? When is there time to learn and develop in a safe and private environment?” She elaborates, “You can choose to have the course taught privately to your group or you can opt for the group course where multiple school districts take the course together.

The collaboration and conversation that occur about a common theme toward a common goal are very powerful. It changes the belief of what achievement is possible by many principals and administrators.”



PIL Approved Courses

Leading Literacy: Data Interpretation in a Tiered Instructional System

Receive up to 43 Hours (24 in class and 19 job-embedded)

USING A UNIVERSAL SCREENER TO COLLECT DATA
DATA ANALYSIS AND INTRODUCTION TO SKILL INVENTORIES
INSTRUCTIONAL PLANNING
STUDENT INTERVENTION RESPONSE

Leading Literacy: The Science of Learning to Read

Receive up to 49 Hours (33 in class and 16 job-embedded)

THE CHALLENGE OF LEARNING TO READ
THE SPEECH SOUNDS OF ENGLISH
CONNECTING TO THE CLASSROOM®: PHONOLOGY™
SPELLOGRAPHY: HOW ENGLISH SPELLING WORKS
CONNECTING TO THE CLASSROOM®: PHONICS AND SPELLING™

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Ed Curry, retired Assistant Superintendent and Director of Elementary Education adds, “We used this Act 45 course as a team-building opportunity for us. And that’s exactly what happened. It focused our team on reviewing and updating our own knowledge. The courses gave us a vehicle to get on the same page and better understand our data and what the data can do for every child and to also re-establish our goals for the next few years.”

Ms. Prefontaine adds, “We got more out of these Act 45 programs than we initially expected. When you can get all the principals together at the same time and share ideas and talk about our expectations for our schools, there is a huge value. We get everyone on the same page about why we need improvements in our schools and we build a common vision.”

There is more to these Act 45 programs than classroom time. Participants have the opportunity to review the data in detail and begin to understand the MTSS planning required in order to formulate an instructional plan to create small-group targeted instruction in every classroom. These courses will better define the literacy initiative(s) at their school(s). “Learning data driven MTSS processes and the science behind teaching reading, writing and spelling will directly impact student academic achievement,” says Ms. Reagle. “It

is executing what you learn that gets the results and these courses support principals in implementing what they learned. You have the content, but if you don’t put it into practice you won’t impact student learning.”

An extremely valuable added benefit of these Act 45 courses offered by Step By Step Learning® is the on-going support provided to participants by Step By Step Learning® consultants for the entire school year. “On-going job-embedded support during the school year is part of the course and is included in the course fee,” comments Pam Reagle. “We provide support directly and privately to every administrator thus forming a partnership for results. All attendees have found this on-going support to be extremely beneficial.” Ms. Prefontaine concurs, “The Act 45 programs have been extremely important to our school improvement efforts, keeping us on track and focused. It is so helpful to have a structure and guidance to keep us moving forward. The support and follow-up from Step By Step Learning® consultants is extremely valuable to increasing academic success.”

If you are interested in courses that can help increase academic achievement, then these are the ones to be considered.

Parent Engagement: Improved Kindergarten Readiness

The Center for Public Education researched how parent involvement can make a difference in a child's education. The Center examined the research and found that "creating a partnership between parents and schools focused on academics truly does have significant impact on student achievement." According to Patte Barth, Center Director, "families working in close partnership with teachers can have a measurable impact on their child's academic achievement, particularly when they are focused on helping students do well in school."

Of the six broad categories of parent "involvement" examined by the study, support for learning at home has the greatest impact on student gains. And when determining what types of involvement work best, a report by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory found one common factor: "Programs and interventions that engage families in supporting their children's learning at home are linked to higher student achievement."

The *Teach Me To Read At Home*[®] program developed by Step By Step Learning[®] helps families of Pre-K and Kindergarten students engage in key early literacy activities with their children. *Teach Me To Read At Home*[®] helps families promote literacy in their homes and collaborate with their child's teacher. Families are taught how to work with their children as they help build early reading skills at home. The program provides information to parents about enhancing their children's literacy skills during the year prior to entering Kindergarten.

Teach Me To Read At Home[®] consists of five sessions, which parents attend with their children, and each session presents a different topic: Book and Print Awareness, Letter Recognition, Vocabulary Building, Sound Awareness, and Letter Sounds. Each session teaches parents about the selected literacy skill and appropriate activities to develop that skill through both large group and small group sessions. Additionally, parents engage in guided practice of the activities with their children and receive feedback from the teachers, as needed.

The Center for Promoting Research to Practice at Lehigh University performed a study on *Teach Me To Read At Home*[®] program to examine its effectiveness. The results of this study – published in September 2010 – prove the effectiveness of the program, stating "students whose parents participated in the *Teach Me To Read At Home*[®] program entered Kindergarten with less risk related to their literacy skills" and "students from the intervention group continued to have less risk across Kindergarten and throughout first grade than students whose parents did not attend the program."

The parents who participated in the program learned that by making simple changes in their reading activities at home, they could make a significant impact on their child. From the study, the majority of parents reported they had previously engaged in many literacy-related activities with their children, but after attending the sessions, they modified the ways they did those activities. Parents indicated the program provided them with a greater awareness of the various ways to develop their children's literacy skills.

The Center for Promoting Research to Practice also found that the *Teach Me To Read At Home*[®] program is effective even if parents attend only one or two of the sessions. By attending just one session, parents can gain an increased awareness of enhancing children's literacy at home and engage in relevant activities with their children.

Real-Life Results

The Pleasant Valley School District has been using the *Teach Me To Read At Home*[®] program since 2006 and has achieved great results from it. "We were one of the first schools to do this program," comments Carole Geary, former Superintendent of Pleasant

Valley Schools. "Prior to this program, we typically had 60% of our kids coming to school at-risk, with only 30%-40% benchmarked at the beginning of the school year. We asked ourselves 'if 60% of the kids are coming in at-risk, how far can we really get them in reading?' We decided to work with Step By Step Learning[®] to do something that would significantly and positively impact our incoming Kindergarteners."

Pleasant Valley launched the *Teach Me To Read At Home*[®] program, inviting parents and guardians to come to a session to learn about the program and encouraging them to participate. This single, large group session was followed by smaller group sessions, working with teachers and their children and learning various techniques and activities that help develop their child's reading skills. After the first year of the program at Pleasant Valley, parents were calling to find out how to get involved in the program. During the course of the school year, the *Teach Me To Read At Home*[®] program touches about 240 families in Pleasant Valley, positively impacting approximately two-thirds of the total 350 incoming Kindergarten students. "We went from 60% at-risk in the beginning of the school years 2002-2006 to less than 40% at-risk this past school year," Ms. Geary proudly remarks. "We have had very significant gains in children coming to kindergarten which in turn accounted for over 90% benchmarked consistently at the end of the year since adopting the *Teach Me To Read At Home*[®] program for parents and guardians."

Another building principal comments, "When our kids entered their Kindergarten year in 2008, they started at 40% benchmarked. Our Kindergarteners are now starting the school year well ahead of those from just two years ago. The improvement happened the very next school year as children of the program entered Kindergarten 25% less at-risk than the past seven years. Each year the program has delivered more children at benchmark and much less at-risk children than ever before seen in Pleasant Valley after tracking the DIBELS[®] assessments since 2002. The evidence is clear, *Teach Me To Read At Home*[®] definitely improved student outcomes dramatically.

Certainly engaging in a comprehensive Multi-Tiered System of Support process is needed in every district, but by adopting *Teach Me To Read At Home*[®], teachers get a better prepared child to begin Kindergarten. With a better prepared Kindergarten, come better outcomes at the end-of-the-year benchmark. To end the year with 95% benchmarked in kindergarten, some schools need to adopt a more comprehensive parent/guardian literacy initiative. Learning begins at home with a "first" teacher... the parent or guardian. Step By Step Learning[®] is simply giving that first teacher, parent/guardian, a bit more knowledge of how to help their child become a better learner. *Teach Me To Read At Home*[®] has done just that ...prepared families so that learning becomes fun and meaningful at home, too.

Parents and Teachers Benefit from Teach Me To Learn at Home[®]

This powerful, activity rich web environment was created for parents to learn how to become their child's best first teacher at home!



Teach Me To Learn at Home[®] learning pathway is designed to help parents and guardians offer a literacy rich environment in their home. We take the best-of-the-best research and evidence in all areas of literacy to create a personalized learning path for parents and guardians of children aged 2-5.

Learning in the home comes to life with "Teach Me To Learn at Home[®]":

- Connect to the portal anytime, anywhere, on any device including smartphones
- 100's of evidence-based activities and proven examples
- Validated by Lehigh University
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Teach Me To Learn at Home[®] shows parents how to teach the best literacy practices to their own children right from home.



Or scan the QR code with your smartphone to be directed to the Registration page.



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their reading. And our teachers felt confident that they knew how to address reading deficits with our kids. That was a huge difference in attitude that led to our success.”

Classroom teachers were the first to receive training, but Geary made sure school principals, reading specialists, speech pathologists and school psychologists were educated on the approach as well. “It was all hands on-deck,” she said. “They needed to understand what was happening and understand the data in order to apply the techniques needed to close the gap. It was important that building leaders be active participants in the process. They had to be the ones leading with knowledge in order to sustain this new approach.”

“An underachieving school becomes a high achieving school through the process, not due to demographics but due to the process,” Mike Grabarits explains. “Step By Step Learning® teaches the process. Our goal is to make every teacher an expert in the science and the MTSS process and we happen to be very effective at developing experts in classrooms.”

Pleasant Valley School District’s success can be attributed to the comprehensive training and one on one coaching in the classrooms that teachers received from Step By Step Learning® consultants. “The magic happens in the classroom,” Geary said. “That’s where instruction changes. You can do as much training as you want, you’re not

going to get results anywhere but the classroom. My research into professional development supported that idea.”

The results were substantial and sustainable. State test scores for all students improved dramatically and were sustained as the initial students moved up through the various grades. “The first group to go through the project from kindergarten had literacy scores in high school that were 85.5% benchmark. Before that, scores were in the mid to low 60s. It was encouraging to have a group of kids come through and preform at that level in high school,” Geary said. “It was rewarding because kids were getting what they needed, when they needed it and that is the only thing I ever cared about.”

The evidence is clear. Kindergarten benchmark scores hovered at the end of every year prior to Step By Step Learning® at approximately 52%. In just a few short years, that benchmark score shot up to 93% and has stayed there in a sustainable fashion for over a decade. And Pleasant Valley remains a half-day kindergarten. “Results are achievable and should be expected no matter what the demographic or poverty level exists in the school, says Mike Grabarits, President of Step By Step Learning®. This is just the proof we were looking for in closing the academic gaps. I am proud of the teachers at Pleasant Valley for their trust and patience. Every teacher can make a difference, if they only knew the science we know.”

- *Instructional support needed to improve students’ reading skills*
- *Professional development for teachers to deepen their knowledge of the science of teaching reading and enhance their instructional techniques to promote more active student learning.*

Now, the Step By Step Learning® team works with kindergarten through third grade teachers to increase their knowledge and understanding of the science of reading and how to collect, interpret, and understand student data. Teachers benefit from customized lesson plans and classroom engagement techniques, as well as frequent in-person, side-by-side follow-up support, including:

- *Personalized in-classroom modeling and coaching*
- *LETRS® content training*
- *Connecting to the Classroom® sessions, and*
- *Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) protocols.*

Teachers can sometimes be wary of trying new things in their classrooms because they don’t want their students to fail. But they soon learned that by making slight modifications to their teaching approaches, significant, quantifiable improvements in their students’ understanding and retention can be achieved. 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.

Kim Harper believes teacher knowledge and coaching makes the difference. “The training is the first part. We had teachers tell us, ‘Oh, we already did LETRS® training,’ but they didn’t have the component of how it translates to the classroom, what it looks like in the classroom. It’s the combination – the knowledge and then the modeling/coaching – you need both.”

BASD 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 a systems and processes audit (Gap Analysis), and focused on building a collaborative culture. The teachers are seeing real improvement in their students’ reading and comprehension.

“Our teachers are saying things like, ‘They’re doing things we never thought they could do before!’ I always say, ‘Because you taught them! Look at what kids can do when we teach them!’” Harper says. “You can’t wait to reach a point where it’s developmentally appropriate -- you have to push them beyond that if you want them to grow. One consultant said it’s like the monkey bars – you can’t stay in one spot and just hang there, you always reach for the next bar.”

In BASD’s elementary schools, that’s just what students and their teachers are doing.

There are three toolkits, each focusing on a specific skill set:

- *Kit One – Phonological Awareness*
Basic phonological and phoneme awareness
- *Kit Two – Beginning Decoding*
Basic decoding skills
- *Kit Three – Advanced Decoding*
Syllable types, affixes, and roots

Each kit contains scripted 20 to 30 minute lessons, appropriate manipulatives, word lists, and five sets of student materials for small group instruction. The Small Group Instruction Toolkit is not a replacement for core curriculum or supplementary intervention programs. It is meant to support teachers by enhancing their instructional delivery to include the teaching behaviors that have been linked to higher levels of reading ability. Using the Toolkits can help everyone grow familiar with the process of a direct, explicit, and consistent lesson structure.

Step By Step Learning® Supports Educators Through:



- *Effective Professional Development*
- *Job-embedded Coaching*
- *Real-time Assessment and Analysis*
- *Modeling Effective Teaching Techniques*
- *Helping Schools Close the Gap for Students*
- *ESSA - Evidence Based Practices*

Absolutely. That doesn’t necessarily have to be a scary thing. When a teacher hears “differentiating instruction” sometimes they hear “lots more work.” And it’s possible to do more work, but it’s also possible to differentiate live, in real time, with the students you’re working with.

Pathways of Progress® helps with that, but it’s not a magic wand. Pathways of Progress® says, here’s the goal for this student that is meaningful, ambitious, and attainable. Here is the progress that a student is making. That student is not on track – we need to do something. Pathways of Progress® and our assessment will also give you a heads-up to a particular area that you might want to focus on and do something about it. But it doesn’t necessarily say, change this or change that. It tells you that you need to make a change and that you need to examine other things you could do to make it more effective.

What is the “Blue Zone” in Pathways of Progress®?

Our goals with the Blue Zone really started out with one goal and has evolved to two goals. Our first goal in setting up the Blue Zone is that we have the benchmark goals that we’ve established for the next assessment. Those are very clear and very helpful. They say, essentially, if you have a student who is struggling and you can get them to this goal, that would represent adequate progress for that student. And those benchmark goals, by the way, work with the Pathways of Progress® -- they both complement each other.

The problem is what about students who, at the beginning of the year, are at or above the benchmark goal? Then setting an end-of-year goal at the benchmark is not very ambitious. And, remember, one of the three things we want is for a goal to be ambitious. For some students who are in the Green Zone, or who are really well above the benchmark goal, the benchmark goal is not a very reasonable goal for them.

We really desired another level of skill that we could set for students who are in the Green Zone

to be headed toward, and hence the Blue Zone. For example, if a student is in the red zone, they’re well below benchmark. The goal for that student is to go for yellow or go for green. That’s really just a powerful heuristic to think about what to do for that student. If you’re in the Yellow Zone, below benchmark, go for green. If you’re in the Green Zone, just going for green is not as satisfying. If you’re in the Green Zone, go for blue. You always want to be challenging the student and setting a goal and an expectation that will be more ambitious.

So always having something for each student to aim at is critical.

Yes. I think of this as being like one of the rules of chocolate, which is that more is better. If you’ve got some chocolate, then you want more chocolate. The same is true for reading. If you’re at this level of skill, more skill in reading is always better. You don’t want to just reach the benchmark goal and become complacent. You want that student continuing to make progress. That’s one of the purposes of the Blue Zone. More is better.

What kind of feedback are you getting from those who have used Pathways of Progress®?

People are really quite excited about it. Those who are using it are pretty much hooked on it – they would be really dismayed if it wasn’t available to them. One of our challenges is getting the word out about what a big deal this is and how valuable it is. It’s worth finding out about, in terms of setting individual student learning goals. Our intent is to help set a learning goal for students who are below or well below benchmark. Everyone should always be doing that – setting a goal is critical. This really broadens it to being able to set a goal efficiently for your entire class.

Pathways of Progress® is available for DIBELS Next in Dynamic Measurement Group’s DIBELS.net data reporting service and Amplify’s mCLASS service. Contact DMG at info@dibels.org for more information about Pathways of Progress®.

Bethlehem's Dramatic Academic Improvement - a one on one interview with Dr. Jack Silva, Chief Academic Officer

Dr. Jack Silva is the Assistant Superintendent for Education and Chief Academic Officer of the Bethlehem Area School District. Positions he has held since November of 2010. A graduate of Pennsylvania State University he earned his masters degree at Kutztown University and received his masters from Lehigh University. In 2015 with the help of Step By Step Learning® he began a new program within the district called Reading By Grade 3 (RBG3). The implementation of this program began at Lincoln Elementary School, which was in the bottom 10% of all schools in the district for academic standards. The success that was achieved at Lincoln Elementary in the first year was so positive that the program was expanded to include the other 15 elementary schools in the Bethlehem Area School District.

One of the first challenges Dr. Silva recognized and embraced about his own situation and would recommend to other school administrators or principals that are struggling with their own underperforming schools is this. "Own your number, you have to say to yourself, is what you have good enough or not. If it isn't good enough, you just have to say it and set a high expectation and provide the high support that goes along with it. It's okay that the students aren't where they should be. It's okay that you have to have changes in your assessment strategies and in your instructional strategies. It's not going to happen overnight. The good news is if you just say it and you have the mind set to change and you start providing the support, it builds a certain natural momentum. It starts with a mind set change and owning your number and committing to the levels of support that the teachers are going to need." Dr. Silva continues. "As soon as the science tells you that more than 90% of the kids, less a significant learning disability, can and should be able to read with the right type and the right amount of instruction, it's hard to then accept 56% being a number your proud of at the end of the year at any grade level."

After recognizing the need for improvement and changes Dr. Silva began looking at the options for change available to him and decided on Step By Step Learning®. He could have used the resources available within the district, but he explained his choice this way. "We had to have someone who would bring the level of coaching and letters instruction and we did not have the capacity within the school district. Step By Step Learning® offered that level of resources plus, it had a strategic approach and a background of having done it in other school districts. That was attractive, and we had a good relationship with Mary Doe Donecker (a senior educational consultant with Step By Step Learning®) who I have a lot of confidence in and would match the needs of Bethlehem and the principals very well."

One resource that Step By Step Learning® provides is in the form of continual instructional support. "The academics improve," Mike Grabarits, founder and CEO

of Step By Step Learning® explains, "because we train the teachers in and out of the classroom first hand. We do not let them sail with just a lesson and a few notes. At Step By Step Learning® we are experts at developing experts."

Dr. Silva agrees that this is essential. "To achieve effective professional development, you have to practice enough hours at it. Many times, you have a seminar or one service day. Real success of any professional learning isn't just in the realization of transmitting the information to the person but giving them a chance to try it, to fumble through it, to be successful and sometimes not be successful and build a degree of resilience. That only happens when you have a coaching element. In public education, there has to be an imbedded part that connects the new knowledge to the regular practice with support for the teacher. That is when it is going to become real. If it is not there then they won't put the energy into practicing and you will have very limited results."

The initial results that the Bethlehem Area School District achieved were anything but limited and continue to expand as the program is incorporated into other grades within the school district. Dr. Silva described the success and continued need for support as the program develops within the school district. "We went from the 40s at the end of the year with the DIBELS® assessment to 88% of the children able to process the core reading essentials after only a few years. We basically doubled the outcomes in kindergarten during our first year and we were able to sustain that in kindergarten and move it out a little bit into the first and second grades. So, that's like hitting a homerun in the first inning. That was good, it gave us the confidence to double down on what we are doing, but we still have a long way to go. There is a constant need of support until it becomes the operational learning or organizational learning within a school district."

"You have to have trust in your teachers," Dr. Silva continues. "Challenge them but give them the level of support. You have to trust your principals that once they have the information, the resources and the time they are going to do it. Overwhelmingly the teachers and principals in Bethlehem are amazing. They want to do the right thing. They want to give the best effort. They want to meet the needs of their kids. There have been countless Sunday nights where teachers have been reviewing and reviewing what they were going to do that week. Wanting to do the very best for their students. Sometimes being worried that they may disappoint their principal or the principal is worried they may disappoint the central office. The overall goal is just to try it. It's okay to make mistakes. If you're doing something that involves your learning and you're doing it differently for the right reason, to have the students improve their performance, it's going to be okay."

The "homerun" Dr. Silva described was very encouraging, but he knew the true test would be the

test of time, substance and if it could effect a cultural change within the system. "Yes, we want quick wins, but it has to be built to last. If it is built to last it has to be based on a level of trust and mutual professional development and professional growth that both sides believe are important. That culture takes time to develop. How the supervision part, the support part, the communication part goes along in terms of developing the comfort and trust is the most important thing."

Step By Step Learning® played a large role in the development of the cultural change and the ability to sustain that change. Dr. Silva credits the hands on coaching as a major factor towards the success. "You need outside eyes with anything. Many times, a system as entrenched as reading, unless you give the opportunity for outside eyes to look in and suggest new ideas and support, you're going to default to the inertia within your own organization. Having Step By Step Learning® in, I can't underestimate the power of the coaching of the individual teachers. That is something that very few school districts have the capacity to do anymore. To have specialized skills or services come in to be able to make that part of the solution, that was important. We would not have made those professional learning gains if we had done it ourselves."

The changes Step By Step Learning® and the Bethlehem Area School District have partnered on, both initially and over the long term, have raised the reading scores for the Bethlehem Area School District to new heights. They have provided principals and teachers with a cultural change that will benefit them for years to come and given the students a solid foundation of reading skill with which to build their academic careers upon.

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