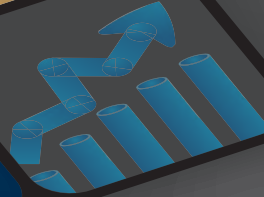


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Each and Every Child



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An e-newsletter by the Iowa Department of Education

Southwest Iowa schools turning heads

*Leadership, collaboration
and persistence close
the literacy gap*

It's just a typical monthly meeting with the special education team at Corning Elementary in the southwest Iowa town that bears the same name. They are poring over progress monitoring data. Faces are intent, eyes fixated on charts.

"So this is what happens after the Christmas break – everyone's scores go down."

"We'll get them up again."

"See that line? That's something you need to celebrate."

"Think about where they all started."

"I know."

"I know."

"This little guy who we swore would never be a reader is a reader. He's at grade level now, he never was before."



Photos by Iowa Department of Education's Deborah Darge

Corning Elementary educators regularly meet with AEA personnel to examine data and determine what, if anything, needs to change to ensure accelerated growth.

"And now we're actually looking to exit him."

They turn to another child, and Nancy Amdor breaks in.

"There are four data points below the line," says Amdor, a special education representative of the Green Hills Area Education Agency. "That indicates that we

need to think about what we're doing and consider changing our approach."

Some discussion follows, and it is agreed the teachers would schedule additional reading intervention. Onto the next student.

Like special education meetings across the state, this meeting was not in any way

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From top, Teacher Wendy Ahrens, Teacher Melody Miller, Principal Jennifer Berns (left), AEA Representative Nancy Amdor, and AEA Consultant Lynn Hockenberry

particularly special. But the results they are getting are. Consider: In Corning last year, 54 percent of students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) in grades 3-5 were proficient in reading. In the Green Hills Specially Designed Instruction (SDI) Literacy Partnership, 58 percent of students in grades 3-5 with IEPs exceeded Standard Score Growth Expectations on the Iowa Assessment based on 2013-2014 data. And the education gap for students who are in grades 3-5 has fallen from 59 percent to 31 percent.

Results have turned heads and made believers out of educators.

"All you have to do is look at the results and know we are doing what's right for the students," said special education teacher Melody Miller.

So just what's going on? It's a combination of a partnership aimed at literacy and a firebrand by the name of Lynn Hockenberry.

Hockenberry, a literacy consultant for Green Hills AEA, is the very essence of the whole being larger than the sum of her parts: educator, task master, cheerleader, booster, Mother Confessor. She gives all credit away to others, and tears up upon their successes. It is leadership personified.

Hockenberry would pooh-pooh such descriptions, and focus your attention on the issues at hand: the students.

Green Hills' emphasis on reducing the achievement gap goes back to 2011, when the agency decided one of its explicit goals was to reduce the gap from 51 percent to 26 percent by targeting services in the area of SDI, Multi-Tiered System of Supports (also known as Response to Intervention), and data. They started with four elementary schools and three literacy consultants who volunteered for this work. As opposed to reinventing the wheel, however, they also chose to see other systems at work.

"After reading *Each and Every Child* and learning of the successes Benton Community Schools were having (*see the November/December 2012 issue*), we contacted Grant Wood AEA and were able to visit Benton Community Schools," Hockenberry said. "This was a turning point for us as we expanded to think about additional instructional materials for our teacher and students."

The initial success of this work over the first two years led to the agency expanding the number of literacy consultants supporting the work to six. The consultants volunteered for the positions and work in collaboration with their special education representative colleagues in the SDI Literacy Partnership. Green Hills' program, which is now in 40 schools, is straightforward. Teachers receive four days of training during their first year in

the partnership. These are provided off site in central locations and enable teachers to study the knowledge base and learn the strategies that they will be employing in their SDI literacy time.

“One of the key components of the work we are doing in partnerships with schools is the ongoing coaching and support that SDI teachers receive from the SDI literacy consultants and our partners at the AEA, the special education representatives,” Hockenberry said. “This ongoing component fosters relationship building and provides us the opportunity to get to really know teachers and students. In addition to the coaching, members of our team demonstrate lessons with students, observe teachers and provide non-evaluative feedback, provide diagnostic testing with students, and assist with ongoing data analysis.”

The focus on data and coaching are critical components of each conversation.

Green Hills also developed a 30-minute block to provide a framework for teachers to implement high-priority focus area skills. The framework includes high-impact skills in the areas of comprehension, fluency and word work. A writing component designed to increase writing fluency is also employed on a daily basis.

Consultants meet regularly with special education teachers, special education representatives and principals to study the data and make additional instructional recommendations based on the data.

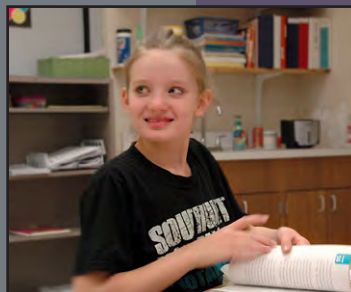
“In cases where students are not making progress using the 30-minute plan, additional diagnostic data is gathered and in some cases the use of additional specially designed intervention materials are recommended by the consultant for consideration,” she said. “These interventions are more intensive, systematic, and targeted in nature.”

Before the program, special education teachers were operating in silos, doing what they thought was best for their students.

“In some cases, students were receiving 20 minutes of reading instruction, and the instruction may have been not specific enough to meet the child’s needs,” she said.

But the program has changed that – particularly as teachers see impressive results. The success, Hockenberry said, has given teachers a renewed confidence.

“We see teachers who are now empowered to do the right thing and ask for things for their kids,” she said. “When I first started, I would say to teachers, ‘We might need more than 30 minutes of instruction time,’ and they would say ‘well, you won’t get that.’



Before implementing the literacy program, many students simply could not read at even a base level and dreaded the instruction. Today, students volunteer to read – and they do it with pride.



Teacher Melody Miller talks through an exercise with a couple of Corning students.

"But once we got data from diagnostic assessments and students started making progress by targeting the right skills, with the right materials to match the child's need – there you have it. Schools started seeing progress, and opened up to increased literacy time. Teachers are now becoming empowered and saying, 'I need this block of time.'"

Perhaps most important is that Hockenberry and members of the SDI Literacy team focus on eliminating preconceived notions, which she calls "changing habits of mind," a sort of default way of thinking.

"Sure, I encountered some who would say, 'well, that person is on an IEP, we would expect them to learn at a slower rate,'" she said. "And I'm like, 'no, I would expect to accelerate the child's growth rate.'"

But results take care of any remaining doubts.

"Our team is passionate about this work," Hockenberry said. "I am privileged to work with this amazing group of consultants who are constantly studying data and the evidence base to find ways to help students. Frankly, in the last four years, I have seen more changes in teacher behavior and results than ever in the past. We are at a tipping point that once you start making a difference for one child, you make a believer in the teacher. Then you start seeing mindsets change: 'if this

child can do this, another child can.'"

But don't take Hockenberry's word for it. Listen to the Corning Elementary teachers.

"Before Lynn, I thought special education was strictly pull out," said Wendy Ahrens. "And the goals were not related to what was going on in the general education classroom. That's all changed."

"At first, I was like, 'oh my goodness, what are you pouring on us now?'" said Melody Miller.

Principal Jennifer Berns at first wondered if this was simply the Tactic du Jour.

"I have seen many things come and go," she said. "But this is different. It is results oriented. The results are right there – you cannot deny it."

In the end, it was Hockenberry's persistence that won them over and put them on the path to success.

"Lynn kept showing up and saying things like, 'what are we going to do about this?'" Miller said. "She didn't leave me alone. She would teach a lesson and model it so I could see it in action. And we keep trying until we find something that works."

"Lynn taught me to never give up, and now I don't," Ahrens said.

"Lynn should be molded," Miller adds.

The group giggles, but then delves back into their work. They are now studying one boy's progress.

"Just think about it, he was reading two years behind class level just three years ago," Hockenberry muses, and then she tears up. "He's now reading at grade level, and we're talking about exiting him."

Indeed, a typical special education meeting at Corning, with anything-but-typical results.

High impact focus areas

From Dr. Jeanne Wanzek's research

Phonemic Awareness

- Segmenting
- Blending
- Connecting sound to print

Phonics

- Alphabetic Principle
- Two-letter combinations
- Multi-syllabic word strategies
- Application of above in both reading and writing
- Repeated reading with a goal (i.e. expression)
- Kids know the goal for the fluency-building activity
- Fluency goal is modeled for students

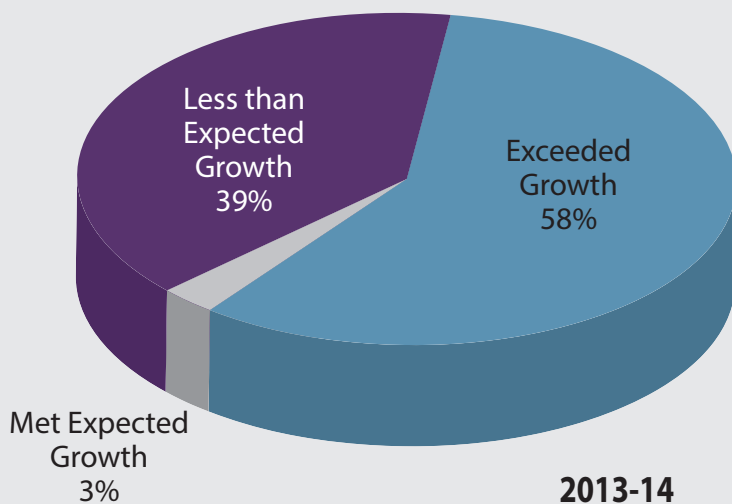
Vocabulary

- Examples/Non-Examples of word's meaning
- How to use and NOT use the word in sentences.
- Linking new words to known vocabulary by using synonyms and antonyms
- Connect to other words (sort & categorize words, word webs, etc.)

Comprehension of both fiction and nonfiction

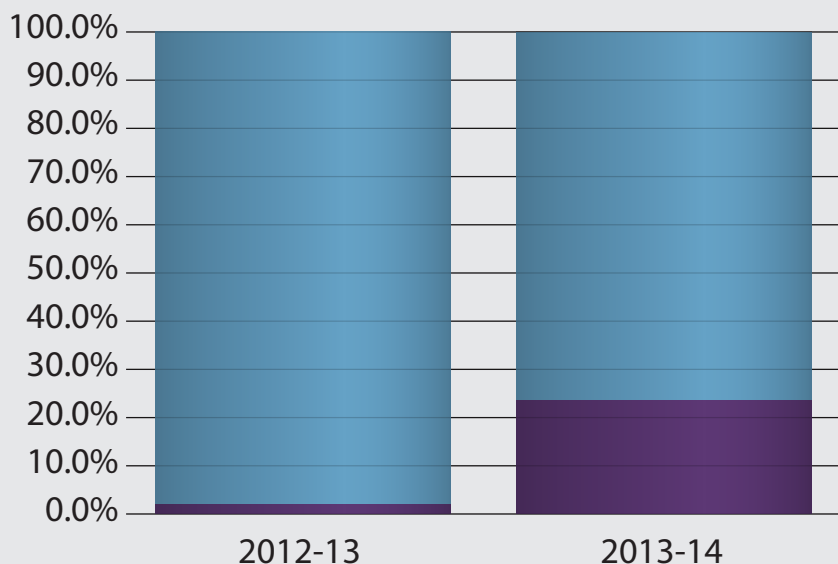
- Ability to generate questions (before, during, and after reading)
- Knowing a process strategy for identifying the main idea
- Summarizing
- Recognizing and use text structure

Growth of students in specially designed instruction



This graph indicates the number of students involved in the partnership during the 2013-14 school year who made more than expected growth on Iowa Assessments.

Growth in proficiency among students on IEPs in the AEA literacy program



In one short year, proficiency rates in literacy soared thanks to a program deployed by Green Hills Area Education Agency.

General observations of a cohort from Sherry Huffman, Green Hills AEA assessment consultant

- Treatment schools (those participating in the program) demonstrate an increase in achievement for students with IEPs and for students without IEPs.
- Treatment schools demonstrated an increase in achievement and control schools (not participating in the program) demonstrated a flat trend line when looking at all students.
- Treatment schools show an achievement level for all students that is higher than the control schools.
- Gap between IEP & Non IEP for treatment schools has decreased by almost 28 percent.
- Gap between IEP & Non IEP for control schools stayed almost the same.

Readers speak up

Readers liked reading about Urbandale Community School District's Jason Volmer, who himself went through special education and today is the district's special education coordinator.

I really enjoy reading these newsletters. This newsletter about Jason Volmer's life from student to teacher was very comforting and inspiring. I have a son who is staffed into special education and he is in 4th grade. He struggles in reading/writing and also has focusing issues. What really hurt us was finding out in 2nd grade that my son had eye convergence issues. His 2nd grade teacher was adamant that he had dyslexia. Given that information, we started first by taking him to an eye doctor. We were informed that my son's eyes were not converging. He had to go through eye therapy for over a year and now is undergoing eye therapy for visual memorization and maintenance. We wished this would have been caught sooner as it delayed his reading and now he is struggling to catch up with his peers. We are really thankful that his 2nd grade teacher had noticed some issues that triggered her to be concerned. My

hope would be that schools would start screening for eye issues at an early age. Student's that are staffed into special education for reading disabilities could be a student, like my son, who suffers from eye issues. I am a parent advocate just like Jason's mom. I request several meetings throughout the school year so I know that progress is continually being made. We have a staff of teachers that are really good to work with and care about the success of students. I believe that a special education student's success is having an IEP team that works together and shares the same goals. Reading stories of success, like Jason Volmer's, gives me hope that my son can be successful in life with family and school staff support. I share stories like this with my son so he knows that working hard and being determined in your education brings success.

*Darcie Arnold
Mediapolis*

Thank you, this was a great newsletter to jump start the second semester reminding us of our task to support every child every day to reach their potential!

*Teresa Bechen
Davenport Community School
District*

Thank you for the inspiring story about Jason Volmer from Urbandale! I've always believed if we "build" our students self esteem and give them a love of learning, they will grow from what level they are at. Good for his parents for being positive advocates for him!

*Julie Bollig
1st & 2nd Multiage
Maple Valley-Anthon Oto Elementary
Mapleton Center, Mapleton*

In the article on *Each and Every Child*, what stood out to me, being a mother of a child with special needs, is that "when we have parents that we consider difficult...I don't really mind, because they are doing what's right for their child." My husband and I were those parents.

We had a major issue in which our conviction for our son's happiness and successes made us go to mediation with our public school.

Anyway, another quote in the article was that "a teacher has the power to make a kid's day or wreck it." I teach in a full-inclusive 3-year-old preschool classroom where I know that I make positive learning experiences for all children every day. I feel that my number one job is to make sure EVERY single child LOVES school!

I will look forward to the next issue of *Each and Every Child*! Keep them coming. They are not only motivating but inspirational and true too!

*Sue Wineinger
Belmond-Klemme
Community School District*

I am a special education teacher and I wanted to express my gratitude for such a wonderful newsletter. I was never in special education, but I too struggled in school, in the area of math. What a great testimony from Mr. Volmer. We need more people like that in our schools, those who understand what it's all about and how it feels. We need more advocates like him.

*Linda Miller
Wilder Elementary, Indianola*