



CASE STUDY

Students in this Colorado District Make Significant Literacy Gains When Educators Are Trained in **LETRS Professional Development**

THE CHALLENGE

Colorado's Littleton Public Schools (LPS), located a few miles south of Denver, is a high-achieving school district that serves approximately 15,000 students. With a longstanding tradition of excellence, LPS was the only school district in the Denver-metro area to receive the Colorado Department of Education's highest-accreditation rating all eight years it had been offered.

A large part of LPS's success stems from the district's support of its educators. After all, when teachers are supported, students can excel. Research shows that teachers are THE most powerful factor in student academic success. Thus, when LPS implemented a Structured Literacy curriculum in the 2017–2018 school year for grades K–2, supporting teachers through the transition and beyond was paramount.

A New Focus on the Science of Reading

At the time, many of the teachers were using the Balanced Literacy approach to teaching early literacy, and LPS students were not at the level they needed to be for phonemic awareness. Administration recognized that teachers needed to understand and be trained in the science of reading pedagogy, and *LETRS*® (*Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling*) was the best literacy training solution to build capacity.

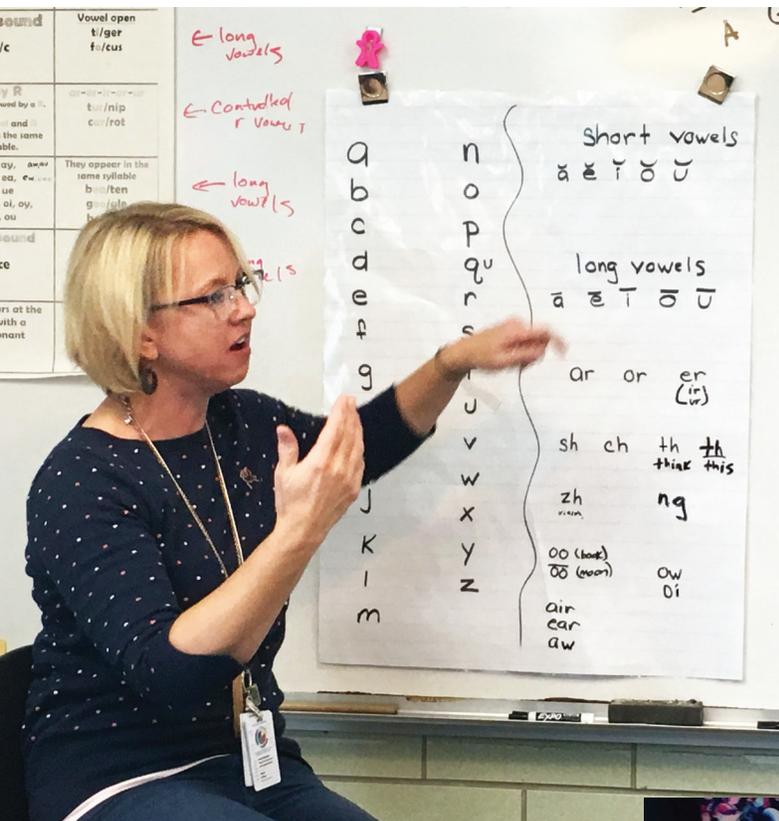
"We recognized we needed to support our educators in understanding the approaches and instructional ideas that are incorporated in a Structured Literacy curriculum," said Amy McIntosh, LPS' Innovation, Equity, and Learning coordinator.

The teachers' previous instructional strategies were not matching up with the new systematic approach, so staff sought new strategies to help teachers reach all students. "We knew we wanted to be able to offer more to our students, ultimately, through developing the capacity of our teachers," said Heidi Wagner, who also works as part of the district's Innovation, Equity, and Learning staff.



LPS Educators Heidi Wagner and Amy McIntosh enjoy a break while participating in *LETRS* professional learning.

THE SOLUTION



“More” came in the form of Voyager Sopris Learning’s *LETRS* professional development solution for K–12 educators. With more than a decade of demonstrated success in schools and districts across the U.S., *LETRS* professional learning was the ideal solution for LPS to provide teachers with the skills they need to master the fundamentals of reading instruction—phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, writing, and language.

A Systematic Approach to Improving Reading Instruction

Based on science of reading pedagogy and accredited by the International Dyslexia Association®, *LETRS* offers educators the background, depth of knowledge, and tools to teach language and literacy skills to every student—and it can be used regardless of the literacy program in use.

After undergoing *LETRS* professional learning, Littleton’s teachers use the Structured Literacy approach to build oral and written language skills.



Students participate in activities that help them become strong readers with solid foundational skills.

Littleton's Educators Feel Empowered After LETRS Training

"We looked at a few different options, and district leadership chose *LETRS*," McIntosh said. "It had the most in-depth and comprehensive approach to understanding the science of learning to read and to spell."

LPS implemented *LETRS* for the 2018–2019 school year with an initial cohort of 44 educators that included K–2 classroom teachers, special education teachers, literacy specialists, instructional coaches, and administrators. The district's third cohort launched in fall 2020, expanding to K–3 teachers. By the 2021–2022 school year, the district plans to have all preschool educators trained using *LETRS* for *Early Childhood Educators*.

"Not a day goes by without a fellow educator asking me when he or she will have the opportunity to participate in *LETRS*," Wagner said. "At a time when the demands on teachers are many, the fact that our colleagues are eagerly signing up for *LETRS* training is telling in and of itself: Once educators get a taste of *LETRS* it leaves them craving more."



Littleton students now work with teachers on sounds and facial expressions as they learn reading and spelling.



"Having been in the field of education for 20 years—as a primary and intermediate classroom teacher, literacy teacher leader, a building administrator, and an instructional coach at the district level—I can say with absolute certainty that equipping educators with LETRS knowledge has the potential to positively impact the lives of children more than any other professional learning you could offer."

—Heidi Wagner, District Instructional Coach

THE RESULTS

Teacher Jan Kempf, a member of the LPS literacy curriculum selection team with more than 20 years' experience teaching kindergarten and third grade, has been thrilled with the *LETRS* training and what it brings to her teaching.

"*LETRS* helped me understand the curriculum in a deeper way, as well as gave me ideas for how to adjust it to meet the needs of my students," she said. "Overall, *LETRS* gave me new confidence in my teaching practice."

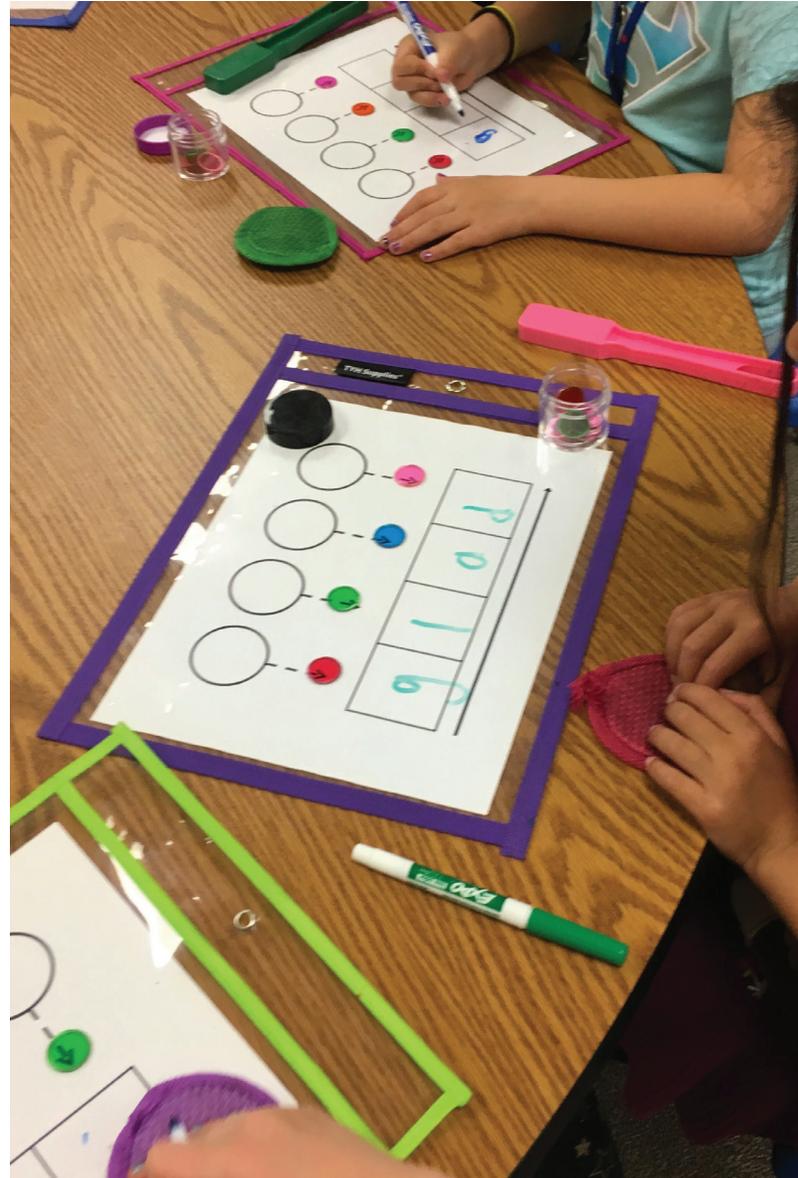
Echoing Kempf, LPS' Carrie Orcutt said *LETRS* empowered her as a coach to feel confident in her ability to support and collaborate with teachers as they navigate their literacy instruction.

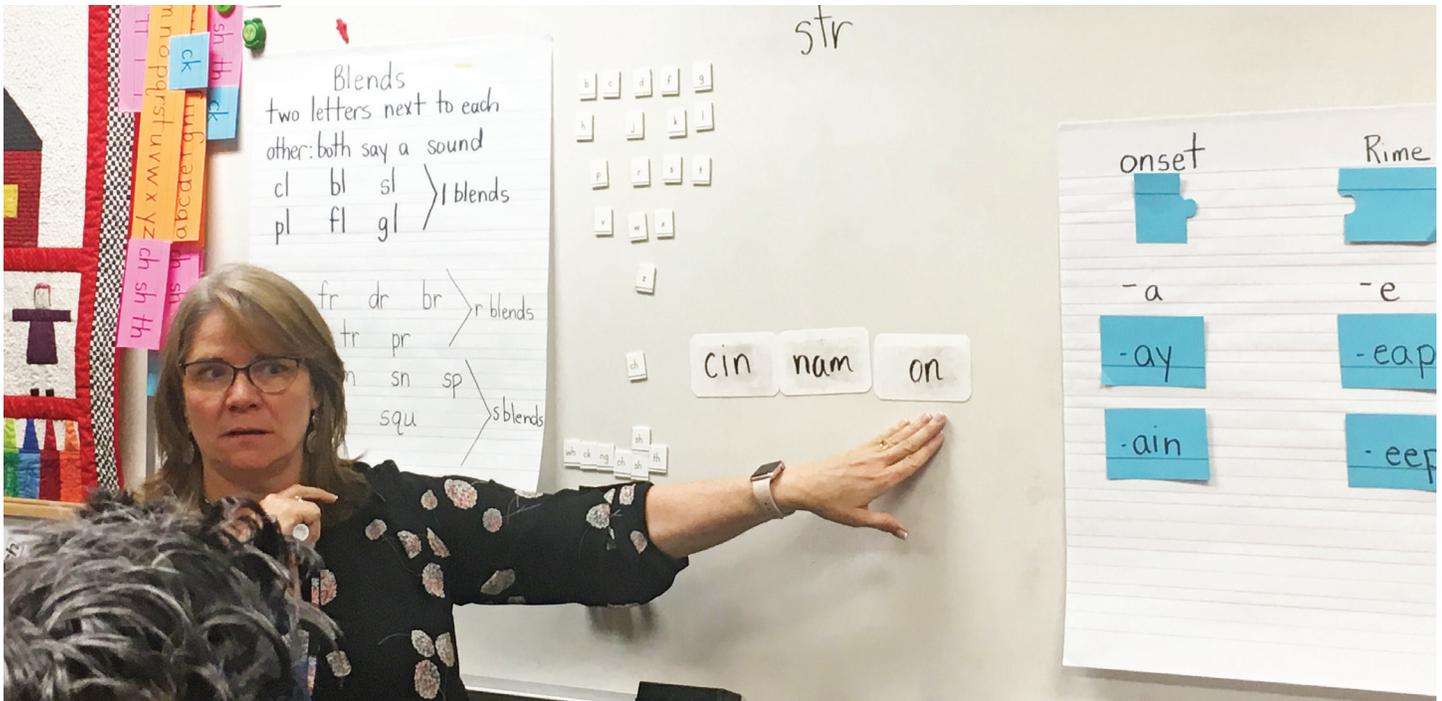
"LETRS is the best training I have received in my career."

**—Carrie Orcutt,
Instructional Coach**



"Before *LETRS*, I was trying to pull from too many resources, which led to confusion and a lot of wasted time seeking information and strategies to pass on to teachers," said Orcutt, an instructional coach. "Now, my literacy support and coaching is focused, and when I provide resources for teachers, I am confident that I am doing what is best for the teachers and the students. *LETRS* is the best training I have received in my career."





Literacy Specialist Tracy McCandless said *LETRS* supports her interventions and gives her a way to enrich lesson plans and how she teaches—every single day.

The professional development solution is helping LPS develop strong readers with solid foundational skills that will allow them to be successful in their literacy development throughout their education, Orcutt said. She added that *LETRS* is helping teachers understand how students learn to read while also providing workable strategies to target and differentiate students in small-group instruction.

“Overall, it has helped fill gaps for teachers in their literacy knowledge and enhanced skills to move forward using a phonics-based curriculum,” Orcutt said.

“It ensures my students aren’t struggling due to lack of systematic and appropriate instruction,” she said. “Students from the *LETRS*-trained teachers are the most likely to have strong phonological and phonemic awareness, which was not true prior to this training. The kindergartners are much more successful with blending sounds and knowing better sounds automatically.”

An Intense and Transformative Journey

"Having been in the field of education for 20 years—as a primary and intermediate classroom teacher, literacy teacher leader, a building administrator, and an instructional coach at the district level—I can say with absolute certainty that equipping educators with LETRS knowledge has the potential to positively impact the lives of children more than any other professional learning you could offer," Wagner shared.

Students Are the Real Winners

While LETRS has energized staff members and boosted their confidence, many who have gone through the training say those benefitting most are the students.

"Reading is an essential skill that can make or break a child's future," Kempf said. "The LETRS course empowered me with more knowledge. Now, I know what to look for and am better able to help my students grow needed skills. In building their confidence as readers, we are laying a strong foundation for future growth, enabling their success in all aspects of learning."



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—Jan Kempf, Teacher



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