

Egypt Lake Elementary School

Florida K–5 School Rejuvenates Its ELA Program with Collaborative Literacy and SIPPS

PROFILE

Egypt Lake School is a Tampa, Florida elementary school with approximately 485 students. Egypt Lake serves an economically challenged community whose students are mostly Hispanic (72%) and African-American (17%). At this Title 1 school, more than 90% of students receive free or reduced-price lunch. For a sizeable number of its students, Egypt Lake is the first U.S. school that they have attended. Egypt Lake also has a significant population (51%) of English Language Learners (ELLs), whose primary or only language is Spanish. The school experiences high student turnover consistent with the area's growing migrant population. Egypt Lake implemented Collaborative Literacy with all its modules (*Being a Writer™*, *Making Meaning®*, *Being a Reader™*, and the intervention program *SIPPS®: Systematic Instruction in Phonological Awareness, Phonics, and Sight Words*).

CHALLENGES

In 2017, when Julie M. Scardino became the school's first new principal in 11 years, she saw areas of concern, particularly in grades K–2: the Egypt Lake student population was well-behaved but unengaged, and the school's reading and math proficiency scores were stagnant.

Scardino recognized an opportunity to rejuvenate the school's literacy instruction and academic culture. Many students faced significant barriers for literacy learning, including economic challenges as well as learning to read and write in a second language. Teachers had 170 minutes per day designated for the literacy block, but in spite of this dedicated time, growth in foundational skills was lacking and intervention was not effective. In addition, the existing curriculum didn't prepare teachers effectively to make the most of small-group reading. "Teachers would pull kids into small groups and not know what to do with them," said Scardino.

Having come to Egypt Lake from a similar school where she had piloted *Making Meaning*, and having toured a school where Collaborative Literacy was fully implemented, Scardino had a vision. "I wanted to create proficient readers and writers," said Scardino. "Seeing the achievement at my past school, and not seeing half the barriers at Egypt Lake [that had existed at her previous school], there was no reason why these students couldn't succeed and reach their potential."

IMPLEMENTATION

With a pilot experience behind her and a mandate to change the curriculum, Scardino brought in Collaborative Literacy. Prior to the beginning of the new school year in 2018, Egypt Lake provided professional learning and held orientation days to introduce the new curriculum. Teachers performed group lesson planning, held walk-throughs of the lessons, and logged on to the Learning Portal. Egypt Lake also added additional professional learning support, and these site-based professional development days, consulting, in-service days, and supportive grade team meetings with Collaborative Classroom experts helped set the stage for success. Together, they studied lessons and debriefs. *Being a Reader* and *Making Meaning* for reading foundational skills and comprehension, *SIPPS* for intervention, and *Being a Writer* for writing instruction gave Scardino and Egypt Lake a comprehensive, integrated literacy curriculum.

When Scardino first became the principal at Egypt Lake, there had been no curriculum that addressed small-group reading instruction. With the implementation of the small-group reading strand of *Being a Reader*, teachers were given the tools to make the most of small-group time with support, prompts, organization, and suggestions to suit a variety of needs. “*Being a Reader* has some scripted pieces for small-group instruction, and also gives teachers flexibility. It has a foundation in word work and comprehension, and everything that we know needs to happen. *Being a Reader* does the heavy work,” said Scardino. Combined with *Being a Reader’s* whole-class instruction, independent strands with embedded social skills instruction, and foundational skills instruction, this started to create confident, independent readers.

Egypt Lake also implemented *SIPPS* (*Systematic Instruction in Phonological Awareness, Phonics, and Sight Words*) as an intervention to help struggling readers. Egypt Lake teams have made the most out of the intentional instructional alignment between *SIPPS* and *Being a Reader*, as well as the explicit routines in *SIPPS*. “It was interesting, because teachers love *SIPPS*, they love the routine and the instruction, and we saw that the teaching of explicit phonics led to good results,” said Scardino. “*SIPPS* is a great complement to our core instruction, particularly in 3rd, 4th, and 5th grades. We saw students improving and decoding better. Teachers are so busy during those grades with comprehension and articles, and if you have someone struggling, more passages won’t help, but *SIPPS* does.”



Photos courtesy of Egypt Lake School



(continues)

RESULTS

Egypt Lake is experiencing an awakening in student literacy and a blooming of teacher confidence, and the success is extending beyond ELA into other subject areas. The school went from a Florida grade of C in 2018 to a B in 2019. Student writing samples are stronger year over year, and students are posting gains in reading proficiency scores, measured by improvements in the twice-yearly state iReady assessments. Scardino says, “Our kindergarteners are now entering first grade reading at higher levels than they were a few years ago, before the implementation.”

Collaborative Literacy has also sparked deeper, more rigorous student thinking, according to Scardino. “As we got into the curriculum and I saw it in action in our classrooms, I realized that it was creating so many opportunities for rigor. We aren’t teaching to the test; we’re asking broader questions that are preparing our students.”

The impact of the program’s integration of social-emotional skills is also evident at Egypt Lake. “The SEL component has been crucial,” Scardino remarked. “It’s built into the lessons naturally and consistently. You can really see it coming to life in the way students are talking and listening to each other, in the respect they show.”

One unexpected result has been in how Egypt Lake teachers have experienced and grown through the implementation. Scardino reports that her teachers feel empowered and supported by the curriculum. “Something that surprised me is how it’s improved their professional confidence as literacy teachers. Seeing how well our students are responding, they know they’re delivering high-quality, effective instruction and they’re deepening their understanding of best practices and their own discernment as educators.”

“I am seeing growth. When I walk through all four kindergarten classrooms during small-group reading, I see that the students who are independently reading are truly engaged with their books. I can’t wait to see what these kindergarteners are going to do as second graders. I feel like our students are getting the literacy instruction they deserve.”

—Principal Julie M. Scardino



(continues)

Here's what Egypt Lake kindergarten teachers say about Collaborative Literacy ...

Loree Semler:

The curriculum has been a game-changer for me personally. I have been a teacher for 35 years. The classroom I was trained to teach in is unrecognizable today. I know that I am a good, strong teacher, but I have struggled with insecurity a bit with all the changes in instructional delivery methods and expectations. . . . By bringing this curriculum onto our campus, for me, it has leveled the playing field. I enjoy its explicitness and am confident that I am hitting all of the important components of reading instruction. My kids are thriving and growing as never before.

I would like to say how much I have LOVED using Being a Reader in my classroom. I am hard pressed to pick out my favorite component, but I do so love all of the strands of Being a Reader. The routines of the program blend seamlessly with the routines I normally have in place for reading instruction. . . . The children love this time.

Devin Rombach:

Setting the foundation with [cooperative structures such as] Turn and Talk at the beginning of the year really has helped my students' conversation skills and their ability to treat one another with respect. Students absolutely know that there should only be one speaker at a time, we make eye contact with the speaker, and that each partner should have equal time to talk.

Haleigh Neel:

The program gives students "think time" that really allows them to think about their answers, as well as why they came up with that answer. The curriculum is always asking follow-up questions such as "How do you know that?" or "Why do you think that?" giving students a chance to explain their thinking and use text evidence.

The build of the writing curriculum has helped my ELL students' writing to become so much better. Starting with a simple picture and then leading to labels and then leading to things the students WANT to write about has given them a joy for writing. Writing is a difficult kindergarten skill, and for my ELL students to be confidently writing sentences is great to see.

The social-emotional learning (SEL) built into Collaborative Literacy has helped my students to interact respectfully with their peers in all aspects of the school day, not just in the classroom. This atmosphere of respect rolls over into lunch, specials, and the playground.



For additional case studies, please visit collaborativeclassroom.org/case-studies.