

Research-Based Program Helps Boost K-5 Word Study Efforts

Millingport Elementary School Seeing Promising Results from Using Scholastic W.O.R.D.®

For one North Carolina elementary school, a new vocabulary program is garnering significant attention from both teachers and administrators for its effectiveness and impact in just a few months of use.

Stanly County Schools in Albemarle, North Carolina serves more than 8,400 students in grades preK–12 and employs 750 certified teachers in 21 schools. The district places a strong emphasis on promoting career and college readiness, lifelong learning, and citizenship.

Millingport Elementary School is a K–5 school located in a rural area of Stanly County and qualifies as a Title 1 school, with about 40 percent of its 190 students receiving free or reduced-price lunches. Bobbie Throneburg has been the curriculum coach at Millingport for the past five years and has had a 31-year career as an educator. “My role is to help teachers by sharing best practices, identifying which curriculum resources are most effective, looking at our achievement data, and sharing what I’ve learned from my years in the classroom,” she says.

Addressing setbacks and prioritizing needs

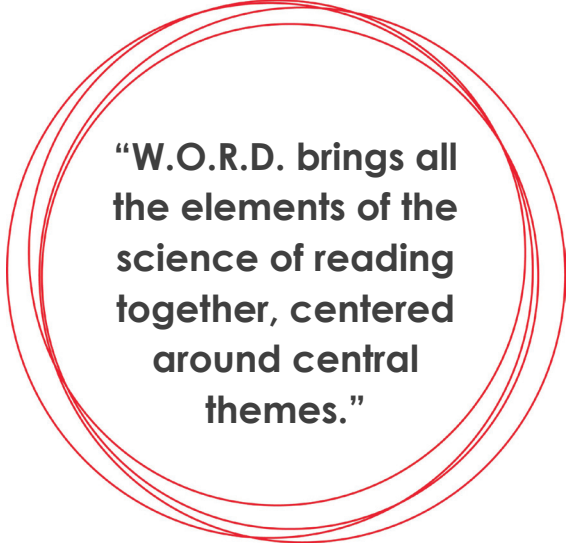
Like so many schools and districts, Throneburg says the pandemic interrupted what was a steady trajectory of improvement over the past several years. “We’ve been on a roller coaster in terms

of achievement scores. We had made a lot of academic progress and by the 2018-2019 school year, we had improved from being a D-rated school to a B-rated school,” she says. “Then the pandemic brought a lot of upheaval and dragged our academic scores back down again, unfortunately.”

While Throneburg and Stanly County administrators were looking for strategies to get students back on track, in April 2021 the state of North Carolina passed legislation mandating that K-12 literacy instruction be based on the science of reading and requiring the use of the research-based program *LETRS*® (Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling) for professional development across the state.

Throneburg joined other curriculum coaches in Stanly County in *LETRS* training in 2021. “We had just gone through the section of the training that was focused on vocabulary and comprehension when a representative from Scholastic met with us and told us about W.O.R.D., which is a vocabulary and comprehension program,” Throneburg says.

“I was immediately interested in the program, because vocabulary has always been a point of weakness in our district, and we’ve struggled to find a solution



“W.O.R.D. brings all the elements of the science of reading together, centered around central themes.”

that met our needs in this area. It turned out to be perfect timing for us, and I was excited to move forward with W.O.R.D.”

Words Open Reading Doors (W.O.R.D.)

Grounded in the scientifically-proven research of Dr. Elfrieda “Freddy” H. Hiebert, Scholastic W.O.R.D. helps K–5 students acquire core vocabulary while deepening comprehension through game-based learning. W.O.R.D. takes a thematic approach and teaches words in context across content areas like science and social studies, helping build background knowledge for core instruction.

The digital program differentiates and personalizes learning based on students’ vocabulary knowledge and provides educators with robust real-time reporting in a dashboard to help monitor student progress and inform instruction.

Putting the science of reading into everyday practice

Throneburg says W.O.R.D. perfectly complemented what she had learned in *LETRS*. “The program is so well-correlated with the science of reading,” she says. “I wanted to start slowly, so as not to overwhelm our teachers. I used W.O.R.D. with a small group of intervention students at first. After seeing how the students responded and how engaged they were but also how challenging it was, I got even more excited. Our students were asking for permission to use W.O.R.D. in their free time.”

After seeing this initial enthusiasm, Throneburg then decided to offer the program to Millingport teachers in February 2022 to use in reading rotation stations, three times a week for about 15-20 minutes at a time. “Our teachers were excited to use it, because we know that building vocabulary is so important not just for reading comprehension, but for other academic subjects as well,” she says.

“W.O.R.D. brings all the elements of the science of reading together, centered around central themes. It was exciting to see and understand how it corresponded with everything I had learned in *LETRS*.”

Data informing instruction

Throneburg says that the program has addressed an ongoing need at the school. “Our teachers have often struggled with finding ways to teach vocabulary. By seeing how students interact with the activities in W.O.R.D. and looking at the data dashboard in the program, our teachers get a better understanding of what to teach, what to focus on, and what students are struggling with,” she says. “For example, the data in W.O.R.D. showed us that understanding antonyms was a weak point for our students. We



never knew that before, and now it has become an area of focus.”

Throneburg says that already, the school is seeing an impact from the use of W.O.R.D. “Our students were two or more years behind grade level after the pandemic. Back in 2018-2019, our students were 88 percent proficient in vocabulary. At the end of this year, they came in at 80 percent,” she says. “That was a significant increase from the middle of the year when we first started using W.O.R.D. Fluency also improved to 88 percent overall. We’re catching up to where we were before the pandemic, and that’s exciting.”

Gaining ground with teachers and district leaders

The impact of W.O.R.D. has also been seen beyond reading and literacy, Throneburg says. “Vocabulary was a key part of what was missing in our instruction. We also started seeing an impact on other subject areas because students’ vocabulary and comprehension had improved,” she says. W.O.R.D. was purposefully designed with ten cross-curricular themes that build on each other at each level and are based on topics that students typically encounter in school. “Our math and science teachers have begun to understand

the importance of vocabulary knowledge in their instruction.”

The results Millingport has seen in such a short time also attracted interest from administrators. “I met with our district leaders and shared the data and what teachers were saying about W.O.R.D., and they were very impressed,” Throneburg says. “They visited one of our first-grade classrooms and saw how engaged and challenged the students were. We’re now looking at using it throughout the district.”

Building on what works

Moving forward, Throneburg says she is excited about the possibilities. “Next year I want to explore more of the features in W.O.R.D. since our teachers are now familiar with the program. I’m looking forward to adding the writing and conversation elements that help students build on their new vocabulary by using it in different ways. I want our school to be enriched in vocabulary.”

“We saw such great results in just half a year that I’m very much looking forward to seeing the results after a full year of having students use W.O.R.D. and having our teaching informed by the data it provides.”

To learn more about W.O.R.D., go to **Scholastic.com/WORD**