



Leaving No Child Behind

How One School District Turned Reading Scores Around in a Single Year

by Joseph Ruscio, Superintendent, Greenfield, MA School District

"The numbers told us loud and clear that we had a big problem to solve."

Our students weren't learning to read as fast as they should be.

In September 2005, on local assessments, just two of Newton Elementary School's 14 first-graders tested as "strong" learners. Two of ten second-graders tested as strong. Some 14 in 20 third-graders were at high risk to fail. Also, the average grade on our fourth-grade state standardized test was — without doubt — unacceptable.

The Greenfield School District had been audited by the state, so we needed help — and we needed it fast. We shopped for a consistent, measurable and scientific solution for reading. We needed a research-based curriculum aligned with No Child Left Behind legislation that provided all the tools our teachers would need to help our students succeed. We found it with Pearson Scott Foresman's *Reading Street*.

A Challenge for Students and Teachers Too

We challenged the students — and our teachers — with a comprehensive research-based curriculum focused on the five priority skills identified by the National Reading Panel — phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. We pushed all the students in each of our four elementary schools. We saw them emerge, becoming more inspired, motivated and engaged day by day — and that's across the board, from the five-year-olds up to the fifth graders.

Reading Street provided the needed professional development for our teachers. And our assessments confirmed what we were all witnessing with our very eyes. The gains were "phenomenal," as Dr. Mary Lou DeBella, principal of Newton Elementary, our lowest performing school, puts it. As a result, our district's federal funding went up: with the right components, including the *Reading Street* program in place, Newton applied for and received a Reading First grant totaling \$118,000.

By March 2006, we had documented incredible improvement, and our May scores, based upon the GRADE Assessment, were nothing short of amazing. In kindergarten, we showed zero "weak" readers. In first grade, we went from two "strong" readers in the Fall to 12 in the Spring. Second and third grade doubled the number reading on level. The fourth graders continued the progress. And our fifth graders made terrific gains, with test results showing zero "weak" readers and 96 percent of the class reading at or above grade level. Our three other elementary schools in the Greenfield School District achieved similar gains with the *Reading Street* curriculum.

The Greenfield Story

Greenfield, MA School District - Newton Elementary School
Percentage of students reading at or above grade level

	September 2005	May 2006
Kindergarten	58%	79%
First Grade	23%	65%
Second Grade	36%	73%
Third Grade	43%	79%
Fourth Grade	61%	78%
Fifth Grade	71%	96%

Results are based upon the GRADE Assessment

Myth-Busting

And perhaps the most impressive news is that a vast majority of the students in each category improved their reading skills. The underachievers skyrocketed; those in the middle moved up to the next level; and the top students soared. One can put stereotypes about demographics, backgrounds, and achievement potentials aside — in *Reading Street*, we've discovered a tremendous curriculum that works.

Reading Street works because it provides tools for instruction, pacing, assessment, and grouping. It prioritizes skills for each grade, so teachers can focus on the right skill at the right time. The program provides a consistent scope and sequence across the district. And it focuses on students as individuals.

Lesson Learned

So, here's the lesson we at Greenfield learned this past year: there are a few critical components for success in the classroom, and they must be inextricably intertwined.

- Be tenacious.
- Set high expectations for students and teachers.
- Inspire students to work hard.
- Provide committed teachers with a rich, research-based curriculum — in essence, the tools they need to do their job.
- And, above all, affirm that students can learn — and they will learn.

Yes, like other districts, the Greenfield School District has many challenges. We still have lots of work to do. We wanted to share our remarkable story about reading scores and tell other under-performing schools that if Greenfield can make such an incredible turn-around in just one year, so, too, can they.



The Greenfield School District adopted the Pearson Scott Foresman *Reading Street* program in September 2005. *Scott Foresman Reading Street* is the first research-based reading curriculum to be aligned with No Child Left Behind legislation. (www.scottforesman.com/ct)

