



## CASE STUDY

## West Allegheny School District

### Executive Summary

The West Allegheny School District, serving over 3,300 K–12 students in suburban Pittsburgh, prioritized reading proficiency for all students by third grade. After initial efforts with a core reading program and various intervention resources were unsuccessful, district leaders sought a systematic, multi-assessment program capable of bridging core instruction and intervention needs. They selected Reading Horizons®, a Structured Literacy program known for its explicit, multisensory approach.

Since implementing Reading Horizons® in 2018 for grades 3–7 intervention classes, West Allegheny has emphasized teacher engagement and capacity-building through coaching and “Train the Trainer” certifications. By 2021, the program expanded to *Reading Horizons® Discovery* Tier 1 instruction district-wide. This rollout involved strategic initiatives such as teacher “boot camps” and monthly “Horizons Huddles” to support the program’s adoption.

The results have been remarkable. After five years, West Allegheny reported higher teacher confidence, improved student spelling skills, and significant reading gains. In particular, seventh-grade students—exposed to Reading Horizons® the longest—showed 86.1 percent proficiency on the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) in 2023, with no students scoring in the below basic reading level.

For the current academic year, the district plans to strengthen support structures like flex days for skill mastery and the “Walk To” model, which offers targeted phonics instruction in small groups for students needing additional help. West Allegheny is also exploring the latest version of *Reading Horizons® Discovery* as a pilot program for further literacy advancement.

### Things to consider before reading

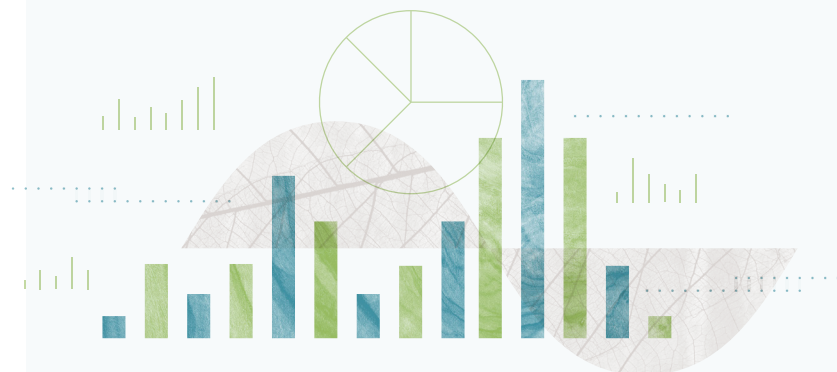
Use this checklist to determine if West Allegheny’s literacy success aligns with your school’s goals and needs:

Does this description align with your school?

- Are you a district or school administrator focused on achieving **reading proficiency by third grade**?
- Is your goal to implement a **systematic literacy program** across multiple grade levels?
- Are your **student demographics** similar?
  - Does your student population include MLLs (e.g., 2.5 percent) and/or students in special education (e.g., 12 percent)?
- Do you have these **foundational supports**?
  - Administrators committed to Structured Literacy outcomes
  - Opportunities for ongoing teacher coaching and professional development
- Can you ensure **access to resources** like those West Allegheny used?
  - Training aligned with Structured Literacy practices
  - Support from program facilitators and in-house literacy leaders

If these conditions resonate, West Allegheny School District’s success with Reading Horizons® may offer valuable perspectives and strategies for achieving your literacy goals.

Checklist adapted from Danks (2023)





# West Allegheny SCHOOL DISTRICT

## Case Study

The Impact of the *Reading Horizons*® Method  
Implementation on Student Learning

### AT-A-GLANCE

West Allegheny School District  
2022–2023 Academic Year

“With improved accuracy and automaticity, confidence soared! My students wanted to read more. They weren’t afraid to write a sentence or read aloud in their classroom.”

—KRISTEN MARTIN, Literacy Specialist

Where reading momentum begins™



## Background and Goals

The West Allegheny School District, a suburban district outside of Pittsburgh, serves a population of just over 3,300 students from kindergarten to twelfth grade. Among these students, 2.5 percent are English Language Learners (ELLs), and 12 percent receive special education services.

To meet their objective of achieving reading proficiency for all students by the third grade, West Allegheny schools initially implemented a core reading program alongside various resources for their intervention students. However, this combination did not yield the desired success in improving students' reading abilities. Consequently, district leaders began searching for a more systematic and consistent program that could be implemented consistently across all schools and grade levels. The chosen program needed to bridge the gap between core instruction and intervention while empowering students to apply their skills beyond the confines of the intervention resource room. The district sought a systematic, explicit program that offered multiple assessment methods for tracking student progress and employed a multisensory approach. Reading Horizons met all of these criteria.

## Implementation

In 2018, West Allegheny initiated the implementation of Reading Horizons in their grades 3–7 intervention classes. The initial crucial step in adopting a new program was securing teacher buy-in, recognizing that the more teachers they could engage and involve, the greater the student benefits.

In the initial years of implementation, teachers actively engaged in coaching sessions facilitated by Reading Horizons facilitators. These coaching sessions played a pivotal role in expanding teacher capacity and bolstering their confidence in utilizing the program effectively. In 2021, a select group of teachers underwent Reading Horizons' "Train the Trainer" certification, providing the district with

educators who were well-versed in the program and equipped to serve as leaders within their respective schools. This initiative ensured that there were knowledgeable individuals at the grassroots level to support and guide fellow teachers throughout the implementation process.

Following three years of successful implementation in intervention classes, the district strategically decided to extend the use of Reading Horizons to Tier 1 instruction, encompassing all students across the district. Introducing a new curriculum invariably comes with its set of challenges. The school district had to tackle the complexities of training new teachers and long-term substitutes and devising strategies for students entering the program midway through the academic year. Furthermore, they needed to adapt to a different pacing and a mastery-based progression model.

The district administration proactively addressed these challenges by devising straightforward yet effective solutions. They introduced "boot camps" to facilitate quickly integrating new teachers and students into the program. Additionally, the district organized monthly "Horizons Huddles," led by the school's reading specialist, aimed at enhancing teacher capacity and knowledge. The teachers and other administrators who were previously certified as "trainers" played a vital role in this implementation aspect.

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“What has struck me most about Reading Horizons is how much sense it makes. There are rules, patterns, etc., that, once the kids have mastered these, make reading so much easier for them. They like it also! I've often said that I've become a master at Wordle simply because of RH!”

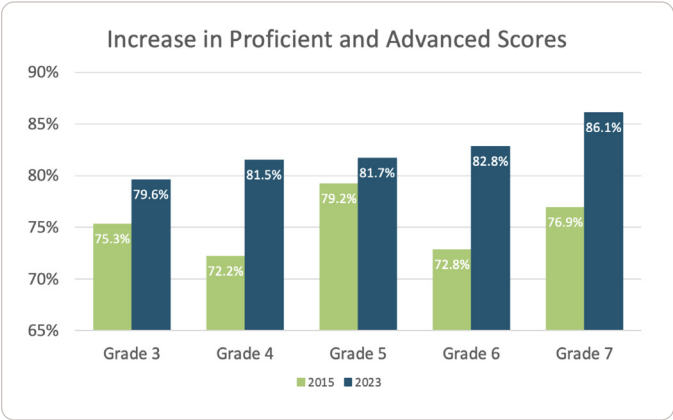
—KAREN FRENCH, THIRD GRADE TEACHER

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Results

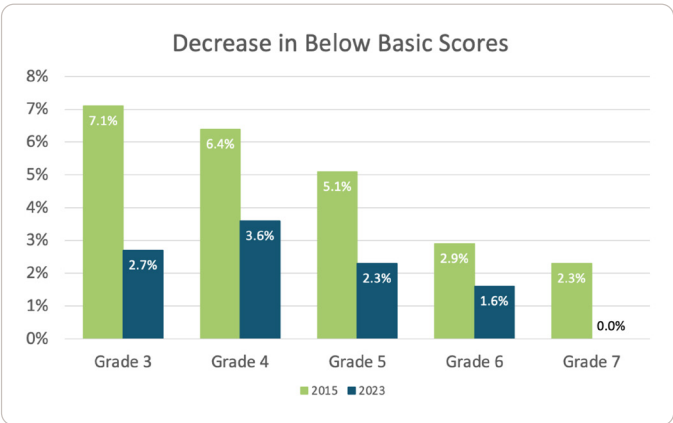
In May of 2023, West Allegheny concluded its fifth year of implementing Reading Horizons, and the outcomes have been nothing short of remarkable. The district administration has been thoroughly impressed, and goals have been surpassed. Notably, struggling readers have gained significant confidence, spelling abilities have improved across the board, and teacher capacity has reached an all-time high. A particularly noteworthy achievement is seen in the seventh-grade students who have been using Reading Horizons since its inception; this year, no students were performing below the basic reading level.

Results from the English Language Arts portion of the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) were used to demonstrate the impact of Reading Horizons on student reading ability. Specifically, the difference in the proportion of students receiving proficient and advanced scores over eight years (2015–2023) was used to demonstrate district-wide improvements. From 2015 to 2023, the proportion of students scoring in the proficient and advanced categories increased for each grade level, with the highest average occurring for Grade 7, who’ve had Reading Horizons instruction the longest, in 2023 at 86.1 percent.



Additionally, the difference in the proportion of students receiving below proficient scores over the same eight-year period (2015–2023) was used to further demonstrate growth in the

district. During that time period, the proportion of students scoring in the below basic category decreased for each grade level. In fact, 0 percent of Grade 7 test scores in 2023 were in the below basic category.



Next Steps

In the ongoing academic year, the school district is dedicated to advancing the implementation of effective strategies in all classrooms. A key focus involves collaboration between the literacy specialists and teachers to optimize the use of flex days, providing targeted support for students working towards mastery of specific skills. Additionally, they are introducing ‘Walk To’ models in grade levels characterized by higher student needs. This model will allow students with the greatest needs to be provided their core phonics instruction by interventionists in a smaller group setting. It will allow them to progress at the pace of student learning to ensure proficiency in each new skill. They strategically envelop all new teachers with coaching and mentor support to fortify the foundation for success, ensuring a robust implementation right from the start. These concerted efforts underscore the district’s commitment to enhancing educational outcomes across the district.

West Allegheny is enthusiastic about exploring the newest version of *Reading Horizons Discovery*® and is eager to initiate a pilot program with their literacy specialists in the near future.

