



## *CLIMBING THE LITERACY SUMMIT*

At the foot of 14,411-foot Mount Rainier in Washington State sits Eatonville Elementary School. Up until 2015 it was a school of minimal accomplishments. It was a priority school, among the five percent of schools in the state with the lowest achievement, which means that for the last three years 40% of its students or fewer did not pass the state assessment in reading or mathematics. Since then, achievement and spirits have soared at Eatonville and this is **the story of that rise**.

Prior to 2015 the teachers at Eatonville used the Houghton Mifflin reading program, *Journeys*, to teach reading and supplemented it with lessons and ideas from Teachers Pay Teachers. *Journeys* like most basal programs, has a traditional weekly lesson plan. Each week the students learn new reading skills, review old skills, read two short passages and one leveled reader. An analysis of *Journey's* indicates that students in third grade will read a total of 77,000 words during the school year and accomplish this by reading a mere 15 minutes a day (Brenner & Hiebert 2010). In addition, the students will learn 23 skills and strategies over the course of the school year, almost one a week (Dewitz, Leahy, Jones & Sullivan, 2010).

The research suggests that **in basal reading programs, too many strategies are taught in too short of time**, with inadequate amounts of practice for struggling readers (Dewitz et al., 2009). Students learn skills for the sake of skills, rather than as tools to grasp literature or learn from informational text.

# EATONVILLE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, EATONVILLE, WA



## The Read Side By Side Reading Program

A few teachers at Eatonville recognized the dearth of reading in *Journeys* and an excess of isolated skill work, and began to search for alternatives. Their search led them to the ***Read Side by Side Reading Program***. This program teaches a text structure approach to comprehension outlined by the acronym C. I. A., which stands for **collect, interpret, and apply**. In the program students read a variety of longer fiction and nonfiction books increasing their knowledge of genres, topics, and text-structures.

Units in the program were purchased and the teachers and **students began to explore the power of reading full books**. The students liked what they read. The novels gripped their imagination and the teachers liked the **growing enthusiasm and confidence** of the students. Prior to the 2015-16 school year Eatonville purchased the full reading program for grades three through five. The results speak for themselves.

## Results

Eatonville, like all of Washington, assesses reading with *Smarter Balanced*, one of two national assessments designed to measure student progress in meeting the Common Core State Standards. The table below documents the test score changes.

### Percentage of Students Passing the Smarter Balanced Reading Assessment

| Grade Level      | EATONVILLE READING SCORES |          |         |         | STATE AVERAGE |
|------------------|---------------------------|----------|---------|---------|---------------|
|                  | 2014 - 15                 | 2015 -16 | 2016-17 | 2017-18 | 2017-2018     |
| <b>3RD GRADE</b> | 51.7%                     | 66.6%    | 68.4%   | 59.9%   | 55.5%         |
| <b>4TH GRADE</b> | 46.6%                     | 69.6%    | 69.8%   | 60.2%   | 57.3%         |
| <b>5TH GRADE</b> | 53.5%                     | 45.9%    | 57.4%   | 55.9%   | 59.2%         |

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**The performance of Eatonville students has improved and so have their attitudes toward reading.** Not all students passed the *Smarter Balanced* test, but it is a very demanding test, requiring close reading, writing in response to reading, and supporting answers with information from the text. It is safe to say that *Smarter Balanced* expects a type of performance that most adults rarely undertake in their daily lives.

**The *Read Side by Side Reading Program* raised reading ability and motivation.** Using the C. I. A. method, students learned to divide books into four quadrants and then prepare themselves for the thinking work demanded by each quadrant. First, they collected information about setting, characters, plot and problems. Next, they used that information to make interpretations about characters, traits, motivations and themes. Finally, they applied what they learned to their own lives and evaluated the themes of the book.

**Read about the experience of one third-grade teacher:**

*“At first the students were skeptical and didn’t seem to believe that they were going to read a whole novel. I explained to them that I was going to read it and together we would discuss the book and write about what we had read. Then, once they saw the four quadrants, **the C.I.A. Approach guided them through the novel.** They started to see that **there was a pattern they could follow while reading a book.** The scaffolds that are built into the program and the format of the four quadrants helped them retain, recall and organize their thinking. **Their comprehension improved and they gained confidence.**”*

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### Transfer of Training in the Program

The program facilitates transfer. Students start with a read-aloud, where they learn principles of text structure and strategies, then they apply these very same procedures when they read a book club selection.

### **One teacher notes:**

*“My students are remembering character traits from the first read-aloud book, Poppy, and using them again to talk about our second book club, Rosa Parks. They are remembering the feelings and traits of the main character in the second read-aloud book, The War With Grandpa, and applying those now as we read our third read-aloud, Glory Be. **Things we learned when reading together months and months ago they have retained** and are now applying independently in a new context. I mean these children are bringing higher level thinking and applying it with automaticity. And it is happening in third grade!”*

At Eatonville, everyone benefited from the *Read Side by Side Reading Program*. **The principal at the school, Mrs. Heersink, reflects on its benefits:**

*“The thing I like about the program is that **it evens the playing field** for all students, those that have language and background knowledge and those that do not. I get emotional just thinking about it. Kids who don't read, don't watch the news with their families, or don't have rich conversations with their parents, don't have background knowledge. They enter school on unequal footing. **This program provides equity and goes a long way to close that gap.**”*



### Eatonville Today

Today Eatonville is a school of distinction: one of few schools to demonstrate growth over several years. It has not achieved the summit of Mount Rainer, but it continues to climb. Several factors underlie the success of the program. You have read about how students build knowledge, learn strategies, transfer what they know and gain confidence. There is one more attribute. **When the students finish a year in the program, they will have read four times the amount of text as a traditional basal reader.** Practice accelerates growth.

**Dr. Peter Dewitz**

For more information on the *Read Side by Side Reading Program*, visit [ReadSideBySide.com](http://ReadSideBySide.com)