

# Making the shift to the Science of Reading

How Blanchester Local School District raised reading proficiency by 22 points—and earned the Governor's Award



Blanchester Local  
School District

# Background

Located in Blanchester, Ohio, Blanchester Local School District serves nearly 1,100 students across three schools, in preK through twelfth grade. The student population is 93.4% white and 2.6% Hispanic/Latino, with 3.4% of students identifying as two or more races. 54% are eligible for the federal free and reduced-price meal program.

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## Challenge

For 20 years, Blanchester Local School District used the same core literacy program. It covered phonics but did not build the background knowledge that students also needed. Achievement stalled at about 50% proficiency, and classrooms felt stagnant.

Assistant Superintendent of Instruction Raechel Purdon said that the turning point came from the teachers: “After two decades with the same program, they were eager for resources grounded in the Science of Reading, that would both strengthen instruction and renew their excitement for teaching.”

## Solution

Blanchester launched its shift in 2020 with a clear goal: build a shared understanding of the Science of Reading and use it to guide every decision. By 2021, teams of educators in the district were studying the pillars of literacy, exploring brain research, and uniting leaders across grades around a common vision.

When it came time to choose a new core program, teachers continued to do their homework. They joined Amplify’s social media groups for Core Knowledge Language Arts (CKLA); connected with out-of-state educators; reviewed EdReports (which rates Amplify CKLA as “All Green”); and invited multiple providers to present.

“When we connected with Amplify, it just stood out,” says Purdon. “What resonated most was their promise of knowledge-rich vocabulary that reaches every student. The equity piece really stood out—CKLA exposes all children to vocabulary and concepts they might not encounter at home. That universal access to rich content was powerful for me and our teachers.”

Confident in the fit, the district adopted Amplify CKLA for 2021–22 without a pilot. Teachers had already explored the online portal and felt ready to go all in. Implementation focused on:

- 1 Teaching with fidelity and protecting time for ELA blocks.
- 2 Building pacing guides and curriculum maps as living documents, adjusted throughout the year based on data.
- 3 Strong building-level leadership and consistent district support.
- 4 Substitutes who shared insights across grades, strengthening vertical alignment.
- 5 Dedicated collaboration time in teacher-based teams for planning and problem solving.
- 6 Music and art teachers aligning lessons to CKLA knowledge units for cross-content integration.
- 7 Quarterly district walk-throughs to calibrate practice.

Classroom culture shifted, too. “The teachers are learning right alongside the students,” says elementary school principal Jeri Earley.

Assistant principal Kristina Taylor adds, “The student engagement, especially in the vocabulary and knowledge portions, kept teachers energized and motivated.”

Blanchester kept building expertise after launch. In 2022–23, all K–4 teachers and administrators completed two years of professional development with LETRS. Staff also drew from Amplify’s professional development and Science of Reading: The Podcast, while expanding in-house training.

To complete its K–8 literacy system, the district added Amplify ELA in middle school for continuity, plus mCLASS® and mCLASS® Intervention in elementary school to sharpen Tier 2 and 3 supports.

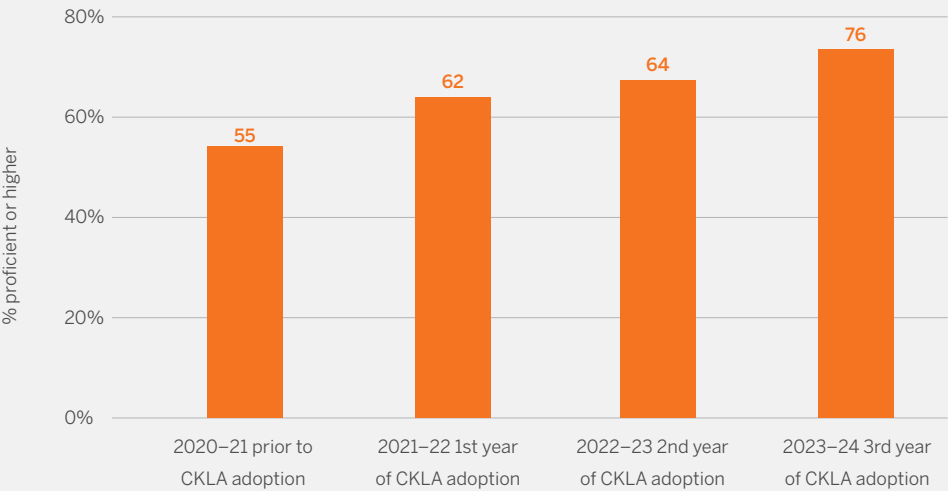
“mCLASS was a game changer for our Tier 2 and 3 students,” says Purdon. “We can now target exactly where to intervene and serve every student scoring red and yellow.”

As the district finalized its suite, leaders consulted Ohio Department of Education resources and saw Amplify featured across recommendations. “We thought, ‘Okay, the state sees how strong Amplify is as well,’” says Earley. “It was reassuring—we’d made the right choice.”

# Impact

Student proficiency rose steadily—from 54.4% before CKLA adoption to 76.1% three years later. And the transformation went beyond test scores.

**Percent of grade 3–5 students at Blanchester School District scoring proficient or higher on Ohio State ELA Tests from 2021–2024**

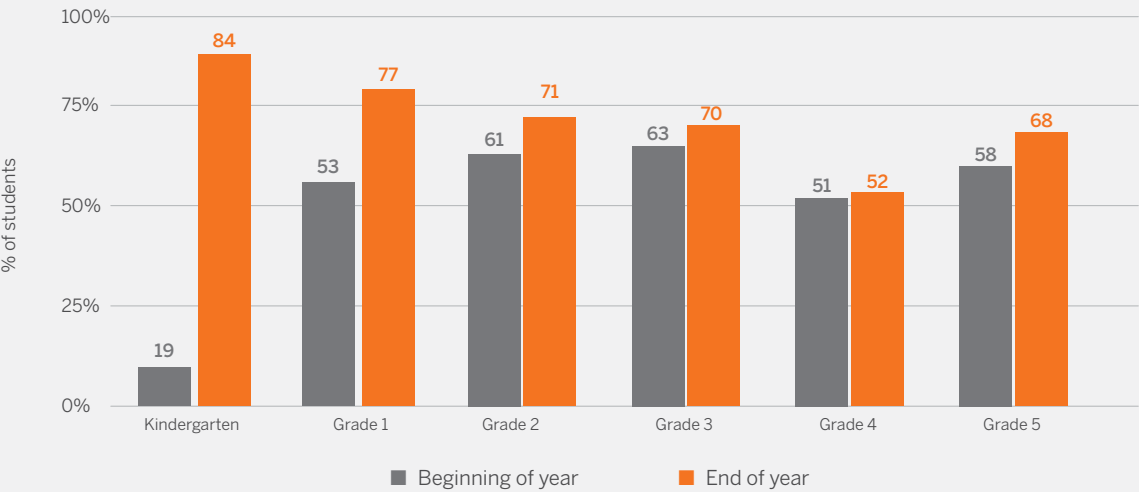


From the start, staff said classrooms felt more rigorous. Earley recalls hearing students in early grades talking about complex topics such as the civilization of Mesopotamia. “It’s so exciting that all children are being exposed to wonderful knowledge and vocabulary.”

Parents and community members noticed knowledge gained in the classrooms traveling beyond school walls. Assistant principal Taylor recalls hearing this: “During a doctor’s visit, a first grader used the correct terms to explain her digestive system, and the doctor asked her mom, ‘How does she know all of this?’” She knew it because of CKLA.

In 2024–25, kindergarten finished the school year with 65% more students at or above benchmark than at the start of the year, according to mCLASS assessments.

Blanchester Local School District students scoring at or above benchmark in the 2024–25 school year



The state took notice. In May 2025, Blanchester earned the Governor’s Science of Reading Recognition Award for these significant gains in test scores.

# Conclusion

With proficiency up more than 20 points and statewide recognition in hand, Blanchester is building on its progress by investing newly-awarded Comprehensive Literacy State Development (CLSD) funds. Next steps include coaching for new teachers, building-wide walkthroughs to identify gaps, targeted support for students with disabilities, and a stronger Multi-Tiered System of Supports process in grades 6 and up. Celebrating their wins and welcoming visitors has also made Blanchester a model for others.

With CKLA, Amplify ELA, mCLASS, mCLASS Intervention, and ongoing professional development in place, the district will keep moving forward one step at a time, with teachers, leaders, and students learning together.



For more information about  
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suite based on the Science of Reading,  
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