CASE STUDY

Urban Community School Personalizes Learning with SRA FLEX Literacy®

Overview

Urban Community School (UCS) has been providing individualized learning opportunities to children from Cleveland’s Near West Side neighborhoods for nearly 50 years. It gives all of its students—78 percent of whom live at or below poverty level—a quality education in the Catholic tradition.

UCS celebrates diversity in learning styles, encouraging students to work at their own pace and evaluating them against individualized goals set by their teachers. Part of its individualized curriculum includes SRA FLEX Literacy, a comprehensive reading and Language Arts intervention system. Teachers in the school’s fourth- and fifth-grade classrooms rely on FLEX Literacy to meet students at their learning levels and quickly get them up to grade-level reading proficiency.
Implementation

During 2014, UCS Principal Lisa DeCore introduced SRA FLEX Literacy in her fourth- and fifth-grade classrooms. After the first year, teachers Shannon Gill and Megan McIntyre report they are pleased with the results.

“Our students’ interest level is amazing. Especially around the online portion,” says Gill. “Some of our students are pretty far behind, so it is nice to see that they are interested in using the program to get up to grade level.”

FLEX Literacy combines print, digital, and project-based learning to address a wide range of learning styles. Project-based activities in the program provide highly relevant instructional support that makes content more engaging for struggling students.

UCS teachers were surprised by how many resources they suddenly had at their fingertips. “We are very excited by the project-based learning,” says McIntyre. “The program has a wealth of resources that make implementation and instruction easy for the teacher.”

FLEX Literacy also provides UCS with new tools for assessing its students so teachers can tailor their lessons to meet individual students’ needs.

Student Engagement

FLEX Literacy provides students at all levels with scaffolded instruction, practice, assessment, and remediation in a way that really connects. UCS teachers have found that their fourth- and fifth-grade students are eager to engage with the content.

“Our kids actually ask if they can go into their FLEX Literacy workbooks, where they highlight pieces of a story for text evidence. They are really motivated by the short stories,” says Gill.

The key is group and individual activities that are entertaining as well as educational. Students get excited about what they are doing, so they participate more fully and become more open to learning.

Both Gill and McIntyre are impressed by how well the program aligns with the Common Core while still engaging students who struggle with reading. “Some of our students are reading at an eighth-grade level; some are at a second-grade level. FLEX Literacy keeps them all interested,” says Gill.

“I would definitely recommend FLEX Literacy for its enforcement of non-fiction,” McIntyre says. “Non-fiction is a weak area for most kids, really. FLEX Literacy motivates them with interesting content, and the length of the stories appeals to low readers. I notice they don’t get frustrated.”

“FLEX Literacy draws students in with variety. It uses a combination of digital, print, and project-based resources. The program offers a range of computer-based instruction; teacher-led, shared-reading lessons; and group activities to reach students of all levels. “It’s very rare to see students take work home, but they do it with FLEX Literacy,” says McIntyre. “They want to do the fun online games, and they don’t see it as work.”

Shannon Gill
Fourth- and Fifth-Grade Teacher
Urban Community School
Results

With 34 years of combined teaching experience between them, Gill and McIntyre know what works. They are quick to credit *FLEX Literacy* with the improvements they’ve seen in their classrooms.

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“Since implementing *FLEX Literacy*, we’ve been acknowledged for progress in reading levels,” says Gill. “And we’re already hearing that sixth and seventh graders are coming in with more background knowledge on their first day of class.”

These results stem from having the ability to personalize the curriculum, an approach to education that Urban Community School has made a priority since its inception. *FLEX Literacy* supports the UCS classroom philosophy of creating a positive learning environment where students’ strengths are used to their greatest advantage.

The Future

UCS educators are just beginning to tap the potential of *FLEX Literacy*. “We’re having success with the project-based learning, but we know we can do more,” says McIntyre. “We’d like to spend more time with the Mastery Tests. And we look forward to becoming more comfortable with the technical portions of *FLEX Literacy*.”

Both teachers are now confident that they will see individual growth in every student, and they would like to see *FLEX Literacy* in place even earlier. “We would love to see our second and third graders using [FLEX Literacy],” says Gill.

About *SRA Flex Literacy*

*SRA FLEX Literacy* combines the best of computer-based and teacher-led instruction with collaborative learning, to provide struggling readers and writers in grades 3 and up the skills they need for college and career readiness.