



**Senate Education Committee
Margaretta Local School District
Ed Kurt, Superintendent
April 9, 2024**

Chair Brenner, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on the academic recovery efforts of the Margaretta Local School District.

My name is Ed Kurt, and I have had the pleasure of serving as the superintendent of Margaretta Local Schools in Erie County for the past four years. Prior to my time there, I served as the superintendent of Findlay City Schools for six years and was with Margaretta for 12 years, rounding out 35 years in education. With me today are Kevin Johnson, our curriculum director, and Keven Wise, principal of Margaretta Elementary School. Margaretta serves more than 1,000 students across our two school buildings: Margaretta Elementary, which serves grades preK-5 and Margaretta High School, which serves grades 6-12. We also sponsor a conversion community school serving high school students. Nearly one-third of our students are economically disadvantaged, 21% are students with disabilities, and 16.2% are students who are gifted.

At the early stages of the pandemic, I realized that our students' ability to read and be proficient learners in core subject areas would be compromised by the impacts of the pandemic. As we all know, virtual learning placed incredible challenges on our educators to teach and on our students to learn. And as we returned to in-person instruction, we made many changes. With the help of our staff and other partners, Margaretta embarked on a journey to commit our district and staff to enhance our literacy efforts and reorient our instructional practices to improve the literacy proficiencies of our students.

2020-21 School Year

In 2020, we began with the Science of Reading. We established two study teams – one in grades K-5 and one in 6-12 – to evaluate and understand the topic and also implement a strategy to incorporate the Science of Reading into our buildings. To get a better understanding of tackling our literacy challenges, we needed to focus first on dyslexia. That led us to consult with the International Dyslexia Association of Central Ohio, Nationwide Children’s Hospital, the Department of Education and Workforce (DEW) and other school districts throughout the state that have been down this path before.

We knew early on that progress and improvement could only be achieved through effective partnerships, so we relied heavily on local, regional, and statewide resources. For example, we worked with literacy specialists at our regional educational service center, North Point ESC, literacy specialists made available by the State Support Teams at DEW, and professionals with the Academy of Orton Gillingham.

2021-22 School Year

This work continued into the 2021-22 school year when, over the summer of 2021, 56 out of 85 total staff members each received a total of 30 hours of training in the Science of Reading. We also started a staffing plan to dedicate professionals to this area, creating an official Literacy Team, creating the position of Literacy Supervisor, and creating literacy coaches focused exclusively on that topic. Some of these professionals were in-classroom educators who then were being reoriented to a targeted area. Our Title I teacher also became part of our literacy team. Our literacy coach and Title I teacher began Orton Gillingham training and also 100 hours of practicum observations, including employing one-to-one reading instruction with students.

As the school year began, we began introducing the Science of Reading strategies into primary classrooms and also implemented vocabulary acquisition strategies into every middle and high school classroom supported by our Literacy Team. We also deepened our partnerships in this first year. We regularly hosted a fellow from the Academy of Orton Gillingham to ensure our district’s implementation of the Science of Reading was being done with fidelity and also to provide organizational and strategic instruction support to our Literacy Team leaders. We also worked with the University of Findlay to leverage collaboration between higher education faculty and our staff through quarterly virtual presentations and discussions. These conversations were crucially helpful for both our staffs as their professional

knowledge on the topic informed our staff and our real-time experience with implementation informed theirs.

It's very important to point out here that after more than a year of planning and implementation, our literacy scores were still a work in progress. This process takes time, buy-in, understanding, and commitment.

2022-23 School Year

We renewed that commitment the following year for the 2022-23 school year when we secured grant funding from the state. Without this funding, perhaps none of our success would have been possible. Margaretta applied for and received a \$200,000 grant from DEW as part of the Reaching All Students Through Language and Literacy Grant Program. This funding supported 25 school districts and community schools to assist with improving their literacy instruction for students who were hardest hit by the pandemic-related school shutdowns. These critical resources allowed us to retrain all our teachers, reorient our classroom instruction, and institute a program called "Flooding." As with the prior school year, we had regular visits from the ESC of Central Ohio and University of Findlay partners.

First, we held a two-day training session for all staff led by literacy specialists from the State Support Team 5. Then, over the series of five days in the summer, all Literacy Team leaders and all school administrators received 30 hours of Science of Reading training from DEW and the AIM Institute for Learning and Research. Between fall 2022 and fall 2023, we had three major training sessions in Orton Gillingham. This was followed up by an additional 18 hours of Orton Gillingham training for all preK-3 teachers, which began in the fall.

We also reoriented our classroom structure through flexible grouping methods. Now, all our K-3 phonics instruction occurs at the same time of the school day, building wide. For the duration of that instruction, if a teacher or support staff identifies that we have a student in 2nd grade who is deficient in a particular area and is reading at a 1st-grade level, we can temporarily send them to an earlier-grade teacher focusing on that deficient area. The same concept applies for advanced learners as well, so an accelerated student in 1st grade reading at a 3rd-grade level can be adjusted upward. Margaretta is also employing this scheduling strategy for math subject areas as well.

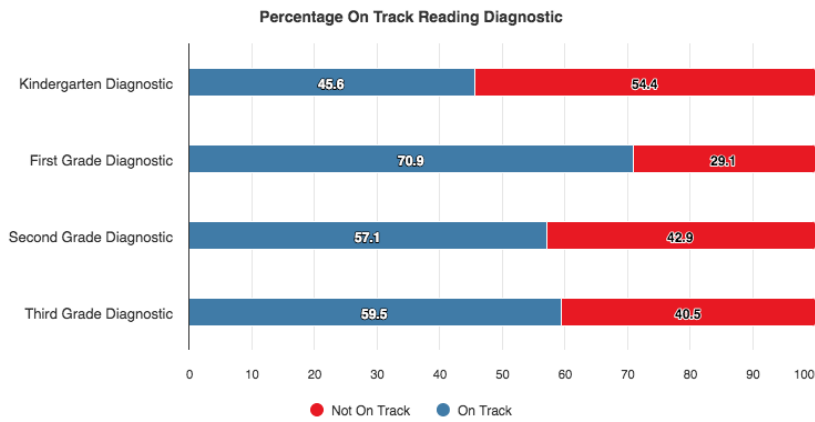
Another critical component of our recovery was a concept we call "Flooding," a method of targeted intervention where we "flood" the classroom with intervention specialists, Literacy Team staff, student teachers, and classroom aides – all in

addition to the classroom teacher – to help provide Tier 2 and Tier 3 supports to students both in and, sometimes, out of the classroom. We can organize students in groups of 4-5 and provide in-classroom, small-group instruction with multiple educators at a time. We even retrained special education aides to repurpose their skills to cover not only behavioral assistance but also reading support. Over the course of this school year, we have improved our kindergartners' reading proficiency at or above the benchmark from 43 students to 64 students out of a total 76 students, representing 84% of kindergartners at or above the benchmark. We could not have this type of growth without the staff, resources, and ongoing professional development to provide small group intervention and data to guide our instruction/intervention.

Our diagnostic data also show gains between this school year and the prior, as shown on the following page.

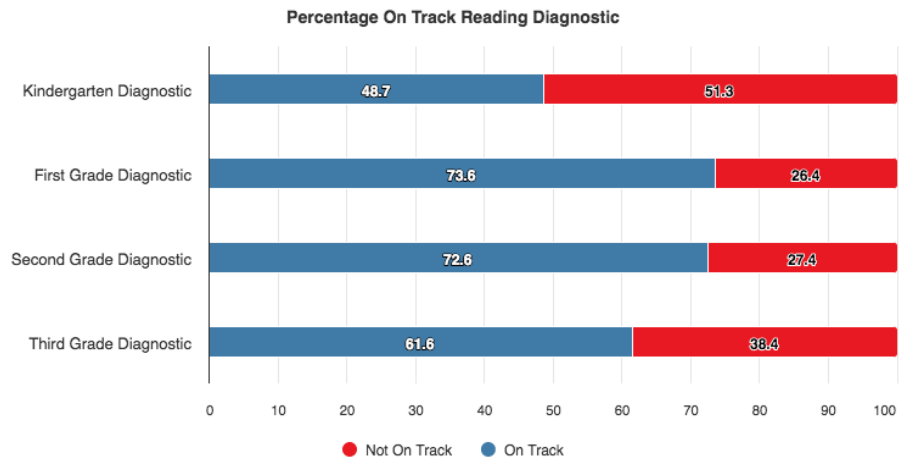
Fall 2021 Reading Diagnostics

The fall 2021 reading diagnostics in kindergarten through second grade are the baselines for kindergarten through second grade improvement on the 2023 Improving K-3 Literacy Measure.

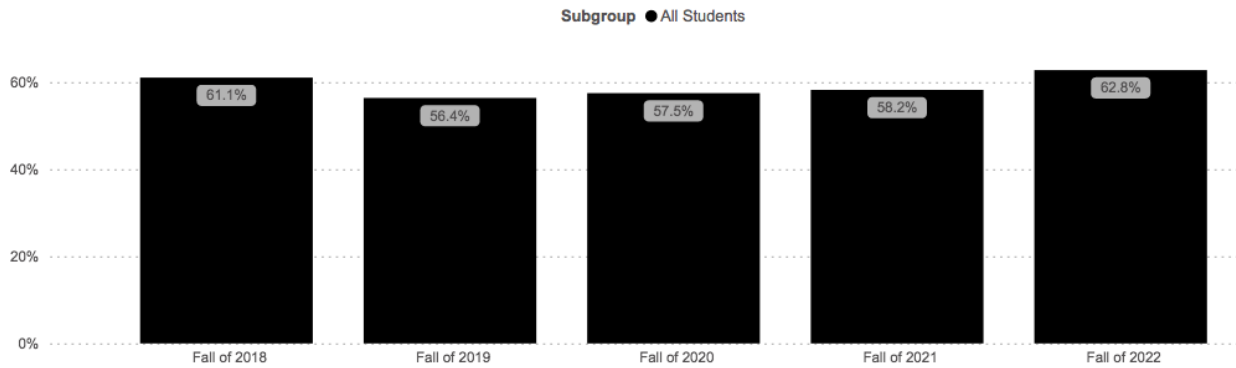


Fall 2022 Reading Diagnostics

The fall 2022 reading diagnostics in third grade are the baseline for third grade improvement on the 2023 Improving K-3 Literacy Measure. If greater than 90% of the kindergarten students in the fall of 2022 are on track, the Improving K-3 Literacy Measure is not calculated and does not contribute to the Early Literacy Component.



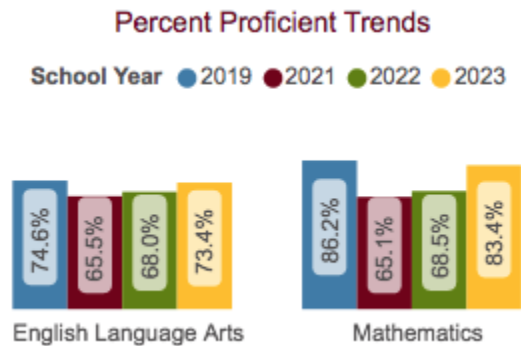
Fall Reading Diagnostic On-Track Percentages by All Students for Grades K-3



2023-24 School Year

In this current school year, we are implementing a brand-new, high-quality curriculum in grades preK-12 in English language arts and math. This was the result of a year-long curriculum study and is a foundational element of our progress. We also continued professional development training for our staff in reading and math and conducted 60 hours of Orton Gillingham training for nine faculty members. Our Literacy Team supervisor and literacy coaches observed classroom instruction and held one-on-one teacher meetings and bimonthly administrative Literacy Chats with staff. And, of course, we continued to rely on our partnerships with bimonthly, small-group work sessions with the AIM Institute for Learning and Research, the ESC of Central Ohio, University of Findlay, and also the Lorain County ESC – a new partner in our efforts – who helped us employ multi-tiered systems of support training for newly established elementary and secondary Literacy Teams.

Throughout this nearly four-year process, we believe we are seeing positive growth for students on both district diagnostic assessments and state assessments alike.



As you can tell, the efforts undertaken by the students and staff of Margaretta take time, patience, partnership, local buy-in, and, crucially, resources to make this all possible. Without our literacy grant, which is expiring soon, and the availability of the federal ESSER funding, we could not have retrained our teachers and reimaged the delivery of education to our students. The challenge for us now is to continue these efforts as those two resource pools begin to expire.

As Ohio embarks on a statewide literacy endeavor, we hope our story and the challenges our students and staff have faced and overcome can help you all craft policy to help support our students and staff improve both academically and non-academically.

Mr. Chairman and members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to tell you about our story at Margareta. I would be happy to answer any questions you have.