CASE STUDY

EDISON ELEMENTARY, TACOMA, WASHINGTON

A STORY OF REDEMPTION IN READING

In Mrs. Sherry's 5th grade class at Edison Elementary School in Tacoma, Washington, the students are high on redemption. Not the *act* of redemption but the *word* redemption which defines the need of Stanley Yelnats, the main character in the novel *Holes (*Sachar, 1999). Stanley was unjustly convicted of a crime, punished for that crime, and badly in need of redemption. What is remarkable about this lesson—one in the *Read Side By Side Reading Program* for grades 3-6, is the knowledge students bring to the discussion of the word. What is more remarkable is the rising test scores after the adoption of the program. Edison Elementary School is now bears the honor, "School of Distinction".

The students in Mrs. Sherry's class, and *all* the students in grades 3-5, are building their literacy. During the course of one school year, each student will read ten novels or nonfiction books, a key factor in the success of the R*ead Side By Side Program.* While some of the books are closely guided by the teacher, increasingly the students learn to stand on their own. Students become more confident to tackle challenging books and deal with texts that are more complex than the typical fare in reading programs. Many factors account for the growing literacy skills of the students at Edison, but before we explain their success, let's take a step back and look at the school.

| Demographic |
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| White 27.6% |
| English Learners 20.3% |
| Students with Disabilities 11.8% |
| Low Income 79.2% |

The School Demographic

Edison Elementary is a typical school in a large urban area.   Almost 79% of the students receive free and reduced lunch, meaning most students live in homes near the poverty line.   Twelve percent of the students are in some form of special education and 17% are bilingual. The students at Edison have many needs and the teachers face many obstacles. Few of the students come from rich literacy homes, where children are read to nightly and where books and readers abound.

Despite these hurdles, in 2018-19 Edison was named School of Distinction by the State of Washington for being among the top five percent of schools in their literacy growth.

Background

In 2015, the students at Edison were struggling. Less than 40% of the students in third and fourth grade were meeting the state standards in reading achievement. By 2016, after just one year with the *Read Side By Side Reading Program*, over 50%of the students were meeting state standards. Since that time, scores have continued to improve. By 2018, 74% of fourth graders and 62% of fifth graders were scoring at the proficient level o a very demanding test, the *Smarter Balanced Assessment.*
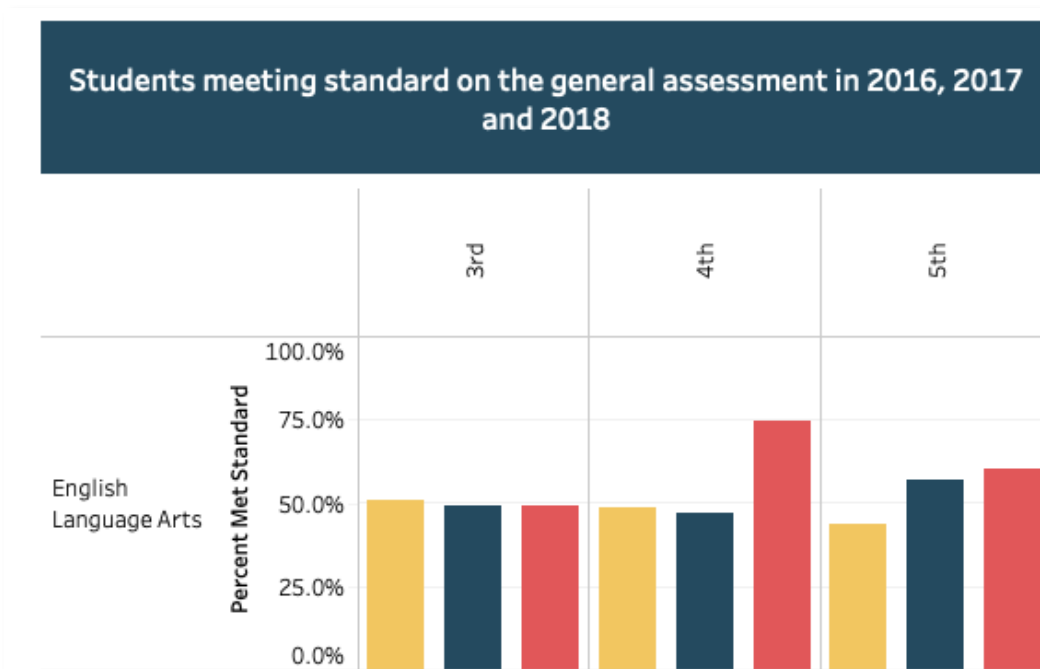
Assessment results for Edison Elementary as shown on Washington State's report card, https://www.reportcard.ospi.k12.wa.us

How Growth Was Achieved

Let's explore how Edison Elementary achieved this growth. In 2014-2015 the school was using the remnants of *Treasures (McGraw-Hill)* and several other pieces when Brittany Vaughan joined the faculty and brought the *Read Side By Side Reading Program* with her. Brittany's enthusiasm for teaching reading with authentic text and the results she achieved convinced the rest of the staff to buy into the program with her.

Several factors within the program account for the success achieved. First, students read more in this program than the previous program. Students read 10 novels in an academic year. This means that students now read 250,000 to 350,000 words per year. In a typical basal program like *Treasures,* students might encounter 90,000 words in a school year. Students at Edison now read three times as many words. Most of our vocabulary knowledge is inferred from content as we read, therefore, to increase vocabulary we have to read a lot of words. Reading more also boosts fluency, builds background knowledge, and provides the opportunity to refine and improve reading strategies.

In the *Read Side By Side Reading Program* students become more competent and motivated readers. Motivation stems from increased confidence and a deepening interest in books. Underlying the program is the Collect-Interpret-Apply Approach (C. I. A.); a process that teaches children how to read a book and attend to the text structure. Children learn to pay attention to details about the character, setting, plot and discern the theme of the book. Students tackle new books with a growing sense of confidence.

A Story From A Classroom

The story of Charlie illustrates how this approach builds competence and motivation. In third grade Charlie was defiant, avoided work, and exhibited zero self-management skills. As he entered fourth grade, he was still not much of a reader. When Charlie encountered the new curriculum he was asked to read and discuss with his class, share his opinions about books with a partner. After reading two novels, "he started to see reading differently. He started to understand how and why stories are written." This motivated him to read on his own and he now reads two to three books week.

Researcher David Share argues that reading is a self-teaching system. Instruction leads students just so far down the path. To grow, students must read a lot of books, like Charlie learned to do.

Conclusion

The teachers at Edison fully recognize that their students are a part o the video-electronics generation, and they are pleased that the new reading program turns their students back to books.

Student learned that reading was more than an assignment, but something to enjoy as one book leads the reader to the next. They learned that books can provide an escape from one world into another. For students at Edison Elementary, the program helped them become competent readers who read for many purposes. Redemption at its best.

For more information about the Read Side By Side Reading Program for 3-6, published by Read Side By Side LLC. contact info@readsidebyside.com or visit https://www.readsidebyside.com.