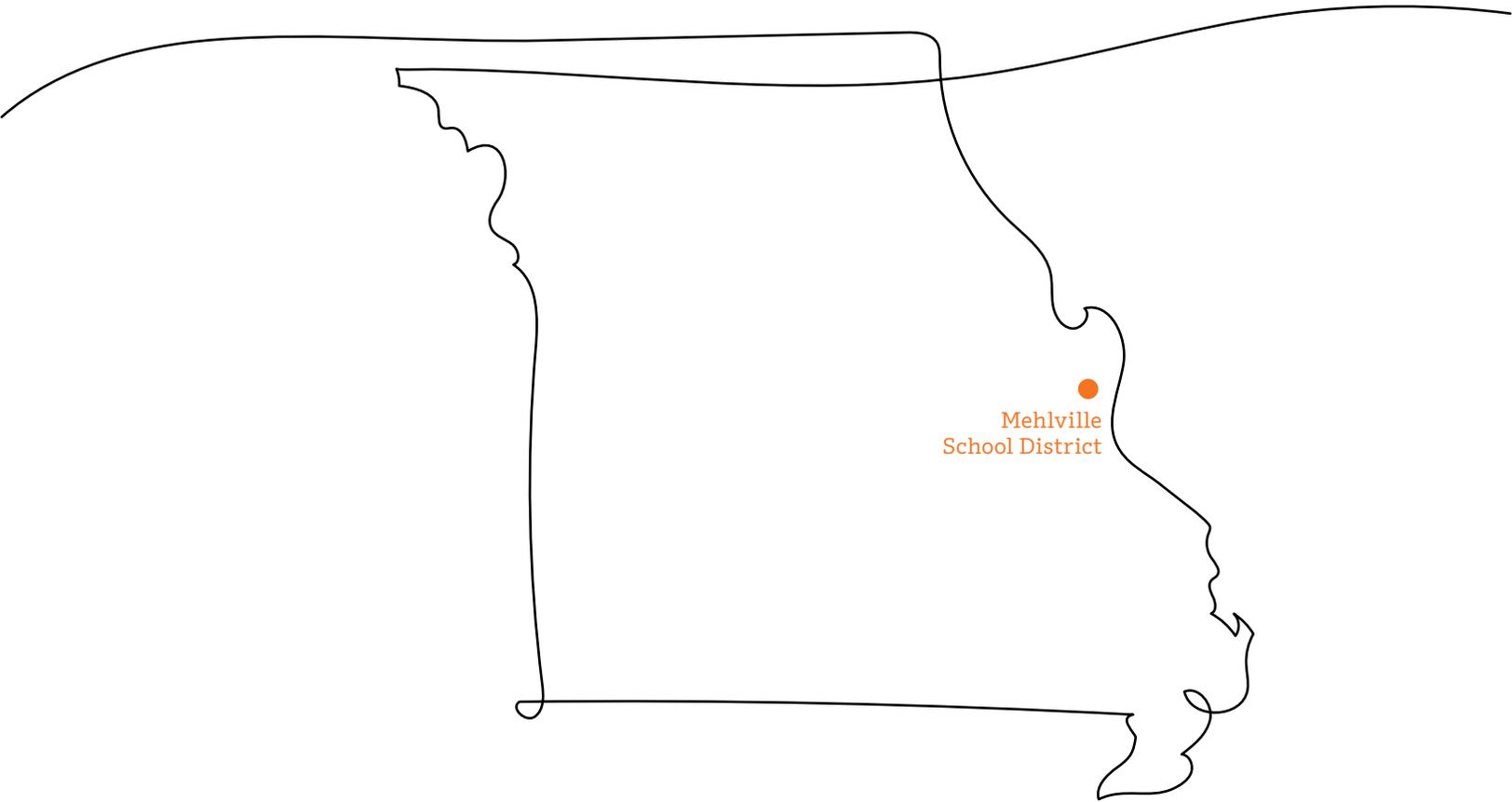


Revitalizing middle-school literacy instruction

How Mehlville School District increased proficiency in grades 6–8 after implementing Amplify ELA



Background

Located in St. Louis, Missouri, Mehlville School District serves nearly 10,100 students in preK through twelfth grade. The student population is 79.5% white, 8% Black, 4% Asian or Pacific Islander, 3.7% Hispanic/Latino, 0.2% American Indian or Alaska Native, and 0.1% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, with 4.3% of students identifying as two or more races. 22% are eligible for the federal free and reduced-price meal program.

Challenge

Amanda Zink, former director of English Language Arts for the Mehlville School District, surveyed the district's literacy landscape and found troubling gaps: an outdated balanced-literacy approach and middle school teachers struggling without a cohesive curriculum to anchor their instruction.

Recognizing the need for change, Zink drew inspiration from the Science of Reading, which had been gaining ground in education conversations since 2018. "We need to stop leveling down. We need to scaffold up," she said at the time, determined to implement a curriculum that would assure student growth and provide a high-quality education.

Solution

With that, the search for a new ELA curriculum was on. Driven by the district's commitment to research-based instruction, Zink and her team led a collaborative two-year review that included options for both elementary and middle schools. They grounded their decisions in rigorous research, diving into the Science of Reading and insights from Natalie Wexler's *The Knowledge Gap*. "Before we piloted any program," says Zink, "I wanted everyone to understand what we should be looking for."

19
schools

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During the 2023–24 school year, the district piloted Amplify across both elementary and middle schools. Afterward, both levels independently chose to adopt it for the 2024–25 school year.

When describing the two decisions, Zink says, “Why would we pick anything besides this program that has been shown to actually work?”

Seventh-grade teacher Samantha Klaverkamp pointed to the program’s content. “It was the Edgar Allan Poe Quest that really got me,” she says. “It got the students up and interrogating one another. They were hilarious.”

The 100-Lesson Pathway helped make the shift smoother, allowing room in Amplify’s core curriculum for beloved novels like *The Outsiders* and other adaptations to student needs and preferences. This flexible approach allowed teachers to tailor experiences to their classroom. “It gave me more time to do the things I wanted to do and what students wanted,” says Klaverkamp.

Professional development also played a crucial role. Teachers valued having consistent support for Amplify CKLA and Amplify ELA across elementary and middle schools. Says Zink, “The Amplify coaches are able to answer really specific questions to help our teachers use the program successfully.”



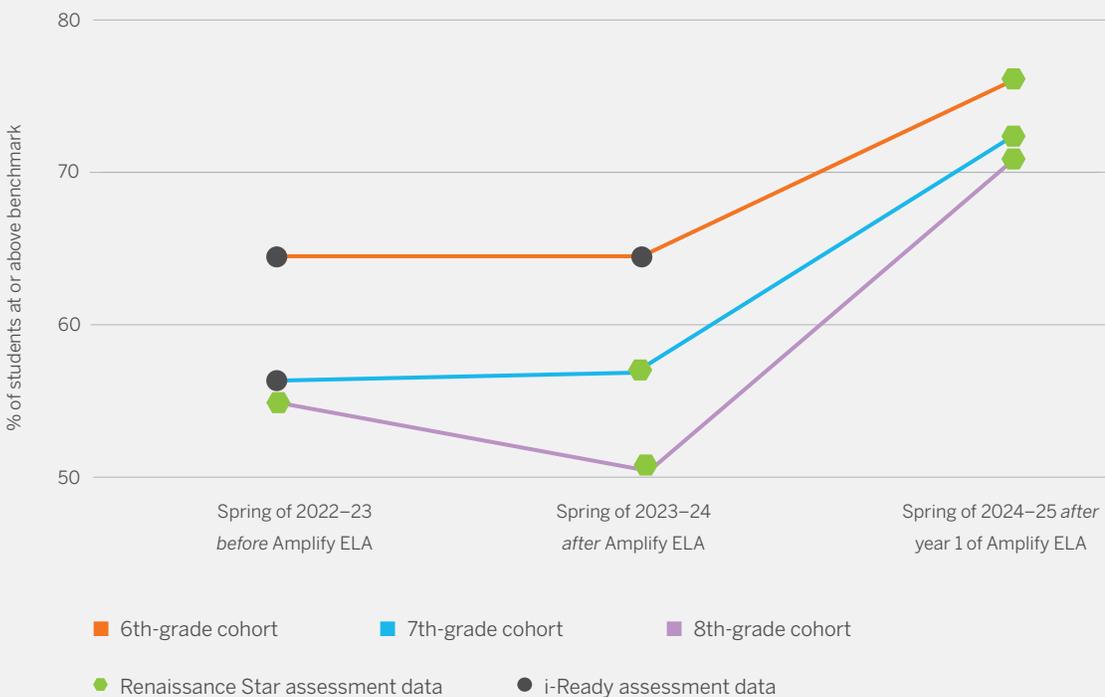
What is the Amplify ELA 100-Lesson Pathway?

The Amplify ELA 100-Lesson Pathway is a curated set of 100 ELA lessons for each grade level. Each set ensures that standards are covered; yet gives teachers flexibility to add their favorite content and provide targeted interventions, or deliver targeted support based on students’ specific needs. The 100-Lesson Pathway is a core feature of Amplify ELA for grades 6–8 and is available for all districts.

Impact

The shift to Amplify produced strong results across the district. After a pilot year, middle school proficiency rates rose sharply in 2024–25, with all three cohorts showing double-digit gains on benchmark assessments.

Mehlville School District: Middle school ELA proficiency



In Carla Coats’ seventh-grade class, where most students had IEPs, many began the year reading at a fourth-grade level and finished at sixth or seventh. “We saw significant growth, and we couldn’t have done that without Amplify,” Coats said.

Amplify’s focus on rigorous, text-based inquiry revitalized classrooms, sparking deeper discussions on, for example, the science fiction classic *Frankenstein* and the investigative unit on the history and causes of the yellow fever. Zink says she saw middle school conversations rise to the level of high school.

The digital platform also played a role, offering differentiated support that helped teachers address diverse student needs effectively and efficiently. “Having the digital differentiation saved me so much time,” says Klaverkamp. She also saw students change in unexpected ways: “By the end of the year, they were much better at communicating with other people in the class, not just their friends.”

Conclusion

Mehlville School District remains dedicated to the 100-Lesson Pathway, confident that the skills built through Amplify CKLA will continue to flow into reading comprehension and critical thinking with Amplify ELA. Zink says she is confident that the team’s work will have a lasting impact for both teachers and students.



For more information on Amplify ELA,
visit: amplify.com/ela.

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