

LINFORD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, LARAMIE, WYOMING

Rural School Posts Major Gains in English Language Arts with *Wit & Wisdom*®

Angela Patzer remembers the day she realized that Linford Elementary School’s new English language arts curriculum, *Wit & Wisdom*®, was having a strong and positive impact on teaching and learning in her Grade 3 classroom. It was fall 2017, and students were discussing the book *One Giant Leap* by Robert Burleigh. Patzer sat back and listened; she was amazed: The conversation was so deep, and so many students were participating.

“I had been a third-grade teacher for 11 years, and I had never experienced that kind of discussion with third graders without teacher guidance,” she says.

Since adopting *Wit & Wisdom* in Grades K through 5 that fall, Linford Elementary has seen strong results. For example, this year the percentage of Grade 3 students scoring proficient or above on the state assessment jumped nearly 14 points from spring 2018. In fact, all the tested grades posted gains.

SCHOOL PROFILE

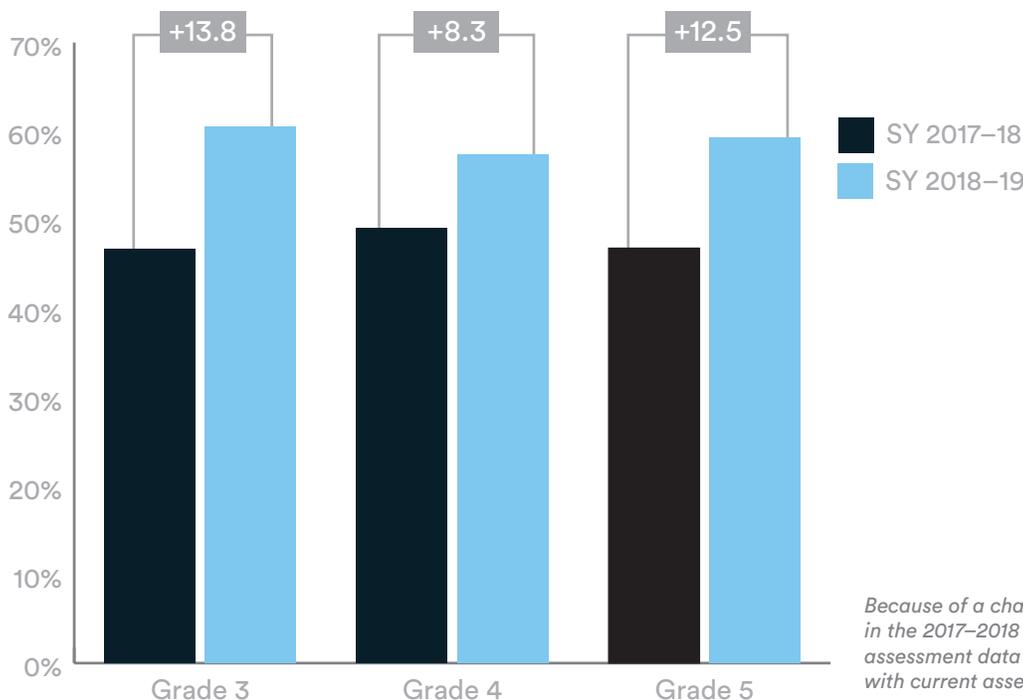
Grades PK–5

300 students

42 percent from low-income families

Adopted *Wit & Wisdom* in School Year 2017–2018.

Percentage of students scoring proficient or advanced on the WY-TOPP ELA assessment



Because of a change in assessments in the 2017–2018 school year, prior assessment data cannot be compared with current assessment data.

Patzer says one aspect of *Wit & Wisdom* that is particularly helpful to her students is the curriculum's approach to teaching a single overall topic—whether it's space, oceans, or Greek mythology—over several weeks through a host of high-quality texts. Students build knowledge on the particular topic while improving their reading and writing. For example, she says, her students loved the module on space, in which they read some general background; an excerpt from John F. Kennedy's speech "We Choose to Go to the Moon;" *Moonshot: The Flight of Apollo 11* by Brian Floca; and more.

"Building their knowledge around a specific topic is really helpful, especially for students who are still building their grade-level reading and writing skills," Patzer says. "When we build their vocabulary and a deep understanding of a particular subject, students can access rigorous texts about that topic much more easily."

INTEGRATING READING AND WRITING

Patzer also likes that *Wit & Wisdom* integrates writing, with prompts for students to write about the texts they read.

"The writing isn't separated from the reading. It's all connected and tied together. That has been amazing," she says. "It's kind of a teacher's dream. The writing is seamlessly embedded into the program. In the past, we spent so many lessons figuring out what to write about."

Linford Principal David Hardesty says teachers schoolwide tell him that the integrated writing is what they appreciate most about *Wit & Wisdom*.

"I have had many teachers come and tell me that's what they were hoping to have in a program," he says. "They've had to work hard in the past to supplement programs with additional materials. Here, we have everything in one program."

That's not to say implementing the curriculum has been a breeze. Patzer says the first year was difficult because many of the strategies in *Wit & Wisdom* were new to teachers or were emphasized more than in other curricular resources. Examples of such strategies include the Painted Essay®, a format for essay writing that calls for specific components to be included in each paragraph; Socratic seminars for class discussions; embedded discussions about fine art; and content-framing questions, such as asking students what they notice and wonder about texts.

"That first year with the curriculum, we felt kind of like first-year teachers again," Patzer says.

DIVERSE TEXTS WELCOMED

Hardesty praises the diversity of experiences represented in *Wit & Wisdom* texts.

"I definitely think the texts represent diverse cultural experiences," he says. "It's one of the things I appreciate about the program. Our students see themselves reflected in it."

Hardesty also likes that a study of fine art is woven into each module. "We have used art as a way of encouraging cross-curricular collaboration. Our art teacher is doing work with our grade-level teams, which is good for ELA and arts instruction," he says.

Hardesty says parents, too, are happy with *Wit & Wisdom*. "Parents are impressed with the level of conversation they're hearing among the students. It's not uncommon for parents to say to me, 'I can't believe that's what they're doing. It seems like middle school.'"

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— Angela Patzer,
Grade 3 teacher

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For other schools thinking about adopting *Wit & Wisdom*, Hardesty echoes Patzer's advice: Recognize that the first year will probably be a little difficult.

"The biggest takeaway for me, reflecting on the past two and a half years, is that the program is a lot to take on in that first year. It was a shift in our approach to ELA instruction," he says. "But stay with it. Continue to implement the program as best as you can and support the program in everything it allows for and encourages students to achieve."

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