



## CASE STUDY



**Dana Talley**  
Chief Academic Officer  
Lincoln Parish Schools  
*Ruston, Louisiana*

# A Quality Education for a Quality Life: Improving Reading Skills in K-2 Students

## The Reading Roadblock

*A Quality Education For A Quality Life.*

This is the motto of **Lincoln Parish Schools** in Ruston, Louisiana.

Certainly, “a quality life” means different things to different people. But for Lincoln Parish, there is no doubt that whatever one’s definition of “a quality life” may be, it starts with giving every student the best opportunities for success.

So when a school in Lincoln Parish had a higher number of K-2 students performing below grade-level reading proficiency than some of the others in the district, **Dana Talley, Chief Academic Officer** at Lincoln Parish, was eager for a program that provides effective literacy interventions for young readers.

Ms. Talley was adamant about three needs:

1. **Data-Driven Coherence:** Any vendor supporting the instructional needs of Lincoln Parish must align with the district’s assessment tools and curriculum.
2. **State Policy Alignment:** Louisiana’s Department of Education has supported high-dosage tutoring efforts for years. Louisiana Senate Bill 177 requires schools to provide tutoring services to students scoring below mastery in Mathematics and English Language Arts.
3. **Partnership Approach:** In education, relationships matter. Vendors have to be able to collaborate deeply and at every level to get everyone to buy in and to be effective.

## Louisiana’s High-Dosage Tutoring Program

Post-COVID-19 pandemic, Louisiana looked to high-dosage tutoring to support struggling readers in early grades. In 2021, the state implemented the Louisiana Tutoring Initiative created by the Louisiana Department of Education (DOE).

## Snapshot

With reading proficiency gaps in some K-2 students at **Lincoln Parish Schools in Ruston, Louisiana**, Chief Academic Officer **Dana Talley** sought support from virtual high-dosage tutoring provider OnYourMark to close reading gaps for primary grades.

**After 10 weeks, the 80 students receiving support grew +4.2% on their overall composite reading scores.** Kindergartners showed the highest gains, moving from the **13th to 24th percentiles.**



Named the Steve Carter Literacy Tutoring Program after the late Rep. Steve Carter, a Louisiana House member who championed literacy, the program provides eligible K-5 public school students additional academic support via high-dosage tutoring. Families apply for digital vouchers worth \$1,000. The voucher is intended to be used to schedule online and in-person literacy tutoring with state-approved tutors.

But the program has proven less than effective. As of February 2024, enrollment in the Steve Carter Literacy Tutoring Program was disappointing at best. Notes Patrick Wall, staff writer for NOLA.com, “The state has struggled to recruit tutors and enroll students, and the bulk of the money budgeted for the program has been reallocated, officials said. This school year, just under 1,400 students are receiving private tutoring—less than 1% of those eligible for help.”

Relying on families to have the means, time, or simply the bandwidth to support their struggling learners just isn’t working. So instead, Louisiana schools are **using ESSER III (Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief) funds to provide high-dosage tutoring during the school day, a proven method of supporting learning loss**.

## Turning the Page

### The Effectiveness of High-Dosage Tutoring

*Kindergartners assigned to tutoring **gained an additional 13.4%** of the control group’s average gains in letter sound mastery from beginning to end of year, or what translates to an **additional about 24 days of school** based upon the CMO’s 178-day school year. First graders assigned to 1:1 tutoring gained an **additional 28.4%** of the BAU control group’s average gains in decoding from beginning to end of year, or an **additional about 51 days of school** (Robinson et al., 2024).*

A recent study by the University of Chicago Education Lab and the nonprofit organization Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC) shows that in-person high-dosage tutoring can lead to large gains in student learning in math. The study looked at Chicago Public Schools (IL) and Fulton County Schools (GA) during the 2022-2023 school year. It found that all of the roughly 2,000 students who participated in district-wide high-dosage tutoring during the school day saw meaningful gains in their math scores.

A similar randomized control trial study by the National Student Support Accelerator (NSSA) at Stanford University conducted during the same

school year focused on virtual high-dosage literacy tutoring supported by the nonprofit organization OnYourMark Education.

There, researchers found that “First graders in 1-1 sessions saw the most improvement, with tutored students performing about 6 percentile points higher on average than students who had not received tutoring.”

### OnYourMark Education’s Tutoring Model

More than high-dosage tutoring, OnYourMark Education uses *precision-dosage* tutoring.

OnYourMark focuses on K-2 students scoring below or well below the benchmark, meeting Ms. Talley’s requirement that any services provided on behalf of the district comply with state policy.

OnYourMark’s research-based instruction is rooted in the **Science of Reading** and **customized using data from the DIBELS assessment** to personalize a curriculum that **targets students’ precise needs**. They use **Amplify’s mCLASS Intervention** when working with schools to create individualized tutoring programs. This met Ms. Talley’s coherence requirement, as DIBELS is the literacy assessment for primary grades used by Lincoln Parish and the Louisiana DOE.

Students receive tutoring four days per week in 20-minute sessions during 20 weeks of the school year. To optimize attendance, these sessions take place during the school day.

The tutoring team consists of college students, retired teachers, and other professional tutors who all receive 20 hours of training before they begin tutoring and at least two hours of tutor training weekly. Of those two hours, 90 minutes are spent in professional development; the remaining 30 minutes are set aside for individualized tutor coaching.

For Dana Talley, the amount of professional development was a significant factor in deciding to partner with OnYourMark.

**“The amount of professional development and the time that they put into their tutors is something that matters to me. A lot of folks will get tutors who are coming in and doing things that aren’t necessarily best practice now, and are certainly not aligned with our curriculum and how we’re teaching. The 90 minutes of professional development and the 30 minutes of coaching a week really stood out.”**

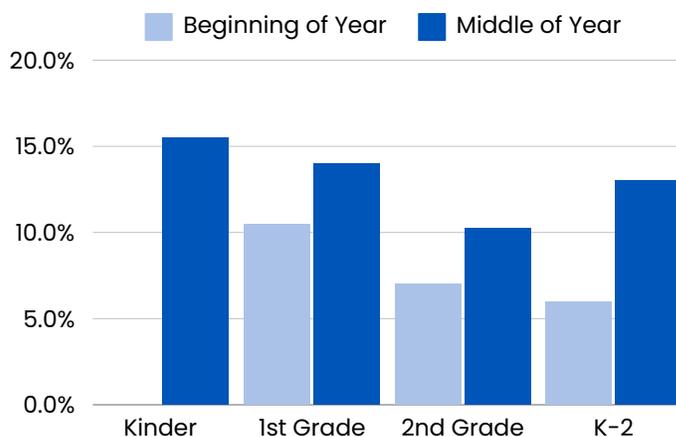
After a successful pilot program with OnYourMark in the Fall of 2023, Ms. Talley pulled together the funding to bring the program to four additional elementary schools in Lincoln Parish.

## Beyond Books: Effective Literacy Instruction for K-2

### Measurable Results from OnYourMark

Already, the learning gains for K-2 students are extremely promising. During the pilot, OnYourMark Education served 80 Lincoln Parish students in grades K-2. The **attendance rate for OnYourMark sessions was 95%** for Fall 2023. And, as of the end of that semester, data demonstrates that

- **All three tutored grade levels (K-2) made gap-closing rates of growth**
- As a collective tutoring group, they **grew +4.2% on overall composite literacy scores**
- Kindergarten students grew the most with **+10.6% overall** composite, moving from the **13th percentile to the 24th**



### Measuring the Immeasurable

Student data proves that **OnYourMark’s use of effective literacy strategies for early grades is working for Lincoln Parish students.** And while the numbers matter to Ms. Talley (she is, after all, a former high school math teacher), there’s more than just numbers to support an ongoing partnership between Lincoln Parish and OnYourMark.

Improved academic confidence creates students who are less risk-averse when it comes to their learning. Students know what they can accomplish, they know that they can acquire any additional skills required to achieve new goals, and they are better able to advocate for themselves and their learning.

*"It's important that teachers notice when **these kids are getting these interventions they're better able to engage, they have more confidence, they're answering questions... They're excited about the content.**"*

*Those are some of the things that we've seen teachers say about the kids who are supported by OnYourMark."*

## Relationships Matter

Every educator has heard the saying *Nobody cares how much you know until they know how much you care*, or the slightly different version *People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care*.

Often attributed to Theodore Roosevelt, the saying is used to emphasize the importance of relationships. In education, it's used to remind teachers that the key to good classroom management and student engagement is a positive student-teacher relationship.

But just because the line is often directed at teachers doesn't mean that it isn't universal within the education system.

It's this expectation at the heart of OnYourMark partnerships. In fact, every tutoring session begins with a relationship-building activity supplied by OnYourMark. "It's not just that I get people who are good at building relationships," says Ms. Talley, "it's that you get people that know **the expectation is that you're going to build relationships, and we're going to give you activities to help do that.**"

And that's really important. You want to hire the right person, but then you don't just turn them loose and hope it goes well. **OnYourMark is very strategic about those activities to build those relationships.** And it was so quick too! **I was just amazed at how quickly the kids really connected to the tutors,"** she adds.

Knowing that the kids love their time with their OnYourMark tutor is important for teachers, too. "Teachers are not going to be happy sending kids to something that they hate or something that they're complaining about. Instead, the kids are like, 'Oh, it's time to go OnYourMark?' and then they're ready to go," says Ms. Talley.

But what about those who are skeptical about making connections virtually? Ms. Talley's advice: Just try it and see.

## Conclusion

OnYourMark Education's research-backed curriculum and tutoring model are powerful resources for Lincoln Parish Schools as its staff works to close literacy achievement gaps exacerbated by pandemic learning loss. Because OnYourMark's methodology aligns with tutoring requirements mandated in SB 177 and literacy instruction best practices via the Science of Reading, Ms. Talley knows she is doing what's best for her students and staff. And because OnYourMark Education puts relationships first, she knows that OnYourMark is doing what's best for her students and staff, too.

Ms. Talley shared, "I think **with teacher attitudes, student attitudes, the administrators and the coaches, and just how folks are feeling, but also how our data is looking... it's a testament to the support we're getting from this high-dosage tutoring we're getting with OnYourMark.**"

To speak with a member of the OnYourMark Education team about how it can support your literacy program, email [partners@onyourmarkeducation.org](mailto:partners@onyourmarkeducation.org) or [click here](#) to schedule a time that best meets your needs.

*"When people say, 'Well, it's virtual, you can't really do that.'*

*I would challenge them. I'd say 'Try it! Do a pilot and see if you still believe that afterward.'*

*You might think that it's harder to connect virtually, **but for OnYourMark, it's not.***

***They're just so mindful of the engagement and the relationships with students."***

