Advancing School Success Through Leadership Support: Palm Valley Elementary School and Litchfield Elementary School District #79

Litchfield Park, Arizona

2007-2017

(Source: KPHO/KTVK)

WIN School & District Profile

FOCUS: LEADERSHIP

PROGRAM: FUNDATIONS®

GRADE LEVELS: K-3

In this profile, we focus on the critical role of the school and district leadership in providing the necessary supports for successful implementation of Fundations at Palm Valley Elementary School (AZ).

WIN
IMPLEMENTATION SCIENCE IN ACTION
WILSON® IMPLEMENTATION NETWORK

ADVANCING SCHOOL SUCCESS THROUGH LEADERSHIP SUPPORT: PALM VALLEY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL AND LITCHFIELD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICT #79

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We also wish to recognize and express our appreciation to the following individuals who co-authored this report:

Michelle A. Duda, Ph.D., BCBA-D of Implementation Scientists, LLC, who shared her tremendous knowledge in the field of implementation science by authoring the sections of this report describing implementation science and its application in Palm Valley Elementary School.

Linda Wernikoff, Wilson Language Training, whose comprehensive understanding of school systems and implementation of WLT's programs informed her writing about the Wilson® Implementation Network and the application of implementation science in Palm Valley Elementary School.

Anne Treadwell, Wilson Language Training, who served as the Literacy Advisor to Palm Valley Elementary School and Litchfield Elementary School District and was instrumental in facilitating the development of this profile.

Preface

In *Make "It" Happen: Using Implementation Science with Wilson Programs* (Duda, Penfold, Wernikoff, & Wilson, 2014), we share our experience and understanding of how the application of implementation science principles can lead to more predicable positive outcomes for students within the complex world of schools and districts. It explains how attending to the "Formula for Success" and its components, the "Active Implementation Frameworks," makes it possible for schools and districts introducing a new program or set of practices to more successfully meet students' needs.

To give life to these principles and components, we have developed a series of school and district profiles on our Wilson Implementation Network (WIN) members. These profiles are written for school and district administrators and staff who are interested in learning about the construction of an implementation plan with strategic professional learning activities and systematic scale up of Wilson programs to more reliably achieve their stated goals and objectives.

The Wilson® Implementation Network (WIN) encompasses selected schools and districts that are implementing one or more of the Wilson programs: Fundations®, Just Words®, or the Wilson Reading System®. These schools and districts were invited to participate in the WIN after demonstrating a dedication to improving literacy outcomes, commitment to creating systems to develop a culture of learning for students and adults alike, and passion for sharing lessons learned along the way.

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About Palm Valley Elementary School

Mission: *"Palm Valley is an extraordinary school where all students are provided with dynamic opportunities to excel in academics, character, attitude, principles, and excellence."*

Palm Valley Elementary School (PVE) rests within the Litchfield Elementary School District (LESD) in Arizona. LESD comprises 10 elementary schools, 4 middle schools, and 1 alternative school/learning center. Since the 2011-2012 school year, Palm Valley Elementary and the Litchfield Elementary School District have been rated an "A" grade by the Arizona Department of Education, demonstrating "an excellent level of performance" (Arizona Department of Education, 2017b).

Palm Valley Elementary School's commitment to implementing Fundations® with fidelity required new policies and procedures, systems changes, and supports. Although these changes created challenges at first, school leadership's steadfast support inspired a mutual commitment among teaching staff, ultimately allowing the school to advance its student achievement goals.

> *"A district leader's job is to support schools for success. The campuses are doing the hard work, it is our role to support them. For successful implementation, a leader needs to make sure they have the right players on their team. You need to think of the outcome and then plan for who is able to partner with you for success. [We] now develop clear implementation plans for implementing new programs based on their experience with implementing Wilson® programs."*
>
> Tamara Honvlez, Director of Curriculum/Professional Development

Litchfield Elementary School District's commitment, under the leadership of Tamara Honvlez, Director of Curriculum/Professional Development, to providing the financial and organizational support necessary for Palm Valley Elementary and other schools in the district to successfully implement Fundations cannot be understated. In particular, its role in building district capacity to support staff by offering certification opportunities to specialists and classroom teachers has played a critical role in launching and sustaining the successful use of Fundations.

This shared level of commitment and support illustrates a noteworthy model of success and sustainability: ***A school and district together form the ultimate partnership***.

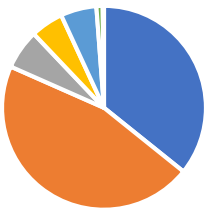
About Palm Valley Elementary School (2016-2017)

School Size

- Serves 848 students
- Grades: Pre-K to 5th grade
- 3 self-contained cross-categorical special education classrooms
- Average class size: 26 students

Student Diversity

- Hispanic (35.8%)
- White (45.9%)
- African American (6.3%)
- Asian (5.2%)
- Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic (5.7%)
- American Indian/Alaskan (1.0%)
- Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (0.2%)



Students

- 3% English language learners
- 3% Students with disabilities in general education classrooms
- 32% Qualify for free or reduced-price lunch

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Overview of Activities

A school or district that strives to reach its intended outcomes must: (1) select interventions known to be effective (red box); (2) utilize effective implementation methods to deliver the intervention as intended (orange box); and (3) leverage an enabling context to support the implementation and sustainability of the intervention (grey box). Guided by Wilson® and supported closely by the district, Palm Valley Elementary School followed these tenets from implementation science research to make progress toward their goal of improved student literacy achievement.

Effective Interventions	Effective Implementation Methods	Enabling Context	Outcomes
To fit its Response to Intervention (RTI) framework, PVE adopted Fundations® as its evidence-based Tier 1 and 2 foundational skills program for grades K-3. **Fundations met the instructional needs of PVE students, met the school's need for a common language across teachers, and was closely aligned with the Wilson Reading System® (WRS), which PVE had begun using with noticeable success for Tier 3.** **PVE was prompted to adopt Fundations based on the district's encouragement, leadership, and support.**	**When: Implementation Stages** The district's exploration into a new Tier 3 program led to the recommendation that a new foundational skills program for general education classrooms also be adopted. The gradual rollout of Fundations® across PVE began with Levels K and 1 in the first year, followed by Level 2 in the second year, then Level 3, and finally Tier 2 interventions, with WRS for Tier 3. **Who: Implementation Teams** The school-based implementation team was instituted in the third year of Fundations use after recognizing that better implementation fidelity was needed. This team was the school's leadership team that assumed additional responsibilities for overseeing the implementation of Fundations and additional Wilson® programs in use. It included the Principal, Instructional Coach, Reading Specialist, and a Wilson® Literacy Advisor. **How: Implementation Drivers and Improvement Cycles** The leadership implementation driver was a noteworthy aspect of the PVE implementation. Strong leadership worked with the district to ensure that all of the implementation drivers were tended to or in place. Then, as the installation of Fundations began, regular evaluation of both the implementation process and WRS and Fundations use in the classroom informed the continuous improvement processes, allowing them to quickly learn from missteps and correct errors before they became too ingrained. ***In this profile, read about the leadership drivers and how they supported the drivers of staff competence and organizational supports.***	The district had observed inconsistent achievement among students over several years and partnered with the school community to make literacy a core focus. With different literacy programs in use across schools, the district was challenged to support each school and to determine why certain students were making progress when others were not. In order to better support schools, understand whether the programs themselves were supporting student achievement, collect meaningful student data, and gain greater consistency of student achievement across schools, the district eventually mandated the implementation of WRS and Fundations districtwide while also providing the necessary organizational and financial supports.	In 2007, PVE selected Fundations, which had just been recommended by the district as an optional program. Since that time, gains in student achievement have been rewarded by the state. PVE and Litchfield Elementary School District have received "A" ratings by the Arizona Department of Education over several years. The district is also rated in the top ten of public districts in the state. Performance on the state assessment illustrates their achievement over the state average. Read more in the Outcomes section.

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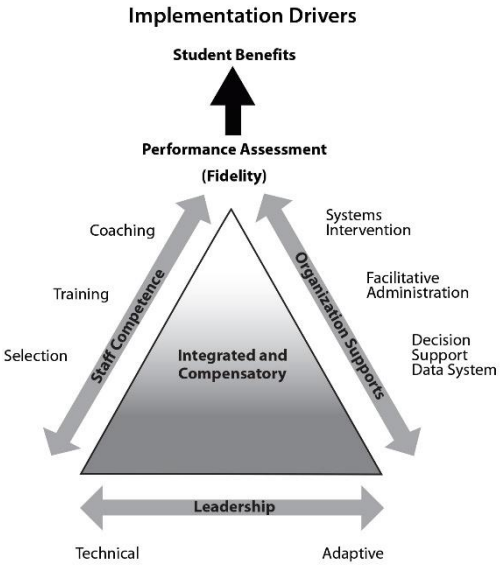
Focus on Effective Implementation Methods

The "How": Implementation Drivers

Implementation Drivers are critical to the successful rollout of a new program and its sustainability over time. In the case of Palm Valley Elementary's launch of Fundations®, the **leadership drivers** were a particular strength.

At the base of the Implementation Drivers triangle, leadership is critical to shaping the competency of staff and organizational supports in order to positively impact student achievement. This includes both technical leadership, to address straightforward problems with straightforward solutions, such as changing a school schedule, and adaptive leadership, to address problems or solutions that may be unclear or provide a nuanced response when the solution demands it, such as figuring out why students are struggling and determining a solution.



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District Leadership Drivers

Palm Valley's success was closely tied to support from the district's leaders. In fact, it was the district that first advocated for a change in programs to address students' needs, and piloted and selected the Wilson Reading System® (WRS) and Fundations programs to address those needs. Pleased by student gains in schools using WRS and Fundations, the district later adopted these two programs districtwide.

They established the expectation that the schools would implement these programs with high fidelity, required implementation plans from each school describing how it would train and coach teachers to implement Fundations with fidelity, and provided the necessary financial and organizational resources and support to each school to ensure that teachers and administrators there could make this happen.

In particular, the district built in-district capacity to support Fundations by offering certification opportunities to specialists and classroom teachers. They invited a Wilson® Literacy Advisor to work with reading specialists and instructional coaches across the district to foster consistency of best practices in foundational skills instruction districtwide. The Literacy Advisor's coaching helped develop the district's capacity to coach school-based instructional staff. This allowed the district to support staff capacity to use Fundations successfully.

The district also selected a common data system (Inform) to allow staff to share student data across schools in the district as students change schools. It also established a common language across the district.

School Leadership Drivers

Strong leadership actions at the school level also had a direct impact on the ability of staff to implement Fundations as well as the organizational factors that further promoted successful implementation. The following table highlights the key technical and adaptive leadership actions at the school level.

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School Leadership Actions

- Attended Fundations® training to demonstrate commitment and support. (Technical leadership)
- Allocated the necessary resources to provide adequate training to staff. (Technical leadership)
- Improved communication of "why Wilson® programs," including meetings with staff and other stakeholders to understand concerns, provide the research behind their decision to use Fundations, and communicate their rationale for why the change was implemented. (Adaptive leadership)
- Set the expectation for staff to participate in training and implement the program with fidelity. (Adaptive leadership)
- Established a Wilson Implementation Team to increase fidelity of program implementation. (Adaptive leadership)
- Committed to hiring staff with strong background in reading and systematic phonics instruction. (Adaptive leadership)
- Utilized a "slow and steady" approach, providing teachers an opportunity to learn Fundations with support from the instructional coach, reading specialist, and/or resource teacher. (Technical leadership)
- Was mindful of not putting too much on teachers' plates in the initial implementation stage. Assistance with lesson-plan development was a key strategy. (Adaptive leadership)
- Ensured that the reading specialist and instructional coach were free from evaluative responsibilities, keeping the focus on teacher support to build knowledge and use of best practices. (Adaptive leadership)

Influence on Staff Competence

- Reduced staff resistance to using the new program.
- Filled vacant positions with those who had strong backgrounds in reading. The new instructional coach and reading specialist had strong backgrounds in systematic phonics instruction, Fundations, and Wilson Reading System® (WRS).
- Required all K-3 staff to attend the introductory Fundations workshops conducted by Wilson Literacy Specialists. Further supported teachers through coaching provided by a Wilson Literacy Specialist and the school-based instructional coach.
- Generated school's own capacity to prepare teachers in using Fundations by training the Title I Coordinator, who achieved WRS Level I Certification and went on to become a Fundations Facilitator and Presenter.
- Provided ongoing coaching and fidelity checks through the reading specialist with help from the instructional coach. They supported teachers through co-teaching, lesson modeling and planning, and teaching classes so teachers could observe peers teaching Fundations lessons.
- Fidelity of implementation is consistently and regularly measured using the Wilson Fundations fidelity checklist and coaching checklists.
- Offered extended coaching time with teachers new to Fundations. The instructional coach spent the first 4-6 weeks in those teachers' classrooms implementing the program and allowing the teachers to observe instruction. Over time, the instructional coach would pull back and support the teachers through a more independent implementation.
- Fostered a common goal, using a common language that teachers began to use.

Influence on Organizational Supports

- Leadership became aware of staff concerns about a new program and was able to respond through better communication on reasons for change, training, and organizational supports.
- During the initial stages of implementation, data-based decision-making relied primarily on DIBELS data (benchmarks and progress monitoring) and Fundations probes. Over time, the team began using other diagnostic tools and multiple data sets. Now, three times a year, DIBELS is administered to K-3 students, and district benchmarks (ASAC) are administered to K-8 students.
- Data is collected via the Inform data system, allowing teachers and coaches ready access to student performance. Because performance data is cumulative, staff are able to observe changes over time.
- Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) were established and became the venue for discussing student data, concentrating on students not making progress, and discussing ways to assist the student.
- While the PLC schedule evolved over time to become more effective, the team now meets every other week to review data. Led by the instructional coach and school administrator, it includes teachers, reading specialist, resource teacher, and school psychologist.
- Use of the Fundations Pacing Chart keeps teachers on track.
- The Fundations Home Support Pack is shared with parents, and Fundations is reviewed with parents at curriculum night.

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The "How": Improvement Cycles

PVE's Wilson Implementation Team regularly evaluated the use of Fundations® in the classroom as well as the implementation process overall. They participated in the district's self-reflection and planning process by using the *District Capacity Assessment for Scaling up of Evidence-based Practices* (DCA) tool to identify the organization's current status in 10 categories. Results identified places in the system that needed attention in order for implementation of Fundations to occur successfully and sustain over time, and provided the framework for setting goals. PVE utilized the Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) improvement cycle to plan for actions that would address their goals, implement those actions, collect information to learn how these were working, and act upon the information to improve upon the current conditions and institutionalize successful practices and policies. In this process, they learned many key lessons to inform their future work.

> *"With district support, our schools have been able to successfully maintain the fidelity of Fundations® and Wilson® instruction. Our knowledge base of effective reading instruction is growing each year..."*
>
> Lisa Bergus, Reading Specialist

Lessons Learned

Clear and proactive communication explaining why a new program was being implemented was critical to reducing resistance from stakeholders.

Principal's support of the teachers, through responsiveness to their concerns, recruiting and hiring the "right" staff, and offering the needed instructional support, alleviated resistance and improved the implementation.

Implementation team played a critical role in promoting and reinforcing the expectation of fidelity of program implementation.

District's financial and institutional support provided the necessary materials, professional learning, and other resources needed for high-quality implementation.

Moving "slow and steady," not putting too much too quickly on teachers' plates during the initial implementation, was important to the smooth rollout.

Initial professional learning for teachers using the new program, and greater training of coaches prior to supporting teachers, led to a smoother initial rollout of Fundations.

School-based coaching and co-teaching from the reading specialist and the instructional coach were most effective for supporting teachers. Offering teachers the opportunity to observe "best-practice" model classrooms was also important.

Keeping the reading specialist and instructional coach free from any evaluative responsibilities was critical in building teacher confidence, knowledge and understanding, and use of best practices to ensure student success.

Consistent process to collect and review student data to evaluate progress and implementation was important in order to understand where students needed extra support.

Measuring the impact of the coaching support on teachers and sharing the results back to staff for reflection was an invaluable way to understand the characteristics of the coaching that work best for their teachers and informed future planning.

Professional Learning Community (PLC) provided a venue for teachers and staff to work collaboratively as a team to review student progress, set goals, problem solve, and identify areas where they needed further professional learning support. Other opportunities for collaborative planning and support were also highly valued.

Developing capacity within the school and district to support the implementation of Wilson® programs with fidelity was essential to sustaining the momentum of implementation, reduced their reliance upon Wilson, and improved the ability of the district to provide ongoing support to teachers.

Institutionalizing in print the program, practices, processes, and systems that were working well would allow them to remain even after key staff moved on from the school or district. Incorporating these into policy helps ensure their use in the future.

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Outcomes: Improving Literacy for All

Since the implementation of Fundations®, PVE and Litchfield Elementary School District have consistently fared well on the state assessment test and received state recognition.

Palm Valley Elementary School's student performance data on the state AzMERIT test is well above the state average. Below are 2015 results:

	3rd grade Percentage of students passing*	4th grade Percentage of students passing*	5th grade Percentage of students passing*
Palm Valley Elementary School	61%	72%	53%
Arizona (Statewide)	41%	35%	32%

(Arizona Department of Education, 2017a)

*Note: "Passing" is categorized as students meeting the "Proficient" or "Highly Proficient" benchmarks.

The school and district have both received state recognition of their achievements:

- ✓ Palm Valley Elementary is an "A" rated school by the Arizona Department of Education demonstrating "an excellent level of performance." (Arizona Department of Education, 2017a, 2017b)
- ✓ Litchfield Elementary School District is an "A" rated district by the Arizona Department of Education demonstrating "an excellent level of performance." (Arizona Department of Education, 2017a, 2017b)
- ✓ District is rated in the top ten of all public districts in the state. (Litchfield Elementary School District, 2017)

"The Fundations Facilitator trainings have improved our teachers' skill set, the ability to provide explicit interventions in Tier 2 for students who may be struggling, and have improved instruction for each grade level that has a Fundations Facilitator. Our school, teachers, and our students have definitely benefited from this program and will be better readers because of the opportunity our teachers have been provided!"

Jennifer Benjamin, Principal

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- ✓ Wilson Language Training® programs, visit: www.wilsonlanguage.com
- ✓ Wilson® Implementation Network, contact Dr. Paul Tortolani: PTortolani@wilsonlanguage.com
- ✓ Palm Valley Elementary School, go to: http://www.lesd.k12.az.us/pvelem.cfm?subpage=95346
- ✓ Litchfield Elementary School District, go to: http://www.lesd.k12.az.us/
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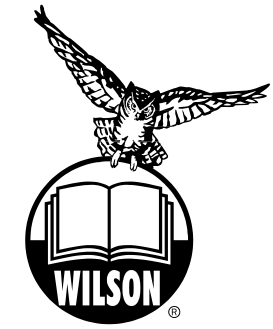
Our mission
is to provide quality professional learning
and ongoing support so that educators
have the skills and tools they need
to help their students become fluent,
independent readers.