

## BOARD AGENDA ITEM

APRIL 20, 2021

### SUBJECT:

*LETRS Professional Development Pilot Program at J.D. Lever Elementary School*

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

J.D. Lever has experienced incremental growth in its reading achievement scores based on the state's summative assessment SCReady over the past three years – from 30.6% meeting expectations in 2017 to 40.1% in 2019; however, in the early grades as well as the upper grades, data shows that students have gaps in foundational reading skills. Over the course of the 2020-2021 school year, the administrative team researched pedagogical practices and programs that show evidence of yielding positive results to assist teachers with knowing how to combat reading gaps in the classroom. The team's investigation led to LETRS (Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling), which is an intensive two-year professional development program focused on the research behind the science of reading.

LETRS provides in-depth professional development in the four core domains endorsed by the American Federation of Teachers in Teaching Reading is Rocket Science (1999). These core domains include the following: (1) an understanding of the psychology of reading development, including the stages of reading growth, the reasons why some children have difficulty learning to read, and the role of instruction in learning to read; (2) structure of the English language, including phonology, morphology, semantics and syntax, and the way that print represents speech; (3) the ability to practice or execute the components of research-based instruction to obtain good outcomes with children; and (4) ongoing assessment for grouping children and determining outcomes of instruction. These core content domains are intended to complement and reinforce any program-specific professional development that the state, district, or school already provides. As teachers learn to implement a central, comprehensive reading program, LETRS helps teachers understand why they need to implement all components, which principles of instruction are most supported by research, and how to interpret screening and progress-monitoring data. The training gives teachers a basis for choosing and implementing supplemental programs for students who need intervention.

The trainings consist of completing three sections each week: participating in an online component with videos and tutorials; participating in required readings in a professional development textbook; and completing a bridge to practice component by applying new learning with students in teachers' classes each week. During this weekly cycle, the teachers and administrators will discuss their learning as part of professional learning community (PLC) meetings.

J.D. Lever administration and district office instructional staff met with Dr. David Mathis, Deputy Superintendent of Division of College and Career Readiness from the SC Department of Education, to discuss LETRS and the only other state-sponsored pilot in

Darlington School District. The SCDE literacy specialist who serves Darlington in the pilot program also met with the school staff to discuss LETRS and potential obstacles that may arise as well as proactive steps to avoid them. The SCDE has offered to support the pilot at J.D. Lever for up to 40 certified participants at the cost of approximately \$3600 per person over the course of two years.

**ADMINISTRATIVE CONSIDERATION:**

School and district administration met with J.D. Lever certified staff to discuss LETRS, and the response was overwhelmingly positive, with 100% of the faculty agreeing to the two-year training. Based on this feedback and the support to be provided by the SC Department of Education through 100% funding as well as a certified literacy specialist to provide regular onsite assistance, administration would like to proceed with this initiative.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

Approve J.D. Lever's participation in LETRS professional development in partnership with the SC Department of Education.

**PREPARED BY:**

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