

INDEPENDENT IMPLEMENTATION STORY • 2026

A step-by-step path to gradual and sustained literacy change

Medford Public Schools partnered with HILL for Literacy to transform literacy instruction from a collection of siloed practices into a coherent, districtwide system grounded in the science of reading. Since their partnership began in 2019, the HILL has helped Medford to:

- Strengthen foundational skills instruction
- Implement a valid and reliable assessment framework
- Build teacher and leader capacity, and
- Align classroom teachers, reading specialists, special education teachers of English language learners, literacy coaches, and administrators around common goals

The results? Medford's K–2 literacy data is now the strongest it has ever been.

MEDFORD READING CHANGE

–2.6 pts **+1.8 pts**
2019 → 2025

Movement from 2.6 points below the state average to 1.8 points above it; in the top-fifth for reading improvement among 19 demographically similar districts.

THIRD GRADE READING CHANGE

44% → **49%**
2022 → 2025

49% of Medford third graders met or exceeded expectations on DIBELS in 2025, +7 points above the state.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES READING CHANGE

9.6% → **16.9%**
2022 → 2025

Up from 9.6% in 2022 to 16.9% in 2025, students with disabilities made the largest gains on state testing of any student group.

(Disability Status may not be reading related.)

THE CHALLENGE

Rethinking Literacy Instruction

"We were a district that really needed consistency and coherence, and HILL for Literacy helped us build that through sustained training, instructional support, and Continuum. That work has helped us create a stronger through line across schools and really start to move the needle."

— DR. SUZANNE B. GALUSI, SUPERINTENDENT, MEDFORD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Medford Public Schools



Located just northwest of Boston in Massachusetts



23% free & reduced lunch



16% multilingual learners



Approximately 1,900 K–5 students



21% special education



Baseline: 2.6 pts below MA avg (gr. 3–5 reading, 2018–2019)

For years, literacy instruction in Medford Public Schools reflected practices similar to districts across the country. The district used a balanced literacy approach including assessments and instructional methods. But as research and state guidance increasingly pointed toward the Science of Reading, Medford began rethinking both its instructional materials and its approach to literacy.

The district needed to adopt high-quality instructional materials and build the knowledge and practices necessary to use them effectively. HILL for Literacy became the technical assistance partner for that work.

For Kristin Howell, who has spent 20 years in Medford as a classroom teacher, reading specialist, and now district literacy coach, the transformation has been significant. Earlier in her career, literacy instruction often felt siloed. She had little visibility into the support students received beyond her classroom from reading specialists, special educators, and English learner educators.

Today, the district is thinking much more broadly about how assessment, scheduling, coordinated and consistent Tier 1 instruction, intervention, and collaboration fit together to support every student.

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"Our work with the HILL has really helped us understand how every component fits together to support our students and get the data where we need it to be for all students to be successful."

— KRISTIN HOWELL
DISTRICT LITERACY COACH
MEDFORD PUBLIC SCHOOLS



THE SOLUTION

Meeting Medford Where It Was and Building From There

Medford's partnership with the HILL began in 2019 with professional learning for classroom teachers in grades K–2 around Enhanced Core Reading Instruction (ECRI) and Tier 1 best practices. One of the most important aspects of this work is that it didn't remain static. Each year, the partnership evolved alongside the district's needs.

Over time, the HILL's role expanded to include classroom coaching across grades K–5, data meetings, professional learning for K-5 (ex. K-2 ECRI-small group differentiated PD, DIBELS training, implementation meetings that provided professional learning), meetings with building principals and district administrators, support for Medford's on-site literacy coaches, and guidance around the district's broader literacy systems.

“*The HILL has been incredible at meeting Medford where we are and understanding what we need step by step. They've really built this with us—helping us understand the importance of data collection and data meetings and making sure every stakeholder is involved in the conversation.*”

— KRISTIN HOWELL, DISTRICT LITERACY COACH MEDFORD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

"They are really in it with us now," Howell explained.

Rather than bringing in a predetermined playbook, the HILL worked alongside Medford to determine what the district needed next. That inclusive approach helped bring together classroom teachers, English learner educators, special educators, literacy specialists, coaches, principals, and district administrators around a more coherent vision for literacy.

For Dr. Kim Talbot, Assistant Superintendent for Academics and Instruction, that cross-functional collaboration has been maybe the most valuable part. The HILL has helped bring traditionally “compartmentalized” teams together for meaningful conversations about Multi-Tiered Systems of Support and how to create a more coherent instructional experience for students across tiers and service providers.

THE SHIFTS

Data That Informs Instructional Moves

One of the most significant shifts in Medford has been the district's relationship with data.

With the HILL's support, Medford implemented an assessment framework to include universal screening using DIBELS, giving educators more specific information about students' literacy needs. But assessment was only the beginning. The larger challenge was helping teachers and leaders understand what the data meant—and what to do next.

As Dr. Talbot explained, the HILL worked closely with Medford's literacy coaches to design data meetings that told a true story about student performance while helping teachers and building leaders identify the “next right thing” to improve instruction.



THE SHIFTS

Data That Informs Instructional Moves (cont.)

Through Continuum, a component of HILL Online, teachers are supported in turning literacy assessment data into action, helping them identify instructional focus areas, group students according to specific skill needs, and connect assessment results directly to instruction, all within a single user-friendly interface. The HILL also helped principals connect student data to the instructional routines most likely to address student needs, clarifying what they should look for during classroom observations and equipping them to more confidently and effectively lead conversations about literacy instruction.

The change is also visible in how teachers approach data. "Teachers are increasing their understanding of what the data means and what to do with it," said Julie Turowetz, district literacy coach. "That's been a really positive change to see."

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND INSTRUCTIONAL CONFIDENCE

Teachers reported:

- ✓ stronger student engagement
- ✓ increased confidence using data-informed instruction
- ✓ more consistency and coherence across schools
- ✓ stronger collaboration across classroom teachers, specialists, coaches, and administrators

“*"We're actually able to live out our instructional vision around using data to inform decisions because the DIBELS data is so actionable in the way that the HILL has taught us to understand and use it."*

— DR. TALBOT, ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT FOR ACADEMICS AND INSTRUCTION
MEDFORD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Building Knowledge, Confidence, and Higher Expectations

As teachers developed a deeper understanding of structured literacy and foundational skills instruction, expectations for students began to shift as well.

Howell remembers a time when kindergarten teachers might have been satisfied with students ending the year knowing letters and sounds. Today, kindergartners are blending CVC words and words with four or five sounds—and educators are asking a different question: What more can we do now to help these students be successful in first grade?

The shift has extended beyond K–2. This past year, the HILL provided professional learning sessions for grades 3–5 focused on small-group foundational skills and fluency instruction—an area where teachers had specifically requested greater support.

Across the district, professional learning has become increasingly connected to classroom practice, coaching, data, and ongoing implementation. The HILL initially led coaching cycles directly with teachers, then gradually helped Medford's own literacy coaches take greater ownership of the work and begin developing their own coaching model. Building in-house expertise and coaching capacity is a huge step toward growth and sustainability.

THE SHIFTS

From Scattered Goals to One Common Vision

Perhaps the most important change has been the shift from individual departments working independently, to a system in which educators increasingly share responsibility for literacy outcomes.

"When I first joined the district, I felt like a lot of departments were working in silos," Turowetz said. "Now everyone seems to be working together toward one common goal. The HILL has really helped us develop that."

The HILL also helped revitalize the district literacy leadership team, create a shared literacy vision, and map scope and sequence and pacing guidance so that educators beyond the classroom can support students in a more coherent way.

For Dr. Talbot, this systems-level alignment is essential to ensuring that students have a coherent experience across Tier 1 instruction, intervention, and across the different educators who support them.

THE RESULTS

Stronger Outcomes and a Turning Point for Teachers

The work is translating into student outcomes. One moment captured just how meaningful that progress has become for teachers. After end-of-year DIBELS results became available, a first-grade teacher went racing through the hallway to celebrate: all of her students had moved out of the highest-risk category, with only one still below grade level.

"We did it!" she exclaimed.

For teachers, knowing they have the tools to confidently support the children they truly care about, changes the way they can show up daily.

For Dr. Talbot, the moment represented a turning point. The results reflect years of *gradual, sustained change*. And for Howell, the district would not be where it is today without the guidance to turn research and best practices into actual implementation.

"It's one thing to read articles and hear what's happening in other states or other districts, but getting that support with implementation is what's created this shift," Howell said. "We've had people guiding us with every decision we've made, and I think that's what's led to outcomes."

More Than a Consultant - A Trusted Extension of the District

When Howell and Turowetz describe what makes the partnership with the HILL different, they return again and again to trust, responsiveness, and the feeling that the HILL is truly invested in Medford's success.

The HILL's coaches and consultants don't limit their support to a scheduled hour or meeting. They answer questions, help plan lessons, problem-solve challenges, and provide ongoing support as teachers and coaches reflect on feedback and put it into practice.

THE FUTURE

Looking Ahead: Continuing the Next Right Thing

Medford's literacy transformation is still a work in progress—and district leaders and coaches are candid about the fact that meaningful systems change takes time.

But the district is now seeing the pieces come together: strong professional learning for educators, effective foundational skills instruction, actionable data, greater teacher ownership, and higher expectations for students.

The strongest testament to the partnership may be that Medford's educators now have the knowledge and systems to keep asking—and answering—the question that has guided the work all along:

Advice to other districts considering similar work is simple:

- ✓ Start where you are
- ✓ Build systems, not just programs
- ✓ Make data actionable
- ✓ Build internal capacity
- ✓ Bring stakeholders together around a shared vision

What's The Next Right Thing We Can Do For Students?

Superintendent Dr. Suzanne B. Galusi emphasized this idea—that HILL for Literacy has truly helped set them up for sustainable success;



INFORMED CHOICES

"That's what happens when you put data in front of smart people who love what they do. They make good, informed instructional choices for their kids."

– DR. TALBOT, ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT FOR ACADEMICS AND INSTRUCTION MEDFORD PUBLIC SCHOOLS



EXPERT GUIDANCE

"We've had people guiding us with every decision we've made, and I think that's what's led to outcomes."

– KRISTIN HOWELL,
DISTRICT LITERACY COACH
MEDFORD PUBLIC SCHOOLS



LASTING IMPACT

"They model the work and build your internal capacity so that, eventually, you can take the training wheels off and sustain it yourself."

– DR. SUZANNE B. GALUSI,
SUPERINTENDENT
MEDFORD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

About this story: Independently documented by LXD Research with Meredith Cooley (Page & Purpose, LLC) for HILL for Literacy, June 2026. Proficiency figures reflect district-reported benchmark data and publicly available records. **See the research:** HILL for Literacy's implementation model meets ESSA Tier 2 (Moderate Evidence) criteria, validated by LXD Research.