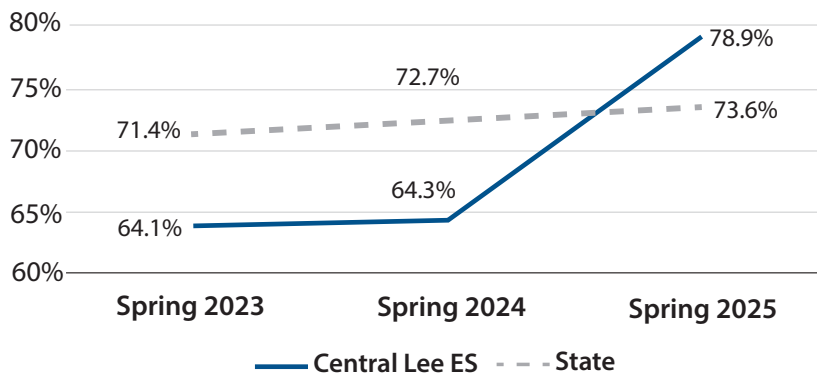




## How Central Lee Transformed Literacy in Just One Year

For this district in rural Donnellson, Iowa—home to the state’s oldest county fair—dedicated educators, a structured literacy curriculum, and coordinated professional learning take home the blue ribbon.

Percentage of Students Meeting English Language Arts (ELA) Proficiency Achievement Benchmarks: All Students



Central Lee Elementary School (the district’s only elementary school) increased ELA proficiency by more than 14 percentage points from spring 2024 to spring 2025, following implementation of *The Literacy Portfolio by i-Ready* for the 2024–2025 school year.<sup>2</sup>

### From Mathematics Gains to Literacy Success

When leaders at Central Lee CSD reviewed their state report card in 2022, they recognized a clear opportunity to improve literacy. Building on two years of success with *i-Ready Assessment* and Personalized Instruction in mathematics, the district expanded the program to reading across Grades K–8 in the 2022–2023 school year.

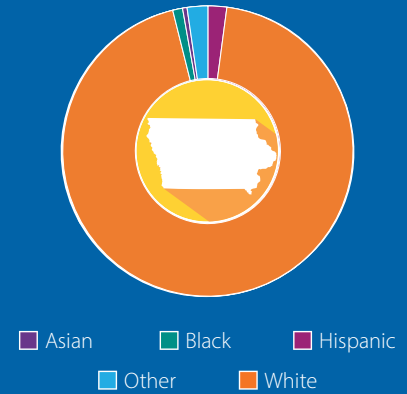
Two years later, they deepened their Grades K–5 implementation by adopting *The Literacy Portfolio by i-Ready*, with *Magnetic Foundations*™ (K–2) and *Magnetic Comprehension*™ (3–5) as the centerpieces of core daily instruction.

<sup>1</sup>Source

<sup>2</sup>Source. The Iowa Department of Education calculates proficiency rates for ELA in Grades 3–11 based on the number of students who scored proficient on the state assessments (Iowa Statewide Assessment of Student Progress (ISASP) and the Dynamic Learning Maps (DLM) alternate assessment) and the total number of students tested. For more information, see the [Technical Guide](#).

Central Lee  
Community School  
District (CSD)  
Donnellson, Iowa

1,194 Grades Pre-K–12  
Students<sup>1</sup>



36.9%  
Students with  
Socioeconomic Disadvantages

“Switching to *Magnetic Foundations* and *Magnetic Comprehension* has been a big gift to our teachers. It means less time spent planning and more time to focus on what our kids truly need.”

—Pam Barclift, Literacy Coach

## Aligning Instruction at Central Lee ES

Central Lee Elementary School (ES), serving Grades K–5, had a strong instructional foundation in place. While leaders knew high-quality teaching was happening in classrooms, student outcomes had not yet caught up.

“Our ELA scores didn’t reflect the incredible work our teachers were doing,” said Curriculum Director Angie Fransk. “We needed to streamline instruction and make sure everyone was on the same page.”

In response, leaders focused on aligning instruction. Establishing consistent expectations, instructional resources, and routines throughout the school helped ensure students had a more coherent learning progression as they advanced through the grades.

## Shifting to *The Literacy Portfolio*

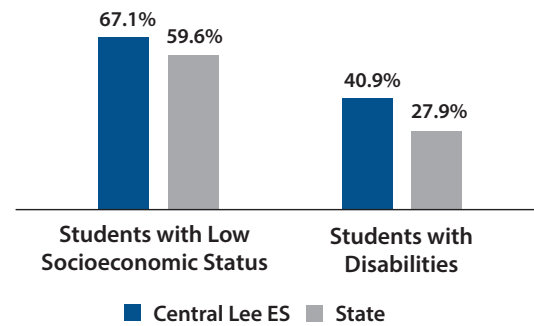
For Central Lee CSD, implementing *The Literacy Portfolio* marked a shift from 15 years of guided reading to a structured, research-based approach aligned with the [Science of Reading](#).

The portfolio provided instruction that connected foundational skills, comprehension, and knowledge building across grades.

*Magnetic Foundations* supported students’ early literacy development with explicit, systematic instruction that follows a clear scope and sequence, while *Magnetic Comprehension* scaffolded comprehension and built vocabulary in the context of knowledge-rich texts.

“The portfolio gave us a way to bring everything together instead of doing things in pockets,” Literacy Coach Pam Barclift said. “It just finally all came together.”

Percentage of Students Meeting ELA Proficiency Achievement Benchmarks by Program: Spring 2025



Central Lee ES students with low socioeconomic status and those with disabilities outpaced the state in the percentage of students placing proficient and advanced on the ISASP and DLM in spring 2025.<sup>3</sup>

## Strong Prep Equals Strong Results

The commitment began long before the first lesson. Teachers dug into the lesson plans available on the Teacher Toolbox, created binders for each unit, and attended in-person professional learning sessions.

Throughout the year, teachers reviewed weekly assessment trackers in professional learning communities to monitor students’ skills mastery, decide what needed reteaching, and keep instruction consistent across classrooms.

“If I leave one classroom and go to another, they’re in sync,” Barclift said. “We’re assessing on the same day, same test, same skills. Instruction is completely aligned.”

## Implementation without a Dip

When districts adopt a new curriculum, a short-term decline in performance is common. But after implementing *The Literacy Portfolio*, the dip never came.

<sup>3</sup>Source

“Our scores just grew,” said Barclift. “We really only changed one thing—moving to a curriculum with a clear scope and sequence. It made all the difference.”

## Growth at Central Lee ES

The results were substantial. From spring 2024 to spring 2025, Central Lee ES increased ELA proficiency by more than 14 percentage points, surpassing the state average.

This growth also marked a turning point for the school under Iowa’s accountability system. After earning ratings of Acceptable in 2023 and 2024, Central Lee ES earned a 2025 ESSA rating of Commendable, exiting ESSA support.

“We went from needing assistance to commendable, all in one year,” said Central Lee ES Principal Heather Fuger. “That’s something we never expected.”

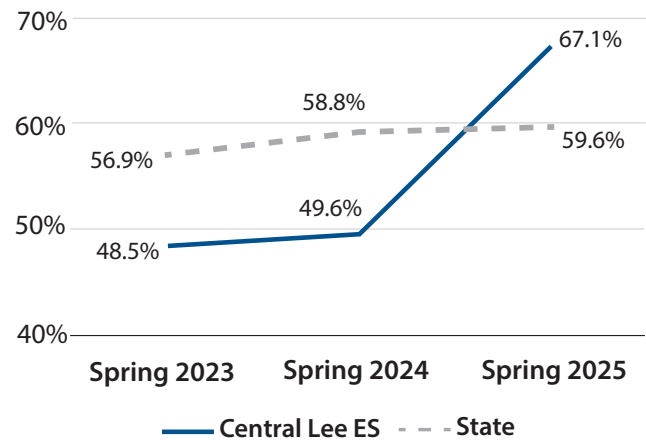
## Impact across Student Groups

Literacy gains extended across student groups. From spring 2024 to spring 2025, Central Lee ES students with socioeconomic disadvantages outpaced the state average in ELA proficiency.

Students with disabilities also demonstrated particularly strong growth, nearly doubling their ELA proficiency over the same period.

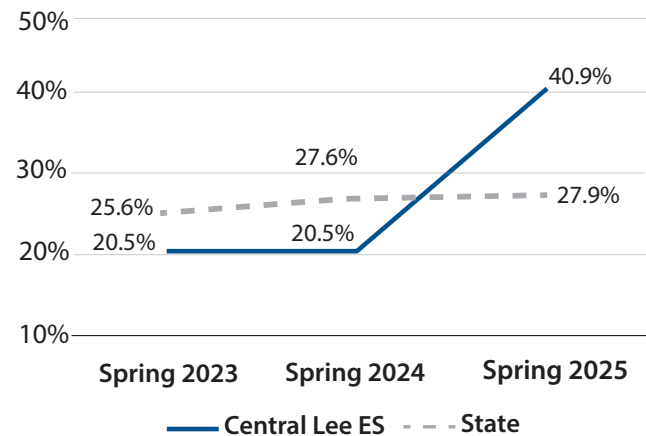
These outcomes reflect the district’s focus on consistent instruction and responsive support. By replacing guided reading with *The Literacy Portfolio*—explicit, systematic, and aligned with the Science of Reading—Central Lee ensured all students, including those in underserved populations, now receive the instruction proven to support literacy development.

Percentage of Students Meeting ELA Proficiency Achievement Benchmarks: Students with Low Socioeconomic Status



Central Lee ES students with low socioeconomic status outpaced the state’s average ELA proficiency by more than seven percentage points in spring 2025.<sup>4</sup>

Percentage of Students Meeting ELA Proficiency Achievement Benchmarks: Students with Disabilities



Central Lee ES students with disabilities achieved a 20-percentage point increase in ELA proficiency from spring 2024 to spring 2025, nearly doubling their proficiency and surpassing the state average by more than 10 points.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup>Source

<sup>5</sup>Source

## Success Grounded in Research

The results at Central Lee align with broader findings on the impact of *The Literacy Portfolio*, which is rooted in *i-Ready Assessment* data and evidence-based research.

[Research across districts](#) using *The Literacy Portfolio* shows that students met or exceeded their growth targets on the *i-Ready* assessment, with more students meeting their growth targets than expected, and average rates of Typical Growth surpassing national averages.

These findings mirror the patterns seen at Central Lee, where strong core instruction coupled with frequent progress checks contributed to notable gains in proficiency.

## Supporting Early Literacy

The adoption of *Magnetic Foundations* and *Magnetic Comprehension*, along with a revised master schedule, transformed Tier 1 instruction and intervention.

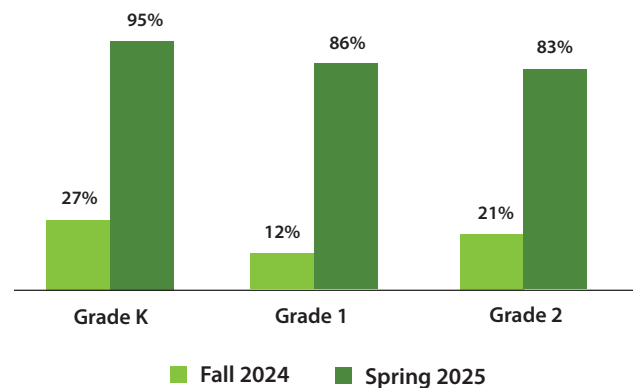
Teachers embraced explicit phonics in early grades and knowledge-building texts in upper grades, creating a seamless progression of skills.

“By the end of kindergarten, students were reading more complex texts than ever before,” Fuger said. “More than they had through any of our other methods for years and years.”



Explore evidence-based literacy programs for your classroom.

Percentage of Central Lee ES Students Scoring Mid or Above Grade Level on the *i-Ready* Assessment



Central Lee ES students in Grades K–2 showed gains of 62 to 74 percentage points in scoring Mid or Above Grade Level on the *i-Ready* assessment from fall 2024 to spring 2025.

## Excitement Builds for *Magnetic Literacy*

Building on the strong foundation of *The Literacy Portfolio*, the district is piloting *Magnetic Literacy* to deepen daily core instruction. The research-based curriculum goes beyond foundational literacy and knowledge acquisition, further igniting students’ ability to synthesize, think, and communicate independently.

“Working with Curriculum Associates has completely shifted the way we use data to drive instruction,” Fuger said. “I’m excited to keep learning from our data and just see how our students continue to grow.”