



institute for  
multi-sensory  
education



## CASE STUDY

# Mountain Mahogany Community School (MMCS) Albuquerque, New Mexico

Mountain Mahogany Community School (MMCS) is a tuition-free, public K-8 charter school in the North Valley neighborhood of Albuquerque, New Mexico. Founded in 2004, MMCS was established to foster skills in students from nearby communities to promote positive and peaceful interactions, with a vision for a school where public education and profound learning are synonymous. With that focus, MMCS accepted its first students in the fall of 2005. One grade was added each year after that, and, in 2013, the school reached full capacity for kindergarten through eighth grade.

The school's mission is "Developing a Student's Agency, Advocacy and Academic Mind."

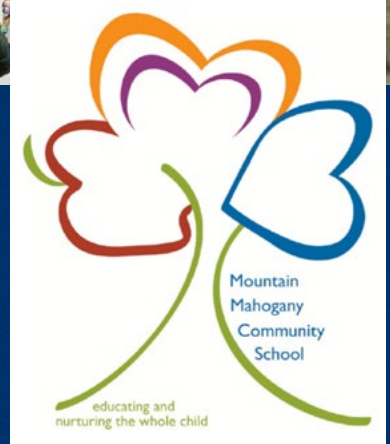
## CHALLENGE

In the 2022 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) report, the State of New Mexico ranked last in the country. And according to standardized test results released in September, only one-third of New Mexico students were proficient in early literacy.

Shortly after Lori Webster joined MMCS in 2018 as director and principal, she knew there were steep hills to climb – reading proficiency scores were dismal; only 25% of the school's students were identified as proficient in reading.

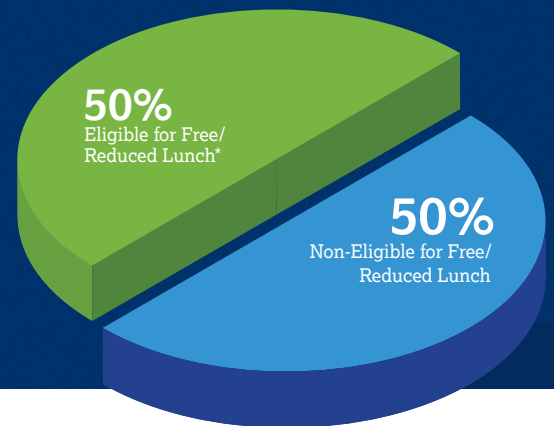
When MMCS reading interventionist Alexandra Wilcox's son and daughter struggled to read – her son was eventually diagnosed with Dyslexia – she ended up paying out of pocket for her son and daughter to go through an expensive and intensive private tutoring program that used the Orton-Gillingham approach.

**"It was heart-wrenching to watch them struggle with something I thought would come so naturally," said Wilcox. "I became determined to identify their specific needs and find the resources to support them."**



200+ STUDENTS

43 EDUCATORS



Realizing that the cost to pay for this type of intervention is out of reach for most families, Wilcox wanted to help other students in the school get the help her children were able to receive and began her journey to learn all she could about Structured Literacy and methods backed by the SOR, which led her to the Institute for Multi-Sensory Instruction (IMSE). As a birthday gift to herself, she paid to go through IMSE OG Comp training. After completing the training, she had comprehensive resources provided by IMSE and began implementing small reading groups at MMCS using the IMSE lessons. She was hired as the Reading Interventionist in 2019.

## SOLUTION

When Wilcox came on board to MMCS, Principal Webster, who was deeply concerned about the school's reading scores, welcomed her ideas – and together, they started encouraging teachers to go through IMSE's training in the Orton-Gillingham approach. Today, all K-2 educators, including special education staff, have attended one of IMSE's 30-hour training sessions.

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**"I believe that all children deserve explicit, systematic, and developmentally appropriate reading instruction," said Wilcox. "Learning to read unlocks a world of possibilities for children and also creates a basis for equity in our educational systems."**

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At the beginning of the 2020/2021 school year, the New Mexico Public Education Department launched a state-wide literacy initiative called Structured Literacy New Mexico. It was focused on identifying struggling

readers before they fail and supporting teachers through professional development based on the Science of Reading and Structured Literacy. The goal is to increase the number of students achieving reading proficiency and reduce the number of students requiring special education services. So far, about 800 K-3 educators have fully completed LETRS training mandated by the state. In addition, the State has mandated pathways in education programs on the college level that teach reading programs based on the Science of Reading.

LETRS instructs teachers in what literacy skills need to be taught and delves deep into the research base behind these recommendations. The intensive program can take upwards of 160 hours to complete over the course of two years. But teachers at MMCS needed more than theory – they needed training that could be completed much faster, and that would give them the skills necessary to successfully reach all students where they are. IMSE training was created by teachers, for teachers, providing impact in the classroom from day one.

## RESULTS

In 2022, Mountain Mahogany's New Mexico state assessment scores in ELA revealed that 50% of students were proficient in reading, a 25pp improvement from 4 years prior when the school began implementing the IMSE Orton-Gillingham approach. MMCS is now a model public school in New Mexico for its efforts with the Science of Reading. The School was ranked in the top 25% of



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There is no denying the incredible impact the pandemic had on some of our youngest learners,” said Webster. “When LETRS was mandated by the State, we all had to go through the training, and it gave us the foundation, the ‘why’ — but we needed to understand the ‘how’ of implementation, which we learned from IMSE.”

Albuquerque Public Schools charter schools based on student performance in ELA on the spring 2022 state assessments.

"I would love for more teachers to understand that this is not just additional work for them; this is in exchange for things that they already teach," said Wilcox.

Since the changes, Wilcox has also noticed students using multi-sensory skills organically in and out of the classroom, teachers looking to get on board with IMSE training, and parents expressing excitement about the reading success of their kids.

Said Wilcox, "The feedback from teachers has been really positive – they want to see their students succeed. When they feel like they have the tools to help students become proficient readers, they are

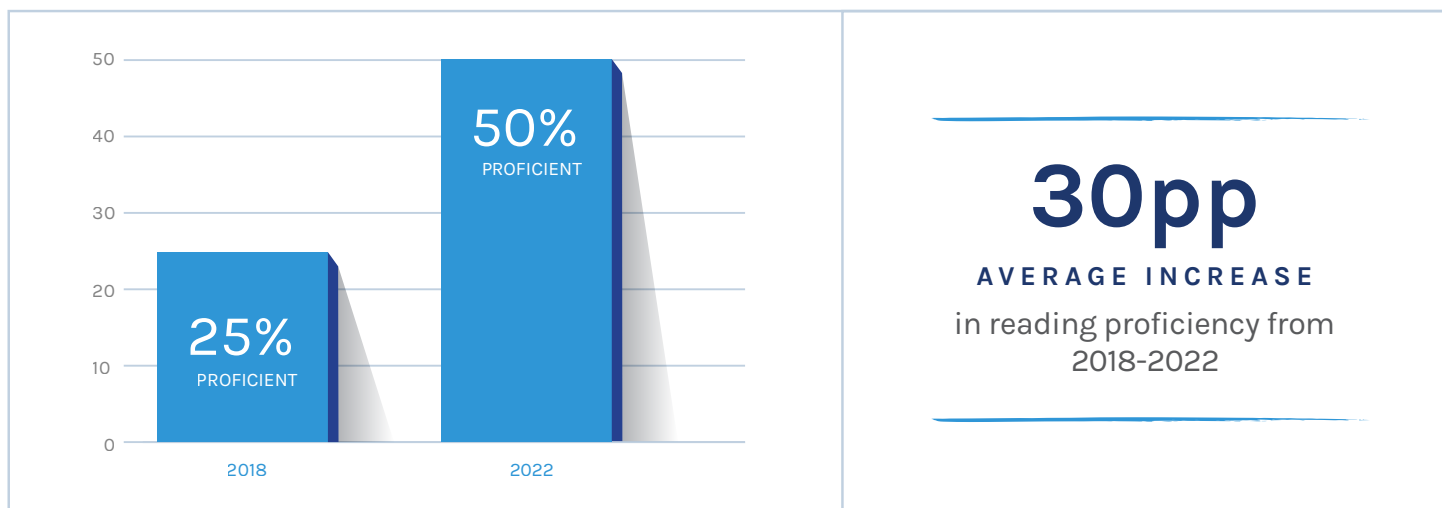
thrilled. Teachers are now coming up to me to say they want to go through IMSE's training."

**She added, "Because our kids now have stronger decoding and fluency skills, it's easier to know exactly what to work on with each kid. When you have a large percentage of kids who aren't even decoding accurately, it is that much more difficult to help every struggling reader."**

Recently, after Wilcox asked a third-grader to read a book, he said, "I can't read, I just can't do it."

After spending time with Wilcox using reading strategies based on IMSE's OG+, he recently learned how to successfully read a decodable book. Said Wilcox, "There is a code to learn how to read, and these kids just have to learn how to crack the code."

## Schoolwide Reading Proficiency '18-'22



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### ABOUT IMSE

IMSE is an education pioneer and the leading provider of Structured Literacy solutions based on the Science of Reading that incorporates the Orton-Gillingham methodology and all five pillars of literacy to empower teachers from day one.

**Institute for Multi-Sensory Education**  
24800 Denso Drive, Suite 202  
Southfield, MI 48033

Contact [info@imse.com](mailto:info@imse.com) to learn more about our work with school districts around the country.