

Ash Creek Elementary Earns “A” Rating with Schoolwide Commitment to the Fast ForWord® Program

Ash Creek Elementary School
Ash Creek Elementary
District #53
Pearce, AZ

School Statistics

Grades: PreK–8

Website:

<https://ashcreekschool.wordpress.com>

Student Population:

75% Free/reduced lunch
25% Special education



Challenges

- Small, rural, high-poverty school

Solution

- Fast ForWord®

Populations served

- Grades PreK-8

Results

- Student growth on state academic assessment
- “A” letter grade for school


“Once we started to use the Fast ForWord program consistently, that’s when we really saw our test scores rise.”

— Diana Hamberger, Teacher

Ash Creek Elementary is a small, rural Title I school located in the heart of the Sulphur Springs Valley, approximately 90 miles southeast of Tucson. In 2018, it received its first-ever “A” rating from the Arizona Department of Education in recognition of year-to-year academic growth and proficiency in English language arts, math, and science. The preK-8 school attributes its success to a variety of factors, including enthusiastic and creative teachers, high standards for all students, a personalized learning environment, and innovative technologies like the neuroscience-based Fast ForWord reading intervention.

Ash Creek Elementary began using the Fast ForWord program in 2010-11, the same year that teacher Sue Shepard took the helm as principal.

“Quality instruction is the most important factor in student achievement. Instruction needs to be responsive to students’ needs



and grounded in the school’s core values, beliefs, and learning expectations,” said Shepard. “We strive to promote the success of every student and the use of the most effective and appropriate technologies to support teaching and learning. The Fast ForWord program is an important part of this.”

Leveraging neuroscience to target the root causes of reading struggle

The Fast ForWord program is an evidence-based reading intervention that uses a unique three-step approach to deliver fast gains to struggling students. It provides them with the foundational language and cognitive skills, intensive practice, and guided reading help that they need to catch up, once and for all.

“When we first looked at the Fast ForWord program, the fact that it was evidence-based was one of the things that was unique about it,” said Vicki Marvick, who teaches grades 3-5 and handles special education at Ash Creek Elementary. “Now that we must have evidence-based interventions under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), we’re so glad we have it.”

Creating a schoolwide commitment to improving student performance

Ash Creek Elementary first implemented the Fast ForWord program with students in special education, then expanded it to all students in grades K-8. Students work on the program 30 minutes a day in their homeroom classroom.

“In the past, we didn’t always have teachers who fully implemented the program and that lack of commitment was evident in students’ performance,” said Marvick.

“Now, the time we set aside for the Fast ForWord program is sacrosanct,” said Diana Hamberger, who teaches grades 6-8. “Once we started to use the Fast ForWord program consistently, that’s when we really saw our test scores rise.”

Supporting best practices in reading


The Fast ForWord program addresses all five of the National Reading Panel’s components of reading — phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Using this comprehensive approach to intervention, schools can rapidly narrow the achievement gap with their most vulnerable students and see continued improvements over time.

“All of the things that are considered to be best practices in reading are in the Fast ForWord program, so we don’t have to worry about accidentally leaving something out or wonder if our students are getting everything they need,” said Marvick. “Also, over the years I’ve noticed that many students with special needs who struggle with reading have issues with sound discrimination. I can’t think of another reading intervention that addresses these issues like the Fast ForWord program does.”

Helping students take ownership of their learning

Within the Fast ForWord program, skill-building exercises personalize to each learner and adapt to their individual areas of need in real-time. Teachers can also use the program’s online data analysis and reporting tools to track each student’s progress.

“Students who read proficiently will do better in English language arts, math, and science,” said Marvick. “We’ve been more committed to our Fast ForWord implementation over the last few years, so it makes sense that it would have contributed to our ‘A’ rating.”



“The immediate feedback is really helpful to students,” said Hamberger. “They love the game-like format, and it motivates them to do better and better.”

“I print out reports with graphs from the previous week and students look at their data. If they didn’t progress or had a low percentage, we’ll talk. This helps them own how they’re doing and pay attention to their progress,” said Marvick. “This data is also helpful when talking with parents about their child’s progress or trying to determine if we should do an evaluation for special education.”

Helping kindergartners make fast gains

“This is my 20th year teaching and my first year with the Fast ForWord program,” said Yvette Tracy, a K-2 teacher in her first year at Ash Creek Elementary. “This group of kindergartners is the highest group I’ve ever had reading-wise. They knew all their letters and sounds by the end of the first quarter. Normally that takes all year. They’re now sounding out words and reading — with a little help from me once in a while — and they take it seriously.”

Tracy also monitors her students’ growth and shares the data with them. “Sharing results is important, so they know they’re not just playing. I don’t call the Fast ForWord program a ‘game.’ I call it by its name so they know it’s important. If I see a student is having an issue with a particular skill, I’ll sit down with them and tell them we’ll address it the next day — and they remember that,” she said.

“We have committed to the Fast ForWord program at every grade level from kindergarten through eighth grade. I see what’s happening with Yvette’s class and think about what great shape these kids will be in by the time they get to third grade,” said Marvick.

Reading above grade level

“Many students who have used the Fast ForWord program are now reading above grade level,” said Shepard. “I keep in contact with the testing coordinator at the high school. When students enter ninth grade, they’re tested in reading and math. Last year, we had students who graduated from eighth grade who were scoring at the 10th, 11th and 12th grade levels in reading, so we know the Fast ForWord program has really improved their reading skills.”

“Our growth is a result of everything we’ve done and the Fast ForWord program is clearly a component of that,” said Shepard.

“One of these students was in special education while attending our school, and she was reading at an 11th grade level by the end the eighth grade,” said Marvick. “We see students move from struggling with reading to becoming good readers, and the Fast ForWord program has a lot to do with that.”

“The Fast ForWord program has also helped students with close reading,” said Hamberger. “Now, when students take benchmark assessments or standardized tests, they carefully read the passages and carefully answer the questions, which helps them perform better. We’ve seen a difference in students’ growth and we’re very happy with the results.”

“I see it in math, too,” said Marvick. “I used to have students who were proficient mathematically but failing math because they didn’t read well and there’s so much reading in math now. So, the Fast ForWord program has helped my students a lot with math as well.”

Increasing scores on state assessments

In 2018, Ash Creek Elementary received a letter grade of an "A" from the Arizona Department of Education for the first time.

Ash Creek Elementary Arizona Department of Education A-F Summary 2018 K-8 Model

	K-8 Points Earned	K-8 Points Eligible
Proficiency	20.05	30
Growth	47.5	50
EL Growth and Proficiency	-	-
Acceleration Readiness	6	10
Bonus Points	3.5	5
Total Points	77.05	
Percentage	85.61*	

**K-8 Model Cut Scores:*

A - 84.67-100%, B - 72.39-84.66%, C - 60.11-72.38%, D - 47.83-60.10%, F - < 47.82%

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