

Elementary School Students Improve Reading Performance with Fast ForWord

Boone County Schools –
Longbranch Elementary
Florence, KY

District Statistics

Number of schools: 23

Number of students: 19,567

Grades: PreK - 12

District Structure: Suburban

Website:

<http://www.boone.k12.ky.us>

Student Population:

4% African-American
2% Asian/Pacific Islander
85% Caucasian
6% Hispanic
3% Multiracial

36% free/reduced lunch
5% special education
11% ELL



Challenges

- Students who struggle in reading, despite interventions

Solution

- Fast ForWord

Populations served:

- Grades K-5 including:
 - Struggling readers
 - English Language Learners (ELLs)
 - Special education

School results:

- Increased performance of tier 3 students on STAR Reading assessment

District results:

- Earned an overall score of 72.4 on state accountability measures in 2013-14, placing the district in the 91st percentile in Kentucky
- Classified as a “Distinguished” school district by the state of Kentucky on accountability measures

Kentucky’s third largest district, Boone County Schools, began using the Fast ForWord and Reading Assistant programs several years ago to help students who struggled in reading, despite multiple interventions. The district now implements the programs district-wide as part of its Response to Intervention (RtI) model. Thanks to its success in raising student performance and closing achievement gaps, Boone County ranked in the top 10 percent of districts in the state in 2013-14.

“When we place students in Fast ForWord or Reading Assistant, they show gains at a rapid pace,” said Superintendent Randy Poe. “With these programs, we’ve increased reading proficiency district-wide.”

SCHOOL SNAPSHOT: Longbranch Elementary

Switching to one intervention to produce gains for tier 3 students

When Longbranch Elementary opened in 2010, teachers implemented several interventions for students performing in the bottom 25 percent on the STAR Reading assessment. “If something didn’t work, we switched to something else,” said Principal Erika Bowles. “The problem was that we weren’t seeing consistent gains.”

In spring 2014, after observing how another elementary school implemented the Fast ForWord program, Longbranch Elementary decided to try a different approach. “We took out every tier 3 intervention we had and switched to Fast ForWord,” said Bowles. “Now it’s our only intervention for tier 3 students.”

In fall 2014, teacher Ellen Steele took charge of the Fast ForWord program and worked diligently to ensure it was implemented with fidelity. “That’s when we starting seeing big gains for students,” said Bowles.

Fast ForWord uses the principles of neuroplasticity — the ability of the brain to rewire and improve — to target the root cause of slow academic progress in struggling students and ELLs. It addresses reading skills while concurrently developing memory, attention, processing and sequencing skills.

“Fast ForWord engages students so they feel like they’re playing a game”

Addressing individual needs and increasing self-esteem

In Steele’s computer lab, all second graders who score in the bottom 25 percent on the STAR Reading assessment work on the Fast ForWord program 30 minutes a day, three days a week. In addition, selected students in grades 3-5 work on the program with paraeducator Lori Stephenson.

“Fast ForWord engages students so they feel like they’re playing a game,” said Steele. “Every teacher I know would love to plug into a child’s brain to find out exactly what they need and this program does that for them.”

Within each lab, students set weekly goals and track their progress daily. “When students can see their growth, they’re more excited and they move through the program more quickly. They understand that they’re the only ones who can make their scores change. That gives them more ownership over their learning. It also increases their self-esteem,” said Steele.

Reducing the number of students at tier 3

“Since we committed to Fast ForWord as our only tier 3 intervention, we’ve seen the number of students at tier 3 drop dramatically,” said Bowles. “At the same time, our students are making more growth than we’ve ever seen before. This systematic approach works so much better than having 15 different interventions going simultaneously. Everyone is on the same page now.”

Accelerating student growth in reading

In fall 2014, shortly after refocusing their Fast ForWord implementation, Bowles noticed that the first graders in one class weren’t improving in reading at the same rate as the students in the other first grade

classes. “We put that class on Fast ForWord and after eight weeks, they were scoring higher in reading than any other class of first graders,” she said. “After that, all of our first grade teachers also wanted their students on Fast ForWord. So now we have a group of first graders from different classes working on the program as well.”

Achieving growth on standardized tests

“In September 2014, we placed 23 second graders who scored in the bottom quartile of STAR Reading into Fast ForWord. As of our last STAR assessment in December 2014, all but four of these students had moved into the 26-50th quartile,” said Bowles. “We’re thrilled with their progress and can’t wait to see what the future holds.”

STAR Reading Assessment Fall 2014 Grade 2 – Tier 3 Students

	# of students at 0-25th percentile	# of students at 26-50th percentile
Sept.	23 students	0 students
Dec.	4 students	19 students

DISTRICT RESULTS: Boone County Schools

In 2013-14, on state accountability measures, Boone County earned an overall score of 72.4, placing the district in the 91st percentile. As a result, it was classified as a “Distinguished” school district by the state of Kentucky.

“Scientific Learning products have helped us to achieve that Distinguished classification and we continue to perform well,” said Poe.

Achieving a return on investment

“Fast ForWord and Reading Assistant have helped us close achievement gaps between subgroups and increase student proficiency and growth in reading. As a result, we’ve been able to decrease the additional services we would’ve had to provide to struggling readers. We’ve also been able to stabilize the number of students in our special education program, even though our student population is growing,” said Poe.

“You can’t put a price tag on a child being able to read, but as educators we have to be careful about how we spend our limited resources. We’ve found that the return on investment in using Scientific Learning’s products is tenfold,” he continued. “We have thousands of students who are now reading on grade level, who would not have been able to do that without Fast ForWord and Reading Assistant. These programs have also dramatically increased students’ self-esteem and their enthusiasm for learning.”



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