

# Westwood Elementary Improves Academic Growth in Reading and Language Arts

Manchester City Schools –  
Westwood Elementary  
Manchester, TN

### School Statistics

**Number of students:** 546

**Grades:** PreK - 5

**District Structure:** Rural

### Website:

<http://www.wes.manchestercitysch.org>

### Student Population:

5% African-American

1% Asian

76% Caucasian

19% Hispanic

74% free/reduced lunch

25% special education

17% English language learners

### Summary

Since implementing Fast ForWord® and Reading Assistant™, Westwood Elementary has seen a positive impact on the TCAP Achievement test scores of students who have used the programs. In its first two years with the Fast ForWord program, the Title I school improved its grade for academic growth in reading from an “F” to an “A,” and it earned an “A” again in 2013. In addition, it has been recognized twice as a Tennessee Title I Distinguished School and a National Title I Distinguished School.

### Challenges

Westwood Elementary educators were concerned about student performance on the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) Achievement test. In 2000, while the school received an Academic Achievement Grade of a “B” in reading, it received an “F” on the Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS), which measures academic growth within a grade and subject over one year.

“We were looking for something to help us raise our TCAP scores,” said Mary Jane Crites, the Response to Intervention (RTI) coordinator and Title I coordinator for Westwood Elementary. “Our principal heard about the Fast ForWord program at a conference, so we researched it and decided to give it a try.”

### Solutions

#### *Fast ForWord*

After launching the Fast ForWord program in 2000, and then implementing it school-wide, Westwood Elementary improved its performance on the TVAAS, raising its grade for academic growth from an “F” to a “C” one year later, and to an “A” two years later.

“For the first three years, we placed every student on Fast ForWord for 50 minutes a day,” said Crites. “As our student population has grown, we’ve had to target the program to students with the greatest needs.”

Selected learners in grades 1-5 now work on the Fast ForWord program 30 minutes a day, five days a week. “We use it in Tiers 1, 2 and 3 of our RTI program with general education and special education students, and English learners,” said Crites.





The Fast ForWord program uses the principles of neuroplasticity — the ability of the brain to rewire and improve — to treat the underlying cause of language and reading difficulties, once and for all. It was developed by neuroscientists to address reading skills while concurrently developing foundational skills including memory, attention, processing and sequencing.

“Fast ForWord gets at the core of the problem for struggling readers by addressing their auditory processing skills and ability to distinguish between phonemes,” said Crites. “If students don’t have those skills, even the best phonics or reading programs won’t work.”

### *Reading Assistant*

In 2010, Westwood Elementary added the Reading Assistant program. Reading Assistant is the only online reading tool that uses speech recognition to correct and support students as they read aloud, building fluency and comprehension with the help of a supportive listener. No other program or e-book provides comparable real-time guidance and feedback.

The school targets Reading Assistant to advanced students in grade 1, and struggling readers in grades 3 and 4. Students work on the program 20 minutes a day, four to five days a week.

“We use Reading Assistant to build students’ fluency and comprehension,” said Crites. “They really enjoy it! It allows them to hear what their reading sounds like, so they better understand what they need to correct and improve. It helps them to read more carefully, read with more expression, and to enunciate words more clearly.”

### *Results*

After several years with the Fast ForWord and Reading Assistant programs, Westwood Elementary continues to achieve high marks on state accountability measures. In 2013, the school earned an “A” for academic growth and a “B” for academic achievement in reading/language arts. It has also been recognized twice as a Tennessee Title I Distinguished School and a National Title I Distinguished School.

“We’re a high-performing school,” said Crites. “Over the years, we’ve seen a positive impact on the TCAP scores of students who have used the Fast ForWord and Reading Assistant programs. We wish we had the lab space and the time to run every student through the programs.”

**“Fast ForWord gets at the core of the problem for struggling readers by addressing their auditory processing skills and ability to distinguish between phonemes,”**

## Westwood Elementary

### Academic Achievement Grades

Reading/Language Arts	
2013	B
2012	B
2011	B
2010	B
2009*	A
2008	A
2007	A
2006	B
2005	B
2004	B
Reading	
2003	A
2002	B
2001	B
2000	B

### Academic Growth (Value Added)

Reading/Language Arts	
2013	A
2012	B
2011	B
2010	B
2009*	A
2008	A
2007	A
2006	A
2005	A
2004	A
Reading	
2003	A
2002	A
2001	C
2000	F

\*The 2009 achievement scores and grades were based on restructured calculations and a redefined grade scale, providing a baseline for comparison to the new curriculum standards and assessments that Tennessee began implementing in the 2009-10 school year. Thus, achievement scores and grades prior to 2009 cannot be compared to scores in or after 2009.

“The Fast ForWord program has improved students’ language and reading skills, as well as their memory, attention and processing skills,” said Crites. “Students are now more interested in reading. They work faster and with more accuracy, and they have more confidence, which improves their performance in math as well.”

Crites has also seen noticeable improvements in students who use Reading Assistant. “It’s been amazing with our first graders,” she said. “In fall 2013, their reading levels were in the high first grade range. By the end of the school year, they were reading at the third grade level!”

“We’ve also seen significant growth with our struggling readers,” she continued. “We have a third grader who had been in and out of Tier 2 since kindergarten. We placed him on the Fast ForWord LANGUAGE Series to build his foundational reading and language skills. Then, in the third grade, we placed him on Reading Assistant. When he started, he was a very slow reader, which was hurting his comprehension, and his reading sounded choppy. Two weeks into Reading Assistant, we began to see a real difference. By three weeks, his progress was amazing! We invited his grandmother to come listen to him read, since he’d improved so much. She stood there with tears rolling down her cheeks. He was so proud, the next day he asked me, ‘Can I invite my mom in and make her cry, too?’ He’s doing so well and developing into a great reader.

“We have so many success stories with our students,” said Crites. “It’s been heartwarming and thrilling to watch them grow.”



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