

High School Students Improve ACT Scores with Fast ForWord and Reading Assistant

Boone County Schools –
Conner High School
Hebron, 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

Solutions

- Fast ForWord
- Reading Assistant

Populations served:

- Grades 9-12 including:
 - Struggling readers
 - English Language Learners (ELLs)
 - Special education

School results:

- Achieved gains of up to six grade levels in reading for struggling readers in high school
- Increased ACT Reading scores by 10+ points or more for 20 percent of the struggling readers

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
- Surpassed state performance on K-PREP tests and End-of-Course (EOC) exams
- Surpassed state performance on ACT College Readiness Benchmarks

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: Conner High School

In 2010, Conner High School launched an innovative Reading for College Success course for students who aren't meeting benchmarks on the ACT Educational Planning and Assessment System tests. The course serves students who have a Reading score below 15 on EXPLORE® in eighth grade or PLAN® in 10th grade.

During the daily 90-minute class, students have 50 minutes of classroom instruction and spend 40 minutes on the Fast ForWord or Reading Assistant program.

Increasing up to six grade levels in one year

"As an administrator, it's my job to make sure our students are ready to go out into the real world when they graduate," said Assistant Principal Mary Sargent. "It's a tough conversation when I have to tell parents their child isn't meeting benchmarks in reading. When I tell them we have an intervention that can help their child move up to six grade levels in reading in a single school year, many don't believe it. But we have the data to show that it works."

In Conner High School's first year using Reading Assistant in the Reading for College Success course, 92 percent of students achieved gains of one to six grade levels according to Reading Progress Indicator, a computerized reading assessment. Reading Assistant is the only online reading tool that uses speech recognition technology to correct and support students as they read aloud, building fluency and comprehension with the help of a supportive listener.

Reading for College Success Course 2010-11 Grade Level Reading Gains

Grade level gain	# of students	% of students
5-6 grade levels	7	10%
3-4	23	33%
1-2	34	49%
0	6	8%

In subsequent years, students have continued to make strong gains.

Reading for College Success Course 2010-2014 Grade Level Reading Gains

Grade level gain	# of students
6 grade levels	11
5	16
4	19
3	31
2	4
1	17

From August to December 2014, students in the Reading for College Success class went from an average 6th grade reading level to 9.5 grade reading level, according to Wendy Karle, a language arts teacher at Conner High School. "Students were so excited," she said. "They leave our class feeling really confident."

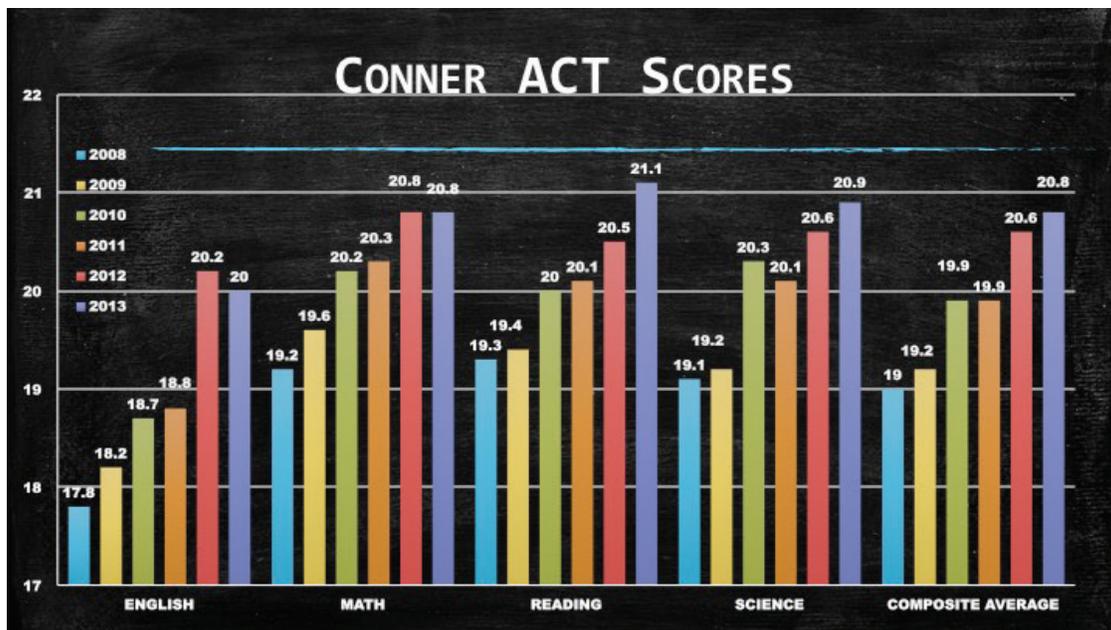
Improving reading skills and confidence

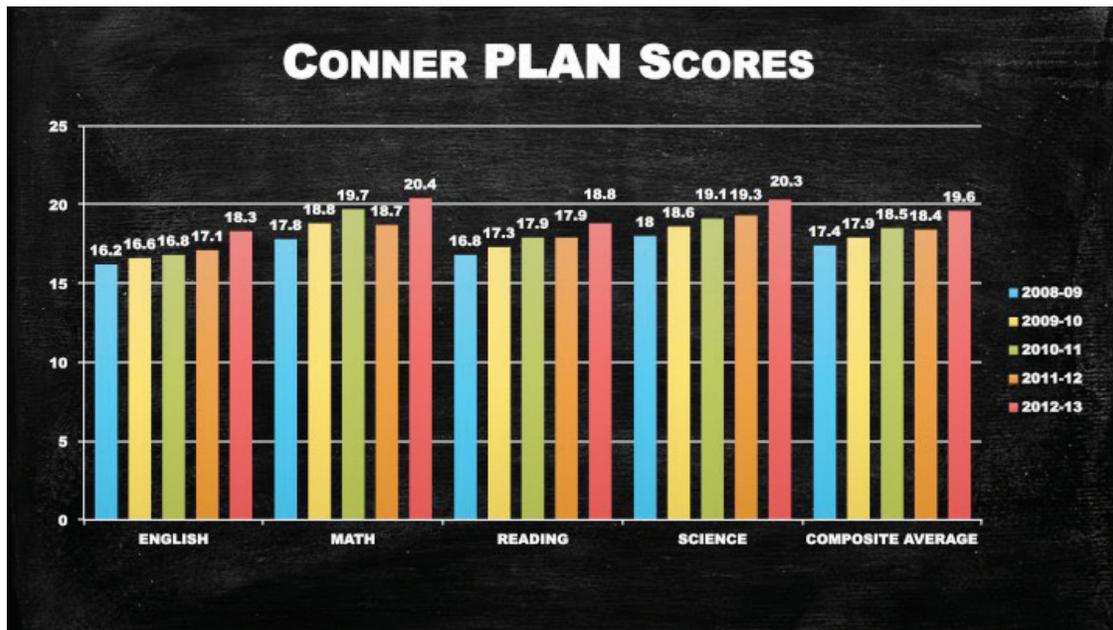
For students with an EXPLORE or PLAN Reading score between 15 and 17, Conner High School also created a pull-out program where students work on Fast ForWord or Reading Assistant 30 minutes a day. Students are released from the program when they score 23 on the reading portion of the ACT practice test.

"Reading Assistant provides each student with individualized instruction. In a class of 20 students, there's no way a teacher would be able to provide that level of one-on-one support," said Sargent. "Reading Assistant helps students with immediate feedback on errors and private playback of their reading. Our students who have used Reading Assistant are now more confident readers and more proactive in their studies."

Achieving ACT gains

As part of a study conducted during the 2011-2012 and 2012-13 school years, students in the Reading for College Success course used Reading Assistant, on average, for 37 days over a period of four months. At the beginning of the study, the students' average EXPLORE or PLAN score was 12.3 (the EXPLORE and PLAN are administered to 8th and 10th graders respectively, but scored on the same scale as the ACT). After using Reading Assistant, the average score on the students' best-effort ACT practice test improved to 18.3. Reading scores improved for 89 percent of students, and 33 percent of students met or exceeded the ACT benchmark score.





Since 2010, 20 percent of the students have made gains of 10 points or more on the ACT after participating in Reading Assistant.

ACT Gains 2010-14

ACT Gain	# of students	% of students
10+ points	83	21%
5-9	109	27%
1-4	128	32%
No gain	79	20%

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.

Surpassing state averages on state tests and the ACT

On the Kentucky Performance Rating for Educational Progress (K-PREP) tests and EOC exams, as well as the ACT, Boone County continues to perform above state averages.

**Boone County Schools
K-PREP Tests 2013-14
Percent Proficient/Distinguished**

Reading

	District	State
Elementary	62.8%	54.7%
Middle School	59.3%	53.2%

Mathematics

	District	State
Elementary	54.3%	49.2%
Middle School	55.0%	44.8%

Language Mechanics

	District	State
Elementary	59.5%	51.8%
Middle School	44.8%	40.3%
High School	60.6%	49.9%

**K-PREP End-of-Course Exams 2013-14
Percent Proficient/Distinguished**

English II

District	State
66.3%	55.4%

Grade 11 2013-14
Percentage of Students Meeting ACT College Readiness Benchmarks
(18 on English; 19 on Mathematics; and 20 on Reading)

English

District	State
65.4%	55.9%

Mathematics

District	State
56.0%	43.5%

Reading

District	State
58.3%	47.1%

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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