Success Story
Elementary & Middle School Literacy  K-12 ELA Program

Madison County Students Make Reading Gains with Fast ForWord

“Where Fast ForWord is implemented as designed, we’re getting months of achievement in weeks of effort.”
-Karen Fischer, Supervisor of Instruction, Madison County Schools, Alabama

Results:

- One year’s reading gains in just 80 days of use
- Increased student confidence

When Madison County Schools (MCSS), one of the largest districts in Alabama, implemented Fast ForWord in 2019, no one could have predicted how useful it would be to have an effective, engaging online literacy program in place. When the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated school closures, MCSS was well-situated to support students by giving them the tools and structure they needed to learn virtually. As MCSS has transitioned back to in-person instruction in 2021, they have continued to see significant and lasting gains in student literacy.

In the fall of 2019, MCSS elementary schools began using Fast ForWord, an adaptive reading and language solution that targets the root causes of reading difficulty with a revolutionary brain-based approach. After being impressed by an average seven months’ growth in just 35 days of use, MCSS expanded implementation to its middle schools as well. In 2021, the Fast ForWord program is being used by K-5 students and select students in grades 6-8 for 30 minutes a day, five days a week, and student competency and confidence are growing.
Making Significant Achievement Gains
Since implementing Fast ForWord, MCSS students have made significant reading gains. The district’s Supervisor of Instruction Karen Fischer says, “Where Fast ForWord is implemented as designed, we’re getting months of achievement in weeks of effort.”

In the fall of 2021, 698 students made an average reading gain of one year over an average 80 days of use, moving up eight national percentile points, from the 39th percentile to the 47th.

There is also a 95% increase in the Proficient/Advanced categories and a 22% decrease of students who are struggling. MCSS has seen that, when used as intended, Fast ForWord builds phonological awareness, decoding, vocabulary, and reading comprehension in almost all students.

Collecting Data in Real Time
Fast ForWord’s targeted, actionable reports at student, class, school, and district levels enable teachers and administrators to assess student strengths and challenges, avoid unnecessary testing, and know how to tailor individual interventions to best meet the needs of all learners.

Fischer notes, “One aspect of Fast ForWord that we like is that teachers get feedback. It wasn’t like they had to test their students once they got off the product to figure out if it worked or not. The teachers quickly had access to some pretty robust data, and students didn’t have to wait two days to hear about that data. This is an exciting development in how we work with students and address knowledge gaps.”

With the detailed reports, teachers can precisely track each students’ areas of growth, and administrators can easily see the results that Fast ForWord is producing.

Personalizing Learning
The personalized learning that Fast ForWord provides by adapting exercises to student performance has greatly contributed to student success. Such individualized instruction allows students to move at their own pace and complete the amount of practice that they need in order to master a skill. Students can remedy gaps without getting bogged down in remediation that keeps them behind grade level.

Fischer speaks enthusiastically about Fast ForWord’s ability to personalize learning for all students: “Teachers have standard class sizes, and they’re not able to individualize feedback and provide the one-on-one interactions that you need to really augment skills,” says Fischer. “So while teachers still continue to provide direct instruction, they use Fast ForWord to really emphasize that practice.”

Fischer also notes that Fast ForWord provides a safe learning environment, as each student works individually on their personalized learning path. This encourages students not to compare themselves to their peers, which strengthens students’ confidence and self-perception.
Utilizing The Science of Reading

Fast ForWord's unique and innovative base of cognitive science research is the secret to reading success, and it aligns with Alabama's initiative to apply the science of reading to literacy education.

Preparation for the Future

MCSS is continuing to move forward from the setbacks of the pandemic, and the future is bright for students and teachers alike.

As Fast ForWord supports master teachers in doing the wonderful work they’ve always done, they will be able to better support students as they gain both greater confidence and the reading and language skills they were always capable of.

Karen Fischer, Supervisor of Instruction
Madison County Schools, Alabama

Our state as a whole is really promoting the science of reading, and Fast ForWord met our needs as we learned what our needs were.

Developed by neuroscientists researching how reading is mapped by the brain, Fast ForWord is backed by more than 30 years of multilevel research and more than 300 research studies. Fast ForWord is aligned with the science of reading, including but not limited to the latest research on phonics, phonemic awareness, and phonological processing, as well as the cognitive skills underlying reading skills, such as working memory, attention, and sequencing.