

Students Improve State Test Scores, ACT Scores with Fast ForWord and Reading Assistant

Boone County Schools

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

Solutions

- Fast ForWord
- Reading Assistant

Populations served:

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

Results:

- Increased performance of tier 3 students on STAR Reading assessment
- 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
- 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: 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 started 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

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. 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.

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 that 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 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

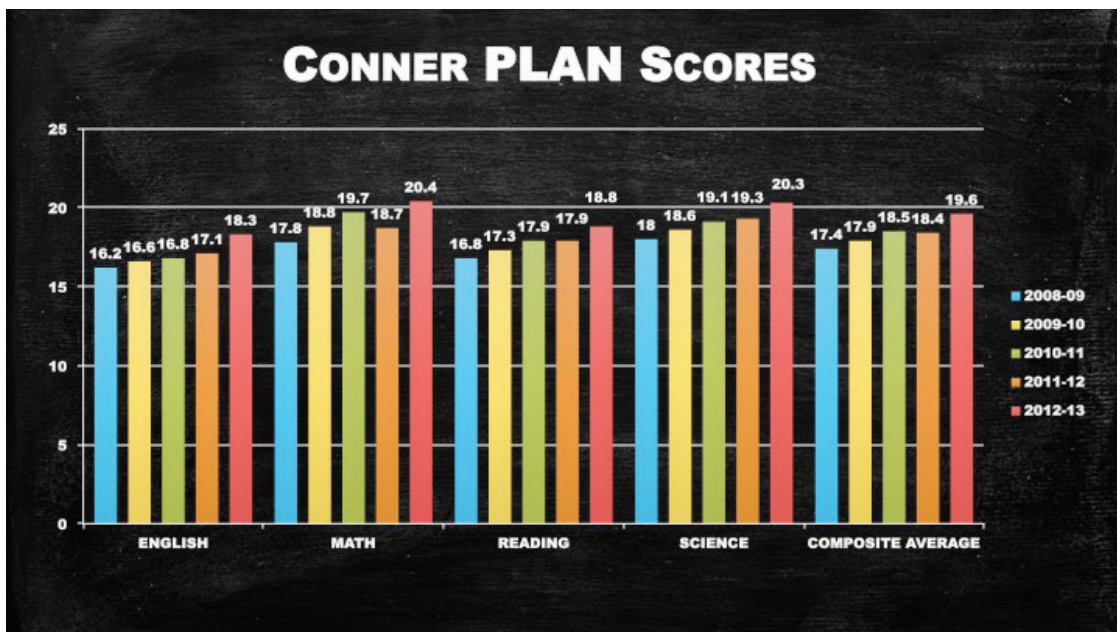
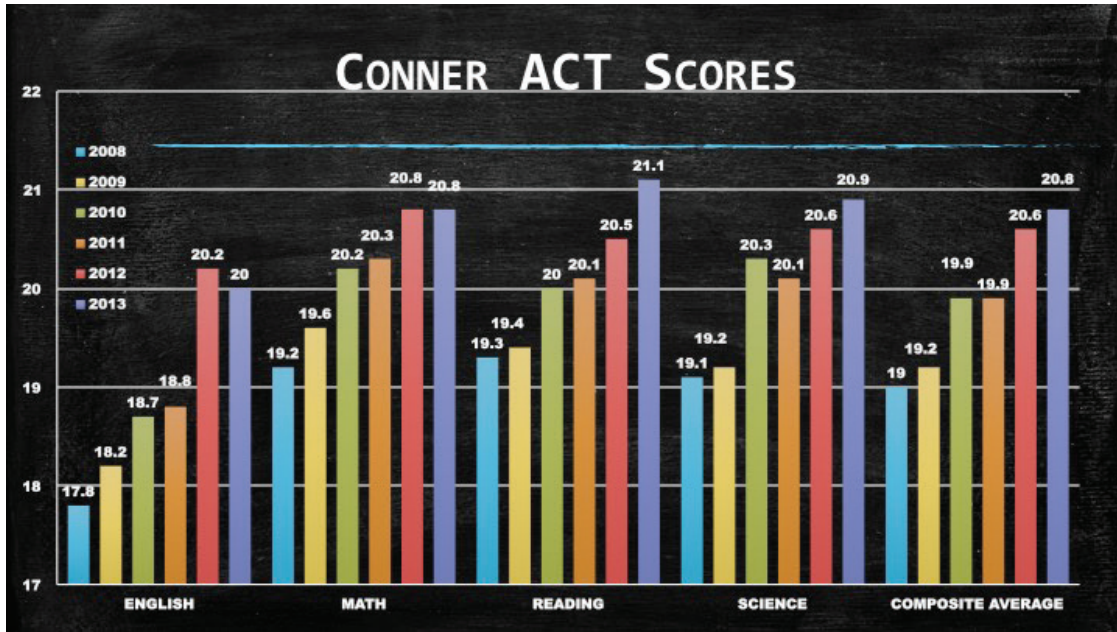
For students with an EXPLORE or PLAN Reading score between 15 and 17, Conner High School also created a pull-out program where students work on Fast ForWord or Reading Assistant 30 minutes a day. Students are released from the program when they score 23 on the reading portion of the ACT practice test.

“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.”



For more info contact:
Phone: 1-888-816-0010
Email: info@scilearn.com