Students Close Reading Gaps and Raise Test Scores with the Fast ForWord® Program

Ryan Elementary – Bronson Community Schools

Bronson, MI

School Statistics

Number of Students: 249

Grades: 3-5

Website:
www.bronsonschools.org/schools/ryan_elementary

Student Population:
1% Asian/Pacific Islander
1% Black
22% Hispanic
73% White
2% Multiracial

62% Economically disadvantaged
15% English language learners (ELLs)
10% Special education

Challenges
- High-poverty school
- Gaps in students' cognitive, language, and reading skills

Solution
- Fast ForWord®

Populations served
- Grades 3-5 including:
    - Struggling readers
    - English language learners (ELLs)
    - Special education

Results
- Gains on Michigan Student Test of Educational Progress (M-STEP) English Language Arts (ELA)

"The Fast ForWord program is the most scientifically-based intervention I've ever used."
— Mark Heifner, Principal

When Mark Heifner first heard about the Fast ForWord reading intervention at an education conference, he was intrigued by the technology and its foundations in neuroscience.

"I'm very interested in technology, especially when it does what people can't do," said Heifner, who is now the principal of Ryan Elementary, a Title I school in southern Michigan. "When I saw a presentation about how the Fast ForWord program retrains the brain and helps students form new neural connections, I said to myself, 'If I ever have extra money, I'm going to get that program.'"

In 2013, after taking advantage of a Fast ForWord free trial, he became even more determined to bring the program to his school.

Ryan Elementary is one of three schools in Bronson Community Schools. The district also includes Anderson Elementary, which serves K-2 students, and Bronson Junior/Senior High School. Located in a rural farming community, it is one of three school districts in Branch County that receives educational support services and programs from the Branch Intermediate School District (ISD) Educational Service Agency.

"I created a joint venture between Ryan Elementary, Anderson Elementary, and Branch ISD's Special Education Services, and we purchased several Fast ForWord student licenses," said Heifner. "We still share the licenses and split the cost between us."

Since launching their implementation in 2014, they have added several more student licenses, and they've expanded the Fast ForWord program to the junior/senior high school as well.

Targeting the root causes of reading struggles

"Back in 2014, our highest-performing students were achieving academic growth at a faster rate than our lowest-performing students. We brought in the Fast ForWord program to help address that gap and targeted it to our most needy students. We've gotten good results ever since," said Heifner. "On the Reading Progress Indicator assessment in the Fast ForWord program, one student jumped from the 5th percentile to the 39th percentile. This is a child who had hearing difficulties from birth through age two, so he missed out on building a lot of neural connections. This program helped fill in those gaps."

The Fast ForWord program is a neuroscience-based intervention that uses a unique three-step approach to deliver fast gains to struggling students. It provides them with the foundational language and cognitive skills, intensive practice, and guided reading help that they need to catch up, once and for all.

At Ryan Elementary, the Fast ForWord program is primarily used as a Tier 3 or Tier 4 intervention with struggling readers, ELLs, and students receiving special education services. Students work on the program before school for 30 minutes a day, five days a week.

"The Fast ForWord program is the most scientifically-based intervention I've ever used. We use Fast ForWord with some of our most struggling students and in many cases have seen astounding results," said Heifner. "Human language is complex. When students have trouble thinking clearly or connecting the dots, it usually traces back to their understanding of language. Take the sounds 'ba' and 'da,' for example. One student could not hear the difference between those speech sounds. We wouldn't have discovered that if we didn't have the Fast ForWord program to break it down and pinpoint that issue. Using the technology to do things we can't easily do — like stretch out phonemes — is a huge benefit. The Fast ForWord program does that and can do it multiple times to create important new pathways in the brain."

> "On the Reading Progress Indicator assessment in the Fast ForWord program, one student jumped from the 5th percentile to the 39th percentile.

Improving fluency and comprehension with a personal guided reading coach

Ryan Elementary also uses Reading Assistant Plus, which is included in the Fast ForWord program. As students read aloud, speech verification technology listens and provides real-time corrective feedback. This oral reading reinforces newly learned reading skills and rapidly builds fluency and comprehension.

"We usually target Reading Assistant Plus to different students than those using the Fast ForWord program," said Heifner. "Reading Assistant listens to you as you read and makes corrections. It's like having a reading coach for each student."

Increasing state test scores
Since Ryan Elementary began using the Fast ForWord program, students have achieved steady gains on Michigan's high stakes assessment.

Ryan Elementary
M-STEP ELA
Percentage of students at or above proficiency

	2014-15	2017-18	Difference
Grade 3	35.6%	40.2%	+4.6 percentage points
Grade 4	30.9%	48.1%	+17.2 percentage points
Grade 5	39.5%	49.4%	+9.9 percentage points

"Each year a new group of kids comes in and each grade level has its own unique needs, but students who use the Fast ForWord program show growth. In grades 4 and 5, our scores are above the state average, which includes schools that are spending $1,000 or more per student than we are," said Heifner.

M-STEP ELA 2017-18
Percentage of students at or above proficiency

	State of Michigan	Ryan Elementary	Difference
Grade 4	45%	48.1%	+3.1 percentage points
Grade 5	46.5%	49.4%	+2.9 percentage points

"Reading is the most important skill we teach our students. It's a portal skill that takes them to different subjects and different pathways in learning," he said. "The Fast ForWord program gives students the opportunity to change their neural networks and make new connections in the brain that weren't there before. It helps them improve their listening, speaking, and reading skills, and it helps with other subjects, too, because language is involved in every content area."

###

FAST FORWORD®

Scientific Learning®

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