

# Students Make Greater than Expected Growth on N.C. End-of-Grade Tests

Hoke County Schools  
Raeford, NC

### District Statistics

**Number of schools:** 13

**Number of students:** 8,000

**Grades:** PreK-9

**District Structure:** Rural

### Website:

<http://www.hcs.k12.nc.us>

### Student Population:

44% African-American

29% Caucasian

13% Hispanic

13% Native American

62% economically disadvantaged

13% special education

8% English language learners



Struggling learners in Hoke County Schools who used the Fast ForWord and Reading Assistant programs made significantly greater than expected growth on the Reading and Math components of the North Carolina End-of-Grade (EOG) Tests. In addition, the more products students completed, the more their achievement exceeded expectations.

### Challenges

Hoke County Schools (HCS) is a rural, Title I district serving nearly 8,000 students in 13 schools. "We're a very high poverty county," said Robert T. Barnes, Jr., assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction for HCS. "Our students come to us way behind in many respects."

"We were looking for a solution to help our struggling learners in reading," said Becky Smith, special projects facilitator for HCS. "However, with many programs we reviewed, students already had to be reading; the programs focused only on strengthening reading skills. We needed a solution that could prepare students to read and then, once they're reading, continue to strengthen their skills."


### Solutions

HCS implemented the Fast ForWord and Reading Assistant programs in 2011-12 to address the needs of struggling learners.

"These programs provided exactly what we were looking for," said Smith. "Fast ForWord helps students who missed important milestones in developing their memory, attention, processing and sequencing skills, and then both Fast ForWord and Reading Assistant help students continue to develop and strengthen their reading skills. Our goals with the programs are to bridge gaps and bring students to grade level."

### Fast ForWord

The Fast ForWord online reading intervention 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.



HCS implements the Fast ForWord program in all eight elementary schools, all three middle schools, one high school, and an alternative school. It is targeted primarily to struggling learners in pre-kindergarten through grade nine.

In addition, it is used with at-risk students in grades two and three to help meet the requirements of the North Carolina Read to Achieve program. The program's goal is to ensure every student reads at or above grade level by the end of third grade. If a student is not proficient in reading, he or she is enrolled in a Summer Reading Camp or retained in third grade.

Students work on the Fast ForWord program five days a week for 30, 40 or 50 minutes a day, depending on the school. Lab managers use Progress Tracker, online data analysis and reporting tool, to monitor student performance and share that data with teachers.

"The great thing about the Fast ForWord program is that it's individualized to each student's needs," said Smith. "Our teachers say they've noticed great improvements in students' skills, including their focus, attention and their ability to follow directions."

### *Reading Assistant*

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.

HCS primarily uses Reading Assistant with struggling learners at the elementary school level. Most students work on the program 20 minutes day, three days a week.

"Reading Assistant helps students improve their fluency, which ties into comprehension. It also helps students build their vocabulary, which is a big deficit here," said Smith.

### **Results**

On average, students who have used the Fast ForWord and Reading Assistant programs have significantly improved their reading and math achievement.

Initially, most students were struggling, scoring at Levels 1 and 2 on the EOG Tests. Despite their history of struggles, the group made significantly greater than expected growth on the Reading and Math components of EOG Tests during the 2011-12 school year. The EOG Test "Growth" scores compare results from the current year to results from past years. Positive growth scores indicate that students have learned more than expected; negative growth scores indicate that students learned less than expected.

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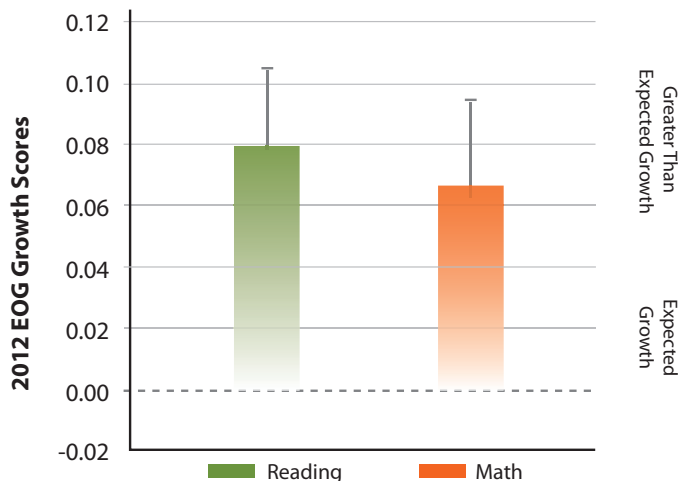
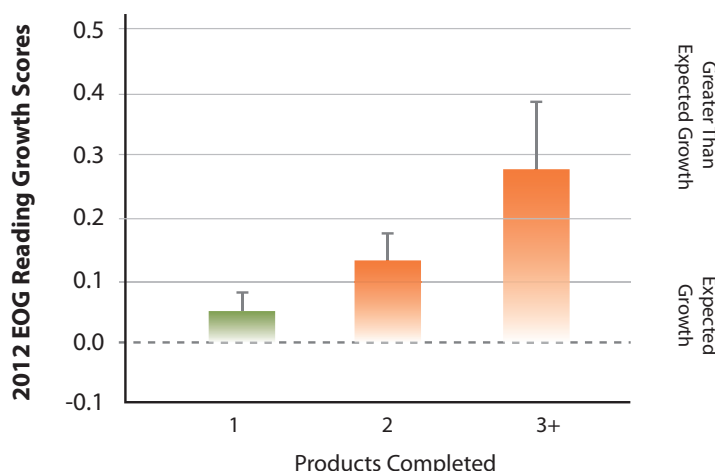


Figure 1. Students with moderate product use made significantly greater than expected growth on both the Reading and Math EOG ( $p < 0.05$ ). A growth score of "0" indicates the student's 2012 score equaled expectations based upon previous scores. Reading scores represent 417 students; math scores represent 420 students.

In addition, the more Fast ForWord and Reading Assistant products students completed, the more their achievement exceeded expectations.

Figure 2. The more Fast ForWord products students completed, the greater the students' growth. Results represent data from 275 students who completed one product, 125 students who completed two products, and 17 students who completed three or more products.

Reading Progress Indicator was also used to evaluate the impact of the Fast ForWord program on students. Initially, students' reading skills were well below grade level. An average of four months later, the group's skills had improved by one year.



"We have a good literacy program but we needed something to help bridge the gaps for students who were behind and bring them up to grade level — and that's exactly what the Fast ForWord and Reading Assistant programs do. They expedite a child's ability to learn to read and then to progress forward," said Barnes.

In 2013, Scientific Learning named HCS a National Reference Site in recognition of its exemplary use of the Fast ForWord and Reading Assistant programs, and significant student gains.

"We're looking forward to having other schools come in and see how we're using Fast ForWord and Reading Assistant, and how effective they are," said Barnes.

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**For more info contact:**  
 Phone: 888 810-0250  
 Email: [info@scilearn.com](mailto:info@scilearn.com)