

Students with Disabilities and Struggling Learners Reduce Failure Rate in Reading and Math

Highland View Elementary –
Bristol City School District
Bristol, VA

School Statistics

Number of students: 225

Grades: PreK-5

School Structure: City school

Website:

<http://www.bvps.org/highland>

Student Population:

10% African-American

81% Caucasian

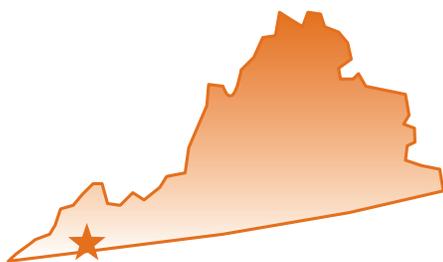
3% Hispanic

6% Multiracial

86% Free/reduced lunch

10% Special education

1% English language learners



Challenges:

- High-poverty school
- Impoverished, stressful home environments
- Children in trauma

Solutions:

- Fast ForWord
- Reading Assistant

Populations served:

- Grades 1-5 (RTI Tiers 2 and 3)
 - Special education
 - Struggling learners

Results:

- Improved performance on state assessments
- Reduced failure rate by 10 percent or more in reading and math

Highland View Elementary, the oldest and smallest elementary school in Bristol City, began using the Fast ForWord online language and reading intervention several years ago. They expanded their Fast ForWord implementation and added Reading Assistant during the 2013-14 school year. Both programs are now used continuously in the school computer lab from 8:15 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Fast ForWord

As part of Highland View's Response to Intervention (RtI) program, struggling learners at Tier 2 (strategic intervention) and Tier 3 (intensive intervention) work on the Fast ForWord program 30 to 40 minutes a day.

"When the Fast ForWord program is implemented well and monitored closely, students progress very rapidly," said Kathy Brown, a Title I reading specialist. "With traditional instruction, we don't see the same gains because we can't do what this program does."



The Fast ForWord program uses the principles of neuroplasticity — the ability of the brain to rewire and improve — to treat the underlying cause of language and reading difficulties. It was developed by neuroscientists to address reading skills while concurrently developing foundational skills including memory, attention, processing and sequencing.

“Fast ForWord sets the stage for the child’s brain to absorb everything that comes their way,” said Pam Smith, principal. “It helps students to focus and pay attention, so they’re able to be more successful with whatever instruction or interventions they receive. They can pick it up much faster. Without that focus and attention, you lose them before you even begin an intervention.”

“At the beginning of the year, we explain to students that Fast ForWord programs will help them in everything — reading, math, science, social studies,” said Brown. “Then once students get started, they love the program.”

Reading Assistant

Selected students at Tiers 2 and 3 also work on the Reading Assistant program 20 to 30 minutes a day, four to five days a week. 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.

“With Reading Assistant, we see huge gains in students’ fluency and comprehension, and they love the stories,” said Brown. “When they finish a story, they’ll raise their hands or stop us in the hall later to tell us what they learned. They’ve never done that with other programs. You can see the joy in their faces when they’re successful. That’s the most rewarding thing as a teacher.”

“We’re short on computers but if we could get everyone in the lab to use Reading Assistant, we would,” said Smith. “The improvements students have made in their comprehension are definitely helping us reduce the achievement gap.”

Results

In Virginia, the Annual Measurable Objectives (AMOs) represent the percentage of students within each subgroup that must pass Standards of Learning (SOL) tests in reading and mathematics in order to make acceptable progress.

“In reading and math, we reduced the failure rate by 10 percent during the 2013-14 school year. We strongly feel that the Fast ForWord and Reading Assistant programs were a major part of this,” said Smith. “When you can achieve a 10 percent reduction in the failure rate in a school as impoverished as ours, that’s really saying something about what our teachers are doing and the programs we’re using.”

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Percentage of students in grades 3-5 meeting Virginia's Annual Measurable Objectives (AMOs)

Reading	2013	2014	AMO	AMO Met?
All Students	59%	65%	69%	R10
Gap Group 1	56%	62%	59%	Yes
Students with Disabilities*	33%	50%	42%	
Math	2013	2014	AMO	AMO Met?
All Students	44%	55%	66%	R10
Gap Group 1	41%	51%	57%	R10
Students with Disabilities*	7%	35%	49%	*

Gap Group 1 = Students with disabilities, economically disadvantaged and English language learners (combined)

R10 = Met the AMO by reducing the failure rate by 10%

* Group was too small to be evaluated by the state for AMO Met

“Our students with disabilities who worked on the Fast ForWord and Reading Assistant programs made significant gains,” said Brown. “In the fifth grade, our special education students achieved a higher percentage of individual growth than our general education students.”

Students who used the Fast ForWord program also improved their reading skill levels. “From August 2013 to April 1, 2014, 30 percent of our students improved their reading skill levels by 1.5 years or more, 15 percent improved by 1.1 to 1.5 years, 26 percent improved by 0.6 to 1 year, and 27 percent improved by up to half a year,” said Brown. “The average gain was 1 year and 2 months. The level of student growth was amazing!”

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