



Improving Student Achievement and Educational Outcomes in Chilton County, Alabama

Chilton County Schools, Chilton County, AL



Ashlie Harrison
Director of Teaching
and Learning



7,752 students
Grades K to 12



Courseware
Exact Path
Reading Eggs



15.8% English language learners
62% free/reduced lunch

The Challenge:

Chilton County Schools (CCS) is a mostly rural school district located in central Alabama, and educators at CCS, like those of many rural areas, are always looking for ways to improve achievement and educational outcomes for the students at all 12 campuses, all of which receive Title I funding. When Ashlie Harrison stepped into the newly created role of director of teaching and learning in 2017, one of the things she hoped to do was to make sure that the district had the right tools in place to meet the needs of students and help teachers be more effective.

When Ms. Harrison reviewed the district's current online programs, she noticed that there wasn't much consistency in usage and that teachers just didn't feel that the programs were meeting the needs of their students. So, in early 2017, Ms. Harrison and her team put together a committee made up of teachers, campus technologists, reading specialists, and administrators, with representation from all campuses to determine what the district needed from an online program provider.

"We really needed something to help with remediation of the students who were falling behind, but we also, at the same time, wanted to accelerate students who were excelling in the classroom," explained Ms. Harrison. "We also knew that we were going to need something that we could do credit recovery with and maybe even obtaining original credit."

The committee listened to presentations from six companies, and then, narrowed it down to two, which committee members took back to their campuses to test out with their students. After about two months, the committee came back together, discussed experiences with both providers and made the decision to go with Edmentum because both students and teachers found the programs easy to use, students enjoyed them, the programs provided comprehensive adaptive curricula for grades K-12, and they allowed the district to address multiple challenges with one provider.

Chilton County Schools (CCS) was looking for an online learning partner who could help the district address multiple initiatives from grades K-12: foundational literacy skills, targeted intervention, individualized learning, credit recovery, unit recovery, online courses, and ACT® test preparation. After reviewing six providers, CCS decided to partner with Edmentum because of the comprehensive offerings and easy-to-use programs and due to the fact that students enjoyed using Edmentum's programs. During the first year of the implementation, schools in the district have already begun to see outstanding growth.

How They Did It:

The implementation kicked off in January of 2018, with Edmentum Consultant Cindy Chancery leading trainings across the district to make sure that all educators knew how to use the programs and implement them successfully.

“Literally, at the drop of a hat, if we call and ask her to come, she will go to the training at a school if she has to,” said Ms. Harrison. “You guys have been wonderful in that aspect because, literally, a teacher, a principal—it doesn’t matter who is having the question or concern—they shoot her an email; she’s very quick to respond.”

Improving Early Reading Skills

Starting with their earliest learners, Ms. Harrison and her colleagues hoped to improve overall student achievement by strengthening foundational literacy skills.

“One of the things that we saw with the actual curriculum that we had in our district at the time was that our students in K, 1, and 2 were really having trouble with the phonemic awareness and the phonics skills,” reported Ms. Harrison.

To address this challenge, students in kindergarten through 2nd grade use Reading Eggs, Edmentum’s pre-K–6 foundational literacy program, during center time in their classrooms. Special education students in grades 3–5, English language learners, and students who need to review reading concepts taught in earlier grades also use the program because of its explicit focus on phonics instruction, scaffolding, and repetition of skills.

“[Reading Eggs] really gives them that awareness that they need to have moving forward to be able to be strong readers,” Ms. Harrison said. “It’s very user-friendly for them as well. I will say our K–2 students that use Reading Eggs—they absolutely love it.”

Providing Individualized Learning Based on Student Needs

Another approach that the leaders at CCS took to help improve student achievement was to make sure that students who were working on, above, or below grade level would receive instruction and practice at a level that was just right for them. For this, CCS implemented Exact Path, Edmentum’s K–12 adaptive assessment and individualized learning program.

“They take that assessment at the beginning, and it gives them a path that is very individualized for that student, and that's what we wanted,” explained Ms. Harrison. “We didn't want a program that was just a blanket where everybody gets the same thing. We wanted it to be something that was very individualized for our students, and we felt like this program did that.”

Students in grades 2–8 use Exact Path during designated center or independent work time. Teachers use the data from the program to help determine small groups and inform classroom instruction. Additionally, if there is a concept that teachers want to reteach in a different way, they will often utilize the lessons in Exact Path for whole-group instruction.

Providing High School Intervention Options, Credit Recovery, Original Credit, and ACT Test Preparation

Exact Path isn't only used in elementary and middle school in CCS. High school students who have difficulty mastering math or ELA concepts, who have learning gaps from prior grade levels, or who are in special education and need additional individualized support use Exact Path during acceleration period, a class period in the middle of the day in which students work on assignments to get ahead, catch up, or to gain additional practice in focus areas.

CCS high school students also use Courseware, Edmentum's customizable course offerings for grades 6–12, in a variety of ways to catch up when they have fallen behind. In addition to using Courseware for credit recovery and summer school, students also can retake or make up content that they didn't master for a better chance of passing the course on the first try.

“If the student's struggling with certain standards, we go in [to Courseware] and pull those standards and give them additional work, trying to front-load, and hopefully help them out before they actually fail the course to keep them from having to go to summer school or things like that,” said Ms. Harrison.

Another challenge that CCS is addressing with Courseware is the need to be able to reach more students with fewer teachers and maintain reasonable class sizes. For subjects that are in high demand, teachers are paired with teacher assistants to run two concurrent sections of the class. In each classroom, students complete coursework online using Courseware. The assigned teacher is the teacher of record for both sections and is

responsible for rotating between the classrooms to provide support and feedback to students. The teacher assistant rotates between classes as well, helping manage behavior and keep students on task when the teacher is in the other classroom. With this model, the teacher can effectively support twice the number of students without increasing class size or teacher workload, and this saves the district money.

Yet another way that CCS is utilizing Courseware to help students meet their academic goals is through ACT test preparation. Students take Courseware courses for use with the ACT test during their sophomore or junior years to help them gain the practice and confidence they need to be successful.

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Ashlie Harrison
Director of Teaching and Learning

Success:

Although CCS is only a little more than a year into its implementation of Edmentum programs, the district has already begun to see some positive impacts.

“We are looking at where did the students start and how much growth or how much progress did they make in a year,” explained Ms. Harrison. “We had several schools in our district that had 98 percent or better growth, even from within their schools, which was excellent. And, I would say Clanton Intermediate was probably our best result of that. They had 100 percent growth, so 100 percent of their students showed growth from the time that they started at the intermediate school to the end of last [school]year.”

Because of the outstanding growth, Clanton Intermediate School won \$20,000 from the \$1 Million for Reading Success (<http://www.wsfa.com/2018/09/13/m-awarded-al-schools-with-significant-reading-gains/>) program for being one of the top 50 schools in Alabama for reading gains from the beginning to the end of the 2017–18 school year. Clanton Intermediate had only been using Edmentum programs for a few months upon winning this award, so this achievement was likely the result of a tremendous amount of hard work and effort from both teachers and students during the entire school year.

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The Future:

Because of the success they have seen, educators at Chilton County Schools plan to continue using Reading Eggs, Exact Path, and Courseware, and as they are nearing the end of the 2018–19 school year, the first full school year

using the programs, they are hoping students achieve even more growth.

For other districts looking to implement online programs successfully, Ms. Harrison offers some advice: "I think the most important part of a program being successful is getting your teachers to buy into the product or the program. I think trying to force something on a district or force something on your teachers or students is obviously not the way to go. So my advice, as far as what works for us, is getting that committee together and making sure that everyone understands that they have a stake in this too and that their opinion is very valuable and allowing them to ask really difficult questions on the front end and get exactly what's going to work best for your district. When you get those teachers in there and those teachers buy into it, it's a lot more likely for the program to be successful."

For more information:

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