

SUCCESS SPOTLIGHT

# Gadsden Independent School District Drives Largest Math Score Increase in District History

Despite seemingly insurmountable challenges, Gadsden Independent School District (GISD) saw the greatest increase in its core math scores in the district's 150-year history—640 percent—from 2021–2022.

Located outside of El Paso, Texas near the Mexican border, GISD is set among the sprawling pecan groves in rural New Mexico. With such a large district footprint—1,400 square miles—teachers' and students' daily commutes can be challenging.

GISD is a Title I district with high levels of poverty and historically low educational achievement. Many of GISD's students are children of



Gadsden Independent School District



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—Roberto Salas

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migrant farm workers who travel across the Mexican border, and almost all are English Learners who start school below grade level in English language arts and often don't catch up.

Despite efforts to improve performance, the district's 17 Grades K–6 schools have consistently been in the lowest percentile in terms of test scores. Recruiting teachers to the district has been difficult because it doesn't pay as well as districts in neighboring states, and the nationwide teacher shortage has only made recruitment harder. Jed Duggan, GISD's director of student success, elaborated: "There's been a lot of teacher turnover in the schools," he said, especially after the district was impacted by the pandemic. "At one point, El Paso was the center for the COVID-19 virus."

Still, the educators at GISD were determined to improve their situation.

## What They Did

In 2019, just before the pandemic hit, GISD hired a new administrative staff that set out to make some big changes.

They adopted *i-Ready Classroom Mathematics*, a student-centered discourse program, and *i-Ready Diagnostic* and Personalized Instruction from Curriculum Associates for their core math needs. When the district initially adopted the products, instruction was virtual, which added another hurdle to their achievement goals. "During the pandemic, student and teacher engagement was low," admitted Roberto Salas, director and instructional specialist for Grades K–6 mathematics. "There wasn't a lot of standardization around the Curriculum Associates products." The data indicated that most students were in a critical situation academically.

In fall 2021, the first *i-Ready Diagnostic* indicated that only 5 percent of GISD's students were Mid or Above Grade Level, 45 percent were Below Grade Level, and 51 percent were Two or More Grade Levels Below. Although students and teachers were finally face to face again, the staff knew they had to work together to turn things around.

"After analyzing the data, we were able to identify where our gaps were," explained Duggan. Geometry was one of those gaps. Administrators identified standards that had not been addressed. They designed pacing guides to keep students on track and encouraged teachers to use student data as their instructional guide. In turn, the teachers used Prerequisites reports to pinpoint specific skill gaps and Instructional Groupings to encourage same-level students to collaborate. The students used My Path to address individual needs through personalized lessons.



### Professional Development

Because almost everyone at the district level was new, Salas arranged centralized professional development (PD) to accommodate staff from various locations. A Curriculum Associates PD professional held six-hour training sessions starting at 7:30 a.m. The district had to get creative to provide the training because they didn't have any early-release days, and many of the staff were traveling long distances to attend.



### Making the Most of the Products

After a few months of using *i-Ready Personalized Instruction* as part of a 90-minute math block, the schools started seeing results. "Everyone was demonstrating growth," said Salas. "Some of the schools had never completed their initial *i-Ready* training, and we made those principals accountable when they saw the high level of performance in other schools."

After the second Diagnostic, which the students took midyear in Spanish, the district started studying the data and Prerequisites reports more closely. "I remember one teacher said . . . 'My students didn't have the prerequisite skills they needed before. Having *i-Ready* makes such a difference because I know which skills to teach,'" noted Salas. Now he collaborates with teachers and models the *i-Ready Classroom Mathematics* lessons. One Grade 6 teacher told him, "Mr. Salas, I've never had my students speak that much in the classroom in an entire year. You made it so interactive. The students were so engaged."

# What They Accomplished

The [authentic Spanish resources](#) that *i-Ready* provides allowed teachers to break down barriers to understanding. By using data to guide instruction, having students taking more ownership for their learning, and providing practice that met the rigor of the standards, the district saw phenomenal performance growth from fall 2021–spring 2022, exceeding all expectations.

“The number of critical students across the district dropped from 51 percent at the beginning of the year to 22 percent at the end of the year,” said Salas. “I’m really proud of all the teachers and students.”

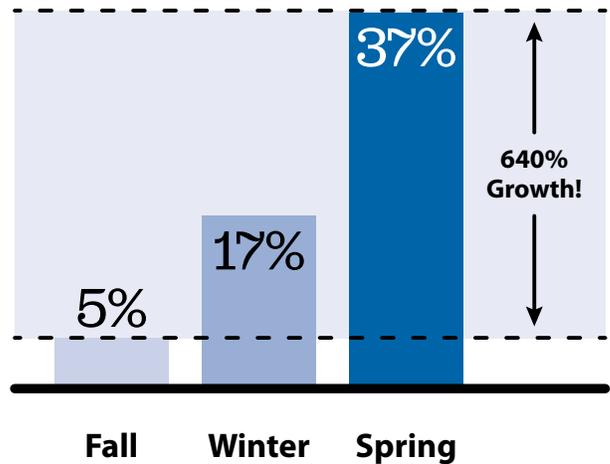
## A Boost in Morale

As a result of their success, there’s been a dramatic boost in morale throughout the district. Although teachers were working harder than ever, Duggan explained, “Teacher efficacy used to be extremely low. Now everyone is feeling confident about our massive math growth and efficacy has improved.” Salas added, “I knew we would show improvement, but the progress we made was far more than I ever expected.”

The district celebrated its success with a visit from some Curriculum Associates employees, who dressed up as *i-Ready* characters. They went to five schools that showed the most growth. “We were all so excited to have them there,” said Salas. “This is the best district in the world,” added Duggan. “The kids are amazing. We have the best staff.”

Next year, their collective goal is to have all GISD’s schools performing at a high level. “It can be done,” said Salas. “We have the resources. We just need to do the work.”

Percentage of Students On or Above Grade Level, Mathematics, 2021–2022



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