

## SUCCESS SPOTLIGHT

# Shelby County Schools Accesses Meaningful Professional Development to Excel Achievement

In 2019, Alabama passed the Alabama Literacy Act (ALA), requiring every school district in the state to use a diagnostic assessment three times a year to measure students' early literacy knowledge in Grades K–3.

Education leaders at Shelby County Schools (SCS), a rural district of approximately 9,000 elementary school students located 34 miles south of Birmingham, set out to find a diagnostic program that met the requirements of the new law as well as the district's commitment to continuous improvement.

SCS had launched a pilot of several programs among the district's English Learners (ELs) in 2019. The pilot went so well that district leaders quickly concluded the programs that had helped their ELs were the ones they'd use to support all the district's elementary students. During summer 2020, SCS adopted Curriculum Associates' *i-Ready Assessment* and *i-Ready Personalized Instruction*, a standards-aligned assessment suite and engaging online lessons that prepare students for grade-level success, as well as the Teacher Toolbox, a library of digital resources for differentiating instruction for all elementary students.

When it came to choosing an assessment program for all the district's elementary students, district leaders knew they needed resources that would truly help learners excel. "We wanted something that dug deep," said Lynn Carroll, assistant superintendent of instruction/deputy superintendent.

Shelby County  
Schools



STUDENTS  
8,927

GRADES  
K–5

TITLE I  
30%

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# What They Did

SCS teachers embraced the new programs and were so impressed with them that the district eventually adopted another Curriculum Associates program, *Ready® Reading*, for all students in 2021, and many schools adopted *Ready Writing* and *Phonics for Reading™* on their own.

At this point, according to Carroll, SCS educators “felt like [they] had it all.” However, it wasn’t until their *i-Ready Partners* sent a professional development (PD) specialist out to conduct *i-Ready* training that educators realized just how much would be possible with reliable student data.

**This successful implementation of *i-Ready* at SCS has been defined by the following:**



## Differentiated Tier 1 Instruction

“Previous to *i-Ready*, any program packages that we had were used more for Tier 2 or Tier 3 interventions, and *i-Ready* was a shift to provide differentiated instruction for Tier 1,” said Carroll. “And due to the pandemic, we have had more splits, more differences, and kids who needed more support, so [having that] differentiated path within Tier 1 was a good selling feature.”



## Personalized PD Sessions

The key to SCS’ success and love of *i-Ready* has been the PD piece provided by Curriculum Associates. “A big part of the teacher’s buy-in is [the PD specialist’s] knowledge from a teacher’s perspective,” said Leah Anne Wood, director of instruction. “He was able to say, ‘Give me a kid; tell me a child that you would like for me to look into.’”

From there, the specialist would pull up that child’s data and discuss the next steps. The teachers saw his level of expertise and learned what the program could do in their individual classrooms. “It is the person who makes the difference,” said Carroll. “He made it real. He knows the program so well. It’s not canned PD. It’s very authentic.”



## Motivating Goal Setting

As part of the district’s improvement plan, educators challenged students to complete 45 to 60 minutes of *i-Ready Personalized Instruction* in each subject every week with a 70 percent pass rate. In order to encourage and support students, “The teachers are doing motivational things in the classroom like adding sprinkles [to a large donut picture] each time a child meets their goal, and then when they fill up their donut, they’re having a celebration in the classroom,” shared Debbie Horton, elementary coordinator. This motivation is helping students be accountable for their learning.



## Expressions of Gratitude

“I just went through a report, and anybody who had moved a child 100 percent or more, I sent them an email and just said, ‘I want you to know we’re watching reports, and we’re seeing great things from your students, and [we] thank you for the dedication and the hard work that you’re doing to learn about this program and to deliver instruction, [which] is certainly paying off,’” said Horton.

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—Leah Anne Wood

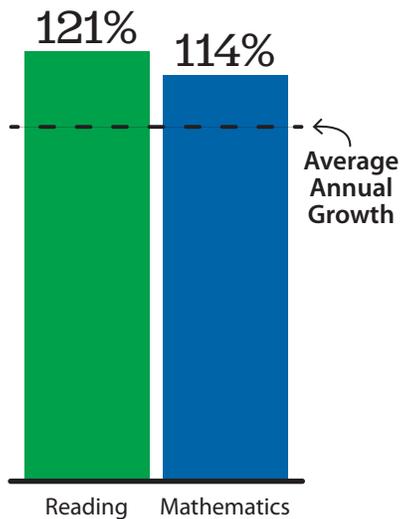
# What They Accomplished

For the 2021–2022 school year, SCS participated in 25 total PD sessions. At the Linda Nolen Learning Center for students with special needs, some students demonstrated 200 percent Typical Growth on their Diagnostics from fall to winter, well surpassing the expected yearlong growth of 100 percent in just half the school year.

**SCS saw the following improvements in its students, according to the *i-Ready Diagnostic* reports:**

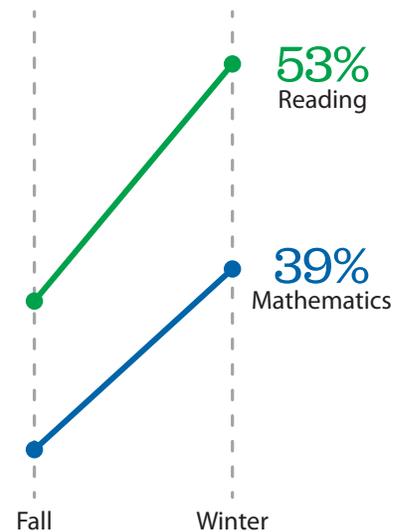
## Typical Growth

For the 2020–2021 school year, the median percent progress toward Typical Growth for SCS was 121 percent in Reading and 114 percent in Mathematics. Typical Growth is the average annual growth for a student at their grade and baseline placement level.



## Placement Levels

For the 2021–2022 fall-to-winter placements, more students have moved to On or Above Grade Level in both Reading (i.e., 53 percent) and Mathematics (i.e., 39 percent).



Horton reiterated that the key to SCS' success has been the expertise of their PD specialist. "[The] conversations among diagnostic information were real time and really authentic and meant something to [the teachers] more so than ever before," she said.

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—Debbie Horton



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