

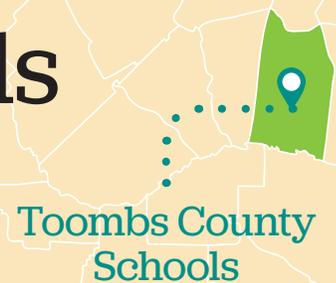
SUCCESS SPOTLIGHT

Toombs County Schools Integrates Assessment and Instruction to Achieve Student Gains

When education leaders at Toombs County Schools (TCS), a small, rural district in southeast Georgia, began looking for an interim assessment program they could use across the district, they had specific goals in mind.

Any new program they adopted would need to be aligned to the Georgia Standards of Excellence, be able to predict student performance on the annual state assessment, identify students' learning needs, and deliver teacher-friendly resources to help make personalized instruction available even in the busiest classrooms.

Tonawanda Irie, curriculum director, and Brandon Hartley, school improvement specialist, lead efforts to improve student achievement across the district. They previously worked together at Toombs Central Elementary School (TCES)—Irie as principal and Hartley as instructional coach—where they helped facilitate a period of increased learning and student growth. In 2018, when the district was looking for a single instruction and assessment program they could use with fidelity in all elementary and middle schools, TCES was viewed as a model for success.



“Teachers are the heart and soul of the classroom . . . so any assessment program that was selected must be embraced by them. The district was looking for a program that enabled teachers to take a hands-on approach in the classroom, not just something that requires students to sit in front of a computer.”

—Tonawanda Irie

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What They Did

After studying how student learning took off at TCES with the implementation of *i-Ready Assessment* and *i-Ready Personalized Instruction*, a standards-based assessment suite and engaging instructional program, the district agreed to pilot these programs as well as Teacher Toolbox across its elementary and middle schools in 2019.

Over the course of the school year, TCS educators focused on the following areas to make the implementation a success:

We've seen tremendous gains in reading and math . . . When you stay within the parameters of using i-Ready, you see growth.

—Brandon Hartley



Professional Development

Irie and Hartley knew from experience that teachers would need training to get the most out of *i-Ready*. Early professional development sessions with Curriculum Associates helped Toombs County's educators understand all the resources that were available to them through *i-Ready* and the Teacher Toolbox, a digital library of instructional resources. This initial training got implementation off to a strong start.



Personalized Learning

Data from the *i-Ready Diagnostic* connects seamlessly to Personalized Instruction, enabling district educators to create individualized learning paths, organize students for small group instruction, and provide detailed lessons that address students' unique learning needs.



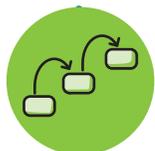
Teacher Resources

TCS leaders quickly recognized *i-Ready* could help bridge knowledge gaps that can occur when teachers retire or move to different positions. "Our new teachers—and even our veteran teachers who needed to step outside of their established routines—learned that *i-Ready* provided everything that they needed," Irie said.



Foundations

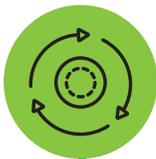
TCS is consistently focused on supporting student growth in foundational literacy and mathematics skills. Specifically, improving students' vocabulary is a key goal for the district because it's the foundation of all learning regardless of subject. Hartley also noted that building students' vocabulary is particularly important for the district's English Learner population.



Consistency

During the COVID-19 pandemic, TCS educators appreciated that *i-Ready Personalized Instruction* made it possible for them to stick to their instruction schedules with a minimum of 45 minutes for reading and a minimum of 45 minutes for mathematics weekly with both their in-person and virtual learning groups. "We were able to keep the ball rolling and didn't have to pump the brakes," Irie said.

When it came time for students to take their Diagnostics, TCS education leaders borrowed space in a county building so students whose families chose to learn remotely would feel safe and be able to practice social distancing.



Continuity

As the district’s curriculum director, Irie values continuity across grade levels. When students understand the assessment process, that’s one less thing to worry about, and they can focus on demonstrating their knowledge, not learning new processes. “You assess the same way in kindergarten that you do in fifth grade up to eighth grade,” Irie said. These factors not only support student growth but also save teachers and students time.

What They Accomplished

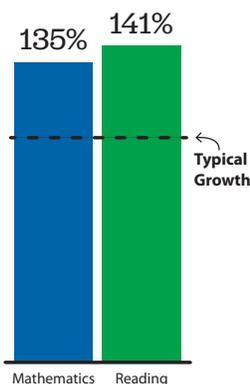
At the end of the 2019–2020 school year, the district’s instructional coaches took the lead on compiling data about student growth. What they discovered delighted educators. “They could see for themselves that the Diagnostics provided actionable data that accurately addresses student needs during the school year and predicts their performance on end-of-year state assessments,” explained Irie. “It was a breakthrough moment when they could say *i-Ready* is truly aligned to standards and that it worked well.”

The district has now used *i-Ready* for assessment and instruction in reading and mathematics for a few years and has achieved steady improvements in student performance.

During the 2020–2021 school year, TCS saw the following improvements in its students, according to *i-Ready* Diagnostic reports:

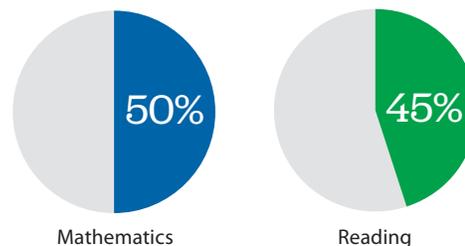
Typical Growth

Students in each grade level improved their Typical Growth by 135 percent in mathematics and 141 percent in reading when they used *i-Ready* for 30 minutes of instruction.



Placement Levels*

50 percent of students in each grade level improved their placement in mathematics and 45 percent of students in each grade level improved their placement in reading over the course of the 2021–2022 school year when they used *i-Ready* for 30 minutes in each subject weekly.



*Research indicates students achieve greater progress with Personalized Instruction if they use it for at least 30 minutes per subject per week while maintaining a high percentage of Lessons Passed.

Our new teachers—and even our veteran teachers who needed to step outside of their established routines—learned that i-Ready provided everything that they needed . . . It is comprehensive, and they were relieved to see they didn’t have to figure out on their own how to help students.

—Brandon Hartley



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