

Visible Men Academy: Suns on the Rise

A new day dawns for a Florida charter school that went from F-rated to A-mazing in two years.



“If they’re going to grade it, then we’re going to try for an A.”

—Neil Phillips

“If they’re going to grade it, then we’re going to try for an A,” says Neil Phillips, cofounder and Head of School at Visible Men Academy (VMA) in Bradenton, Florida.

“Despite any misgivings I have about the over-emphasis on standardized testing,” he adds.

As all Florida educators know, the Department of Education does indeed use the state test to grade the schools and districts across the state. And for better or worse, the grades matter.

Phillips founded VMA to address the chronic underperformance of an at-risk student population about which he has two core beliefs: capability is high and expectations are too low.

As the staff at VMA will tell you, “100% of our students live at or below the poverty line, and 100% are capable of excellence.”



Central West Florida

Enrollment:
100

Grades:
K-5

Single Gender:
All male

Students of Color:
96%

Extended School Day:
8.5 hours

Extended School Year:
205 days



Staff at VMA call their students “suns” and encourage them to “SHINE” on the school values of Selflessness, Honesty, Integrity, Niceness, and Excellence.

Challenge

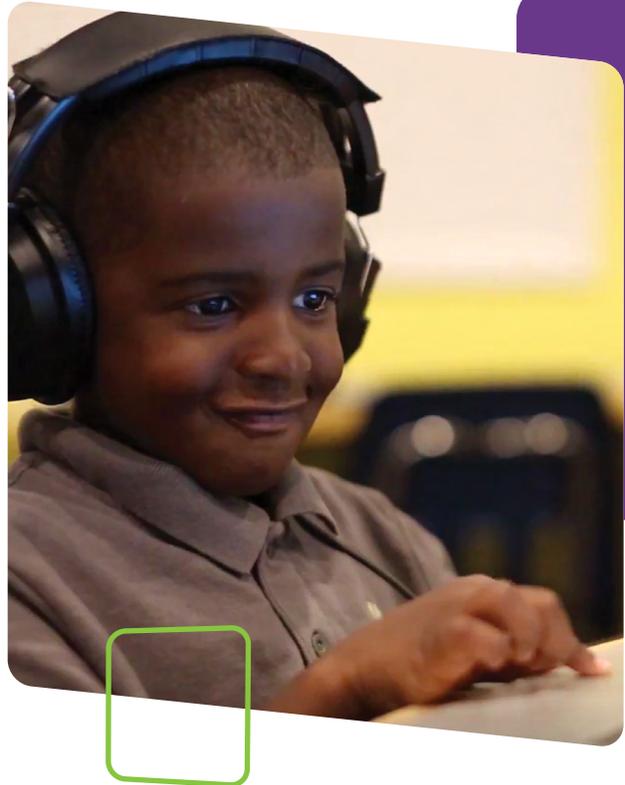
Two years ago, VMA received a disappointing result following the administration of the Florida Standards Assessments (FSA). Despite some substantial individual gains from the previous year, too few students received passing scores, and VMA received a failing school grade.

Given the many challenges facing their students, VMA leaders knew they were playing catch-up.

“What we noticed is that over 80 percent of the kids come in about two years or more below grade level,” says a school administrator.

“So we aimed for them to achieve at least 1.5 years of growth in each school year.”

Phillips announced a plan to increase gains in the school newsletter, pledging to strengthen curriculum alignment and data analysis practices in the coming year.



Change

For 2016–2017, VMA adopted *i-Ready Diagnostic* and *i-Ready Personalized Instruction* for Mathematics and Reading in Grades K–5.

After the administration of each Diagnostic, *i-Ready* arms educators with information such as a student’s placement level (e.g., early Grade 3) and the skills they need to learn or practice to fill holes in understanding or keep growing in their mastery of the standards.

“

We wanted a tool that could inform instruction, adapt to student needs regardless of level, and help parents understand how their kids were doing.

We work hard to monitor our usage and lesson pass rates, and our teachers love using the data! *i-Ready* has definitely helped elevate our suns’ achievement.

—**Tiffany Mickens**
Assistant Head of School

”

i-Ready Personalized Instruction remediates skills deficits by assigning an appropriately leveled queue of online lessons and quizzes to each student. After reviewing students’ placements and progress within each domain, teachers pull the appropriate differentiated resources from the online Teacher Toolbox to support instruction.

Impact

One year into the FSA Improvement Plan, VMA achieved such extraordinary growth that it received a congratulatory letter from the governor.

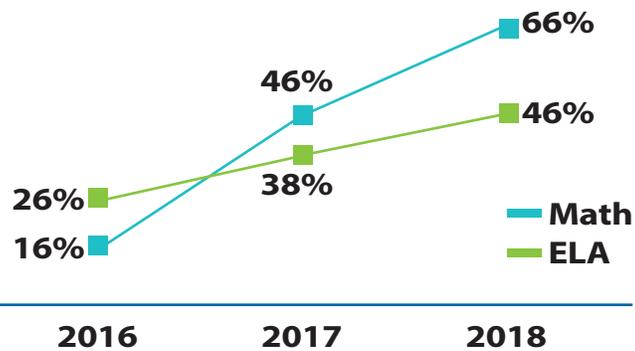
VMA had ranked in the top one percent of Florida schools for growth in Mathematics and the top two percent for growth in Reading.

After Year 2, the school was awarded an A grade.

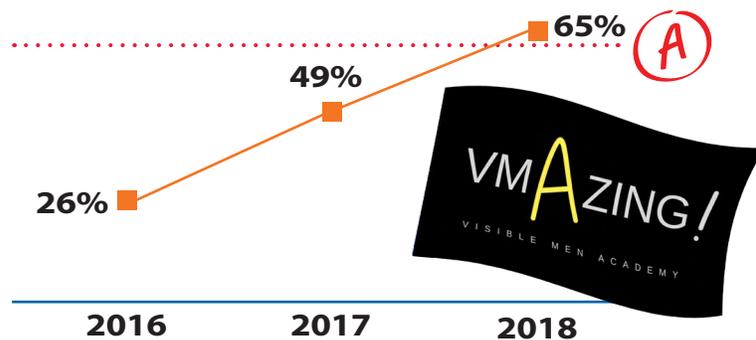
Phillips, a Harvard graduate who studied literature, took inspiration for the school's name from the novel *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison. The book chronicles one man's journey of self-discovery amidst systemic racial prejudice.

Thanks to the vision and leadership of Phillips and the VMA staff, these visible young men have indeed caught the eye of state officials and the surrounding community. They've proven what Phillips knew all along—this is a school to watch.

Percentage of VMA Students with Passing FSA Scores



VMA Performance on Florida's School Grading Scale



Is your students' potential shining through on the state test?

Make sure your state knows what you do—that all your kids are capable of more.

Visit [i-Ready.com/Empower](https://www.i-ready.com/Empower) to explore how *i-Ready* can help students make the gains they deserve.



@myiready



Curriculum Associates



@CurriculumAssoc



iReady