

Scholastic Programs Help Educators Significantly Raise Reading Scores on State Assessment

RISE Academy in Florida Credits Scholastic F.I.R.S.T. and Literacy Pro for Dramatic Improvement

For one charter school in Margate, Florida, taking a different approach to reading instruction and the use of new software tools resulted in one of the state's largest improvements in third-grade reading scores on the 2022 statewide assessment.

RISE Academy (Raising Individual Student Excellence) is a public K–8 charter school that is part of the Broward County Public Schools and was founded in 2008. Dr. Carmella Morton is its founder and executive director. “Our curriculum is focused on science and technology,” she says. “We are one of the only STEM Cognia-certified schools in south Florida and proud to be one of the highest-performing schools in Broward County.”

As a public charter school, RISE Academy follows the curriculum of Broward County but has the freedom to use additional educational materials and resources. The academy currently enrolls approximately 300 students, and Morton says the leadership hopes to move the school into a new facility soon so it can accommodate more students to keep up with demand.

High-achieving but still looking for ways to improve

Despite RISE Academy's steady improvement in grades from the state department of education—moving up from a B rating from school years 2016–2018 to an A rating in 2019—school leaders were looking for ways

to improve further. Tricia King, curriculum specialist, says she was also looking to address the impact of the pandemic. “We were seeing learning loss in many areas but most clearly in reading,” she says. “I attended a literacy workshop in the district in February 2021 where I saw the Scholastic programs F.I.R.S.T. and Literacy Pro, and they were just what I was looking for. I knew they could provide our teachers with the tools they needed and would motivate and engage our students.”

Introducing interactive, personalized reading programs Scholastic F.I.R.S.T. (Foundations in Reading, Sounds & Text) is a research-based program that focuses on teaching students the five foundational reading skills through interactive and adaptive activities and games, as well as eBooks. Designed to fit seamlessly into any classroom schedule, Scholastic F.I.R.S.T. is effective both in small-group rotations as well as in independent digital learning settings.

Scholastic Literacy Pro is a reading management solution that provides access to a library of over 2,800 eBooks for students in grades K–8, comprehension checks for thousands of books, assessments, and many additional resources for teachers and families. The platform curates a personalized bookshelf for



each student, using a reading recommendation engine that works in partnership with teachers to drive students toward books that are aligned with their interests, grade level, and independent reading level.

Reorganizing classrooms into rotation models

“We started using F.I.R.S.T. for our K–2 students and Literacy Pro for grades 3–5 beginning in August of 2021,” King says. “At the same time, we rearranged our classrooms to follow the recommendation from Scholastic in a design better suited for both whole-class and small-group instruction in a rotation model. That was something we had wanted to do, but Scholastic provided us with a clear blueprint.” [pictured at right]

“We use F.I.R.S.T. and Literacy Pro in stations as part of our 90-minute reading blocks, which use a 30-minute rotation schedule. Implementation was fast and easy for our teachers, because the

programs were so straightforward. Teachers and students loved using them. They saved our teachers a lot of time and helped them understand how to conduct small-group instruction effectively."

Data and insights help guide instructional decisions

King says the analytics help RISE Academy educators to make more informed, data-driven decisions. "The programs provide a lot of insight and enable teachers to understand the proficiency of students in specific areas," she says. "We use that data in combination with our progress-monitoring assessments to group students together in reading groups and identify students who need extra help, instruction, or encouragement. It helps me guide our reading specialists on what to focus on in a specific classroom or with a small group or individual student."

Seeing dramatic results

RISE educators were encouraged by the progress throughout the past school year. "We have two progress-monitoring assessments during the year, and we saw

steady improvement in our reading scores, particularly for third grade," King says. "Finally, at the end of the year, the percentage of third-grade students reading at or above grade level on the FSA (Florida Standards Assessment) rose to 71 percent, 20 points higher than on the previous year's assessment."

"This increase was the largest in Broward County and one of the most dramatic improvements of any school in the state," says Dr. Adriana Guerra, principal of the academy. "We used the same curriculum as before. What changed was adding Scholastic F.I.R.S.T. and Literacy Pro. The results prove that these programs are effective. And they had an impact across our curriculum; because students' reading skills improved, they did better in science and math as well."

"It was amazing to see the scores improve by such a wide margin," King says. "Our high-achieving students continued to be high-achieving, while

struggling readers improved significantly. Of the lowest-percentile students for reading in grades 3–5, some 90 percent moved up during the year. The missing piece that we needed was using these Scholastic programs in combination with moving to a rotation model."

Expanding on the partnership

Looking to the future, King says educators at the academy are excited and motivated by the results and looking forward to continued improvement in reading skills and assessment scores. "We are excited to continue working with F.I.R.S.T. and Literacy Pro because of the great results we've already seen, and we plan on adding Scholastic W.O.R.D., which is a game-based vocabulary and comprehension program for grades K–5, to expand and build on the work we're doing with reading instruction," she says. "Scholastic's programs have made all the difference for us, and we're grateful for that."

To learn more, go to www.scholastic.com/edtech.

