

Alabama district's Title I students progress quickly with Istation

E-learning program uses monthly assessments to target individualized math and reading resources

While Hoover City Schools had been successfully serving the needs of its Title 1 students, the central Alabama district wanted to streamline the process.

Hoover City did just that when it implemented Istation, an e-learning program that identifies learning gaps and provides engaging interactive lessons and face-to-face teaching strategies to get students back on track. Implemented in Hoover City in the fall of 2015, it is used in Response to Intervention (RTI) for students in grades 1 through 5 in the district's four Title I schools.

"After we started using Istation, we made adjustments to our preexisting practice called 'monitoring students out,'" explains Debra Walker Smith, PhD, director of federal programs and testing for the district. "Students were going back into the general education classroom and were being successful, so we were able to serve additional students—more than we ever had in the past."

Aligned with the Common Core

The program, which is aligned with the Common Core State Standards, supports diverse instructional approaches such as small- and whole-group instruction by emphasizing the seven essentials for blended learning: formative assessments, adaptive curriculum, personalized data profiles, teacher-directed lessons, school-to-home connection, professional development and proven results.

Monthly, nationally normed assessments—called Istation's Indicators of Progress (ISIP™)—measure student growth, and teachers use that information to select lessons while working with five or six students at a time, Smith says.

"Istation helps us to diagnose exactly what a student needs in instruction and provide that for them," Smith says. "And it helps make those small groups even smaller. If we have two students who are similar in their misunderstanding, we can group them together and work deeper with the lessons and strategies."

Engaging, interactive lessons

Students enjoy the program, Smith says, especially the interactive elements with fun characters. At the same time, progress reports are generated for teachers and administrators.

"Students like the animation and the feeling that they are playing a video game instead of actually practicing content and doing their work," Smith says. "Teachers report that students in the classroom are often singing the little chants to themselves because they have strategies contained in them."



Smith especially appreciates seeing reluctant readers turn the corner.

"Once the student goes through a series of lessons and that light bulb clicks on, they're just reading everything," Smith says. "Istation definitely helps drill down to the standards that students haven't mastered. And when students do, they are so excited to share what they've accomplished."

The district's most recent report shows the following improvements in Lexile reading scores for students in Title I schools from August 2017 to April 2018: First-grade students gained 370 points; second-grade, 280; third-grade, 155; fourth-grade, 165 and fifth-grade, 132 points.

At-home component

Istation lets students and parents use the system at home.

"Our parents want to be able to work with their students, but some of them don't know how," Smith explains. "To have something like Istation provide that additional layer of support not only helps the student, but helps the parent as well."

Before Hoover City implemented Istation, the district used other solutions that were lacking, Smith says. "The support wasn't there from the vendor. The reports were not as easily accessed or used by teachers or administrators."

And now? "We've never felt like we couldn't reach out to Istation for additional support," Smith says, adding that representatives conducted in-person trainings for the first two years. Now, experienced teachers train new staff.

"I believe that this program is one of the best investments we have made using our federal funds," Smith says. "I like the ease of implementation, but more importantly, I like that students feel successful using it."



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