

## Cleveland Metropolitan School District Reading Scores Transformed by Accelerated Reader

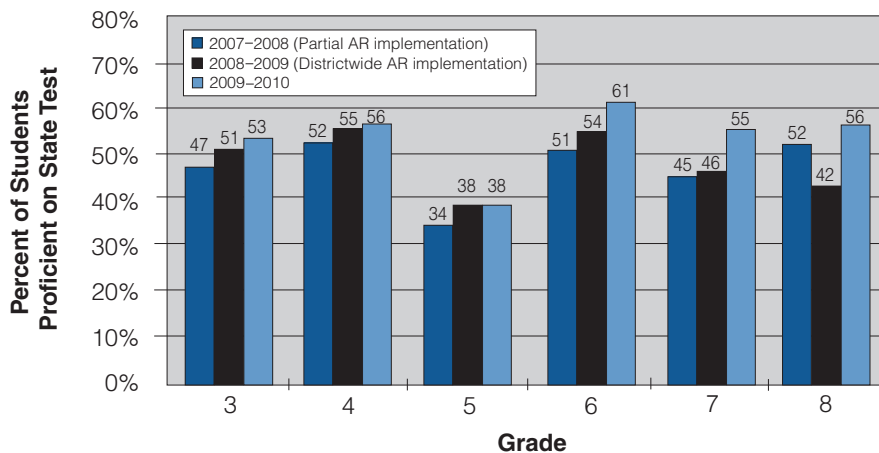
### Introduction

“The primary goal of the Cleveland Metropolitan School District is to become a premier school district in the United States of America.” As is clear from their mission statement, the Cleveland Metropolitan School District (CMSD) is a district focused on success. Educators there are proud of their students’ achievements in recent years, but are intent on developing these “pockets of success” into a strong foundation upon which to build for the future of all their schools and students.

CMSD is currently undergoing a bold Transformation Plan, driven by research and best practices in student achievement and school reform initiatives, which calls for fundamental, system-wide changes in their schools.

Key to this mission is Accelerated Reader (AR), according to chief academic officer for the district, Eric Gordon. Since AR was implemented districtwide in Cleveland during the 2008–2009 school year, the percent of students scoring Proficient on the Ohio Achievement Assessments (OAA) has been on the rise (Graph 1).

**Graph 1: Percent of Cleveland Students Scoring Proficient on OAA Increasing With AR Use**



### Educator Background



**Eric Gordon** is the chief academic officer of the Cleveland Metropolitan

School District. Having taught in the New Orleans Public Schools and the Toledo Public Schools as well as served as a high school principal in urban, rural, and suburban school districts, Mr. Gordon brings a varied background to CMSD. Under his academic leadership, the district has engaged in the development of a three-tiered academic improvement model that focuses on both traditional academic achievement strategies and dramatically improving the conditions for learning for students and families. Led by Gordon, CMSD has improved its state rating to *Continuous Improvement*, having earned strong achievement gains across state measures. Mr. Gordon holds both bachelor’s and master’s degrees from Bowling Green State University in Bowling Green, Ohio.

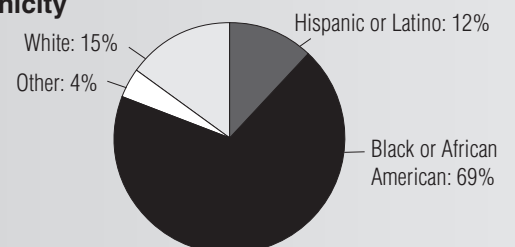
### School Profile

Cleveland Metropolitan School District  
Students: 48,457; Grades: Pre-K–12  
Cleveland, Ohio

### Demographics

Urban/Inner City  
Gifted and Talented: 7%  
Students With Disabilities: 22.3%  
Title I Districtwide  
Limited English proficiency: 5.5%  
Free or reduced lunch: 100%  
Mobility: 30.7%

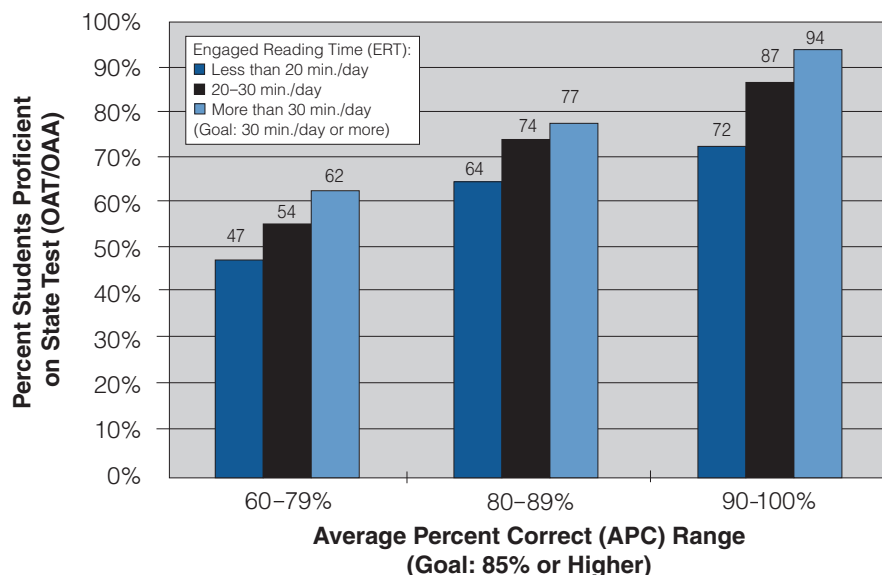
### Race/Ethnicity



Specifically, CMSD students who used AR during the 2009–2010 school year scored an average of 5 scaled score points higher on the OAA than students who did not

use AR. Graph 2 shows higher AR quiz scores and more time spent reading yielded the greatest gains.

**Graph 2: Time Spent Reading With Deep Understanding Boosts Cleveland Students' 2010 OAA Reading Gains** (Grades 3–8, n = 14,701)



## Study Description

At the heart of the Cleveland Metropolitan School District's Transformation Plan is the strategy to build, maintain, and develop quality schools in all neighborhoods. In this culturally diverse school community, building upon success is possible through an infusion of support via academic team coaches, barrier breakers, solution specialists, and content-area flexible experts, who ensure all accomplishments benefit the district as a whole.

CMSD curriculum is organized into eight segments, implemented in four- to five-week windows, where educators strive to have students meet a select, streamlined group of benchmarks focused on deep understanding. Underpinning these benchmarks, according to Gordon, is the notion of “deep practice,” in which students are “authentically engaged in practicing the key understandings they have learned.”

The district began using Renaissance Learning's Accelerated Reader program, and the accompanying STAR Early Literacy and STAR Reading assessments,<sup>1</sup> districtwide during the 2008–2009 school year, at a time when the district was seeking a way to ensure students were experiencing deep practice in reading. After a

rigorous evaluation by a district team led by Gordon, Accelerated Reader was selected based on its documented independent research, ability to align with Ohio Academic Content Standards and local curriculum, ability to differentiate for subgroups, bilingual accommodations, and quality of and commitment to implementation training, among other measures.

Present day, with the implementation solidly underway for two school years, Gordon reports, “Accelerated Reader has a research and evidence base that shows significant positive gains in general reading scores when used with fidelity. The role of a dedicated project manager was key to ensuring that the Cleveland Metropolitan School District was able to implement AR with the fidelity it requires.”

In the Cleveland school district, every literacy classroom is expected to devote 30–35 minutes of the 90-minute literacy block to guided independent reading practice within each student's ZPD, or zone of proximal development.<sup>2</sup>

A student's ZPD is determined using a grade-equivalent (GE) score from the STAR Reading assessment and the AR Goal-Setting Chart. After students finish reading books

“CMSD attributes our successful implementation of AR, led by our dedicated project manager, as one of the factors that helped the district achieve significant gains in reading on all grades of the Ohio Achievement Assessments in 2009–2010.”

<sup>1</sup> STAR Early Literacy is a reliable, valid, and efficient computer-adaptive assessment of 41 skills in seven critical early literacy domains. Norm-referenced STAR Reading is a reliable, valid, and efficient computer-adaptive assessment of general reading achievement and comprehension for grades 1–12.

<sup>2</sup> A ZPD is the reading range that will result in optimal growth for each student, where books are neither too difficult nor too easy, and students are challenged without becoming frustrated or losing motivation.

independently, they take a computerized Accelerated Reader quiz to check their level of reading comprehension. Educators use the quiz results to monitor students' growth in reading achievement.

To ensure students benefit from Accelerated Reader to the greatest extent possible, CMSD teachers utilize several other AR Best Practices<sup>3</sup> to guide their implementation in addition to having students practice reading within their individualized ZPD range. Teachers work diligently to set personalized reading goals for each student and meet frequently with students for brief one-on-one conversations, called taking Status of the Class, to guide reading practice and ensure students are on task as well as to offer support and praise.

To reward students for a job well done, encourage them to continue their momentum towards becoming lifelong readers, and involve the community in their reading efforts, the district recently hosted an event for students called Read, Dribble, and Score. Students gathered at Cleveland State University to watch the CMSD All Stars and Harlem Globe Travelers play basketball. Students designated as All Stars had achieved the highest number of points read—a measure that tracks engaged time spent reading—and maintained an average of 85% or higher correct on their Accelerated Reader quizzes, another of the recommended AR Best Practices.

## Results

Gordon credits much of the reading growth experienced by his students to using Accelerated Reader: "CMSD attributes our successful implementation of AR, led by our dedicated

project manager, as one of the factors that helped the district achieve significant gains in reading on all grades of the Ohio Achievement Assessments in 2009–2010."

CMSD teachers are also thrilled about what they and their students have accomplished using this tool. Jackie Dietrich, now a Media Specialist at Thomas Jefferson Newcomers School but formerly a second-grade teacher at Benjamin Franklin K–8 School, was moved to tears last school year when a child who entered her classroom in late fall with knowledge of only 120 high-frequency words ended the school year advancing 1.5 grade levels: "I was so proud of him and he was even prouder of himself.... I couldn't believe the progress and excitement AR had created.... I have to say that AR was a part of why I wanted to move into a library position, a bigger part was seeing what it could do in my classroom.... Knowing this type of thing wasn't happening in other buildings, I wanted to go and see if I could help create a library program and an AR program that could be a central part of the school like it is at Ben Franklin."

In a first-grade classroom at Henry W. Longfellow School, Gloria Boyd, who now teaches first graders at the district's Early Childhood Development Center, saw similar results last school year: "I have been using AR for over 5 years, and I enjoy the program because students who are struggling have improved."

Ed Coughanor, an English teacher at Jane Addams High School, has high praise for AR as well: "Accelerated Reader is the single most powerful tool I have used in my 39 years

"I was so proud of him and he was even prouder of himself.... I couldn't believe the progress and excitement AR had created."

### About CMSD

The Cleveland Metropolitan School District is the second-largest school district in Ohio, with some 45,000 students attending classes at 130 pre-K–8, high school, and new and innovative school facilities. The district has 6,330 full-time employees, including 3,463 teachers. The 82-square mile district serves the municipalities of Cleveland, Bratenahl, Linndale, and Newburgh Heights, as well as parts of Garfield Heights and Brook Park.

CMSD's mission statement calls for schools of choice "where students will be challenged with a rigorous curriculum that considers the individual learning styles, program preferences, and academic capabilities of each student, while utilizing the highest quality professional educators, administrators, and support staff available."

In August 2010, CMSD began a 5-year Academic Transformation Plan to graduate all students ready to compete in the 21st century global economy. Other Transformation goals are to provide high quality schools in all neighborhoods; hold all employees, not just teachers, accountable for academic success; recruit, support, and retain high-quality principals and teachers; expand what works and rethink and change what does not; attract and retain students and families in Cleveland; and right-size the district by effectively using facilities and resources.

<sup>3</sup> AR Best Practices are researched-based guiding principles for using Accelerated Reader to ensure fidelity of implementation.

of teaching. This program enabled our school to win the State Superintendent's School of Promise Award of Ohio for 4 years, a feat accomplished by only two other urban schools in the state."

In addition to the increased percentage of students scoring *Proficient* on the OAA since beginning the districtwide implementation of AR in 2008–2009 (see Graphs 1 and 2), a closer look at the data shows that students who used AR saw their scaled score points improve an average of 0.13 points for every book read, 0.57 points for every additional minute of daily engaged reading time (ERT),<sup>4</sup> and 0.66 points for every additional average percent correct (APC).<sup>5</sup>

Many CMSD third graders were tested twice in the 2009–2010 school year (in October and May); thus, their

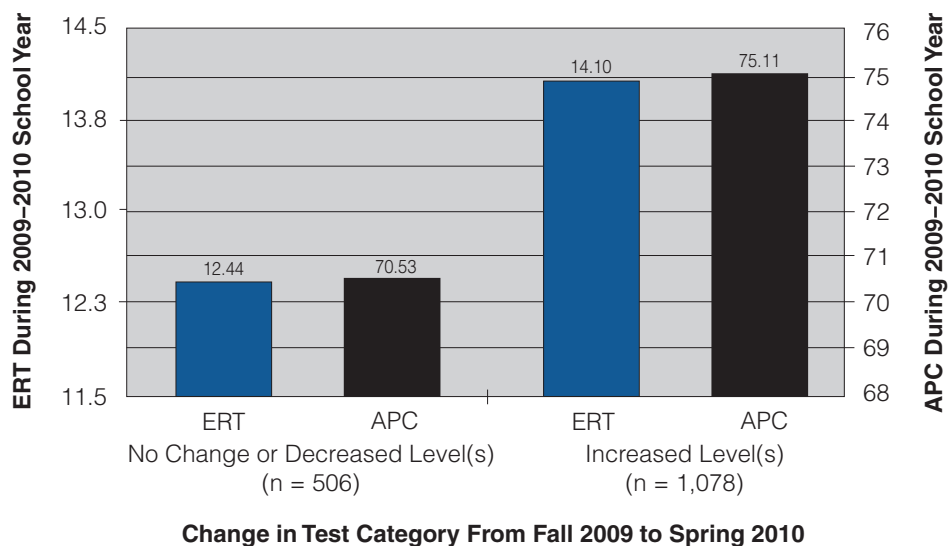
growth was tracked over time. The data reveal that each of three key factors resulted in a greater likelihood that OAA results would indicate an improvement in students' assigned state test categories (i.e., Limited, Basic, Proficient, Accelerated, Advanced)—the more books students read, the more ERT they devoted to reading, and the greater their APC on AR quizzes. Graph 3 shows students' OAA levels improving as their ERT and APC grows.

"Accelerated Reader is the single most powerful tool I have used in my 39 years of teaching."

### Conclusion

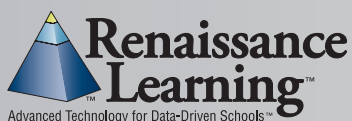
In the Cleveland Metropolitan School District, passionate educators are focused not only on achieving success but also building upon what has been accomplished to ensure every student at every school has a chance to excel both in their academic lives and beyond. For CMSD, Accelerated Reader is an important partner in this mission.

**Graph 3: More Engaged Time Reading (ERT) and Higher Average Percent Correct (APC) on AR Quizzes Yields Positive Change in OAA Performance Levels (Grade 3, n = 1,584)**



<sup>4</sup>ERT is an estimate of the number of minutes per day that students are actively engaged in reading practice.

<sup>5</sup>APC on AR Reading Practice Quizzes is a measure of student comprehension of books read.



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