

Miami-Dade County Public Schools: Strengthening Instruction for All Levels Across a Large District

Challenge

As the fourth largest district in the United States, Miami-Dade County Public Schools experience many challenges that face large, diverse districts. Since the ELA curriculum is selected by a committee consisting of reading coaches, teachers, and district staff, addressing their varied concerns was top of mind for Vanessa De La Peña, Elementary Executive Director at Miami-Dade.

Ms. De La Peña and her team needed an ELA solution that would meet the needs of a district that serves more than 150,000 students in grades K–5. Getting consensus from the committee was one goal, but there were several other factors to consider. With their diverse student population and varied instructional needs, ensuring that every student was getting equitable instruction was a priority. As Ms. De La Peña noted, “increasing the rigor of instruction in all classrooms is really a difficult task.”

Solution

As In 2013, the selection committee in Miami-Dade County Public Schools chose to adopt *Wonders* in a rare unanimous vote.

While reflecting on what influenced that decision, Ms. De La Peña shared that “there were a few things that were unique about the program, like the tight connections between the core *Wonders* ELA program, *WonderWorks* intervention, and *Maravillas* Spanish Language Arts, and the match of skills taught and text used.”

This aspect of *Wonders* has helped Miami-Dade to “understand how we can have the seamless connection across disciplines. For students who are struggling, the connection between *WonderWorks* and *Wonders* is seamless: the same skill, genre, and vocabulary. With EFL students, *Maravillas* helps us develop students who are biliterate and bilingual; they build an academic vocabulary in the second language and it’s also seamless.”

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“We were looking for texts that addressed the complexity and rigor of the new standards,” said De Le Peña, “and *Wonders* was the only solution that presented three pieces of text to the students each week that met that benchmark.” The Reading/Writing Workshop serves as the foundation, “where we start teaching the weekly skills and strategies.”

The Literature Anthology features authentic texts that increase in complexity and length, and the paired texts are the basis for thematic analysis. “Having those three pieces of text connected thematically, including half fiction and half nonfiction, helps our students understand how to apply the standards across multiple genres and in longer texts, which builds stamina.”

Ms. De La Peña called out the Access Complex Text (ACT) routine in the Teacher’s Edition as “a great scaffolding tool that helps make our teachers aware of what makes that text complex and what students might be tripping over. It gives them tools and strategies to support those elements and by extension provides teachers with a bridge to help their students.”

Wonders’ digital resources, which are housed on the *ConnectED* platform, have also made an impact in Miami-Dade: All of the teacher resource books, the different skills and lessons, and even Vicki Gibson’s *Managing Small Groups*. Being able to easily navigate the plethora of resources on *ConnectED* ensures that our teachers are using them. The professional development on *ConnectED* is really a great resource.” All of these resources build a digital professional library for our teachers.

Results

Miami-Dade has seen both qualitative and quantitative results since their implementation of *Wonders*. In April 2013, when the annual Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT 2.0) was administered, the percentage of Miami-Dade students in third, fourth, and fifth grade scoring “Proficient” in reading was well below the state average.

After just eight months of *Wonders* instruction, Miami-Dade students took the FCAT 2.0 again in April 2014. Not only did Miami-Dade close its achievement gap, its students’ reading proficiency levels exceeded the state average.

Miami-Dade has continued its ELA success through the transition to the new Florida State Assessments (FSA) in 2015. The percent of Miami-Dade students in grades 3-5 who scored at level 3 (satisfactory) or above has met — or exceeded — the state average all three years the FSA has been administered. They’ve experienced increases in the percentage of students achieving the highest level (5) as well as decreases in the percentage of students scoring at the lowest level (1). The results in grade 3 have been particularly impressive; the percentage of students scoring at level 3 or above rose by 4% from 2016 to 2017, outpacing all of the other large districts in Florida.

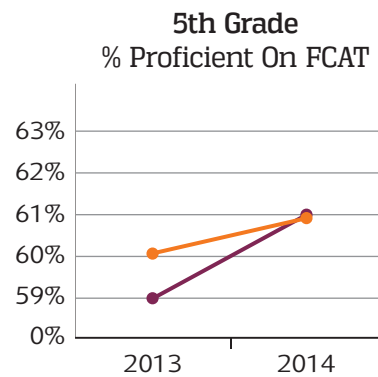
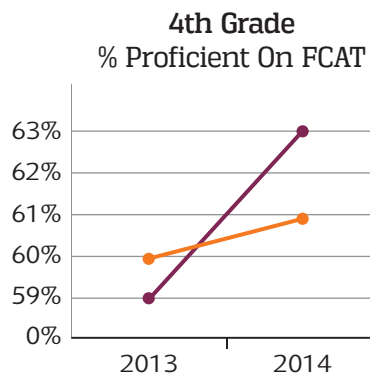
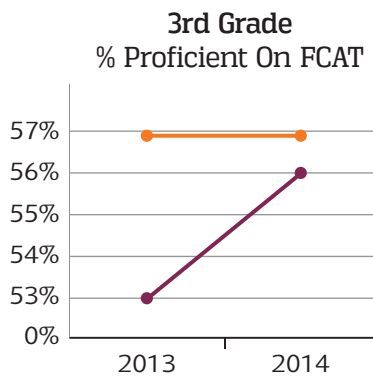
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According to the M-DCPS Department of English Language Arts, “After four years of implementation and three years of our new state assessment, it is clear that the reading instruction and selections within *Wonders* prepare students for Florida State Assessments by giving the students the reading confidence and stamina they need. It helps our teachers scaffold instruction to build comprehension.”

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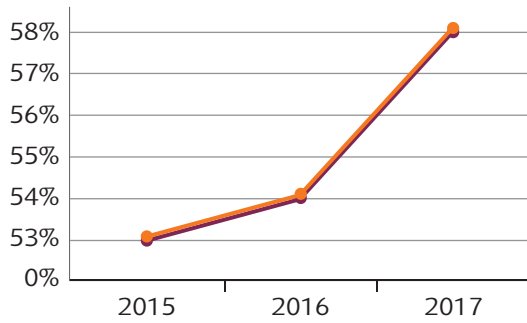
Wonders digital resources continue to help Miami-Dade effectively address student and teacher mobility. Ms. De La Peña recommends the *Wonders* implementation course on ConnectED to principals, new teachers, and teachers who are new to a grade. “We simply do not have the staff to provide that training repetitively; we are a very large district and a very mobile district, so there are new teachers coming in and out of our schools continuously,” she noted, “as years go by, principals will move teachers from grade level to grade level, and that can be a pretty big paradigm shift. Therefore, having digital resources readily available is very helpful to school-site administrators and teachers.

FCAT 2013–2014



FSA 2015-2017

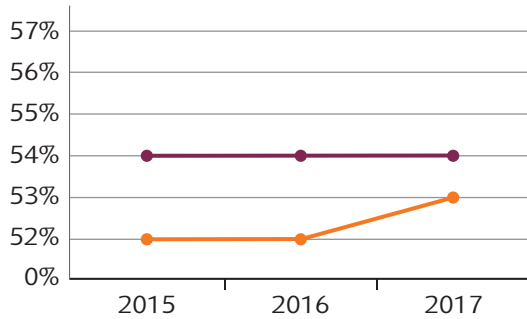
3rd Grade
Level 3 or Higher



4th Grade
Level 3 or Higher



5th Grade
Level 3 or Higher



We understand that class performance can improve due to a number of factors, including the innate ability and prior education of the students participating, as well as differences among professors and their pedagogies. We believe that, even taking these factors into account, *Wonders* can contribute to improvements in student outcomes.

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