

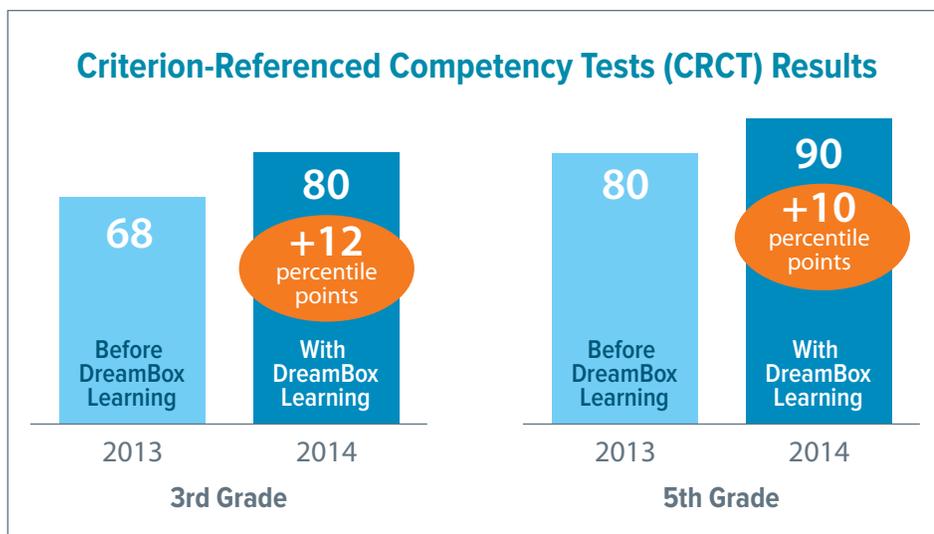
S. L. Mason Elementary School, Valdosta City Schools, Georgia

# Making an Impact in a High-Needs District on a Shoestring Budget

## RESULTS AT A GLANCE

### S. L. Mason Elementary achievement scores grew more than 10 percentage points in just one year

DreamBox Learning® Math was adopted by S. L. Mason Elementary in Valdosta, Georgia at the beginning of the 2013–14 school year. After just one year of implementation, scores had improved nearly 10 percentage points. The strong results convinced administrators to scale up and implement DreamBox districtwide.



*“We do universal screening three times a year and our math scores are higher than our rating scores every single time. The same is true on our Georgia Milestones testing ...”*

*—Dara Holt  
Curriculum Director,  
Valdosta City School  
District*

Four years later, Dara Holt, the curriculum director for Valdosta City Schools (VCS), reports that DreamBox continues to boost achievement rates in K–5 schools across the district, “We do universal screening three times a year and our math scores are higher than our rating scores every single time. The same is true on our Georgia Milestones testing: in every grade that’s tested, the scores in math are higher, every single time—and that’s district-wide on multiple measures in math.”

## Overcoming teaching and learning challenges in inner city schools

VCS in southern Georgia, faces several challenges that negatively affect student achievement, including high poverty, high student mobility rates, insufficient funding, and problems with teacher retention. All of the schools are Title I, and a full 100 percent of students receive free or reduced-price lunch. Plus, student mobility rates hover at 40 percent. These socioeconomic factors, coupled with limited funding often set the stage for vast achievement gaps.

Five years ago, VCS began exploring technology solutions to personalize learning and help every child succeed. After spending more than a year looking for an affordable, online math intervention solution that challenged, encouraged, and engaged each student individually, they chose DreamBox Learning Math. In September of 2013, they began piloting DreamBox at S. L. Mason Elementary, one of the district’s underperforming schools. By the following year, math

proficiency of third and fifth graders at S. L. Mason had grown by 10 percentage points, outpacing gains made at other VCS elementary schools. “The only thing different among the schools that year was DreamBox at Mason,” reported Holt. On the heels of this success, Holt and her team began implementing DreamBox districtwide.

## Using reporting to inform instruction and measure ongoing growth

Today, teachers at all five elementary schools are using DreamBox as part of their station rotation instructional model. They rely on DreamBox reporting to drive small group instruction for Tier 1 students, and to create targeted long-term assignments with AssignFocus™ for Tier 2 and Tier 3 students in their Response to Intervention (RtI) program. The administrative team also relies on DreamBox data to monitor and measure growth, identify learning trends, and evaluate student preparedness for high-stakes assessment testing.

## Finding ways for kids to get more DreamBox time—before, during, and after school

Because VCS is a high-poverty district, there is often limited access to the Internet. During school hours, students get forty-five minutes a day of DreamBox time on a desktop or iPad, but getting online access after school can be more of a challenge. For those students who don’t have broadband access at home, the local Boys and Girls Club offers an after-school program that enables kids to get online. Additionally, some of the schools in VCS also offer a “Breakfast Club.”

## Empowering teacher agency by providing more professional learning opportunities

Staff attrition rates are higher than average in economically-challenged districts, and VCS is no exception. But, research shows that providing the right support can make a huge difference in teacher retention. To counteract the effects of staff churn, and to help boost retention rates and improve teacher agency, VCS is now hyper-focused on providing ongoing Professional Development (PD) opportunities for new and existing staff—and they’re using DreamBox PD resources, such as MyFlexPD,™ to help get everyone up to speed fast. With MyFlexPD, teachers can access job-embedded PD, on demand, that is driven by what students are learning in DreamBox.

This year, VCS also sponsored what they hope will become an annual event—a Professional Learning Day in October to train grade-level support teachers in each building. Now each elementary school has a dedicated grade-level resource who can support teachers who are new to DreamBox. By empowering their educators with access to both on-site expertise and DreamBox’s MyFlexPD, VCS is hoping to keep their teachers engaged and set them up for success.

## Valdosta proves a high-needs district can also be a high-performing district

Despite numerous challenges including economic disadvantages, high student mobility rates, and higher-than-average staff attrition rates, Valdosta City Schools report that math proficiency is on the rise—and it has been since making DreamBox part of their personalized learning model districtwide. Year after year, students continue to post consistently higher math scores on Georgia Milestones testing and other assessments. And, with increased emphasis on creating more professional learning opportunities for educators, Valdosta is on track to boost teacher retention rates too.

## DREAMBOX IMPLEMENTATION

- Piloted during the 2013–14 school year at S. L. Mason Elementary
- Scaled district wide in all elementary grades since the 2014-15 school year
- 24/7 access with multiple devices
- Funded through Race to the Top & Title I
- Response to Intervention (RtI)
- Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) initiative

## VALDOSTA CITY FAST FACTS

- 8,134 K–12 students
- 71 percent African American, 21.9 percent Caucasian
- 100 percent free/reduced lunch
- 5 elementary schools, 2 middle schools, 1 high school
- ESOL: 2.5%
- Special Education: 12%
- Gifted Education: 5.1%



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