

Revitalizing Pinellas County Schools with K–5 Custom Curriculum Development



Case Study

The Client

Pinellas County Schools

The Project

Custom Curriculum Development

The Need

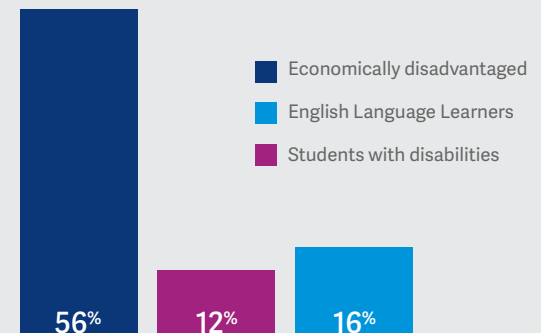
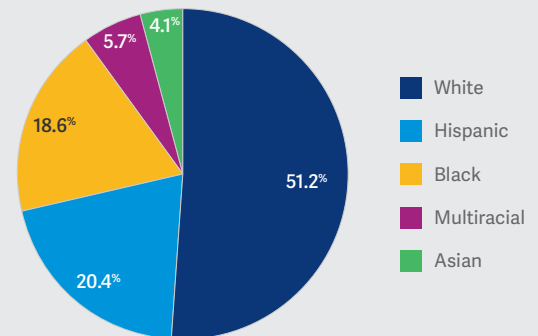
In February 2020, Florida adopted the Benchmarks for Excellent Student Thinking (B.E.S.T.) standards in English language arts. In the decade before these new standards, Pinellas supplemented and developed its own materials. For this mid-size urban district, serving over 91,000 students in 143 schools, new standards provided the opportunity to create a custom curriculum that featured localization and alignments between reading and writing.

The Opportunity

Pinellas County Schools had a district literacy team with the capacity to guide and review custom development. They were committed to providing a rigorous curriculum driven by high-quality and culturally diverse texts, with a focus on localized content for maximizing student engagement. Their challenges included a tight development window of 6-8 weeks ahead of use, causing limited runway for initial revisions and post-pandemic learning achievement gaps.

The district had several key priorities. First, they wanted to create a core curriculum aligned with Florida's B.E.S.T. standards that reflects local content. They also wanted to embed the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), ELL supports, and SWD supports. Finally, the district wanted to develop a grade 3–5 word study curriculum to support instruction in the Science of Reading, and incorporate vocabulary and skills featured in reading selections, and close post-pandemic gaps in academic achievement.

District Demographics



The Solution

The district decided their goals would best be met by developing a completely new, custom ELA curriculum for grades K–5 and a custom word study curriculum for grades 3–5; and they selected PCG to help them achieve this vision. They leveraged their own phonics program in grades K–2 to meet these goals. To meet their priorities, the district partnered with PCG to produce new customized unit outlines, explicit, scripted lesson plans, common assessments, texts, and teacher and student materials. With PCG, the district developed lesson plan templates that reflected research-based instructional delivery model (Gradual Release of Responsibility).

The Outcome

The district and PCG created a knowledge-building set of instructional materials with scaffolds to improve accessibility and texts with activities that support engagement for all learners across Pinellas County. A custom curriculum that started in grades K–2 built a strong foundation that contributed to the academic growth of students in grades 3–5. The components included:

- 8 ELA units per grade, each with 160 lesson plans representing a full year of instruction, including differentiated small group lessons
- Explicit lesson plans following the Gradual Release model, including sample teacher think-alouds, exemplar student responses, ELL supports, SWD supports, and embedded teacher instructional best practices
- End-of-unit culminating activities, engaging students in a standards-based synthesis of the knowledge-building topic

PCS earned an “A” grade from the Florida Department of Education in 2024 for the first time in the district’s history. Overall growth for PCS Grades 3–5 from SY 2023 to SY 2024 is 6%. The average growth throughout Florida was 4%. This put PCS in the top 15% of Florida school districts for fast achievement.

To learn more about PCG’s work, contact us today!



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