

How Atlanta Public Schools' Commitment to Free-Choice Reading Is Building a City That Reads

To boost declining literacy scores, leaders at Atlanta Public Schools created a city-wide reading program in partnership with Beanstack. RACE2Read, which stands for Read Across the City Everyday, places an emphasis on independent, free-choice reading and increasing access to books across the city. Five years in, students logged more than 10 million minutes during the 2021–2022 school year, and then again in 2023, and in record time.

With a far-reaching coalition of partners, a focus on visibility and book access, and Beanstack's suite of motivational reading tracking tools, APS leaders are seeing long-term reading habits take root district-wide.

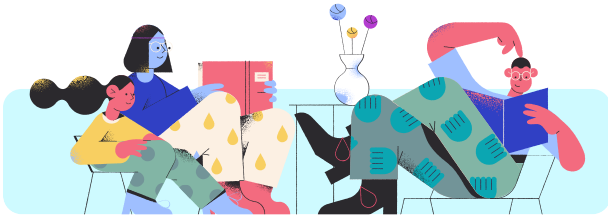
"We know that independent, free-choice reading really builds readers and helps readers grow stronger by increasing their vocabulary and strengthening fluency. And it helps just build the joy of reading for students."

Jennifer Saunders

Director of library media services
for Atlanta Public Schools



APPROACH



Emphasize Independent Reading

To encourage reading outside of the school day, APS leaders wanted to place more emphasis on free-choice reading and less on stressful quizzes and restrictive reading levels. Beanstack helps their students stay motivated and provides an all-time digital reading log to track reading habits and build awareness.



Set Individual and Community Goals

Every August, RACE2Read sets a community reading goal for the school year and sets smaller, individual goals for each school in the district. Students, staff, and families use a network of Beanstack sites to track reading and see realtime progress toward that goal.

RESULTS

APS tipped over the 10 million minute mark for the first time in May 2022, averaging just about 1 million minutes per month. And in 2023, the district made even bigger reading strides and hit their goal in March—two months earlier than the previous year! Students increased their monthly reading totals by more than 40%, averaging 1.4 million minutes a month during the 2022–2023 school year.

CONCLUSION

Beyond the big numbers, Saunders has seen RACE2Read's far-reaching impacts take root throughout the city. From strengthening family reading habits to getting community partners' employees reading and logging, Atlanta truly is building a whole city that reads.



Cultivate Community Partnerships

A vast coalition of partners, including nonprofits, educational organizations, and big corporations, play a crucial role in promoting the initiative and donating rewards and incentives. To stay aligned, the APS library media services team holds bimonthly partner meetings, where participating organizations report on their progress and share ideas.



Motivate With Rewards

Rewards and friendly competition are an important aspect of RACE2Read. Prizes are distributed at the student, school, and district level—often as a surprise. Some months, the top readers may receive free books, while at other times, top schools may win author visits, field trips, and experiences arranged by the district's internal partnerships office.