

SUCCESS STORY

The Beanstack Buzz Reaches Charleston County

During the summer of 2022, Charleston County School District in South Carolina aimed to achieve a sustainable county-wide reading initiative across all age groups. To meet this key goal, Christy James, the district's library and media services specialist, led the effort to implement Beanstack in all schools within the district. A few months after the launch, we spoke with James about Beanstack's implementation and early success within the Charleston County school system. In their first semester alone, 90% of the district's schools actively use Beanstack. What's more, the district-wide reading culture is thriving, thanks to some friendly reading competition and the allure of hitting a big community reading goal.

In our conversation, James observed that Charleston County needed a software that would "celebrate all readers and not just be mindless comprehension." With Beanstack, students have already expressed enthusiasm about their reading experience, while teachers are engaging with meaningful data and holistically viewing their students' progress. There's been so much eagerness to read using the Beanstack platform that five schools in Charleston County reached their community reading goals for the year just over a month after the launch!



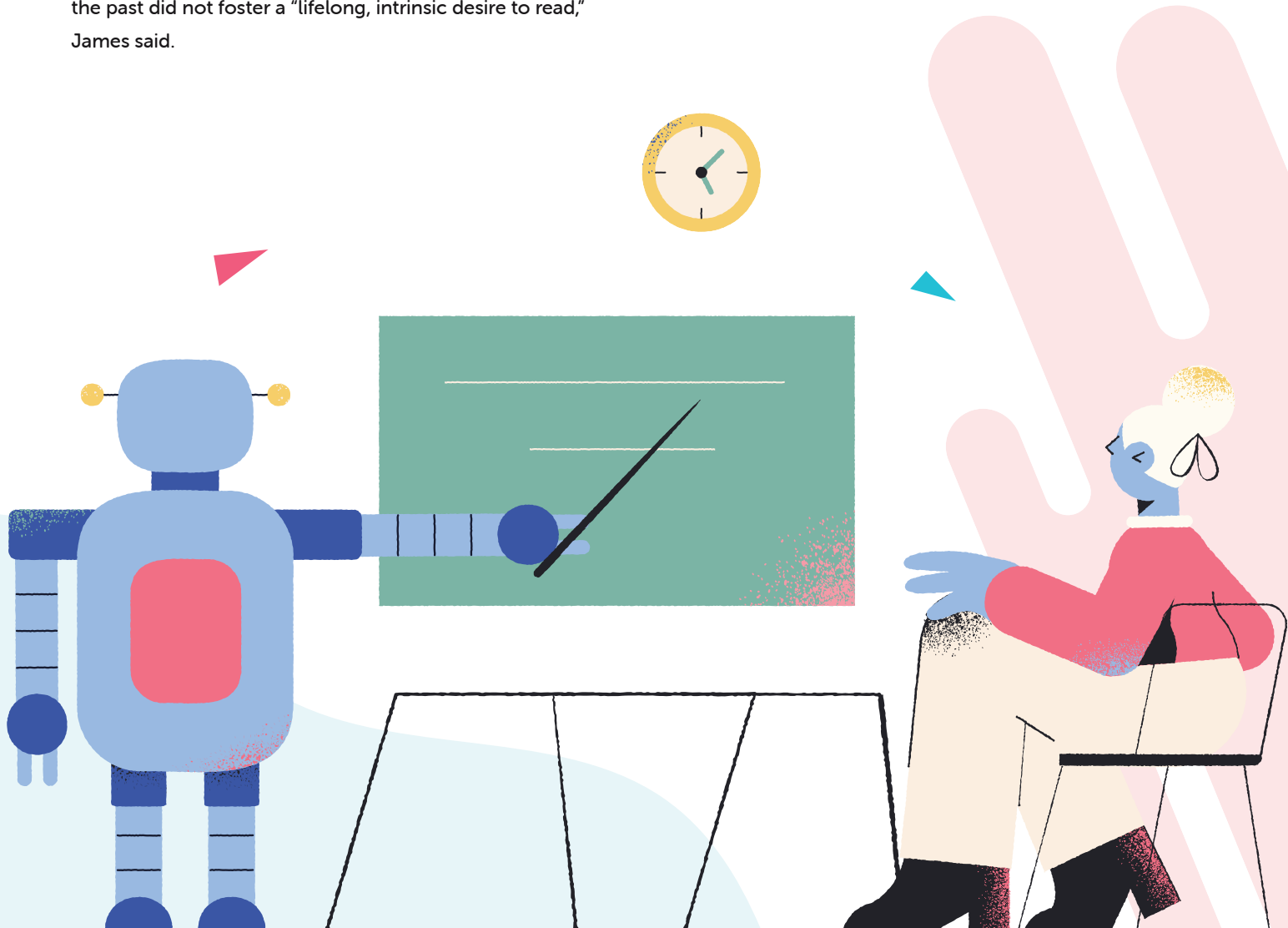
The Beanstack Journey

Phase 1: Reassessing the Status Quo



Reading programs like Accelerated Reader have been around for decades, but James and her librarians, along with classroom teachers and other literacy allies, grappled with their shortcomings. Quiz-based softwares and restrictive reading levels reward a specific type of reader, and students who read shorter or more accessible books don't earn as many points. On top of that, there is very limited data to track growth. Paper reading logs can be helpful in the short term, but become impractical for teachers and librarians to maintain year-to-year as students move on to higher grades. Using these approaches in Charleston County in the past did not foster a "lifelong, intrinsic desire to read," James said.

In early 2022, the district transitioned to a new English Language Arts curriculum. The new curriculum focused on more authentic reading tasks during class, and provided the space to consider an alternative reading motivation and tracking program. The librarians of Charleston County wanted to ensure that all reading, whether in the classroom or the library, was tracked and celebrated. This active problem-solving paved the way for James to dive into what Beanstack could offer their community of readers.




Phase 2: Grassroots Implementation



James first heard about Beanstack from her colleague Holly Frilot, the library media education supervisor at Cobb County School District in Georgia. James and Frilot have monthly calls to catch up and share resources. During one of their meetings, Frilot mentioned that her district implemented Beanstack to help solve some of the same problems Charleston County experienced with their previous reading initiatives. Then, at the American Association of School Librarians conference, James and a fellow member of the Charleston County teacher-librarian advisory team got a firsthand look at everything Beanstack offers. James remembered feeling that the program would be “accessible, exciting, and relevant for all students.”

Soon after, James set up a demo and meeting between Beanstack representatives and other members of the school district, including ELA curriculum leads, that sealed the deal. Every step of Charleston County’s decision-making process involved peers sharing word-of-mouth recommendations, until the buzz of all the possibilities became irresistible.

James implemented Beanstack at the beginning of the school year—a notoriously busy time. But a combination of meetings with school media specialists and personalized training events led by their Beanstack client success manager led to a successful rollout. By the end of October, 90% of schools within the district were using Beanstack. School librarians were the platform’s biggest cheerleaders, and often led meetings to show teachers the opportunities available to them. James recalled how teachers raved about having “access to reports for their students” and easy quick checks on a student’s reading progress. The kids’ enthusiastic response to the new program, however, was the most exciting. James described that, once students started to log minutes and earn badges, they began asking teachers to use Beanstack in the classroom. “The kids end up being the biggest promoters,” James said.



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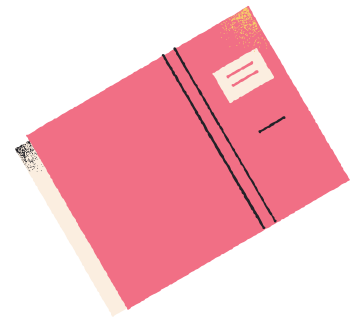


Phase 3: Race to the Finish



Charleston County set a district-wide goal, called the 15,000,000 Minute Challenge, to read a combined total of 15 million minutes in the 2022–2023 academic year. Each school was given their own community reading goal to achieve within the academic year. For instance, one school has a community reading goal of 245,700 minutes, while another has a goal of 137,200 minutes.

Excitement among students and teachers started strong—so strong that three schools began a friendly reading rivalry to try and top the Beanstack leaderboards each month. Buist Academy, Drayton Hall Elementary, and Camp Road Middle School vied for the top spot in the school leaderboard during the first semester, and are quickly accelerating the district’s journey to 15 million minutes. And within schools, friendly competition took hold between different classrooms and across grade levels. James and her colleagues’ driving motivation to help students of all ages find an intrinsic interest in reading is well underway.

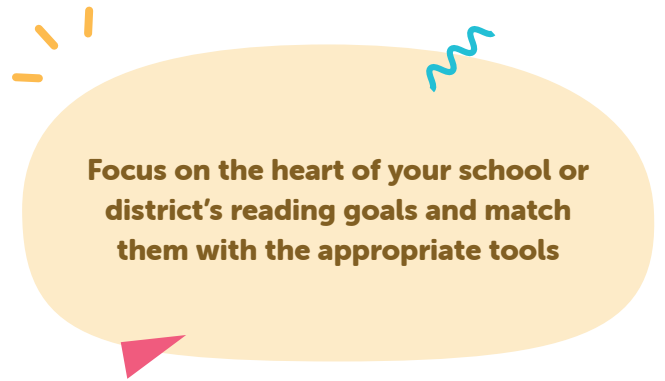


Reflections on the Journey: Beyond Charleston



Focusing on the heart of your school or district's reading goals and matching them with the appropriate tools is James's big advice for teachers and librarians who want to make a difference in their school's reading culture. "Look at what the district goals are and [look at] what platform is going to allow all grade levels to connect with [those] goals," she said.

James also emphasized the importance of getting feedback and input from librarians and teachers early on in the decision-making process. And she stressed how crucial it can be to find time to stop, reflect, and redirect to find the reading motivational approach and platform that helps reach your district's goals. We're thrilled that James is helping lead her district's growing culture of reading with Beanstack's support and can't wait to see what Charleston County School District's readers can accomplish this year and beyond.





About Beanstack

Beanstack helps public and school libraries effortlessly facilitate reading challenges and reading fundraisers. The flagship product of Zoobean Inc., Beanstack is licensed by over 10,000 public libraries, school districts, and corporations around the world. Its investors include Mark Cuban from ABC's Shark Tank and its founding members were previously Washington, D.C.'s teacher of the year and Google's first head of K-12 education outreach. To learn more, visit beanstack.com.