

## WHITEPAPER

# Build a Culture of Reading: The Data Behind Reading Challenges

Ongoing research from organizations like [Scholastic](#) and [The Children's Reading Foundation](#) shows that daily independent reading can dramatically improve a child's long-term academic success. The proof is in the pudding: kids who [read 20 minutes a day](#) score better than 90% of their peers on standardized tests. Independent reading also impacts [social and emotional development](#), providing students an outlet for relaxation and exploration of new cultures and perspectives. And some studies even show that reading effectively [rewires kids' brains](#), improving their communication capacity. While shifting an entire school culture might seem like a daunting task, reading challenges offer one effective and easy-to-implement solution to engage your students and get them reading.

With so many benefits, it's obvious why teachers and administrators want to encourage students to develop a daily reading practice. But how do you inspire students to read without forcing their hand? The answer lies in one of librarians' time-tested tools: the reading challenge. In this whitepaper, we'll examine the data behind reading challenges, and how they can help your school or district develop a strong culture of reading.



# The Benefits of Reading Challenges



By turning daily reading into a community initiative and a game, reading challenges are one of the most successful techniques to motivate students to pick up a book. In fact, Zoobean's data show that reading challenges can make a big difference when building a culture of reading. Here's why.

## 1. Digital Challenges Grow Reading

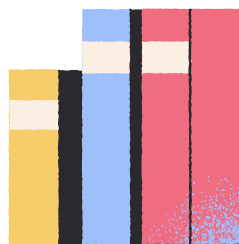
As Beanstack's school and library partners ramped up the number of active challenges on their sites from 2019 to 2020, their communities responded by reading more. During that time, Beanstack sites saw a 70% year-over-year increase in Active Challenges, which translated into a 56% year-over-year increase in daily minutes logged by active readers. In essence, active readers logged 61 minutes per day in 2020 during a challenge up—up from 39 minutes a day in 2019.

**Beanstack readers log 19 minutes per day on average,** approaching the healthy reading benchmark of 20 minutes per day. Those numbers are up from 16 minutes a day in 2019 (a 19% year-over-year increase). Beanstack readers also log an average of 83 books a year—double the 44 books per year read by “frequent” readers, as defined by Scholastic in its ongoing [independent reading reports](#).

## 2. Reading Challenges Gamify Reading

At the foundation of a reading challenge is gamification. By turning literacy into a fun game rather than a chore, students are more apt to participate. While paper reading challenges rely on physical prizes to leverage the benefits of gamification, digital reading challenges take gamification to the next level, leveraging leaderboards, digital and paper badges, streaks, and stats to motivate students to read.

As Matthew Lynch writes in his article, [Gamify Reading for Maximum Student Engagement](#), “With the kids excited about interacting with each other, with technology and with a format they are comfortable with, real changes in motivation and learning opportunities will become a part of their daily experience.”



### 3. Reading Challenges Motivate Students by Making Reading Social

Humans are social beings, and learning as a group can bring both intrinsic rewards and academic success. [A study of second- and third-grade students](#) showed that lower-level readers who sought out peer guidance for reading had better implications for future reading success, while [studies of teen students](#) found that they “learn more quickly and more effectively when their peers are present than when they’re on their own.”

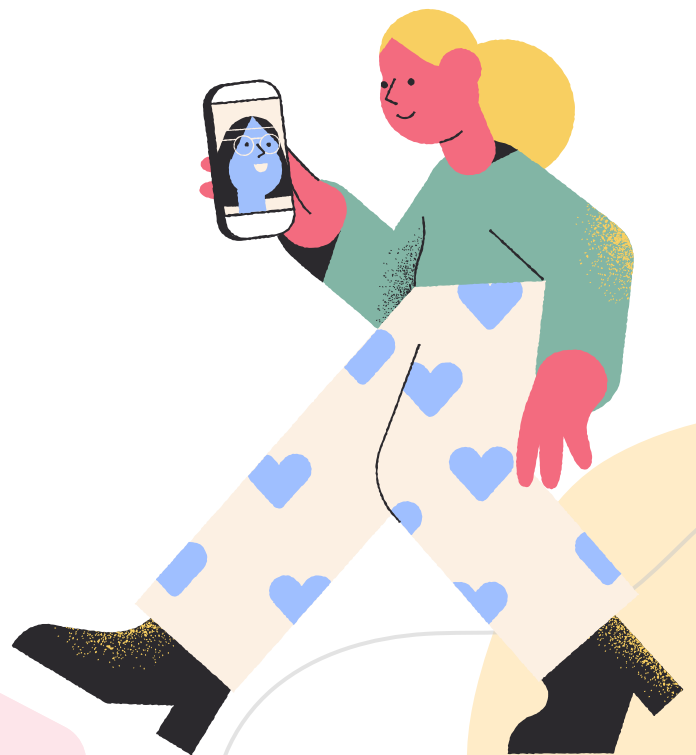
Reading challenges are all about community effort, and that changes how students think about reading. Beanstack’s Friends and Leaderboards feature allows students to build a network of friends on the Beanstack app, where they can see their peers’ reading progress and celebrate their successes. This feature also lets students see what their friends are reading, so they can discover new books. When students work together to contribute to district and school-wide reading goals they are more motivated to read because they want to be a pro-social part of their community—the power of positive peer pressure.

When we combine gamification with social connections, the results are profound: student readers who add friends on their Beanstack site log, on average, an additional hour per week of reading.

### 4. Reading Challenges Boost Library Circulation

A strong reading culture relies on a thriving school library, and tracking library circulation is one way to measure the success of your school’s reading culture. Boosting library circulation is also important for funding. When you boost library circulation, you not only prove that your students are reading, but also guarantee they’ll have access to the resources they need for years to come.

[One survey](#) of public libraries in Pennsylvania and southern California found that in 75% of libraries, summer reading programs (SRPs) increased circulation from 6% to 10%. This is also the case in school libraries. One Beanstack client (a school district serving roughly 44,000 students) saw an average 26% increase in school library circulation year-over-year. And one of their most active schools, which participates in multiple Beanstack challenges per year, experienced a whopping 183% increase in circulation in their school building alone.



# The Power of Going Digital



The benefits of implementing a reading challenge are clear— but many districts struggle to determine the most effective way to execute them. While paper reading challenges do make an impact, they are harder to manage (all those bits of paper!), they are less engaging, and, perhaps most importantly, they don't allow for districts to track progress on a larger scale. Data on digital reading challenges, however, show that going digital can dramatically improve student engagement, particularly when schools adopt a reading challenge mobile app. And collecting information on who is reading, how often, and which books becomes a snap when the app automatically collects all of this data.

With distance learning under COVID making it even more challenging to [reach students and inspire them to read](#), digital reading challenges are now more important than ever. Paper challenges become nearly impossible to implement and manage in a remote learning environment. Digital reading challenges powered by Beanstack support district-wide goals for reading fluency and can help improve and maintain your district's culture of reading whether your students are at home or in the classroom. And since the app is designed to work for physical, digital, and audio books, students can easily log all of their reading—no matter where or how they read.

**Broward County Public Schools made the choice to go digital after years of coordinating a district-wide paper reading challenge.**

**They made the switch for several reasons: paper is easily lost or damaged, not as engaging as a digital platform, and doesn't provide the same level of insight into student data entry. After making the switch to digital, Broward county students logged more than 350,000 books, with as many as 92% of students participated in some of the top-performing schools.**

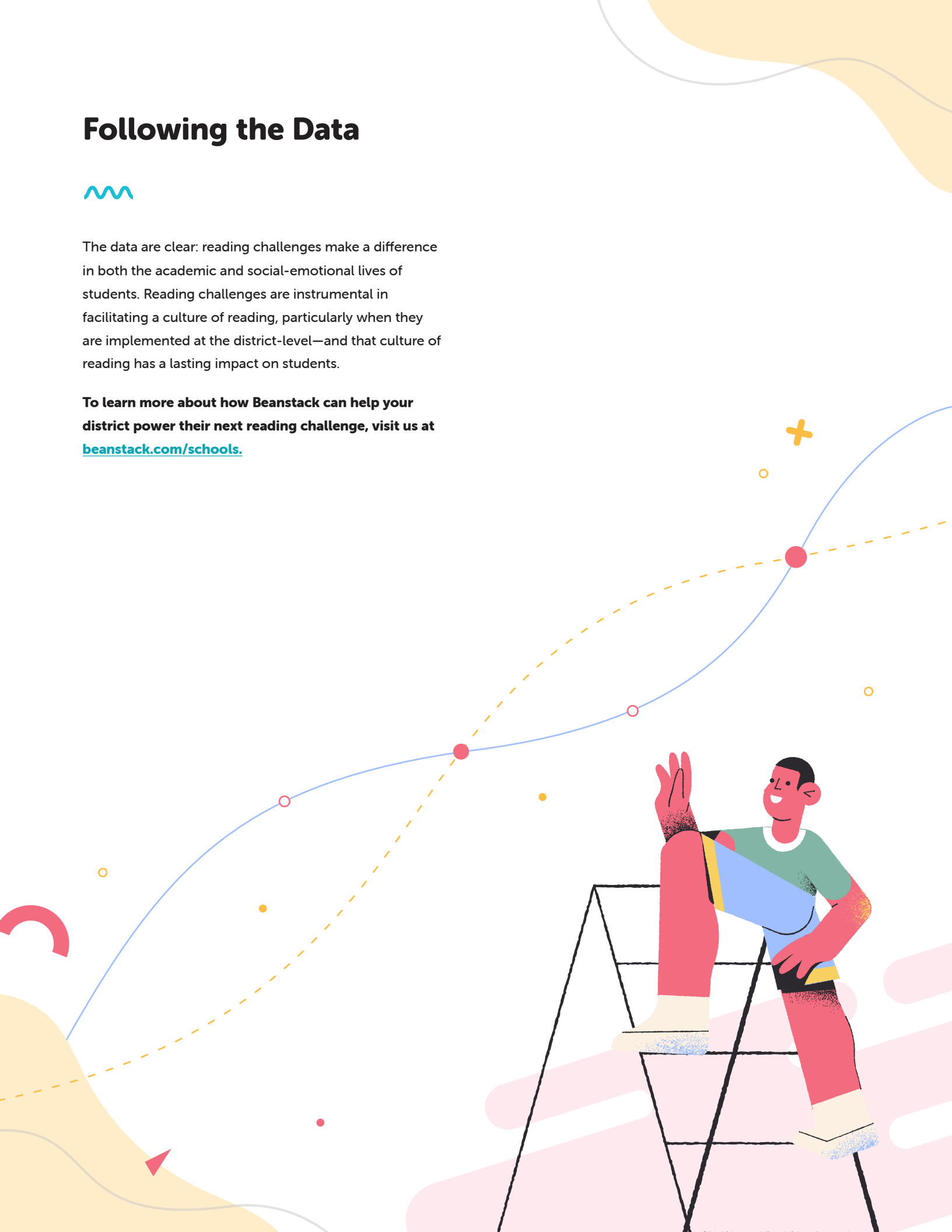


# Following the Data



The data are clear: reading challenges make a difference in both the academic and social-emotional lives of students. Reading challenges are instrumental in facilitating a culture of reading, particularly when they are implemented at the district-level—and that culture of reading has a lasting impact on students.

**To learn more about how Beanstack can help your district power their next reading challenge, visit us at [beanstack.com/schools](https://beanstack.com/schools).**





# About Beanstack

Beanstack helps educators build a culture of reading in their schools and districts through the power of reading challenges. Many common reading programs focus too heavily on assessments, which can discourage students and make reading less enjoyable. With Beanstack's reading challenges, educators can encourage independent, choice reading time - the number one way to build strong readers.

Beanstack is the flagship product of Zoobean, Inc., created to help people read more and read together. Beanstack is licensed by over 10,000 public libraries, school districts, and corporations around the world. Zoobean's investors include Kapor Capital, Mark Cuban, RevUp Capital, the AT&T Aspire Accelerator, and Amazon's Alexa Fund. Its founders were previously Washington, DC's Teacher of the Year and Google's first Head of K-12 Education Outreach. Learn more at [beanstack.com](https://beanstack.com).