

# CASE STUDY

## First Graders at Alabama School Make Great Strides in Reading Achievement in 8 Months

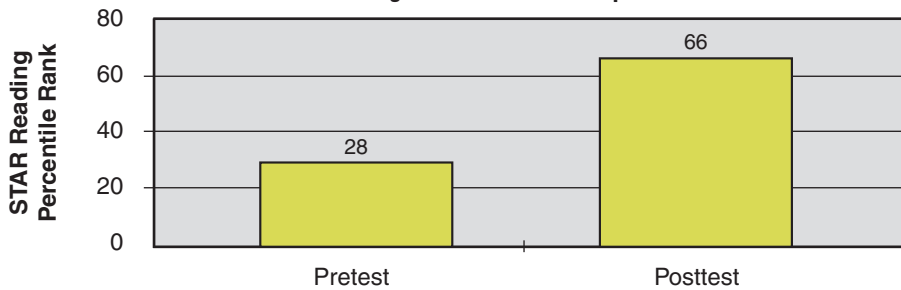
Sources: Charlotte Whetstone, principal, Coosada Elementary School  
Research conducted during the 2000–2001 school year.

According to Whetstone, best practices training was essential to making Accelerated Reader a success at Coosada Elementary.

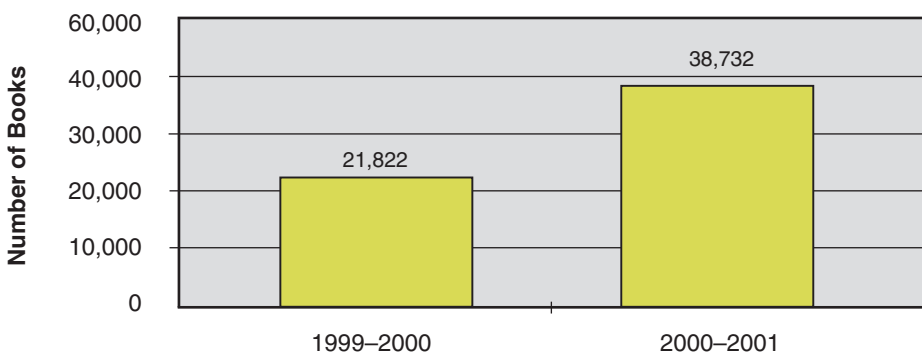
### Introduction

With the help of Accelerated Reader™ (AR™) software and its accompanying best classroom practices, first graders at Coosada Elementary School realized remarkable gains in reading achievement after only 8 months of implementation (see Graph 1). The school's library circulation increased significantly as well (see Graph 2).

**Graph 1: First-Grade Students Show Gains After Eight Months of AR Implementation**



**Graph 2: Annual Library Circulation Increases**



### Educator Background

**Charlotte Whetstone** received a special education degree from the University of Florida and a master's degree from Auburn University. She completed her certification in administration/supervision from Troy State University. Whetstone was a special education teacher for 21 years and has been the principal of Coosada Elementary since it opened in 1998.

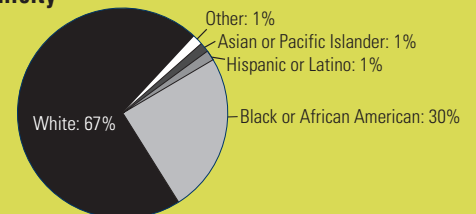
### School Profile

Coosada Elementary School  
Students: 580, Grades: K–1  
Millbrook, Alabama

### Demographics

Suburban  
Title I  
Free or reduced lunch: 44%  
Mobility: 8%

### Race/Ethnicity



## Study Description

Accelerated Reader, a computerized, progress-monitoring tool, was installed in approximately 75% of the first-grade classrooms at Coosada Elementary when the school first opened its doors in 1998. During the same school year, the principal, media specialist, and two teachers attended Renaissance Learning's seminar on AR's research-based best classroom practices. Afterwards, the educators immediately incorporated these recommendations into the school.

According to Principal Whetstone, best practices training was essential to making Accelerated Reader a success at Coosada Elementary. By the 2000–2001 school year, Accelerated Reader was implemented in the entire school as part of a school improvement program. The addition of a 30-minute, before-school reading program further extended the scope of AR.

*Scheduling time for reading practice* is one of the key recommendations for a successful Accelerated Reader implementation. To this end, the educators at Coosada Elementary employ many techniques. All first-grade students practice reading for a minimum of 60 minutes throughout the day, while kindergartners are *read to* for 30 minutes, *read with* someone for a minimum of 5 minutes, and *read independently* for a minimum of 5 minutes. In addition, volunteers who work with students on a weekly basis are trained in Duolog Reading<sup>1</sup> and Coosada's educators have developed a program called AR Helpers, which pairs first graders with kindergartners to read and take quizzes on a daily basis.

Teachers use data from AR to inform their teaching and monitor each student's independent reading practice. With



guidance from their teachers, students learn to read carefully for comprehension and track progress toward individual goals. As students meet their goals and become independent readers,<sup>2</sup> their names are announced over the school intercom and their pictures are displayed on the “spotlight” wall in the main lobby. Meeting individual goals is also rewarded with a party with the principal at the end of each grading period.

## Results

The computerized STAR Reading standardized assessment was administered to all first graders as a pretest between September and December of 2000 and again as a posttest in May 2001. (This assessment can only be administered to children with a sight vocabulary of at least 100 words, which all first graders had by December.) The students' results show a remarkable increase of 38 percentiles, from a pretest mean percentile rank of 28 to a posttest mean percentile rank of 66 (see Graph 1). What's more, by the end of the year, 282 of the first-grade students had achieved Independent Reader Certification.

Library circulation at Coosada Elementary also increased dramatically. When Accelerated Reader was only partially implemented during the 1999–2000 school year, 21,822 books were checked out of the library. This number rose by 77% to 38,732 books in circulation when AR was fully implemented in 2000–2001.

## Conclusion

This success story at Coosada Elementary demonstrates that when Accelerated Reader is fully implemented according to Renaissance Learning's best classroom practices students can achieve significant reading success.

<sup>1</sup> Duolog Reading is a research-based, structured, one-on-one tutoring technique that pairs independent readers with emerging readers for extra reading practice.

<sup>2</sup> Students achieve Independent Reader Certification when they have accumulated 10 Accelerated Reader points (by reading books to someone, with someone, or independently) and have read three books independently at the 1.2 readability level.