



# Discovery Education Assessment

## CASE STUDY

### **Birmingham City School District Increases State Test Scores Using Discovery Education Assessment**

---

#### *Encouraging Academic Excellence*

Birmingham City School District works diligently to provide the best educational support by encouraging academic excellence within a safe, secure and nurturing environment. Located in Alabama's largest urban city, BCSD has a primarily African-American student population with roughly 78% of that student body on free or reduced lunch programs. In addition, the district is decreasing in size as surrounding suburban and rural districts are rapidly growing. Today, BCSD is comprised of more than 30,730 students and 67 schools.

As federal requirements established by NCLB continue to drive the importance of standardized testing, districts like BCSD are faced with the challenge of incorporating instructional methods that ensure each student achieves appropriate learning goals and performs appropriately on the state proficiency test. Like many districts nationwide, BCSD did not meet No Child Left Behind AYP goals after the 2002-2003 school year, causing decision-makers to search for an immediate, effective solution.

#### *Predictive Analysis Issue*

As part of the State of Alabama's School Accountability Program, students are required to take the Stanford Achievement Test Tenth Edition (SAT10) and the Alabama Reading and Math Test (ARMT). These two sets of tests determine yearly progress and evaluate student comprehension and retention. After the 2002-2003 school year, district administrators agreed that BCSD educators were lacking the appropriate tools they needed for predictive analysis.

"We needed a way to predict what was happening before it happened. There was just too much guessing," said Dr. Claudia Williams, Chief Academics Officer for BCSD. "We needed a tool that could give us a clear indication of our strengths and weaknesses, which could then inform our preparations and instructional planning."

After NCLB was instituted, BCSD made great efforts to ensure passing scores. Some teachers created their own tests to help determine how well their students were performing; others purchased generic tests to use instead. Unfortunately, these methods did not provide an overall district analysis and were often not correlated to Alabama standards.

"We were conducting multiple tests throughout the year, but were not receiving the data we needed to make accurate decisions," said Charles Willis, Principal of Smith Middle School in BCSD. "Plus, the



# Discovery Education Assessment

## CASE STUDY

process of analyzing the data we did have was extremely time consuming. We needed formative assessments that could yield the right type of timely data that would ultimately drive instruction.”

The district’s new goal was to find the most efficient and relevant benchmarking system available that would help them measure and assess their students prior to the actual SAT10 and ARMT at the end of the year. They would need a tool that would allow teachers to monitor student progress throughout the year and quickly and easily identify student weakness.

### ***Predictive Assessment Series as Solution***

BCSD promptly formed a committee comprised of principals, teachers and administrators to thoroughly examine products that could serve as analytical tools. During a three month period, the committee studied and reviewed six products with similar characteristics. The team was looking for a tool that would identify student strengths and weaknesses; provide that feedback quickly and accurately; and offer disaggregated information in a way that could help pinpoint areas where reinforcement was needed.

At the conclusion of the review period, the committee chose to implement the *Predictive Assessment Series* (PAS) from ThinkLink Learning, now a business unit of Discovery Education. PAS would match the objectives tested on the SAT10 and the reporting categories assessed on the ARMT, providing BSCD multiple opportunities for analysis.

With up to 90 percent predictive accuracy, PAS serves as the most effective assessment solution available. It is also one of the most affordable. With ThinkLink Learning’s PAS, students take up to three pre-configured, state-aligned tests throughout the school year in reading, language arts, math, and science, depending upon the preferences of the district. Testing requires less than one class period per subject and can be delivered online or on paper. Ultimately, PAS saves time for teachers, gives students realistic practice exams that help prepare them for the actual state test and provides accurate student data that teachers can use to alter instruction.

### ***Marked Improvements Yield Success***

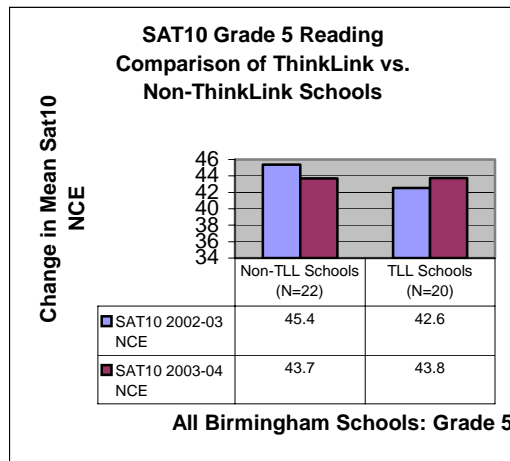
For the 2003-2004 school year, PAS was implemented in 20 elementary and nine middle schools. Incorporated in grades 3-8, results indicated that even though a significant decline in SAT10 scores occurred from 2002-2003 to 2003-2004 for most non-ThinkLink using schools, those schools that did use PAS showed marked improvements.



# Discovery Education Assessment

## CASE STUDY

“As schools that participated in the initial ThinkLink trial saw increased scores in language, math and reading for most grades, our educators saw the benefits immediately,” said Williams. “Belief in the system amplified as the test results illustrated exactly what PAS had predicted.”



Schools, especially in grades 3-5, showed increased scores in all three subjects while those that did not use PAS either had loss or very little gain. After the positive results yielded after the 2003 SAT10 and ARMT, every elementary and middle school in the district implemented PAS for the 2004-2005 school year. In addition, BCSD chose to incorporate professional development to help its teachers become more familiar with the concepts of standardized assessment and to better utilize data to focus instruction.

“PAS proved to be extremely beneficial when used properly. Our school went from meeting AYP at only 13 percent to meeting it 100 percent the following year after implementing ThinkLink,” said Willis.

As states have complied with NCLB requirements, ThinkLink/Discovery data has helped spur dramatic and significant improvements on the ARMT test used by Alabama to report proficiencies. For example, in math, where differences in the control group were less dramatic in the first year, teachers have begun to focus on the use of the data to improve this subject as well. Gains were achieved in math in grades 3-6 with substantial gains of 50% in two years in grade 8 math and 21% in grade 8 reading.



# Discovery Education Assessment CASE STUDY

“Support provided by ThinkLink has been ideal. In tune to our needs, they have been willing to adjust things when we ask and recommend alternatives,” said Williams. “This year we are extending the agreement to include all high schools.”

Overall, PAS provides BSCD educators and administrators with an accurate tool for assessing their students and informing future instruction. “Best of all, our teachers have the ability to refine their instructional methods based on real research and our students are learning how to use the assessment results to enhance and improving their own learning experiences,” Willis concluded.

#### April 2007 update to case study:

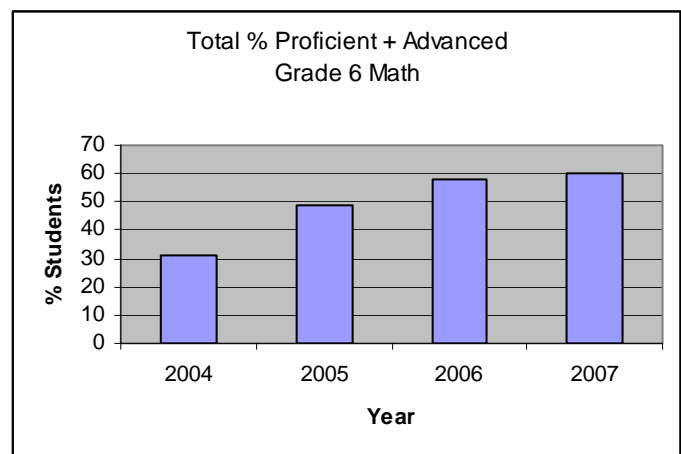
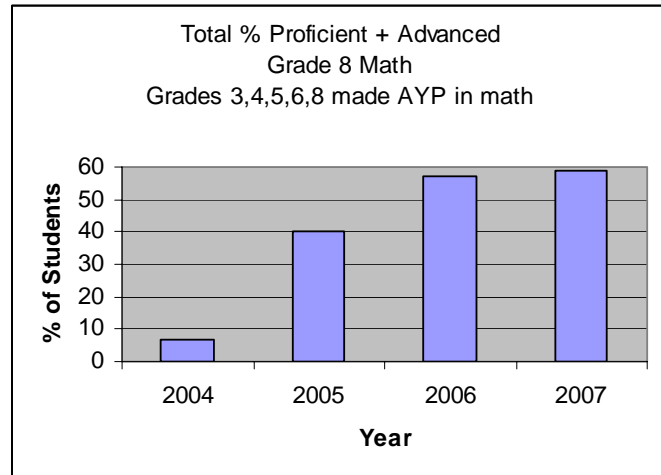
*A report released by the Council of the Great City Schools in April, showed that students in Birmingham city schools scored better in state math and reading assessments than fourth and eighth-graders in other large urban school systems.*

#### August 2007 update to case study:

*The greatest improvements were among Birmingham’s sixth- and eighth-graders in math. While only 31 percent of 6<sup>th</sup> grade students scored at or above proficiency level in 2004, 60 percent did so in 2007. In grade 8, the percentages rose from 7 in 2004 to 59 in 2007.*

###

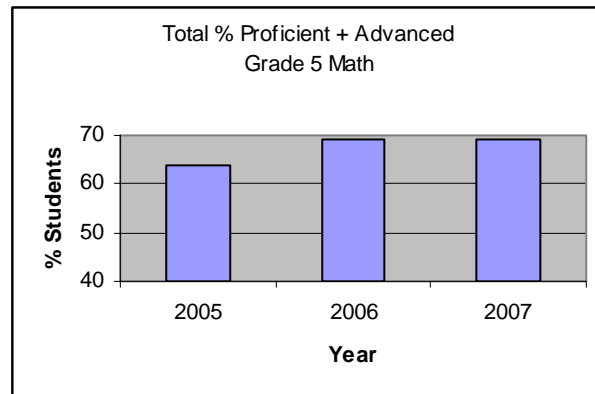
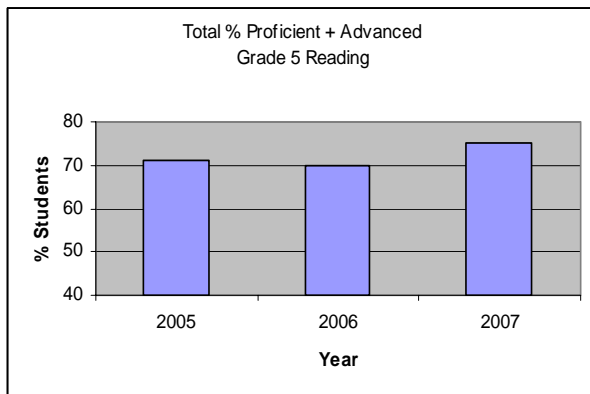
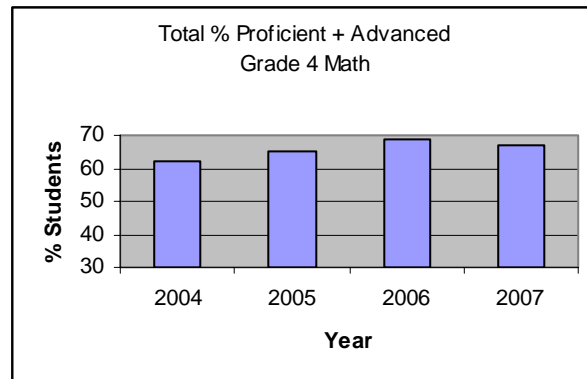
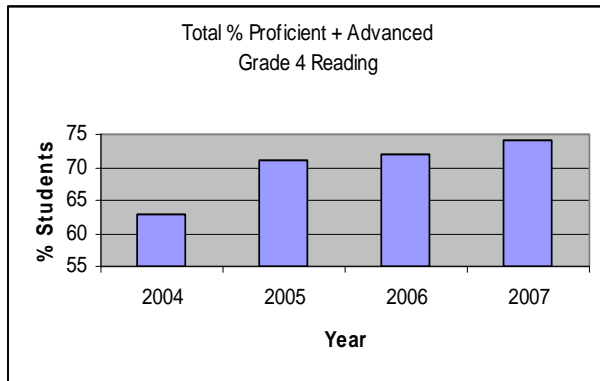
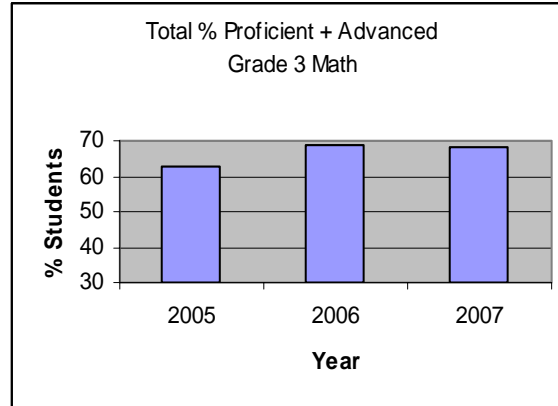
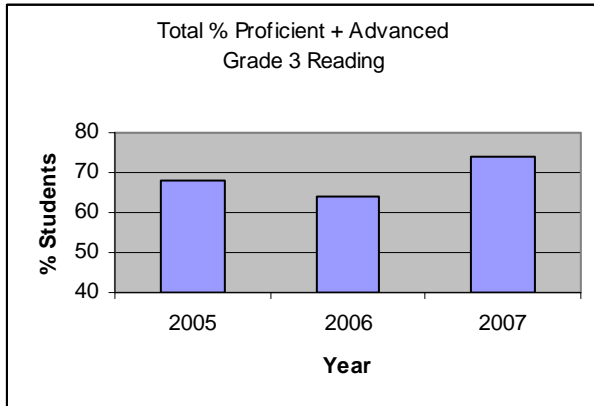
For more information, please contact:  
Stephen Wakefield, Discovery Education, 301-272-1206, [stephen\\_wakefield@discovery.com](mailto:stephen_wakefield@discovery.com)





# Discovery Education Assessment CASE STUDY

**Comparison of Reading and Math by Year: % of Students Making AYP.  
All grades, all subjects show gains from 2004, 2005 to 2007.**





# Discovery Education Assessment CASE STUDY

