



## Scintilla Charter Academy Valdosta, GA

### Remarkable gains in reading proficiency after one year of EL Education curriculum implementation

#### District Profile

When it opened in 2015, Scintilla Charter Academy (SCA) provided a choice for students in the City of Valdosta and Lowndes County, in southern Georgia. In the 2016-2017 school year, 40% of SCA's 500 scholars were African-American, 4.4% were multi-racial, and 2.4% were Hispanic. Nearly 60% of SCA students qualified for free or reduced priced meals. Additionally, 11% of SCA's student population received special education services, 11% received academically gifted services, and 1.3% were English Language Learners.

Scintilla's mission is "to increase student achievement and develop social responsibility through educational innovations in a safe community of involved families and educators."

However, after the first year, students' reading scores were disappointing. Nearly three fourths of Scintilla's third-, fourth-, and fifth-graders could not read at grade level.



*In an ELA module called "Toys and Play," kindergarteners become experts in taking care of their materials while working and playing together. Photo Credit: Scintilla Charter Academy*

#### Choosing a Curriculum Solution

In the spring of 2016, a new administrative team recommitted to the mission's aim of educational innovation. They researched successful educational models and embraced EL Education's model of curriculum, instruction, and school culture infused with rigor and joy. They also negotiated an agreement to pilot EL Education's gold-standard ELA curriculum for kindergarten-fifth grades. Instructional Coach Liz Freitag notes, "We didn't have any training from EL staff the first year. We had access to all the resources on the website, and we had Wendy Hodgson [EL Education Curriculum Support Specialist] on the 'Bat phone.' That was enough to get us started, and our enthusiasm grew with the results we saw—first intuitively, and then with hard data."

#### Learning from First-Year Challenges

Before long, students and teachers were experiencing the rigor and joy of literacy lessons the EL way first hand. "Liz called me in October to ask whether they were doing it right, because students were having too much fun," recalls Hodgson. Freitag laughs when she remembers that moment, but notes that students were bought in right from the beginning. "This is a curriculum that intentionally serves the needs of every student without giving up fun lessons and engagement with interesting content."

Teachers responded more variably, say Freitag and Director of Academic Enhancement, Amanda Miller. Teachers with fewer than three years experience dove in enthusiastically. The curriculum provided detailed lesson plans and explicit guidance in instructional techniques, and they didn't have to "unlearn" practices that had already become habits. Teachers "really had to change their mindset," says Miller. "In this curriculum, students get exposed to new ideas and to new ways of reading, talking, thinking, and writing. They practice and practice and practice. And eventually they master it, not just for the test but in a way that sticks."

An important part of teachers' feeling successful in the early months was that "character is fully integrated into how and what kids are learning," says Miller. Teachers discovered that teaching conversation norms and practicing them intensely enabled students to run a respectful conversation on their own, even in first grade.

Leaders were also strategic in supporting teachers who were implementing the curriculum by phasing in components of new teaching practices one at a time. Freitag facilitated grade-level team meetings in which teachers collaborated to synthesize lesson plans and to identify their next steps for planning and assessing. Each teacher also had a chance to observe a peer teaching the curriculum and to reflect together on what worked and what didn't. In the end, even resistant teachers were persuaded by the results. "When a teacher with 26 years experience saw that students in the classroom next door with the novice teacher were growing more than her own students, she was ready to give the curriculum a try," says Dean of Students Mandy Avera.

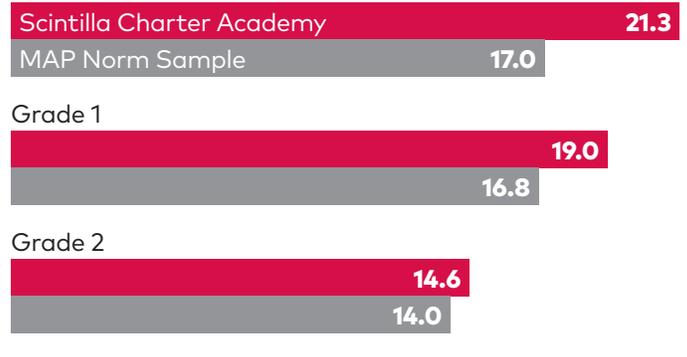
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**Amanda Miller**  
**Director of Academic Enhancement**

## Results

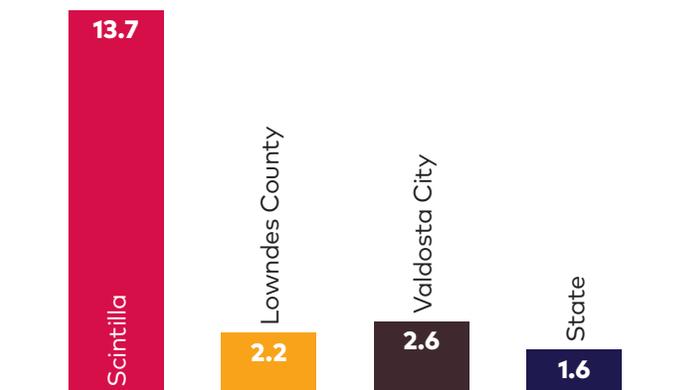
Scintilla Charter Academy primary students showed impressive growth on the NWEA Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) assessment from Fall 2016 to Spring 2017 compared to a 2015 nationally representative norm sample. Kindergarten students achieved a gain of 21.3 RIT (Rasch Units), 4.3 RIT better than projections based on the norm sample, which put them at the 93rd percentile for growth. First- and second-grade students also beat growth projections by 2.2 and .6 RIT respectively, putting them at the 79th and 58th percentiles for growth.

### Kindergarten



*RIT (Rasch Unit) growth results from Fall 2016 to Spring 2017 for Scintilla Charter Academy and the MAP Norm Sample in Grades K-2.*

While Valdosta City and Lowndes County (districts from which Scintilla draws) and Georgia overall proficiency rates remained steady from 2015-16 to 2016-17, Scintilla's overall proficiency for third- through fifth-graders rose dramatically—by nearly 14 percentage points. Scintilla's growth outpaced the gains made in the district and state by more than 10 percentage points.



*Percentage point gain in students reaching proficiency on the Georgia Milestone's ELA assessment from Spring 2016 to Spring 2017.*

## Building on First-Year Success

Going into their second year of implementation, Scintilla leaders and teachers plan to expand their understanding and implementation of EL Education curriculum by digging deeply into literacy labs for primary grades and the ALL block for elementary grades. Teachers are also implementing Crew (small advisory groups similar to morning meeting), student-led conferences, community meetings, and learning expeditions that allow for combining science and social studies instruction. More faculty are attending the EL Education National Conference and participating in EL staff-led professional development. "We're all in," says Miller. "You can't argue with the data."

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