

Soaring Science and Civics Success in Boynton Beach, Florida

Christa McAuliffe Middle School, The School District of Palm Beach County



Jeff Silverman,
Principal
Rachelle Lowen,
Assistant Principal



1,270 students
Grades 6 to 8



Study Island



41% Free and Reduced Lunch
15% Students with Disabilities
11% African Americans
58% Caucasian
22% Hispanic

The Challenge:

Christa McAuliffe Middle School, located in Boynton Beach, Florida, has always been focused on integrating technology into its curricula. This school is named after the American teacher and astronaut who lost her life in the Challenger space shuttle tragedy, and her legacy remains at the forefront of the school's mission as a technology magnet school.

“We have a lot of integration of computers and different certification programs for our students,” said Rachelle Lowen, assistant principal at Christa McAuliffe Middle School. “We have blended classrooms. We really try to immerse [students] in technology and innovation.”

But in 2016, the school's leaders noticed a dip in science scores in 8th grade and immediately sought options to overcome this challenge. It was through connecting with the principal from a neighboring school that a strong Study Island endorsement sent leaders at Christa McAuliffe Middle to further investigate the online program.

“Our first year, our only goal was to bring up science scores,” noted Jeff Silverman, principal at Christa McAuliffe Middle School. “We bought Study Island for science. Our results came in, and we had significant gains in science for the first time in several years.”

To ensure that students are meeting science and civics FSA goals, Christa McAuliffe Middle School in Boynton Beach, Florida, leverages Edmentum's Study Island to provide individualized standards-aligned practice and support. With an increasingly robust program implementation that now includes math and English language arts as well, educators continue to report impressive FSA score improvement and

attest much of that success to their Study Island implementation.

How They Did It:

In Ms. Lowen's own words though, "It's been a progression." Teachers had the opportunity to use it all year but primarily focused on leveraging Study Island science for Florida Standards Assessments (FSA) prep during testing season—February, March, and April. "They focused primarily on the 8th grade standards, but then they would go back to 6th and 7th grade to give the kids the full exposure," noted Ms. Lowen.

Upon seeing a nice jump in scores that year, they negotiated bringing in additional subjects for the 2017–18 academic year. Civics, specifically, was identified as an area tested by the FSA in the 7th grade and one in which not many aligned materials for preparation were offered outside of Study Island.

"The civics teachers really took hold of it," remarked Ms. Lowen. "That was great to see because our civics scores were great this year." Additionally, some other educators recognized the value of expanding the school's implementation into other subjects. "In math and language arts, once they started to see the power of it, some of the teachers started to use it."

One key to this implementation's growth—a Study Island Challenge that was created to focus on usage during the 2017–18 school year. "We made it a really fun thing that was almost like a competition amongst the grade levels," noted Ms. Lowen. The school focused the challenge around the recommended use of Study Island for 20 minutes a day and set the goal at a rigorous five hours in just two weeks.

"That's where we got so much buy in," remarked Ms. Lowen. "We had every student in the school talking about the Study Island Challenge. We would announce updates at lunch and put students' names on the big screen. Kids would be cheering on their friends, saying: 'How do you have 17 hours? That's amazing.' Or, just to see their names up there with four hours and 20 minutes, and they're like: 'Whoa, we're so close to getting our five hours. We can get there.' It gets the kids excited about studying, really. So, that's a really fun thing to see happen."

In the end, 450 students representing all three grades reached the five-hour mark and were rewarded with a ticket to see a hypnotist show during the school day. Outside of the challenge, Study Island is used for after-school tutorials as remediation, and teachers are able to use the program in their classrooms as they choose.

The tutorial program lasted for about eight weeks and was held after school for about an hour and a half, twice a week. Students were identified for the program based on Ms. Lowen's review of student data, as well as teacher recommendations.

"It was easier for me to recruit teachers [for the tutorial program] because they didn't feel like they had to be coming up with their own lessons [by using Study Island] and they were able to spend more of their time really monitoring the students and tailoring the program for each individual student."

Also key to the school's academic growth was this simple and efficient implementation of Study Island. Lowen summed it up, "[Students] were able to go through, from the beginning, take the pretest, and see what skills they needed. Then, the teacher would monitor each student and make sure that they were meeting their level. If they were below level, then that meant working on those lessons, giving [students] that extra support on that skill to make sure that they were able to get to grade-level mastery. Then, move on to the next standard."

“The use of the program for teachers wasn’t very confusing. It was easy to set up classes. I think the teachers also see the benefit because the way the program is designed. The questions are so aligned with the way they would see it on the FSA that they feel like the time spent is worth it.”

Rachelle Lowen,
Assistant Principal

Success:

Success at Christa McAuliffe Middle School is all in the numbers. From 2016 to 2018, Science FSA achievement scores increased from 61% of students receiving a ‘proficient’ score of 3 or above to 74%. Similarly, from 2017 to 2018 Civics FSA scores increased from 85% to 86%. “It seems that Study Island made the difference,” said Principal Silverman. “It finally got us over the hurdle we were stuck at instead of declining. Our scores turned around.”

Reflecting on two years of success, Ms. Lowen pointed to a couple of key areas where Study Island was really able to shine: “The use of the program for teachers wasn’t very confusing. It was easy to set up classes. I think the teachers also see the benefit because the way the program is designed. The questions are so aligned with the way they would see it on the FSA that they feel like the time spent is worth it.”

Additionally, teachers saw the value in being able to access easy reporting. “I know the teachers like that they can have everything individualized for the students,” said Ms. Lowen. “If they really are trying to help give every single student a chance, not just a blanket lesson, they like that they can monitor the kids in an easier way, like using [Study Island’s data dashboard] Sensei. And, being able to just assign students what they need with just one click of a button instead of having to go and pull one resource for this kid and something for this one. Everything is just right there. They can really personalize the learning of every student just with one click.”

Together, these thoughtful features of Study Island have been able to support significant results. “I think our scores really came out on top to show that [students] got a little bit of an extra boost in their preparation,” exclaimed Ms. Lowen. “We love Study Island.”

“Most of the teachers said they really felt Study Island was above and beyond the other programs we had been using. They love it, the kids like it. As a principal, what more do I need?”

Jeff Silverman,
Principal

The Future:

For Principal Silverman, the idea of future expansion with Study Island is all grounded in how teachers are responding to the program today: “Most of the teachers said they really felt Study Island was above and beyond the other programs we had been using. They love it, the kids like it. As a principal, what more do I need?”

Additionally, the school’s leaders have big goals to see the implementation grow this 2018–19 school year: “I want to have teachers working on it from the very beginning [of the school year] and try to get that 30 minutes every week, whether it’s with homework or if it’s with getting a Chromebook cart in there,” stated Ms. Lowen. “Let’s think of ways that we can get the kids interacting on it from the very beginning of the year.”

With strict fidelity across all subjects, Ms. Lowen expects nothing short of the success she saw this year at Christa McAuliffe Middle School.

“When you look at our [FSA] scores for Science, Civics, Math, Language Arts, I mean, we’ve been going up, especially for Science,” she remarked. “That’s going to be the biggest testament to how effective Study Island has been.”

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