



With FastBridge, Districts Have One Assessment Solution That Solves Many Challenges

FastBridge is helping educators improve all tiers of instruction; evaluate intervention effectiveness; bring equity to gifted education; and turn data into impactful action.

School districts nationwide are using the [FastBridge](#) universal screening and progress monitoring solution from Illuminate Education to gather deeper insight into students' academic and social-emotional behavior (SEB) needs. Equipped with this information, teachers are delivering more targeted instruction to improve student learning.

Here are some of the many examples of success from around the country:

- In [Decatur Public Schools](#), teachers are using FastBridge for universal screening of all K-8 students in reading, math, and SEB skills—even screening remotely in 2020-21, due to the pandemic. Teachers use these data to plan instruction, group students appropriately for small-group learning, and identify and close students' skill gaps.
- [Shelby County Schools](#) in Tennessee uses FastBridge to make its gifted education program more equitable by screening all students for possible giftedness. The brevity and validity of FastBridge's screening tools make this possible.
- In [Westside Community Schools](#), teachers are using the insights they gain from FastBridge assessments to strengthen their multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) process, with a strong focus on improving whole-class Tier 1 instruction. As a result, there are dramatically fewer students who need intervention.
- In [Fulton County Schools](#), teachers use FastBridge for progress monitoring of students receiving Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions to evaluate effectiveness. The system has helped to reduce unnecessary interventions and identify the root causes of students' struggles in half the time as other progress monitoring tools.
- In [Saint Paul Public Schools](#), FastBridge has helped improve reading scores by taking the guesswork out of Tier 1 instruction and reading intervention, giving teachers not only valuable insight into students' skills gaps but also a clear plan for addressing them.

FastBridge uses both computer-adaptive tests (CATs) and curriculum-based measures (CBMs) to support universal screening and progress monitoring. The system's comprehensive reporting features help educators accurately measure risk levels, identify specific academic and SEB skills gaps, and plan instruction and intervention. FastBridge also suggests research-based academic interventions that target specific learning needs for the class, small groups, or individual students, complete with teacher guidance—and it helps teachers progress monitor to evaluate whether interventions are working and if they're working fast enough.

Supporting Academic & SEB Universal Screening—Even Remotely

Decatur Public Schools, a small urban school system in central Illinois, switched to FastBridge as its universal screening platform a few years ago. “We were using NWEA’s Measures of Academic Progress before, but there were some pieces missing that we thought were important to implement in our district, such as SEB screening,” says Assessment Administrator Teri Moore. “Also, the progress monitoring tools we have with FastBridge aren’t something we had access to through NWEA.”

Both of those elements play an important role in the district’s efforts to support the whole child.

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FastBridge offers brief, evidence-based tools for reading, math, and SEB screening. In addition to screening students in reading and math, Decatur uses the Social, Academic, and Emotional Behavior Risk Screener ([SAEBRS](#)) to gauge all K-8 students' risk for SEB needs. The SEB screening takes just one to three minutes per student via the district-issued iPads. This brief screening helps schools address the critical SEB skills gaps that can often get in the way of successful learning.

“We’re not going to improve students’ academic achievement if their minds aren’t in the right place,” says Jeff Dase, Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning.

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In addition, the FastBridge platform provides comprehensive reporting on individual students, classes, grade levels, and schools, complete with suggestions for appropriate academic interventions that teachers can use to close the gaps in students' skills. “We’re not only able to get the data,” Moore says, “but we also have access to the specific next steps we should take based on this information.”

With Decatur schools closed in fall 2020 because of the pandemic, the district’s universal screening had to take place remotely for the first time. Pulling this off for more than 5,000 students across 13 buildings was like choreographing a Broadway musical. Yet, Decatur was able to do this successfully, thanks not only to the hard work of faculty and staff but also to the simplicity and flexibility of the FastBridge screening tools—giving educators the information they needed to guide students’ success.

Advancing Equity

Shelby County Schools, Tennessee's largest public school district with more than 113,000 students, was already using FastBridge to screen K-8 students for academic intervention needs. Administrators discovered they could use the same FastBridge screening tools to screen all students for the district's long-running gifted education program as well—without adding another assessment to their testing calendar and at no additional cost.

Despite a strong, district-wide focus on equity, Shelby County found that white and Asian students were overrepresented in its gifted program in relation to their share of the overall student population, while Black and Latinx students were underrepresented. This disproportionality meant that students who were deserving of gifted education were missing out on the benefits of participating: [Research](#) shows that students in gifted programs are more likely to take advanced courses and have higher educational attainment.

“ The FastBridge screening tools are short, taking only about 20 minutes to complete—long enough to yield reliable data, and short enough to avoid testing fatigue with students. ”

Previously, Shelby County had relied only on referrals from parents and educators when identifying students for its gifted program. However, many teachers and other adults aren't trained to recognize traits of giftedness, causing a referral-only process to yield an unreliable and incomplete candidate pool.

District officials realized that universal screening would make the identification process more equitable; using objective data as the first step of screening removes any qualitative data that may be influenced by student behavior, appearance, or background.

Shelby County first tried NWEA's Measures of Academic Progress for gifted screening. However, the length of the assessment was causing testing fatigue with students, causing some to start answering questions quickly without thinking carefully about their responses. "The kids who do really well tended to take much longer to test," says gifted program Supervisor Jennifer Chandler. "Even after an hour-long window, we had some students who had to come back to finish their test." This not only caused frustration with students but also ultimately resulted in less valid and reliable data.

By contrast, the FastBridge screening tools are short, taking only about 20 minutes to complete—long enough to yield reliable data, and short enough to avoid testing fatigue with students.

Using FastBridge to screen all students for inclusion in the gifted program has made a tremendous difference. In one year, Shelby County was able to grow the program by nearly 900 students, or about 25 percent. What's more, the district increased its number of underrepresented students (Black and Latinx) at a higher rate than overrepresented students. "That's very exciting," Chandler says, "and it shows we're on the right track."

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Strengthening Core Instruction to Support All Learners

Although the Westside Community Schools in Omaha, Nebraska, were using an MTSS process to provide targeted intervention to students who needed extra support, district leaders noticed their most struggling students still weren't making gains in reading. "It was time for a new approach," said Director of Elementary Teaching and Learning Dr. Greg Betts.

Westside leaders realized a need to increase the efficacy of Tier 1 core instruction, and that teachers needed support in understanding how to use data to improve their teaching. The school system chose FastBridge to help with these goals.

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Westside began using FastBridge during the 2018–19 school year. "After our first year, we had more teachers using the system and administering assessments than we ever had with our prior assessment system," says MTSS Coordinator Karin Mussman.

Yet, district leaders noticed that the data were not yet being used to drive decisions throughout their MTSS in the ways they intended. In response to these findings, Westside developed a professional learning community (PLC) structure to help teachers use student data to inform their instruction.

During the FastBridge PLC meetings, teachers meet in grade-level teams to dig into the screening data and reflect on what they can do to strengthen outcomes for all students.

They choose proven instructional strategies they can use to achieve their goals from a list of research-based strategies the district provides—and they create an action plan based on these strategies. This PLC work leads naturally into the MTSS meetings.

By pairing MTSS meetings with a PLC process using FastBridge data, “we have put greater focus on core instruction as the foundational element to an effective MTSS system,” Mussman says, “and we’ve seen really promising results.” For instance, Westside has dramatically reduced the number of students needing Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions—and before the pandemic hit, the district was on track for experiencing its highest-ever reading scores.

Effective Progress Monitoring

Georgia’s Fulton County Schools, which serves about 90,000 students, uses FastBridge as a progress monitoring tool to make sure that students’ interventions are working and that they’re working fast enough. Using FastBridge has given educators powerful insights that help them make timely intervention decisions with confidence. “It takes the guesswork out of our intervention work,” says Iris Im, Response to Intervention and Student Support Team Administrator for the district.

FastBridge helps the team align academic interventions to students’ needs. “Before, our elementary schools commonly implemented reading comprehension interventions and math problem solving interventions for students in grades 3-5, because they felt students were getting the biggest impact with these interventions,” Im says. “With FastBridge, we were able to see that we needed to address reading fluency before we addressed comprehension.”

A key advantage of using FastBridge for progress monitoring is the system’s [FAST™ Projection Line](#), the only tool to provide an accurate prediction of future growth in only six data points, as opposed to the usual 12. This enables educators to make accurate decisions around interventions without losing additional weeks or months of testing time. “The FAST Projection Line is a major buy-in point for teachers,” Im says.

“ It takes the guesswork out of our intervention work. ”

Since FastBridge also offers screening tools and progress monitoring tools for SEB, educators are able to determine whether students need an academic or SEB intervention in order to succeed. For instance, a middle school student’s academic data suggested he was proficient in reading, yet failing his reading class. He told his instructor that he was feeling overwhelmed in class, and so his teacher used the SAEBRS/mySAEBRS screening tool to evaluate his SEB skills. Although the teacher rated this student highly in the emotional behavior category, the student rated himself low due to his intense anxiety. “It was actually his anxiety that was impacting his performance in reading class,” Im says. Using the Direct Behavior Rating tool within FastBridge for progress monitoring in conjunction with academic interventions has also helped Fulton County reduce unnecessary interventions and address underlying issues related to behaviors.

Having actionable data to understand needs and guide decisions has had enormous impacts for the district.

Turning Data into Action

Knowing which skills students are lacking or that a specific intervention isn’t working is valuable information, but teachers also need a plan for helping students achieve. This is another area where FastBridge excels, as the 37,000-student Saint Paul Public Schools can attest to.

When Sue Braithwaite became the district’s Supervisor of Literacy, she took on the challenge of improving reading scores. The district adopted FastBridge to identify students’ skills gaps and make more informed instructional decisions.

Initially, Saint Paul planned to use FastBridge for universal screening and progress monitoring of students in grades K-8. But once teachers and administrators saw the system's effectiveness, its use has expanded into the ninth and 10th grades as well.

The system's [Screening to Intervention \(s2i\) Report](#) has made even teachers who were skeptical of using a universal screening and progress monitoring tool into believers. The s2i report helps teachers identify which specific interventions are needed in math and reading, complete with recommendations based on each student's individual needs. "The data is usable, responsive, and reflective," Braithwaite says.

FastBridge's ease of use has helped Saint Paul educators turn data into meaningful action. Teachers now have the insight they need to plan both Tier 1 instruction and intervention, and this information has also informed the district's adoption of curriculum. When it was time for the district to adopt a new reading curriculum, teachers knew from the s2i report that they needed a program that began with phonics. When the staff pitched their program choice to administrators, they had data to support their selection.

“FastBridge’s ease of use has helped Saint Paul educators turn data into meaningful action.”

The insights gained from FastBridge are moving the needle on achievement. The district saw a 1.1-percent gain in reading scores on the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment last year, and every racial group reported growth. Saint Paul hadn't experienced gains in its reading scores since 2010, and even then, the growth was only about half a percentage point. Braithwaite attributes this improvement to the district's implementation of FastBridge and the use of data to drive instruction.

Empowering Educators with Useful, Usable Data

From effectively supporting universal screening and progress monitoring, to simplifying assessment so it doesn't take away from teaching, to informing very rich, substantive conversations about what students need for success, FastBridge from [Illuminate Education](#) is empowering education and supporting student growth nationwide.

In the process, FastBridge is helping teachers and administrators solve some of their biggest challenges and drive key initiatives forward across a variety of learning modalities—from advancing student equity, to improving both interventions and core instruction, to turning data into impactful action. What's more, the system's rapid assessments and easy-to-use reporting tools are freeing teachers to spend less time on testing and more time on the activities that matter most: providing high-quality instruction and supports to students.

