



Chattahoochee Hills Charter School

A unique charter school develops benchmark exams that exponentially increase student academic and growth outcomes—while supporting student well-being in an immersion environment.

OVERVIEW

Organization

Chattahoochee Hills Charter School

Location

Chattahoochee Hills, GA

Numbers

Number of students: 552

Grades: K-8

Number of schools: 2

About Chattahoochee Hills Charter School

Chattahoochee Hills Charter School is serving Fulton County, approximately 45 minutes outside of Atlanta. As an immersion school, the team's objective is to integrate three key domains into academic content: the arts, agriculture, and the environment. School culture is centered around growth academically, civically, and personally.

At Chattahoochee Hills, nature is embraced as a means for both student learning and well-being. The great outdoors is treated as a conduit for creativity and inquisitiveness, as well as a channel to academic curriculum and mastery. It also serves as a critical backdrop to encourage high attendance and high engagement. The campus features several miles of hiking trails and is home to many animals including goats, pigs, and chickens.

Nesting Academic Rigor in a Unique Learning Environment

While Chattahoochee Hills' focus on immersion-based learning is important to the staff, positive student outcomes in well-being, growth, and academics are still paramount.

In the summer of 2018, the Chattahoochee Hills leadership determined they needed clearer insight into students' needs as they progressed through their learning. This would involve a refurbished assessment program, tailored carefully to their unique scope and sequence without sacrificing standards alignment. The hope was to increase their College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI) scores, a multi-faceted score by which the Georgia Department of Education measures school and district effectiveness.

In the 2018-19 school year, Raymond Edwards joined the Chattahoochee Hills team as Director of Curriculum and Instruction. The hire was featured as part of an expanded leadership team tasked with realizing the charter's vision of ever-increasing academic growth while also providing the unique learning experiences central to the charter's structure. To achieve these goals, Edwards knew the team needed assessments that provided deeper insights into their students' specific learning needs and areas of strength, both of which the team did not have much visibility.

“When I first got here, it didn’t seem like our teams were routinely making instructional decisions based on data,” said Edwards. “While teachers were working really hard to support students, the presentation of data and data conversations was a new practice for some.” Edwards saw an opportunity to support his team while growing a positive data culture around how they measured data and used the results to inform their pedagogy and practice.

Creating Information-Rich Custom Assessments

Edwards started by working with teachers to identify which standards needed to be assessed at various points in the year. Using Illuminate Data and Assessment (DnA) and the Inspect item bank, Edwards built custom mid- and end-of-trimester exams assessments by carefully selecting items that aligned to their curriculum’s scope and sequence. Illuminate also enabled the set up of assessments to yield the highest amount of information about student learning. For instance, by including three DOK 1, three DOK 2, and one DOK 3 level questions for each standard, teachers were able to examine at which level the students were performing with clarity.

Edwards then created question groups and question group alignments for each standard, which allowed the team to analyze the students’ strengths and weaknesses. In addition, he created and assigned a performance band to each question group that mirrored the school’s criteria for success. Students that scored an 85% or higher demonstrated mastery, a 70-84% demonstrated proficiency, and below a 70% did not show proficiency. Setting this performance band allowed teachers to plan for differentiated instruction.

IMPROVING STUDENT OUTCOMES

In the first year of using Illuminate, Chattahoochee Hills students
2019 Georgia Milestones math and science scores soared:

- +9% increase in math proficiency level in middle school**
- +43% increase in science proficiency level in middle school**

Reports Designed with Teachers in Mind

After the administration of each trimester exam via Illuminate DnA, Edwards and his team of teachers would collaborate to analyze the data in order to remediate or enrich the students' mastery. The reports delivered within the platform provided key instructional information to the Chattahoochee Hills teaching teams, enabling them to identify which students have not shown mastery and require reteaching in order to master a concept or learning target.

Illuminate provided a number of pre-built reports that turned the assessment results into quantifiable action steps. It allowed them to create small groups for differentiated instruction and reteaching, and to identify students who need more individualized support, whether it is in reteaching or enrichments. "Teachers are able to create small groups in their classrooms based on the data, whether it is to enrich a certain group of students or remediate a different group of students," said Edwards. "The difference is simply being able to sit and help them analyze the data so they can make the most informed decision possible."

In accordance with his coaching cycle, he would meet with teachers once a week to evaluate their assessments from the previous week and mid-term exam scores. They would look at both areas of strength and weakness, starting with objective feedback about the results in terms of where students had the most success and where they struggled.

Diving deeper into the questions and items, they would look to identify instructional factors that contributed to the issues and ask what the data might imply. Going a step further, they asked what steps would be required as a response. Any gained knowledge would be turned into a plan for the following week around how they can reteach the standard while progressing with the rest of the curriculum.

For the reassessment process, Illuminate is used to capture the data quickly and organize it in an easy-to-understand layout. "We appreciate how the user can look at every student's performance, and then apply performance bands and corresponding colors to quickly visualize how students are doing," said Edwards. For example, students who present with several red areas means they are struggling, while students who show all green would indicate the class is ready to move on.

Illuminate also provides a Matrix Report that helps teams determine the questions with which students struggled the most. Equipped with this information, teachers can use frequently missed items as warm-up questions for their classes. This practice allowed them to remediate unmastered content while continuing to progress through scope and sequence. “Illuminate DnA did a phenomenal job giving us graphs and charts that organized the data for us and allowed us to quickly group students for reteaching,” said Edwards. “It also provided us with items that we could use in any reteaching efforts.”

Closing the Achievement Gap

In 2018-19, Chattahoochee Hills saw its greatest growth in content mastery and student progress in mathematics and science, particularly at the middle school level. This was due in large part to the utilization of data garnered from the assessments created within Illuminate.

Based on the results from the 2019 Georgia Milestones, the students’ proficiency level in math increased from 52.2% to 61.2%. In science, their proficiency increased from 34.4% to an astounding 77.3%. Fifty-four percent of their African-American students scored between the 66th and 99th percentile in their growth in math, while 53% of the economically-disadvantaged students scored in the same percentile range. These results show that students who have traditionally underperformed academically are now outperforming their peers.

Thanks to Edwards and his team, the school increased their middle school CCRPI score from 56.2 (F) to 87.1 (B) in just one year. “Last year yielded some pretty phenomenal results, and I’m sure the students will do the same thing again in the future,” said Edwards. “A lot of that has been pushed by our use of data analysis, especially the data and reporting that we get from Illuminate DnA.” Chattahoochee Hills is an example that student-centered assessment and collaborative data analysis can go a long way in closing the achievement gap.

