



# Putnam County Charter School System

A Georgia charter school district uses common formative assessment and an MTSS collaboration and management solution to personalize instruction.

## OVERVIEW

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### District

Putnam County Charter School System

### Location

Eatonton, GA

### Numbers

Number of students: 3,033

Number of staff: 250

Number of schools: 4 (plus a virtual  
Digital Learning Academy)

### Illuminate Education Customer Since

2016–2017

## About Putnam County Charter School System

The mission of Putnam County Charter School System is to help all students in acquiring knowledge, fostering aspirations, and developing life skills that will empower them to become self-directing, productive, and contributing members of a global society.

The district has a high poverty rate, with 95% of students qualifying for free or reduced-price lunches. Despite this challenge, its graduation rate exceeds 90%, thanks in part to a relentless focus on standards-aligned instruction and assessment.

## Personalized learning based on standards mastery

Educators are aware that every student learns at a different pace and in a different manner. Georgia's Putnam County Charter School System acknowledges this reality by identifying each student's unique academic needs and creating a personalized learning pathway that addresses these needs.

The district requires students to master 80% of the state standards for their grade level before they can advance.

“ For the students who haven't learned a concept, we'll reteach and reassess. We only care that a student has actually mastered the content. ”

“We believe that you continue to teach until a child reaches mastery,” says Kathy Smith, accountability support specialist for the district. “For the students who haven’t learned a concept, we’ll reteach and reassess. We don’t care about the student’s average score for all tests; that’s just penalizing students for not getting it right the first time. We only care that a student has actually mastered the content.”

Developing highly personalized learning plans requires deep insight into each student’s skills and content knowledge. With help from [SchoolCity](#), an assessment creation and administration solution from Illuminate Education, the district develops customized standards-aligned common formative assessments at each grade level to gather this insight.

“Common formative assessments give us the ability to provide constant feedback to students.”

Teachers and administrators also use Illuminate’s [eduCLIMBER](#), an MTSS collaboration and management solution, to gain a comprehensive, 360-degree view of each student. With these two systems working hand in hand, Putnam County Charter School System has increased its graduate rate by more than 20 percentage points since its baseline data point in 2012.

## Using data to drive instruction

Having common formative assessments aligned with state standards helps the district achieve a number of objectives. For instance, it ensures that all students have access to the same high-quality curriculum at each grade level with which to align their assessments. It helps teachers understand how each student is progressing toward mastery of standards, and it helps them evaluate the effectiveness of their instruction.

“Common formative assessments give us the ability to provide constant feedback to students,” says Beth Bacon, another accountability support specialist for the district.

Putnam County Charter School System uses SchoolCity to develop the assessments. SchoolCity makes it easy for users to create and administer paper-based or online assessments from existing test documents or an item bank containing more than 80,000 standards-based items in ELA, math, science, and history.

“ [SchoolCity] allows us to monitor students’ learning, and it informs pacing guide adjustments and summer semester programming at the end of the year. ”

When building assessments, teachers can opt for the “student view” to see what the exam would look like from the student’s point of view. “I can see what that question looks like to the student taking the test online,” Smith explains. “I can go through to make sure the visuals are clear, the directions are clear, and the students are not going to have any trouble with that test.”

SchoolCity includes a wide variety of built-in supports, such as Google Translate and text-to-speech functionality. Teachers and administrators can turn each type of support on or off for individual students, creating customized accommodation profiles that apply for every assessment a student takes within the system.

In addition, a comprehensive dashboard provides actionable reports with analysis of the items that students got right or wrong, as well as the standards that students have met or still need to achieve.

Putnam County Charter School System has created pacing guides that include opportunities for educators to teach, assess, reteach, and then reassess students to ensure mastery. “SchoolCity drives our instructional focus,” Smith says. “It allows us to monitor students’ learning, and it informs pacing guide adjustments and summer semester programming at the end of the year.”

## Taking data-driven instruction to the next level

While SchoolCity provides comprehensive information about how students are progressing toward mastery of state standards, Putnam County Charter School System has taken data-driven instruction to another level by adding eduCLIMBER, which gives educators whole child insights into every student’s needs.

“eduCLIMBER has brought us a whole different way of looking at information.”

eduCLIMBER combines academics, social-emotional behavior (SEB), attendance, and other student data within a single platform, giving educators a holistic, 360-degree view of each child.

“eduCLIMBER has brought us a whole different way of looking at information,” Bacon says. “We can look at snapshots that we could never see before, because the data were scattered among different spreadsheets.”

eduCLIMBERS give teachers complete, whole-child information about each student, including both current and historical data. The system also includes intervention tracking tools, a dedicated collaboration interface, and a suite of analysis tools to glean insights from data.

Color-coded data helps educators see at a glance whether students are exceeding expectations, meeting expectations, struggling, or in need of intervention. Educators can tag students for inclusion in various district-defined groups, giving them an easy way to track and monitor students according to the services or interventions they're receiving. In addition, educators can set up the early warning system to receive automatic alerts when students have met or fallen below certain thresholds.

"The teacher gets those warnings very quickly at both ends of the spectrum, whether students are struggling or succeeding," Bacon says.

“ That has been amazing for us. It allows us to think about what shifts we need to make within our system to serve all students more effectively. ”

Teachers in the district use eduCLIMBER to focus their conversations during intervention meetings and in parent conferences. Having both current and historical data helps teachers unearth the root causes of why students might be struggling.

For instance, if a student has performed well historically and then all of a sudden is struggling, "that tells us maybe it's not about academics," Bacon says. "Maybe something else is going on with this child, perhaps at home or in relationships. [The system] gives us an overall picture rather than just a snapshot."

## Making a difference with student data

With the help of both SchoolCity and eduCLIMBER, Putnam County Charter School System has built a data-driven culture aimed at personalizing instruction for every student. The results speak for themselves, as the district has increased its graduation rate from 70% in 2012 to more than 90% today, with success spanning all groups of students.

SchoolCity and eduCLIMBER “work beautifully together,” Smith concludes. “We don’t just assess students, but we determine their needs, we develop strategies or interventions to help them, and then we reassess to make sure what we’re doing is making a difference.”



To learn more about SchoolCity and eduCLIMBER, reach out to [schedule a demo](#).

