



Grandview Heights Middle School Memphis, TN

EL Education Curriculum Kickstarts Academic Growth for All Students

School Profile

In 2015, Grandview Heights Middle School, a neighborhood school in the heart of Memphis, was ranked the lowest performing middle school in Tennessee. However, the district didn't give up on Grandview's students. Instead, Shelby County Schools designated Grandview as an Innovation Zone school and provided extra support designed to move students from the bottom five percent of academic performance in the state to the top 25 percent over five years. Principal Deartis Barber III took the helm of the school, setting ambitious goals to accelerate the academic growth of every student by focusing on literacy and numeracy, and enhancing social development. The Grand, as faculty affectionately call the school, serves 446 students in grades 6–8.

2017-2018 Demographic Data

- » 96% Black/African American
- » 1% Hispanic/Latinx
- » 2% White
- » 87% Economically disadvantaged
- » 22% Students with disabilities
- » 4% Homeless

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Deartis Barber III, Principal

EL Education Curriculum Implementation

To turn the school around and make growth sustainable over time, district leaders moved quickly to acquire a literacy curriculum that research shows works for all students. Grandview Heights piloted the EL Education Grades 6–8 English Language Arts Curriculum for the district in 2016-17. Based on their results, the district expanded implementation to include its other six middle schools and adopted the K–5 curriculum for all 80 elementary schools throughout the district. Principal Barber notes that he was initially concerned that the curriculum doesn't assess students in the same way as Tennessee's standardized tests, but after two years of watching how the curriculum prepares students to do the kinds of thinking required by standardized tests, he says this: “If a principal is considering the EL Education Curriculum, I can say emphatically, YES, make this choice. Football players lift weights to get ready for the game, even though you don't see them lifting weights on game day. EL is lifting weights. If students are able to master the content and tasks of this curriculum, then what they see on the standardized tests will be easy.”

During the pilot year, Grandview Heights teachers initially received a two-day intensive introduction to the EL Education Grades 6–8 English Language Arts Curriculum from an EL Education coach. After that, building instructional leaders and district coaches met monthly with an EL Education coach to conduct learning walks and investigate systems and structures needed to support a new curriculum implementation. For example, leaders at Grandview Heights changed the focus of collaborative team time from just looking at summative data to co-planning lessons and reflecting on challenges and successes.

Grandview Heights instructional leaders, who were learning the curriculum right alongside teachers, strengthened schoolwide consistency through individualized coaching and collective professional development. According to Barber,

teachers initially wanted to hang on to their grammar books and readers. “This curriculum was harder,” he says, “but after the first semester when interim assessment scores came back, they were convinced of its value.” Then teachers dug in and created their own professional learning community—sharing resources, learning the protocols together, and giving each other feedback during their collaborative planning time.

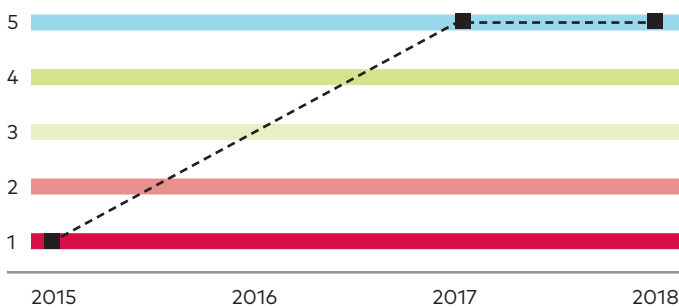
Results

In the first year after implementation of the EL Education Grades 6–8 English Language Arts Curriculum, Grandview Heights students showed the strongest growth in the district. School leaders and teachers agree that three components of the curriculum led to these results:

- » Close reading of complex text with rigorous tasks is the daily fare of the new literacy instruction, replacing the grammar and skills instruction of times past.
- » Differentiation and scaffolding are built into the lessons. “We don’t just do that for some students,” says Barber. “We do it for everyone. That’s what inclusion is.”
- » A social-emotional curriculum is infused into the lessons, encouraging students to have robust and relevant conversations about books and life.

Tennessee measures student growth year over year by comparing a student’s growth to his or her peers who have performed similarly on past assessments. At the end of the 2016–2017 school year, after one year of implementing the curriculum, and in subsequent years, Grandview Heights achieved a Level 5 (the highest possible performance level) in language arts, showing significant evidence that students made more progress than the growth standard for overall student growth.

Performance as measured by the Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (note: no data available for 2016)



Barber notes that the goal for his Innovation Zone school is not only for students to learn faster but also for them ultimately to achieve the high literacy levels that will empower them to excel in a global society. Meeting that goal will take a great curriculum and more. He and his staff continue to work toward consistency in instruction and consistency in student attendance over time. In 2018, all subgroups of Grandview Heights students “demonstrated high absolute achievement,” reflecting a significant reduction in chronic absenteeism as well as increases in achievement and growth, with a priority based on progress towards English language proficiency.

Tennessee Student Achievement and Growth Ratings for 2017-2018, Including Subgroups

Student Group	Student Academic Growth Rating			
	1	2	3	4
All Students				✓
Black, Hispanic, and Native American Students				✓
Economically Disadvantaged Students				✓
Students with Disabilities				✓

- 1=Demonstrated low performance
- 2=Demonstrated average performance
- 3=Demonstrated significant growth
- 4=Demonstrated high absolute achievement

In order to sustain this high growth across all subgroups over time, Barber and district leaders are investing in two strategies. First, they have committed to supporting teachers in every school across the district to master the art and science of the EL Education curriculum. Second, they are taking a “growth mindset approach” that includes leaders, teachers, and students. Staying the course with a curriculum that lifts everyone up to high expectations takes grit, but persistence and consistency will move all students toward proficiency in the long haul.

EL Education provides schools and districts with professional development, coaching, and resources to support two types of partnership:

- » **School network partners:** Schools that implement EL Education’s full school design and its unique approach to curriculum, instruction, culture and character, assessment, and leadership.
- » **Literacy partners:** Districts and schools that adopt EL Education’s K–8 Language Arts curriculum and work with EL Education to support its implementation and impact.