

DreamBox Math helps Buckhorn Creek Elementary students' math proficiency and confidence soar

Wake County Public School System, North Carolina

When Buckhorn Creek Elementary opened in the 2018–2019 school year, math proficiency on the North Carolina End-of-Grade Tests was 63.1%. In the 2021-2022 school year, proficiency went up to 76.1%, according to Dr. Daniel Simons, principal.

Dr. Simons proudly describes Buckhorn Creek as a diversely blended school. “Since we’ve opened, we’ve had this great blend of students racially, ethnicity wise, language wise, and that has continued to grow,” says Dr. Simons. When looking at student demographics, about 13% to 14% of students are Hispanic, 10% to 11% are Asian, 12% are Black, and roughly 60% of students are white. Approximately 6% of students are English Language Learners, and another 12% of students require special education services.


The percentages, however, don’t tell the whole story. “Percentages don’t give you a whole picture,” he explains. “I think that sometimes people look at schools and assume there’s no need there, but when you really start digging down and look more at individual students, you can see that need.”

When asked what the primary, school-wide focus for the 2022–2023 school year is, Dr. Simons shares that it’s twofold:

1. Build a supportive school culture post-pandemic

In the post-pandemic school landscape, Dr. Simons wants to make sure his staff and students are supported and know they’re a part of a team, or as he says, a crew. Dr. Simons calls the collaboration among teachers and school leaders a crew mindset. Crew mindset is “really all [about] supporting each other and thinking about a growing team.” It works because if one person is struggling or a little weaker, you wouldn’t know it because other colleagues step in to support. It takes a team to achieve a result, and the way to do it is together and collectively.

Social and emotional learning is key to helping students recover learning loss. Post-pandemic, educators, administrators, and students struggle to get back on track.



Buckhorn Creek Elementary School	
School serves	PreK–5
Total students	702
Classroom teachers	~54
Students who received free or reduced lunch	23%

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Dr. Daniel Simons, Principal
Buckhorn Creek Elementary

“Right now socially and emotionally, everyone is struggling across the world...” Dr. Simons explains. “In schools, we’re seeing more behavior [issues], but I think our focus on that social-emotional – that crew mindset – and supporting each other, which includes kids, has really helped.” He shares that, as a crew, Buckhorn Creek educators are working to be more united and precise with the strategies they’re using to support students.

Visuals and progress monitoring are integral to social and emotional learning, especially for children who struggle with math or certain math concepts. DreamBox helps teachers personalize instruction and keep children engaged with precise strategies for their growth. Pinpointing specific needs and pumping up students’ confidence with rewards for making gains keeps students eager to learn more.

2. Maintain strong DreamBox Math usage

At Buckhorn Creek Elementary, DreamBox Math is used school wide. Teachers took to DreamBox eagerly because it didn’t add to their workload. Instead, it gave them resources to meet individual student needs. Children can work independently. If they don’t understand a problem, they’ve learned to click on the question mark and read the question again to help them understand. So, while a teacher works in small groups or with intervention, other students can continue their progress doing meaningful work in DreamBox Math. Students get direct feedback while working in DreamBox. From there, they gain the confidence to make mistakes and expand their conceptual knowledge of math and how to solve problems on their own.

Dr. Simons is proud of the growth students have made in math proficiency. Prior to using DreamBox, Dr. Simons notes that many of the 5th-grade students, for example, were working at a 2nd-grade math level. In fact, he cites **the school’s growth data for math in 2018–2019 was -7.31 (below expected growth). With DreamBox being used consistently, at least five lessons a week, in the 2021–2022 school year, the data changed to +7.88 (exceeds expected growth).**

Dr. Simons uses morning announcement videos that he records and DreamBox challenges and boards to maintain student usage momentum. He says teachers all have a set number of lessons for their students to complete—between five and seven—which aligns with DreamBox’s recommended usage. Dr. Simons reflects on the early days of DreamBox implementation and how teachers have proudly taken ownership of promoting strong usage. “When we first started, I literally would go through every child in the school, and I would assign lessons because I couldn’t ask teachers to do more. We’re a crew, we are all doing this together – over time they have taken that on.”

Now, rather than checking to see if students meet the goals, Dr. Simons relies on the students’ reports, especially the Standards Report and Predictive Insights. They give a clear reading of how well students have progressed and where they need further help. Even more important is the ability to give parents specific data that show children’s level of proficiency.

The DreamBox reports are also a great resource for special education. Teachers can quickly see what skills students are mastering and where there is specific need for intervention or further in-person assistance.

With the support of DreamBox, Dr. Simons is thrilled about being able to put school culture, social-emotional learning, and academic growth back into the forefront during the 2022–23 school year and beyond.



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