

# Reading with Relevance Accelerates Student Achievement

## School Profile

### City/State:

Martinez, California

### Ethnicity:

African American: 50.4%  
Latino: 30.8%  
White: 14.5%  
Asian/Pacific Islander: 2.7%  
Two or More Race: 0.9%  
None Reported: 0.9%

### School Type:

County-Operated  
Court School

### District Enrollment:

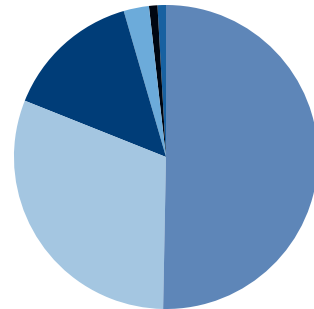
233 students in court  
& community schools

### School Enrollment:

110 students

### Grades:

7-12

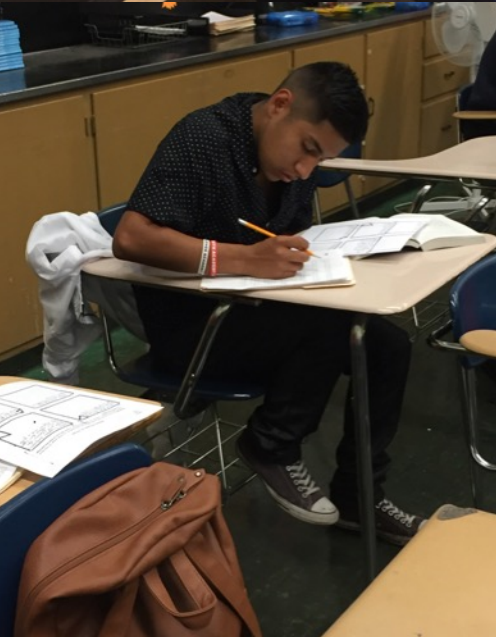
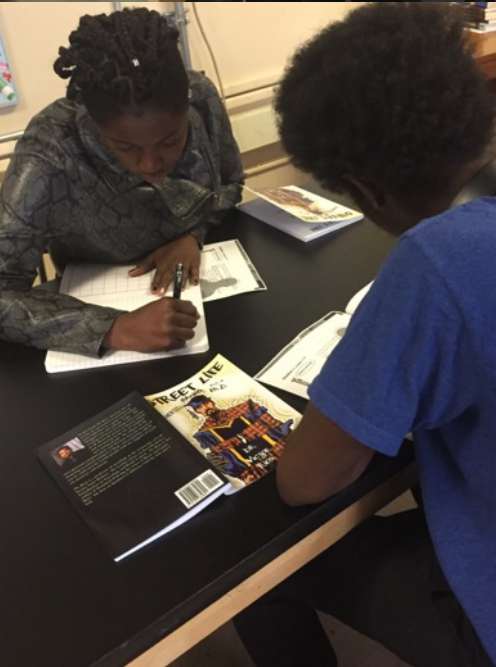
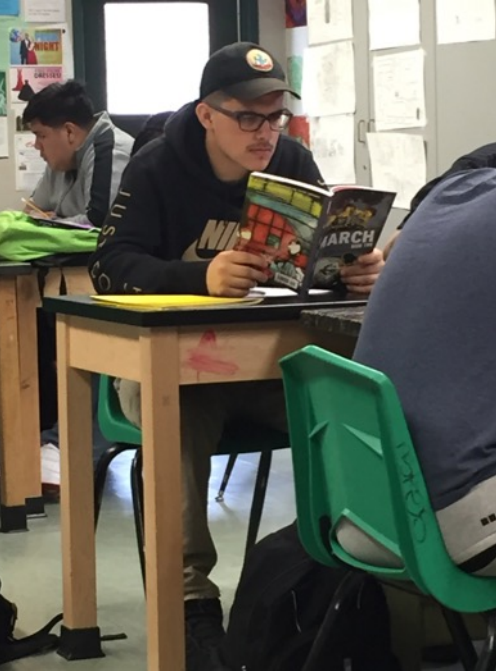


## >> Overview

The Contra Costa County Office of Education operates programs for high-risk youth, including those referred by probation and by local school districts for expulsion, behavioral issues or school attendance problems, and those in probation court facilities. The programs seek to provide challenging academic curriculum and assist students in developing positive social skills.

## >> Challenge

The population served in court schools are students who have not experienced success in the traditional education system: they are high schoolers operating with elementary-level skills who have bounced between school placements and don't see themselves as learners. These students' sense of disconnection from school is a key factor in their path to court school; however, their school leaders Robert Bowers and Rebecca Vichiquis saw a critical opportunity to re-engage them through meeting their academic and social/emotional needs. "One hundred percent of my students have experienced some kind of trauma, shares Bowers. "If we want to teach them, we have to address what's going on under the surface."



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“For the first time, my students have been asking to read. They’ve been asking to write. They have been inspired by Reading with Relevance, which centers around books that mirror the social emotional challenges they face in their communities. Teachers are experiencing stronger relationships with their students and are beginning to understand the importance of SEL.”

-Robert Bowers,  
Assistant Principal

“My students were ASKING to start their essays today!! What the??? I’ve never had any student ask to start an essay. EVER.”

-Caryn Quezada, Teacher

“The students love the novel. They read willingly and eagerly, without much prodding from me at all. When I handed them the books they lit up. Highly engaging for them! Every day they ask, ‘Are we going to read today?’ An English teacher couldn’t ask for much more than that!”

-Brian Singer, Teacher

“I think students should do Reading with Relevance because every student in my class was fighting just to read a part of the book. This book is sad and funny at the same time...it has a lot of feeling. This book shows you a new culture you probably didn’t know about.”

-Court School Student

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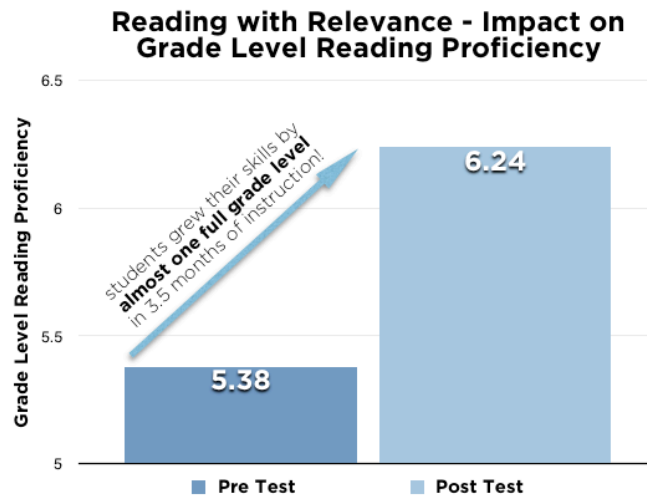
## >> Solution

Bowers began looking for a program that would meet the academic and social/emotional needs of his students. He selected Reading with Relevance based on its use of culturally-relevant texts, its integration of social/emotional learning standards, its ease of use for teachers, and its history of success with students years behind grade level literacy skills.

With the support of career pathway funding, CCCOE began implementing the program during the winter of 2017. The process began with teacher training, modeling, and coaching, supporting teachers to develop the capacity to integrate social, emotional, and academic learning, and dig deep into meaningful conversations with their students about novels like The Hate U Give and The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian.

## >> Results

Reading with Relevance was a powerful catalyst for student achievement. Students’ grade-level reading skills were assessed before and after participation in the program. Students experienced a statistically significant improvements in their reading proficiency, showing nearly one full grade level of growth (0.86 years) during three and a half months of instruction. Students with disabilities, who represented 31% of the intervention group, showed a literacy gain of 1.08 grade levels--making more than a year’s progress during only one-third of a school year. This is the power of uniting academic and social emotional learning - engaging students in their own success!



“I have seen on average **a full grade level increase in reading ability** with all students enrolled in the program. Students also are beginning to develop the pro-social classroom skills that result in increased engagement and less time outside of the classroom.”

-Robert Bowers, Assistant Principal