

# Zanesville High School Focuses on Vocabulary to Close the Achievement Gap

SUCCESS STORY: Zanesville High School, Zanesville, Ohio



## Zanesville High School at a glance:

Enrollment	904
Free or Reduced Price Meals	72.7%
Race/Ethnicity	70.9% White, 12.5% African-American, 0.6% Asian, 1.4% Hispanic/Latino, 14.4% two races

[source: StartClass.com]

## CHALLENGE:

*The school sought to close the achievement gap and build school pride.*

With #ReThinkZanesville as a motto, Zanesville High School Principal Garry Young is looking to boost the school's reputation, which has suffered in comparison to higher-achieving schools in the district. "We're doing some things to specifically work on test scores," he told the Zanesville Times Recorder. "But we're really trying to overhaul that opinion, that culture."

To address this challenge, the school is tackling the achievement gap by taking approaches to help to level the playing field, thus improving the school's position on the Ohio Report Card and instilling students with a feeling of pride. The school specifically pinpointed the difficulties that many students have with state reading tests because of insufficient vocabulary knowledge.

## SOLUTION:

*Zanesville implemented word-learning intervention using Vocabulary.com.*

Zanesville High School addressed students' language deficits by shifting from traditional vocabulary instruction to Vocabulary.com. After a one-month trial, Zanesville introduced the Vocabulary.com Educator Edition throughout the school in the fall of 2014.

At the same time, Zanesville also began competing in the Vocabulary Bowl, a nationwide competition in which students vie to move their schools up the leaderboard by mastering words on Vocabulary.com. Participation in the Vocabulary Bowl appealed to the students' competitive spirit and also gave them an instant sense of recognition for their efforts.

## **RESULTS:** *Students see immediate results and take pride in their vocabulary learning.*

Since Zanesville adopted Vocabulary.com, teachers report that students are learning more words on a more consistent basis than by using traditional word-learning instruction, and gaining a richer sense of those words' usage and multiple meanings.

Zanesville teachers were thrilled with the quality and the quantity of the word learning taking place. "I feel like my students are getting more in-depth vocabulary instruction. Vocabulary.com allows students to become familiar with the different nuances of words' meanings and different ways to use them," said English teacher Annette Porter, who uses the tool with her students including those who have Individualized Education Programs (IEPs).

Lori Lee, who teaches honors English, said she values the individualized instruction Vocabulary.com provides. "Some students struggle more on the spelling. Some kids struggle with context or synonyms and antonyms. When we do the old fashioned instruction we don't hit all those depths of vocabulary instruction."

Vocabulary.com is saving Zanesville teachers time in and out of the classroom, they say. "Vocabulary.com allows me to continue vocab instruction without actually having to devote class time to it," said Lee. "I like the fact that I can assign a list that is pertinent to what we're studying without taking that extra time in class." Porter added, "Using the teacher dashboard makes it very easy to monitor students' time spent learning and progress toward mastery."

Not only were the students mastering new words that will help them learn more easily, they were seeing evidence of their success in monthly Vocabulary Bowl leaderboards, and earning the school monthly badges for placing in the Ohio Top 10. Students are proud of the school's success. "It offers them a sense of pride in themselves but also in the school," Principal Young said.

Zanesville's vocabulary success has led to positive press and community recognition as well. Using the Vocabulary.com PR Toolkit, the school created a press release about their achievements, and the Zanesville Times Recorder presented them as an example of a school taking positive steps toward self improvement.

## **CONCLUSION:** *Teachers report that students are moving to close the achievement gap.*

Teachers and administrators are confident that Zanesville's vocabulary initiative will move the needle on the school's Ohio Report Card. Already, teachers report a new fluency among students when words are used or discussed in class. Said Porter, "From the number of times my students are telling me 'Hey I know that word' or 'I've heard that word before,' I believe that we should see a closing of the gap on our reading vocab and comprehension" on state-mandated tests as well as admissions tests like ACT and SAT.

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