

Council for Leaders in Alabama Schools

Montgomery, Alabama

State education association offers powerful supplemental adaptive digital learning instruction to K–12 schools across Alabama, supported by grant-funded specialists and in-school facilitators

Beginning in 2006, through a partnership with the Alabama State Department of Education and Stride Learning Solutions, and funded by the CLAS Motivated Data Grant, CLAS began offering Stride Skills Arcade, an online supplemental adaptive learning system, to K–12 schools statewide at no cost to schools. CLAS selected the Stride Skills Arcade because of its adaptive learning capabilities and the ability for teachers to customize instructional content and delivery for each student based on their needs and performance.

The grant also provides funds to support the program with part-time CLAS Academic Specialists to support schools. Gina Price, CLAS State Coordinator, shared, “Because of the way CLAS has partnered with the Alabama Department of Education, this program is free to all Alabama schools, which administrators appreciate very much, given the competing needs for their professional development budgets.”

Schools must apply for the use of Stride Skills Arcade and agree to work cooperatively with the CLAS Academic Specialist assigned to their school. The CLAS Academic specialists are typically retired administrators or teachers dedicated to supporting the educators and students in the schools they serve. Fifteen CLAS academic specialists support approximately 7 to 15 schools each within a geographic region. They provide teacher training, ongoing support, and make quarterly visits to schools.

To provide first-hand support at the local school level, each school designates someone in the school to serve as the school’s facilitator. This is often a teacher, an academic coach, or sometimes a media specialist. After initial training, academic specialists provide ongoing support and guidance, and they visit schools at least quarterly to provide support and connect with school facilitators.

Math benchmark pass rate improvement was nearly twice that of peers not using Stride Skills Arcade



STATE ASSOCIATION

Type of school:

State-level online K–12 supplemental program

Schools served:

118 Elementary schools

37 Middle schools

24 High schools

Grades served:

Pre–K through 12

Program started:

2006

Students served by program:

77,780

Free/Reduced-price lunch:

72%

Staff:

1 State Coordinator

15 Academic specialists

1 Facilitator in each school

Instructional model:

Supplemental online instruction

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

CLAS is Alabama's premier school leader organization, providing professional learning, curriculum support, and other services to schools.

Through a partnership with the Alabama State Department of Education and Stride Learning Solutions, CLAS offers the Stride Skills Arcade adaptive learning system to K–12 schools across Alabama.

Stride Skills Arcade is an award-winning game-based adaptive learning system for grades Pre-K through 8 to accelerate learning in math, language arts, reading and science.

The Stride Skills Arcade offering is funded by a CLAS grant, the Motivated Data Grant, and is available to Alabama schools at no cost.

Support for schools is provided by grant-funded CLAS academic specialists as well as school-based facilitators assigned within each school.

An independent university-based study found that Stride Skills Arcade students overall improved math benchmark pass rates by 15% compared to their demographically matched peers who improved pass rate by 8%. The same study found Stride Skills Arcade students overall improved reading benchmark pass rates by 10%.

Adaptive Learning Instructional Model

CLAS offers Stride Skills Arcade to schools across Alabama, from kindergarten through the twelfth grade. As shown in the table below, subject area focus varies for different grade levels. Stride Skills Arcade is typically used in grades K–2 for reading, math, and language arts. In addition to reading, language arts, and math, some schools also choose to incorporate science for grades 3 through 8. At the high school level, it is most often used by special education students or those students who may need specific academic remediation.

Stride Skills Arcade subject area focus

Grade Levels	Subject area content primarily used
K–2	Reading, Language Arts, and Math
3–8	Reading, Language Arts, Math, and Science
9–12	Algebra II, Geometry, English I, English II, English III, U.S. History, and Biology

Students use Stride Skills Arcade before, during, and after their regular schedule. They access the system in school classrooms, at learning stations, centers within classrooms, computer labs, as well as at home. CLAS provides Stride Skills Arcade to a wide range of students, including medically homebound, special education, special needs, Response to Intervention (RTI), and students engaged in continuity of learning over summer and winter breaks. Some students also use the system at home to practice and reinforce academic skills.

Stride Skills Arcade is designed to enhance learning, while incorporating games and rewards to motivate students. Its adaptive technology presents concepts students still need to master at the grade level most appropriate at the time.

Stride Skills Arcade includes an academic as well as a gaming portion. The academic portion begins on grade level for a student and makes adaptive adjustments based on skill performance. If students struggle with on grade level skills, the system first remediates one grade level below. If students continue to struggle, Stride Skills Arcade will remediate to another grade level in specific skill areas. Based on student performance, remediation will move a student up or down as much as two grade levels. When students answer incorrectly, they are given a rationale for why their answer was incorrect.

Students collect coins for correct answers, two coins for correct answers on the first attempt and one coin for correct answers on the second attempt. This rewards system feedback is a motivational piece that encourages students to perform at their best. Stride Skills Arcade makes it easy for teachers to assign skills based on student needs or to differentiate instruction. For example, if a student is performing more than two grade levels below, a teacher can assign skills at the student's actual instructional

Founded in 1969, the Council for Leaders in Alabama Schools (CLAS) is a professional education organization dedicated to serving the needs of over 4,000 school and district administrators across the state. CLAS includes representatives from the following organizations:

Alabama Association of Secondary School Principals

Alabama Association of Elementary School Administrators

School Superintendents of Alabama

Alabama Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development

Alabama Association of Middle School Principals

Alabama Council of Administrators of Special Education

Alabama Association for Prevention, Attendance and Support Services

Alabama Child Nutrition Directors

Alabama Association of School Personnel Administrators

Alabama Association of Career/Technical Administrators

Alabama Leaders Advocating for English Learners

Alabama Association of 504 Coordinators

level, as outlined, for example, in a student's Individual Education Program (IEP) or based on a student's intervention needs.

Students can redeem coins to play a variety of digital games provided within Stride Skills Arcade. A teacher or whole school can also set up custom rewards programs consisting of teacher-specified prizes, rewards, or privileges. Students can redeem coins for these prizes or to play games.

Schools can also schedule specific schoolwide or smaller group contests. During a contest, students can track their own progress on a scoreboard. Administrators and teachers receive an email at the end of the contest listing student scores. Certificates can be printed for winners.

Stride Skills Arcade aids teachers and administrators in a variety of ways

Each week teachers receive a report highlighting student skill strengths and weaknesses, as well as other student performance and usage information. Teachers can access real-time student data on the Stride Skills Arcade teacher dashboard. The Quiz Builder feature is used by many teachers to

create assessments for entire classes or specific groups of students. The quiz builder consists of a large question bank with items based on state academic standards and skills. Quizzes are automatically graded in real time, helping teachers quickly review skill mastery and identify areas for remediation or review. Instructional videos are also available that teachers can assign as part of a preview/review for the entire class or for a specific group of students.

The Stride Skills Arcade Progress Monitoring Assessment (PMA) is a benchmark assessment designed for students in grades K–8 in reading and math and is administered three times a year. Teachers use PMA data to see which skills students have mastered. In addition to the PMA, a Gap Assessment is available in Stride Skills Arcade, which is typically given only when a teacher wants a more in-depth analysis of student strengths and weaknesses.

CLAS academic specialists communicate regularly with principals and facilitators to discuss the school's progress. Principals and school-based facilitators also always have direct access to their school's data.

Academic Specialists — The Backbone of the Program

Academic Specialists are funded by the CLAS grant and form the backbone of support for the entire lifecycle of the program. They provide initial training and orientation to schools, from which principals and teachers can determine how best to structure the program to fit their instructional and operational plans.

The CLAS staff believes their Academic Specialists are the key to successful implementation and optimal student success.

Academic specialists are available to aid and support schools throughout the year. As Rhonda Lewis, Academic Specialist, shared, “My schools feel comfortable calling me at any time. After the initial trainings, I will visit my schools and invite teachers to ask questions and discuss topics they wish to discuss.”

Frank Buck, Academic Specialist, shared, “My role is to help my schools implement and use Stride Skills Arcade, access and understand their data, and support their teachers as needed. At the beginning of the year, I help them get their students into the database so teachers can start using the program. I also archive old classes and set up new classes. And then we determine what each school’s training needs will be to start the year.” He urges teachers to regularly use performance data to provide encouragement and motivation to students. He believes that when students know this is something their teachers care about, they will care about it too.

CLAS Academic Specialists provide monthly performance summaries to each school. Rhonda Lewis shared, “I once had a school with scores that were very, very low when compared to state scores. In one year of using Stride Skills Arcade for 15 minutes every day, that school went up to a C in just a few weeks. It was amazing. I know first-hand that Stride Skills Arcade can really improve student outcomes.”

The CLAS staff believes the Academic Specialists are the key to successful implementation and optimal student success.

What the Schools Say

Leeds Elementary School (Leeds, Alabama)

Stride Skills Arcade is used for remediation as well as acceleration at Leeds Elementary School. An instructional coach and an assistant principal serve as the school-based facilitators. They meet regularly with their CLAS Academic Specialist, Beverly Smith, to review student performance and growth. Leeds Elementary uses the Stride Skills Arcade PMAs to see where students are and determine what they need to do to reach the next level.

As Justin Burns, the Principal, explained, “Our teachers love using the PMAs. It allows them to adjust for each student according to their needs. The instructional coach helps teachers differentiate based on the PMAs, so there are multiple levels of support.” The school also uses PMAs as preparation for state testing because Stride Skills Arcade “has given us an opportunity to not have any surprises. We know exactly where we stand because Stride Skills Arcade is aligned to our state standards,” said Burns.

Students have fun, and are learning, when using Stride Skills Arcade, and the data show it. Smith said, “From looking at reports, we see that the increase in usage is correlated to the increase in student success. And when you can sit down beside a student and observe them as they’re working in Stride Skills Arcade, it’s just a joy.” She related another story about how she was visiting with one of her school’s afterschool programs, and students were congratulating each other when they answered questions correctly and earned coins and badges. She could see how students were really supporting each other. As another form of encouragement for students, the school regularly hosts a pizza party for the class or grade level that logs the most correctly answered questions.

CLAS Academic Specialist Beverly Smith provides her schools a weekly summary reference sheet she calls “Tuesday Tips.” Smith said she loves to visit Leeds Elementary School and sit with the students when she has her quarterly visits. She shared a story of one visit with a second grader:

I was interviewing a student and said to him, “You are just doing great, and you are getting so many answers right. You’re earning a lot of coins and you played a lot of games. You had a lot of fun. But I would like to know, when you don’t know an answer, does Stride Skills Arcade help you? And how is it helping you?” I can still see him now when he answered me. He said, “Miss Beverly, it knows by how I answered the questions what to do to help me.” That just blew me away. A student knew exactly how the program was helping him. Did he not sum it up?

When asked about what learning gains and transformations he has seen in his school because of Stride Skills Arcade, Principal Burns shared the following:

Well, it's like anything in life. I think you get out of it what you put into it. And so, the teachers who utilize it more, we see more growth, and the teachers who do not use it as much, we will see less growth. We do see in the data a positive correlation between the amount of practice and academic outcomes and growth. Stride Skills Arcade gives our teachers another valuable resource. During intervention time a small group of students can focus on areas where they struggle or need extra help. It's not just for low-performing students; it also meets the needs of our high-performing students. It's continually pushing every kid in the classroom. They enjoy the games and the challenge of bettering themselves without the typical stress they feel around state testing.

Burns also emphasized that Stride customer support is quick to respond and help as needed. Burns added, "Whenever I have an idea of how to make the system better for my teachers and students, Stride is very receptive and responsive to our needs."

Brewton Elementary School (Brewton, Alabama)

Students at Brewton Elementary School use Stride Skills Arcade for at least 15 minutes every day. Debbie Stokes, the reading specialist, is the school-based Stride Skills Arcade facilitator. Brewton Elementary has two computer labs with instructional aides that support students during computer time, which is a required 30-minute block for every student. During that time, students work on Stride Skills Arcade. Principal Barry Wood explains the students' dedicated digital learning makes their use of the system a success for each student and their school in general.

Students not only work on Stride Skills Arcade in school but many also use it at home and during their summer and winter breaks. One student at the school enjoyed the program so much that her parents bought her a Chromebook to work on Stride Skills Arcade at home. Stokes emphasized that Stride Skills Arcade really motivates students to succeed, and they thrive on the instant gratification of the games. Stokes said, "One student said he had just set his own goals again this morning. He said he really loves that he can do that and as he gets better, the program gets harder, continuously challenging him."

Teachers love how easy Stride Skills Arcade is to use for both students and teachers. Wood noted, "Teachers really appreciate Stride Skills Arcade's adaptive nature because it pushes our high achievers." Many of the teachers at the school also use Stride Skills Arcade to build their own assessments and quizzes, and then use that data to inform their instruction.

When it comes to support from Stride, Stokes noted, "Stride is very responsive and dependable in providing us support when we need it. Whenever we provide feedback, Stride listens."

In addition to academic outcomes, administrators, teachers, and students share their Stride Skills Arcade success stories. Gina Price, CLAS State Coordinator, shared, "Teachers like that Stride Skills Arcade is a ready-made, content-based program that they're not having to develop. Teachers enjoy using the program, and they see their students motivated to use it. Teachers also appreciate receiving the performance data to understand the skills students have mastered and the areas that need additional instruction."

Frank Buck, Academic Specialist, shares that Stride Skills Arcade is really about the intangibles, "It's about kids enjoying the program, playing the games, scoring higher points, and being excited about badges. For the teachers and administrators, it's about the numbers, the percentage of questions answered correctly. The biggest purpose of the Stride Skills Arcade data is to start a conversation such that when we look at the data and we ask the why question, then we get to some of the things that can really influence teaching."

"Stride Skills Arcade allows our teachers to differentiate and meet students where they are. The greatest transformation for our school was first seeing the success of our students because of Stride when it was just an extracurricular component and then, consequently, transitioning Stride Skills Arcade to be an integral part of our daily learning program because it's making that big of a difference in our students' learning outcomes."

– Principal Barry Wood

What the Data Say

CLAS found that schools get the best results if Stride Skills Arcade is used daily for at least 15 minutes because that is when they observed the most notable increase in student academic outcomes. In an independent study done on “CLAS’s use of Stride’s Supplemental Program on ACT Aspire test scores in Alabama,” the results included the following:



Stride Skills Arcade students overall improved math benchmark pass rates by **15%** compared to their demographically matched peers who improved pass rate by **8%**.



For reading benchmarks, Stride Skills Arcade students improved by **10%** whereas their peers showed no statistically significant change.



Economically disadvantaged Stride Skills Arcade students improved math pass rate by **23%** whereas their peers showed no statistically significant change.



Students who are black and economically disadvantaged improved at a greater rate than their peers for math pass rate (**23% vs. 10%**) and reading pass rate (**18% vs. 13%**).



Students in Special Education improved reading benchmark pass rate by **57%** compared to an improvement of **33%** by their matched peers.

(Henry & Carpenter, 2017)

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References

Henry, D., & Carpenter, J. (2017). Impact of the Stride Supplemental Program on ACT Aspire Test Scores in Alabama. Auburn Center for Evaluation at Auburn University.