

South Carolina's state-wide virtual school program, VirtualSC, launched the Summer Middle School Assistance Project in June 2014. The three-week summer pilot program was designed to assist students in participating schools who had completed Grades 6-8 instruction but who required remediation in mathematics in order to perform at grade level. By customizing EdReady learning goals and materials, the VirtualSC pilot improved initial assessment scores by an average of 29.36 points (on a 100-point scale) for all participating students at the end of the three-week period. In one middle school, the average score gain for all students was 36.45 points.

### INSTITUTIONAL PROFILE

South Carolina has 81 school districts and 1,218 public schools. According to the National Center for Education Statistics State Snapshot Report for 2013, 31% of South Carolina 8th graders were placed at the "Below Basic" achievement level in Mathematics, and 38% at the "Basic" level. VirtualSC, formerly the SC Virtual School Program, has served as the statewide supplemental online learning program since 2007. The program offers courses for high school credit free of charge to any student enrolled in a South Carolina public school, private school, or home school. In 2014, the legislation governing the program was revised to lift a cap on the units of credit that students may earn with VirtualSC. Students may now take unlimited courses with the program.

For the 2014-15 school year, Common Core State Standards are the basis for instruction and assessment. However, the state has developed new South Carolina College & Career Ready Academic Standards that will replace Common Core standards in the 2015-16 school year.

### IMPLEMENTATION

Teachers and administrators in some South Carolina middle schools expressed concerns about students who had completed grades 6-8 but had not achieved grade-level competencies in mathematics. In accordance with its



#### DETAILS

**WHO WAS SERVED:** Middle school students

**WHEN:** Summer 2014

**NUMBER OF STUDENTS:** 344

**IMPLEMENTATION:** Three-week summer remediation program

**RESULTS:** The average EdReady score gain for all 344 students was 29.36 points (out of 100); at one participating middle school, the average point gain was 36.45

**INSTRUCTIONAL APPLICATION:**  
Self-paced with facilitator assistance

mission to provide quality online educational support to South Carolina students, VirtualSC quickly responded to the concerns. Using EdReady with customized goals and instructional materials, in addition to an in-house facilitator training module, VirtualSC provided a three-week summer program to help students enhance their readiness for success in mathematics in the following school year.

As the 2013-2014 school year drew to a close, VirtualSC sent invitational flyers to school districts in the state. Interested middle school principals at 14 campuses completed an online survey and then collaborated with staff at VirtualSC to set up online accounts for facilitators assigned to work with 344 students enrolled in the program.

In further discussions with campus administrators, VirtualSC customized EdReady materials for the specific needs of the pilot population. EdReady materials are goal-based and designed around specific educational standards, but, in South Carolina, standards in mathematics are in a state of flux. For the 2014-2015 school year, Common Core Standards are being used, but they will

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—Jamie Bugner, Curriculum Coordinator, VirtualSC



be replaced by South Carolina standards beginning with the 2015-2016 school year. Thus, administrators at the pilot schools were given a choice between aligning instruction with Common Core Standards, or with standards the state had used before the implementation of Common Core. A third choice was to use a combination of the standards. In the end, administrators agreed to six sets of goals, two each (Common Core and SC) for grades 6, 7 and 8. In this way, administrators at the pilot schools were allowed to create goals specifically for their student populations.

In addition to the EdReady materials, a key piece of the pilot was a facilitator component that provided online training and an online forum. Additional assistance for facilitators was provided through e-mail and telephone contact. The facilitator component was created and monitored by VirtualSC specifically for the pilot program.

Campus administrators had total autonomy over the user-end implementation of the pilot and assessment of student

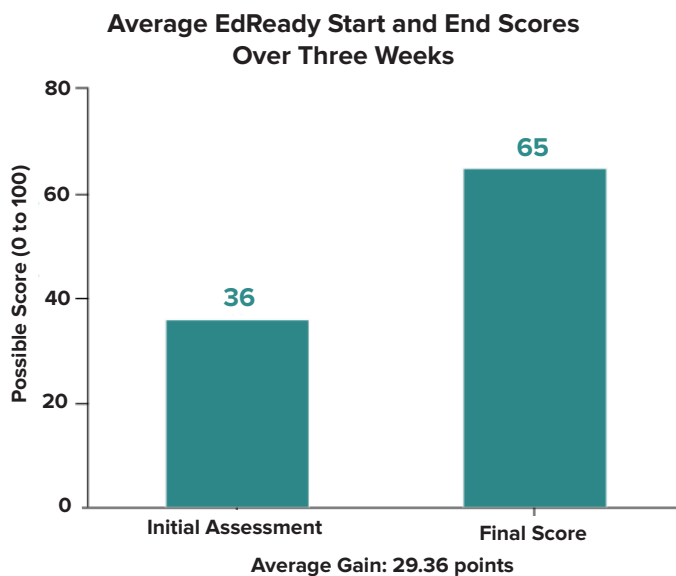
progress. Some schools used the pilot as a summer-school alternative, while others offered it as an option for students who had struggled through their school-year mathematics classes. Some schools used EdReady exclusively, while some used it as a supplement to other materials. All set the target score in EdReady to either 90 or 100 (out of 100). Each campus had its own facilitator requirements, so the facilitator role ranged from administrator to teacher to technical assistance personnel. Facilitator assignments included assisting students with setting up online accounts, helping them through the study materials, and answering general questions.

VirtualSC recommended that students work in campus computer labs, at least through the first week of the pilot, but this was not a requirement. Although some schools complied with the recommendation, requiring students to work in campus computer labs Monday through Friday, other schools allowed students to work at home.

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### RESULTS

VirtualSC reports that, for all participating students, the overall average point gain between the students' initial EdReady scores and the final scores was 29.36 (on a 100-point scale). One school reported an average point gain, for all participating students, of 36.45.



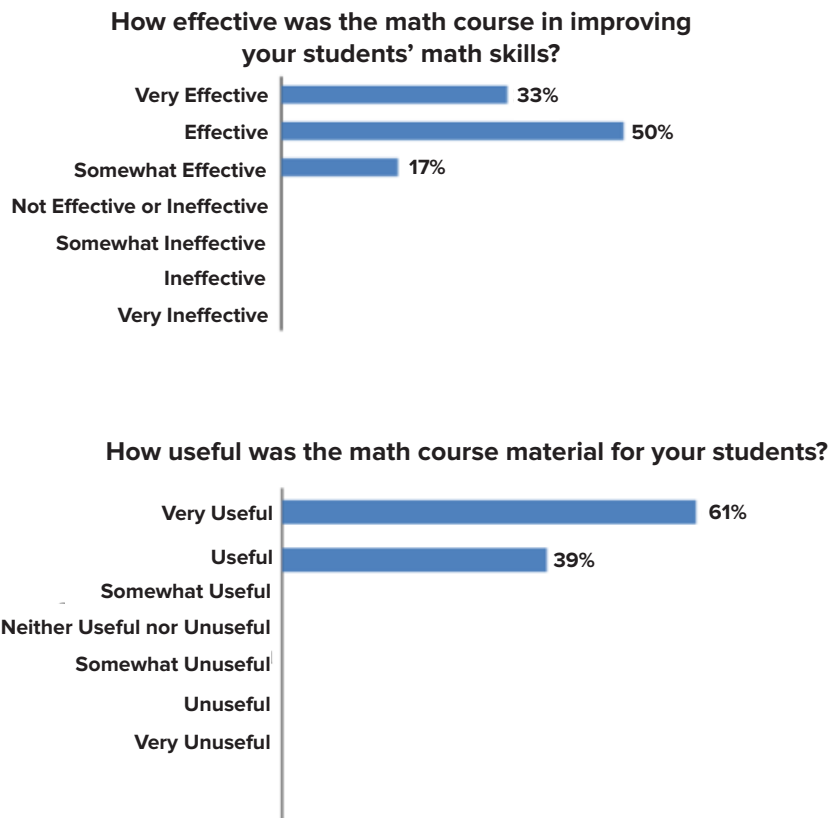
In South Carolina, promotion in middle school is based on the principal’s discretion, so improvement in EdReady, attendance, and other factors were taken into account. All but one school responded to Virtual SC’s requests for information on promotion rates. At those schools, 301 students who used EdReady were promoted. The reason that Virtual SC and the schools were so pleased with EdReady is that the students made so much progress in such a short time. Most of the summer school programs met for 3-4 days a week for three weeks. Given that many of the students started with such low scores, they were happy to see that the students made such progress toward being on grade level, that the students stayed engaged, and that the facilitators were pleased with the program. Starting this pilot, Virtual SC had no idea whether EdReady would be appropriate for middle school students. Going forward, they are now collecting other data from schools that are using EdReady, such as external test scores (primarily MAPS, but also End of Course Exams) and course pass rates as well as promotion data.

**STUDENT SURVEY**

One-hundred eighty four (184) students from six of the participating schools responded to an end-of-pilot survey. Of these students, 80% reported that EdReady had improved their math skills; 93% said the EdReady course was easy to navigate; 96% said they had a good experience with EdReady: “I liked that I could learn at my own pace and not [have to] worry about [not understanding], because if I couldn’t [understand], the program or the teachers would help me,” one student wrote. Another student wrote that he enjoyed “watching the points go up [on my dashboard] when I finished lessons.”

**FACILITATOR SURVEY**

Twenty-one (21) facilitators were surveyed at the end of the pilot, too. Of the facilitators who completed the survey, 48% were administrators, 100% of whom indicated that the pilot was successful. Of all responders, 83% agreed that support from EdReady staff was Good, Very Good, or Excellent. Of all responders, 86% would recommend the EdReady assistance materials for use during the school year.



According to facilitator comments on the survey, one of the most successful tools in the pilot was the EdReady reporting feature, which facilitators used not only to monitor student progress, but also to motivate students by discussing their progress. Cortney Gehrke, at Hartsville Middle School, reported, “We have all enjoyed the ‘tracking’ system [that allows] students and teachers to monitor student growth.” Amy Murray, facilitator at Camden Middle School, wrote, “The group we had were those considered for retention and [who] have poor study habits. For them to know we could see everything they did at any time was powerful.”

### WHAT’S NEXT

Every good pilot program teaches its providers valuable lessons. For VirtualSC, the lessons centered around the facilitator training they developed and provided. It became clear early on that some facilitators had not completed the training before the program began, so they were unable to assist students in the most effective, efficient way possible. In the future, VirtualSC is committed to requiring all facilitator training be completed before a program is implemented. VirtualSC staff reports that the 2014 Middle School Assistance Project was a success not only because

of the EdReady materials, but also because of the excellent EdReady customer service (especially from the tech team).

VirtualSC is currently (spring 2015) offering EdReady in a developmental Algebra I course to a high school, and talks are underway with a middle school to provide EdReady to students struggling with 8th grade mathematics. In addition, VirtualSC is exploring ways of implementing EdReady resources in VirtualSC math classes, as well as offering EdReady to students as a supplemental study option throughout the school year. Plans are underway to roll out the program statewide over the summer 2015 semester and the 2015-2016 school year.

Jamie Bugner, a VirtualSC Curriculum Coordinator, stated, “We saw fantastic improvement numbers with our EdReady students. Many students were able to advance to the next grade when previously this may not have been an option, and we received very positive feedback from our facilitators.” She went on to say, “EdReady is a fantastic resource for students looking to improve their math skills, and we highly recommend its use. We are looking forward to using EdReady on a more widespread basis in the future, and cannot wait for more subject areas to become available.”

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