

## DeKalb County Receives SREB's 2020 District Leadership Award

*Alabama district honored for its commitment to increasing literacy achievement*

June 30, 2020 — DeKalb County School District in Alabama is the winner of the Southern Regional Education Board's 2020 District Leadership Award for its commitment to advancing literacy achievement. The district will be recognized on July 6, 2021, at SREB's Making Schools Work Conference in Nashville, Tennessee, due to the cancellation of the 2020 conference in New Orleans, Louisiana.

SREB's District Leadership Award recognizes districts that implement continuous improvement processes that help schools transform their school and classroom practices, establish and sustain change, and increase student achievement.

In 2017, DeKalb County district and school leaders and teachers came together to study why students were not meeting state and national proficiency standards. Leaders and teachers identified reading deficiencies among sixth-, seventh- and eighth-grade students that were contributing to lower ACT scores in high school and preventing students from transitioning to college and careers.

After gathering data and surveying stakeholders, the district embarked on a three-year partnership with SREB to implement [Powerful Literacy Practices](#) in grades six-12 with professional learning and content development support from SREB coaches. District English, science and social science teachers selected by their schools began attending trainings on the use of the practices in 2017-18. New and veteran teachers then collaborated to implement them using online tools and resources. All core teachers were on track to adopt the practices when schools closed due to COVID-19.

Early results of the initiative show strong promise, and district leaders hope to continue the progress made to date to help all students reach a proficient level in reading. A study conducted by DeKalb district leaders participating in a Jacksonville State University Educational Specialist program found that sixth-, seventh- and eighth-grade students taught by teachers who were early adopters of the practices increased their Spring 2019 Scantron Performance Series National Percentile Rankings results in reading by 10, 13 and 5 percent, respectively, compared to students whose teachers had not yet been trained. Teachers interviewed for the study reported that the training improved their classroom instruction and helped them incorporate close reading strategies and diverse writing products.

Based on the Literacy Design Collaborative, SREB's Powerful Literacy Practices show teachers how to embed literacy-based assignments in their instruction that advance students' reading, writing, speaking and listening skills. Students read grade-level or higher texts and demonstrate their understanding in classroom discussions and written products.

*The Southern Regional Education Board works with states and educators to improve public education at every level, from early childhood through postsecondary education. Learn more about SREB at [sreb.org](http://sreb.org).*

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