

CASE STUDY

Keep Reading Fresh: Beanstack and the Pasadena Independent School District

The leadership at the Pasadena Independent School District (ISD) has always looked for innovative ways to keep reading scores up. While many other school districts rely on semester- or year-long reading challenges, Pasadena’s district-wide literacy initiative—called “keep reading fresh”—revolves around shorter timeframes, so that students are continually excited to pick up a book.

Beanstack’s customizable web app is the ideal tool for Pasadena’s shorter reading challenges, allowing the district to easily choose new themes and prizes every six weeks, including incentives from big name corporate sponsors. From switching up themes every season to building in more opportunities to reward students for their hard work, Pasadena ISD is keeping reading fresh all year long.



Shorter Reading Challenges Offer More Opportunities for Success

Most districts implement year-long reading challenges at the district level—so why did Pasadena choose to do things differently?

The answer is simple: the school found that shorter reading challenges keep their students motivated to read. While some kids might feel discouraged during year-long challenges when they realize they'll never catch up to top readers, leveling the playing field every six weeks means students have more opportunities to reach their goals even if they had a tough previous month.

Shorter challenges also provide much needed change and motivation during slower points of the year, like the weeks leading up to winter break. As Anne Farley, Library and Instructional Materials Specialist at Pasadena ISD, says, "The Winter Reading Challenge comes right at the right time, because that's when kids are slowing down. But this picks them back up and gets them through the rest of the year."

As a final benefit, shorter reading challenges allow Pasadena ISD to reward students throughout the school year, so students reap the benefits of reading all year long instead of only once, at the year's end. The district also found that mixing in tangible rewards—like school-wide parties—can help motivate the entire school to read. To do so, they reached out to community partners.



Combining Tangible and Digital Rewards With Community Sponsors

For their Winter Reads challenge, the Pasadena ISD reached out to Chick-fil-A, whose local franchise went above and beyond to support their reading goals. “When we started working together with them, they were awesome and started finding even more ways to promote,” says Farley. The company created promotional videos featuring teacher read-alouds, gave away 10 gift cards a month to incentivize students to keep reading throughout the challenge, and offered winning schools a huge chicken-nugget party—including catered lunch for teachers.

While tangible “big prizes” like gift cards and nugget parties may occur less frequently, they complement the digital incentives and badges that are already built into the Beanstack app. And with Beanstack’s gamification features, like leaderboards and streaks, kids can track their progress from phones and devices at home.

Partnering with a business sponsor like Chick-fil-A turns your reading challenge into a community affair—helping your district build a culture of reading beyond the school walls. And securing sponsorship for reading challenge prizes is much easier than you think, says Farley. “You would be amazed at how many different places will back you, even for small things,” she says. “Just go call.”

The Power of Reading

A year after Covid moved much of the country online, Pasadena ISD is still 40% remote. But even with so many students learning remotely, the district’s reading scores continue to go up—a fact that Farley credits to their partnership with Beanstack. With test scores on the rise and students feeling enthusiastic about reading, it’s easy to see how district-wide challenges make a positive difference in students’ lives.

Beanstack’s user-friendly mobile app makes it easy to implement district-wide reading challenges, while capturing valuable data on student success.

To learn more about how Beanstack can help foster a culture of reading in your district, go to beanstack.com/schools.





About Beanstack

Beanstack helps educators build a culture of reading in their schools and districts through the power of reading challenges. Many common reading programs focus too heavily on assessments, which can discourage students and make reading less enjoyable. With Beanstack's reading challenges, educators can encourage independent, choice reading time—the number one way to build strong readers.

Beanstack is the flagship product of Zoobean, Inc., created to help people read more and read together. Beanstack is licensed by over 10,000 public libraries, school districts, and corporations around the world. Zoobean's investors include Kapor Capital, Mark Cuban, RevUp Capital, the AT&T Aspire Accelerator, and Amazon's Alexa Fund. Its founders were previously Washington, DC's Teacher of the Year and Google's first Head of K-12 Education Outreach. Learn more at beanstack.com.