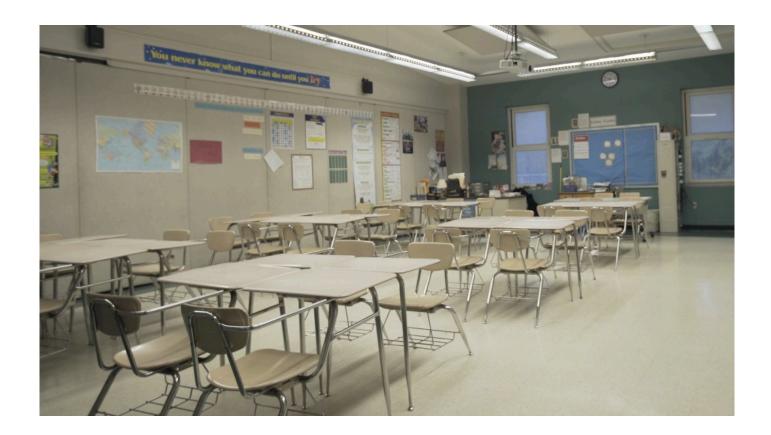# Classroom Redesign Improves Reading

🕐 Read 3 mins

Julie Marshall has taught a lot of students. More than 3,400 students have passed through her classrooms in her more than 30 years of teaching. She thought she had seen it all. Until this past year.

"I have worked hard to engage students for more than three decades. It wasn't until this year, that I saw the change I've been hoping for," said Marshall of Saluda Trail Middle School in Rock Hill, South Carolina. The big difference is the classroom itself.

Marshall currently teaches seventh grade at Saluda Trail, in a community where the majority of students come from families living at or below the poverty level. In 2015, the school was one of 12 recipients of the Steelcase Education inaugural Active Learning Center Grant bringing flexible mobile furniture, new technology and interactive learning tools to Marshall's students.

"We've brought life into our classroom. The first day students walked in they were shocked. They had never experienced this kind of environment and couldn't believe somebody cared enough to give this to them," said Marshall. "The engagement is incredible; students who have never been able to achieve come into this room and suddenly they're participating."

"The engagement is incredible; students who have never been able to achieve come into this room and suddenly they're participating."

Following the classroom redesign, Marshall's 2015-16 seventh grade students completed assignments 98 percent of the time – up from her previous year's class who had a 52 percent completion rate. In addition:

- 95% of students increased their end-of-year grade, up from 81% who improved the previous year.
- More than half (62%) of students surpassed their Northwest Evaluation Association reading growth targets, up from 35% last year.

95% of students increased their end-of-year grade.

"An increasing number of schools – from middle schools to universities – are exploring space design as a valuable educational tool," said Sean Corcorran, General Manager at Steelcase Education. "An active environment is the key to re-engaging students in the classroom, and we're continuing to develop tools that can help both students and teachers be successful."

An observational study conducted by Steelcase researchers shows that space impacts behavior; the traditional classroom setup of desks and chairs aligned neatly in rows and columns is outdated and does not adequately support interaction needed to foster student success. As an alternative, the Active Learning environment supports flexibility, collaboration and blended learning through a combination of modern design and practicality.

"I'm fortunate to work in a school that believes in project-based learning; and now I have a classroom to support that. Our classroom is a place where students come to learn, talk, grow, dream, believe and achieve. This engagement transfers into their lives and makes them want to overcome obstacles while believing in their abilities to do so," said Marshall

As Marshall begins her second year teaching in the redesigned classroom, she is again tracking her new student's success. Positive results have already been observed during the first semester of the school year.

The application period for Cycle 4 of the ALC Grant begins on Friday, December 1, 2017 and will remain open until Friday, February 2, 2018.

Rebecca Charbauski
Senior Communications Specialist

Rebecca, an Emmy-winning journalist, reports on global research impacting the places where people work, learn and heal. Over her career, Rebecca spent 17 years covering local and national news events on television and a variety of digital platforms. She directed a digital news group in Kansas City for three years before becoming news director in Grand Rapids, Michigan for more than five years. Prior to Steelcase, Rebecca worked with one of the four largest media groups in the United States to coordinate news coverage among 48 newsrooms from the east to west coast.

Featured Products