

## RESEARCH SUMMARY

# INCREASING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND PARENT PARTICIPATION

### **Saluda Trail Middle School ROCK HILL, SOUTH CAROLINA**

*Steelcase Education Active  
Learning Grant Recipient,  
Cycle 1*

Saluda Trail Middle School in Rock Hill, South Carolina, serves more than 850 students, 30 percent of whom are below grade level. The school's commitment to project-based learning was long constrained by classroom furnishings: heavy metal desks and unstable bookshelves, with poor projection tools and lighting.

The Active Learning Center (ALC) Grant was used to convert a conventional space into a more active, mobile environment featuring Verb seating for a 7th-grade English language arts class.

### **STUDENTS FEEL BETTER, LEARN BETTER**

Since using the new classroom, teachers have observed new student attitudes and behaviors, with apathy giving way to a desire to learn. Almost all of the 110 students interviewed or surveyed indicated that they felt more engaged, motivated to attend class and be creative, and able to achieve a higher grade.

Students expressed their impressions in a number of ways. "I like the tables in Dr. Marshall's room," said one. "They keep me from having to always get on the floor to work. I really like when we put two tables together and make a big

table. It gives us a lot of workspace. We all stand around the table and work and talk together."

Another student said, simply, "We work hard in the Active [Learning Center] room, but it does not feel like it."

### **RISE IN COMPLETED ASSIGNMENTS**

Over two years, instructor Dr. Julie Marshall conducted a mixed method study to determine whether there is a correlation between the active learning approach and its impact on student motivation and engagement, as evidenced by changes in achievement. Results were impressive.

**"Every day [students]  
look forward to getting  
in the room. They meet  
me with hugs in the  
hallway, thanking me  
for this classroom."**

*Dr. Julie Marshall, Instructor,  
Saluda Trail Middle School*

MORE THAN

99%

COMPLETED ASSIGNMENTS  
IN THE ALC, COMPARED TO 53%  
IN THE OLD CLASSROOM

Prior to using the ALC, the percentage of completed assignments was at 53 percent. During year one, the percentage of completed assignments increased dramatically to 96.92 percent. In year two, the average continued to increase to 99.91 percent.

### IMPROVED GRADE AVERAGE

Dr. Marshall also compared end-of-year grades for three years – the year before the ALC was installed, and in the first two years of the new classroom’s use. By the end of the first year in the new space, students had made modest improvements in grade point average. Leading into year two, the instructor made refinements to planning and placed a greater emphasis on student choice and questioning skills. Advanced students in the class responded with a leap of growth. Where the average point increase among this group was 2.3 in year one, by year two, advanced students grew their grade average by 18.6 points.

### HIGHER TEST SCORES

While the Active Learning Center experience did not include test prep, students who used the classroom showed improvements on their MAP (Measure of Academic Progress) scores. By year two, the number of students exceeding the targeted goal increased 30 percent, while the number of students failing to meet this target decreased by 18 percent.

### A SURGE IN PARENT PARTICIPATION

Dr. Marshall also credits the new Active Learning Center with striking changes in parent participation. “Because so many

**“We want our child in here. This is exciting.”**

*Parent, Saluda Trail Middle School*

of our students are from generational poverty, parents are often skeptical of coming to school as they harbor negative attitudes based on their own classroom experiences,” she said. “The ALC has changed what parents feel and do for their students’ school.”

By year one, the parent volunteer rate had doubled, attendance at parent-teacher conferences increased and teachers noticed improved parent support at home. And by year two, parent participation had continued to increase in all of these areas.

According to Dr. Marshall’s year two report on progress, “A group of key parent leaders from the previous year’s class began networking over the summer of 2016. They were sharing their child’s experience in the Active Learning Center. This small group of parents became passionate advocates for the ALC and wanted their friends’ children to also have the active experience. As word spread, reluctance to the ‘new’ center began to dissipate, and it became where many families wanted their child placed. The new furnishings were a draw, but more important was the excitement that seemed to live in that center. Parents learned that not only was the center active, but it was anchored in project based and inquiry learning.”