



DRC BEACON SUCCESS STORY

Cook County Schools

We could not speak highly enough of how much DRC BEACON has helped us look at our data and prepare our students for the Georgia Milestones.

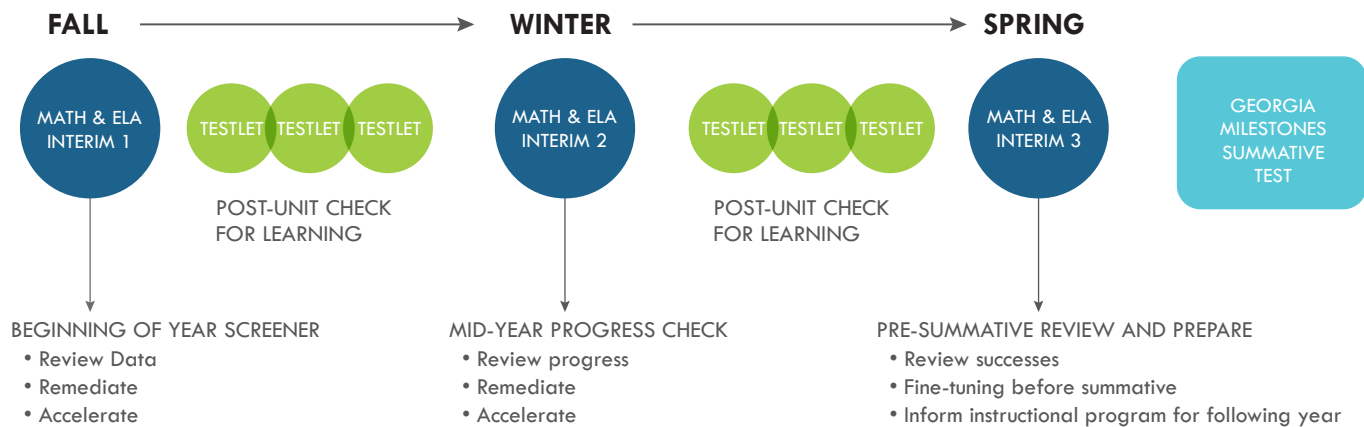
In this success story, Laural Heard, Professional Learning Director/System Testing Coordinator at Cook County Schools in Adel, Georgia, shares how her district uses DRC BEACON to measure students' skill growth throughout the year, inform data-driven formative instructional planning and student grouping, and increase student readiness for the end-of-year summative test. Laural also shares best-practice ideas on how the district uses report data to support parent-teacher meetings and one-on-one conversations with students.

Informing and Improving Instruction with Classroom Teachers

How has DRC BEACON helped you improve instruction in the classroom?

Since we started using BEACON, we have seen an improvement with teachers being able to see exactly where their students are and the skills that they know at the beginning of the year, and then measure those skills throughout the year. When we first started using BEACON, our teachers were only using the testlets. The following year we decided to give the full test at the beginning of the year, which amazed our teachers. It let them know immediately which skills the students were coming in already knowing in the grade-level content. It showed them which students were not only ready for that content, but the fact that some were actually two grade levels below. BEACON has helped our teachers really prepare with their students and understand where they are when they walk in the room.

DRC BEACON Program Choices in Cook County Schools



Once they've taught a skill, teachers can immediately look at the reports and see, "My students have mastered what I just taught," or "I have some remediation that I need to do." The reports have allowed us to make data-driven decisions and see in real time what our students are learning throughout the school year.

How have DRC BEACON reports informed you about what students have learned?

For the last two years, our teachers have given the full BEACON test at the beginning, middle, and end of the year. Then throughout the school year, they've given the testlets to their students as they've completed a unit or area of study. That has allowed our teachers to be able to see the students' growth. Once they've taught a skill, teachers can immediately look at the reports and see, "My students have mastered what I just taught," or "I have some remediation that I need to do." The reports have allowed us to make data-driven decisions and see in real time what our students are learning throughout the school year.

Which reports have been the most beneficial?

We give the full battery test at the very beginning of the school year, and then our teachers are able to look at the individual results and see if a student was given questions two grade levels above or below their content area and grade level. This allows the teachers to see where those students are at the beginning of that grade level. After they've given the full battery test and taught different content, they will administer a testlet. Whenever they look at the group performance report, they're able to see graphs that show the students who have mastered that specific content and those who need remediation in that content. We really like to look at the group performance report because that allows our teachers to see their whole class and what they just tested, and who is prepared to move on and who needs remediation.

How have reports helped you make goals for students?

Our teachers have been phenomenal with sitting down and using the reports to show the students exactly where they are. At both of our elementary and middle schools, we have time allotted every day where students can get exactly what they need. Because these reports from BEACON are so well laid out, our students can see exactly where they're ready for acceleration and where they need remediation. It's helped our teachers to sit down and have those one-on-one conversations so that even students understand the reports that they're seeing and know what they need.

How have the student growth reports helped you determine student needs?

All of our teachers sit down and look at the student growth reports—whether it's by content area or grade level—and they decide what areas have they taught that our students have not quite understood, and what they need to reteach. They then sort their students into classrooms where they will get those specific needs met. The ability for teachers to look at those reports together as a grade level or a content area and see exactly what's needed has helped those students be able to go to someone who can help them with those specific areas.

How have parents reacted to the reports?

This year we have started having parent-teacher nights where we are strictly focusing on data, and BEACON has become a large part of the data piece that we use. We print the reports, sit down with parents, and let them see the growth that their students are making. What we have realized with the individual student report is that at the very beginning of the year, it can be a little misleading if the parent looks straight at the bottom and sees how their child will perform on the Georgia Milestones (statewide summative assessment). At the beginning of the school year, we're giving them a test on grade-level content that they haven't been taught yet. We do not want our parents or students to feel deflated at the very beginning of the year, so we don't show that report at the very beginning of the year, but we do show it in December and then we'll show it again in April to let the parents know what we can expect for Georgia Milestones. We have individual reports that let the parents know exactly what skills the students need for growth, what skills the students were shown on the test, and in what grade level they were able to master those. Because they're so specific, those reports have been very helpful with our parents.

Informing and Improving Instruction with School or District Leaders

How has DRC BEACON helped your school or district learn where to focus support?

At the district level, we sit down with our curriculum directors and our special education directors, and we look at all of the data from multiple assessments. With BEACON, we're able to drill down to specific skills and areas of student need. School-level administrators are having those exact same conversations when they meet with their teachers and they can say, okay, as a grade level, this is what we are seeing. These are the deficits that we are finding. These are the areas that our students are coming in mastering that we do not need to use as much time on as we have in the past. So, our district leaders and our school leaders are both finding the information to be so important to lead data-driven meetings.

How has DRC BEACON helped your school or district support teachers?

We meet typically once a month and look at where our students are academically. BEACON has been a driving force in those conversations. We've been able to focus our PLCs on the data that we are receiving from BEACON. All of our teachers are familiar with the reports and how each time they give a testlet, their data is going to change. This has allowed our teachers to have conversations about ongoing data changes in their schools.



Cook County
SCHOOLS

ORGANIZATION PROFILE

- Number of schools: 5
- Grade levels: PreK–12
- Student population: 2,960

DRC BEACON TESTING PROGRAM

- Full Battery: three times per year (beginning, middle, and end)
- Testlets: throughout the year upon completion of a unit or area of study

USES OF DRC BEACON DATA IN COOK COUNTY SCHOOLS

- Fall: Evaluation of grade-level content knowledge (beginning of year screener)
- Mid-Year: Measurement of skill growth
- Spring: Areas of need prior to state summative test
- Year-round: Check for learning after teaching a unit or area of study (testlets)
- Sorting students into classrooms based on areas of need
- One-on-one check-ins with students
- Reviewing student growth at parent-teacher meetings
- Data review meetings with educator professional learning communities
- Planning meetings with district- and school-level administrators, curriculum directors, and special education directors
- Preparing students for end-of-year summative (Georgia Milestones)

Which DRC BEACON reports have most helped you with your work as a school or a district leader?

The group comparison report is a fabulous report for either the district-level or the school-level administrators to go in and compare grade levels and students from classroom to classroom. This report allows us to see our areas of need and to compare the test data in different classrooms and with different groups of students. This past spring, we did a comparison of our spring BEACON reports and our Georgia Milestones reports to see how closely aligned the two tests were. We made some significant changes to our pacing guides and our curriculum maps as a result. By looking at those reports, we've been able to see exactly how our students have moved and what we need to change from year to year.

With BEACON, we're able to drill down to specific skills and areas of student need . . . our district leaders and our school leaders are both finding the information to be so important to lead data-driven meetings."

How has DRC BEACON improved learning in your school or district?

DRC BEACON has greatly helped us prepare all of our students to take the Georgia Milestones. Even though we've had the practice site, the students were still not completely prepared for the end-of-year Georgia Milestones. But in the last two years, especially our third-grade teachers have said they've never had students feel so comfortable and so at ease taking the Georgia Milestones, and it's simply because they take BEACON and the testlets multiple times during the school year leading up to it. When the Georgia Milestones open in May, they're completely familiar and it's not intimidating. They know how to use all of the tools and it just feels like something they've done all school year. That has helped our students and our teachers to alleviate that stress of the unknown. We know what's coming and the students feel so comfortable with it.

Final Thoughts

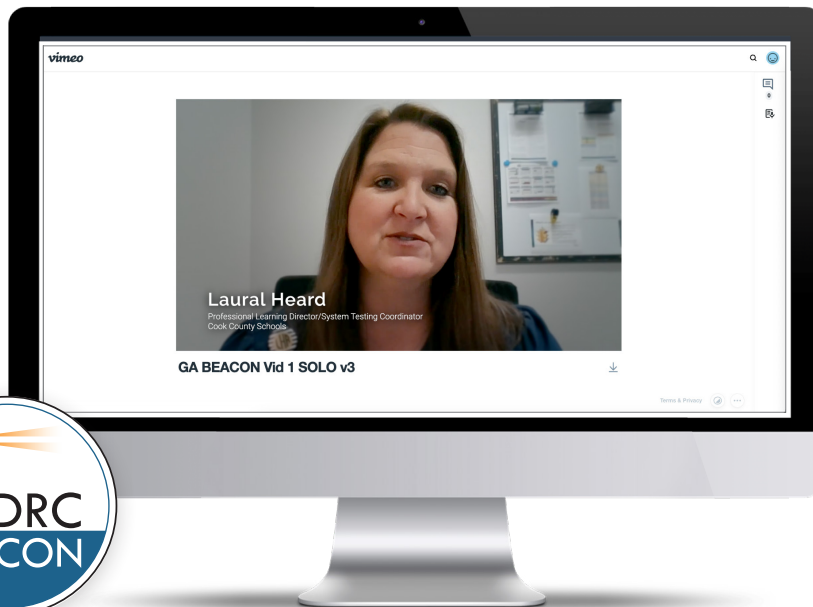
What would you say to other Georgia districts who may be thinking about using DRC BEACON?

Go for it. This is our third year using DRC BEACON. Our first year, we used it strictly for the testlets because we had a universal screener that we were using in our district, and we did not want to over test our students. By the end of that school year, we realized that we had really missed out on an opportunity for giving our students that practice with Georgia Milestones. The next year we dropped the universal screener that we had purchased, and we gave students BEACON as their universal screener. They took it three times last year, and they took testlets as they completed their content. Then when they took Georgia Milestones, they felt so comfortable with it.

The best part was that in April when we gave the last BEACON assessment to our students, our teachers raked through the data and they looked at exactly what the students were missing. During that last month of review (before the Georgia Milestones) we all know we need to just give our students that little bit more of a prepared feeling. We were able to specifically pinpoint areas that we knew they were going to need with the grade-level content that they had been taught, and fine-tune those areas that they had not received. BEACON has helped us tremendously in this regard. We could not speak highly enough of how much it has helped us look at our data and prepare our students for the Georgia Milestones, and also just making sure that they have all of the grade-level content, they have experienced all of the standards, and they are ready to move on to the next grade level.

Is there anything else you'd like to share about your experience with DRC BEACON?

Using BEACON has been a tremendous asset for our teachers and our students. Our teachers have had a lot of changes since Covid. The standards haven't changed, and the Georgia Milestones hasn't changed, but the classroom has changed, and the students have changed. With all of the changes, our teachers needed something that felt stable, and BEACON has really been that stable piece for us. It's just been a platform that's been familiar in a time when we needed familiarity.



Hear more from Laural and other Georgia educators in our DRC BEACON Educator video series, available at www.drcbeacon.com.

