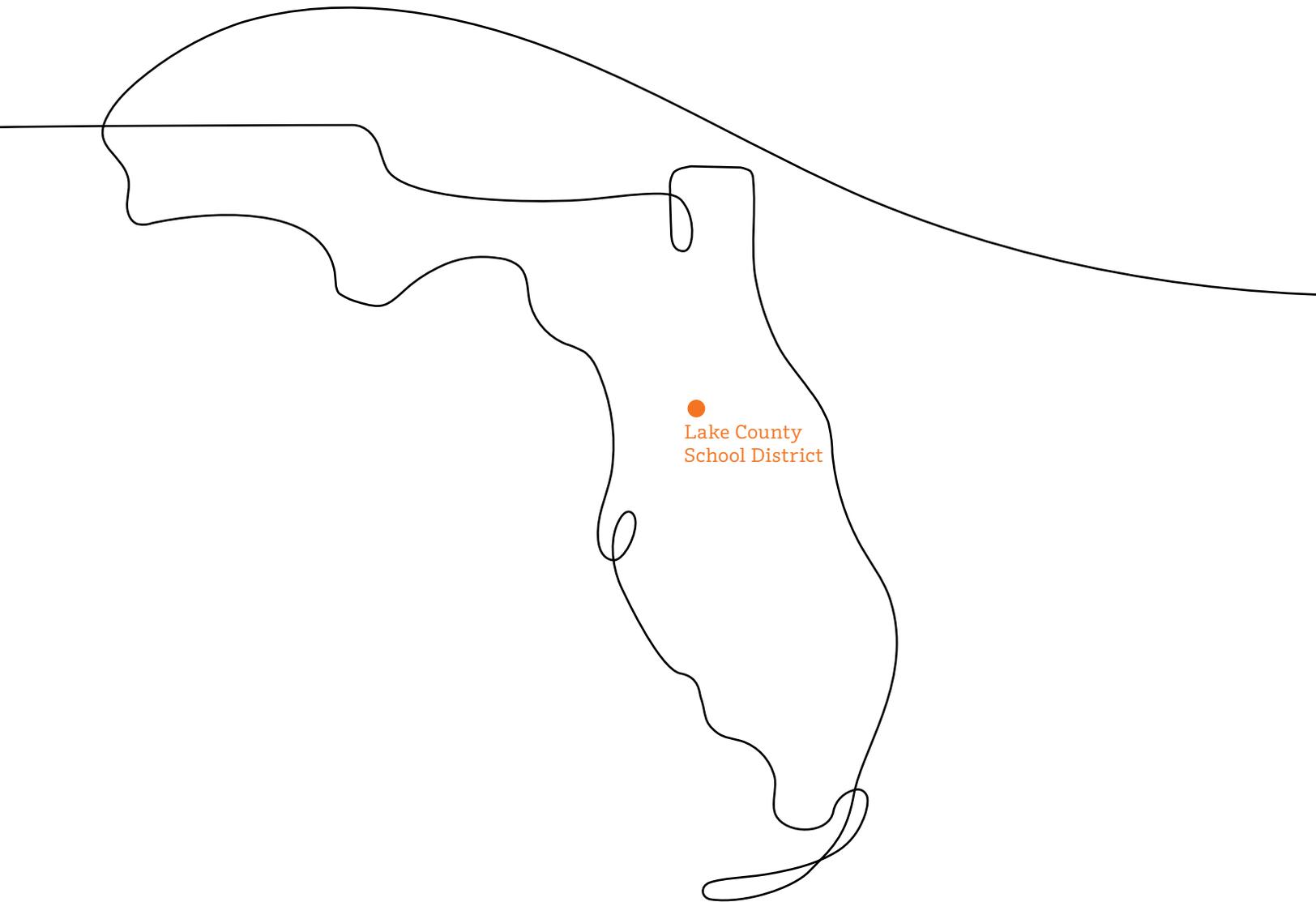


# Achieving student growth in middle school

Florida's Lake County School District achieves 54–62% growth on middle-school state assessments, with Amplify ELA.



# Background

Lake County is a midsize district in Central Florida, serving over 48,000 students. The student body is 43.9% white, 16.2% Black, 2.4% Asian or Asian/Pacific Islander, 31.6% Hispanic/Latino, 0.5% American Indian or Alaska Native, and 0.3% Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander. In addition, 5.9% of students are multilingual/English learners (ML/ELs).

## Challenge

Neysa Olivares-Torres supports about 25,000 students in her role as 6–12 ELA program specialist. She's devoted the past seven years of her 15-year education career to her current role. As a former high school teacher, she often felt frustrated by the lack of a comprehensive core curriculum, and, like many fellow educators, often had to pull from disparate resources—or create her own—to build a cohesive learning experience for her students. We were piecemealing and flying the plane as we were building it," she reflected. "I wish we'd had a comprehensive curriculum the way our teachers have now."

## Solution

Olivares-Torres knew that engaging teachers in the core review and adoption process was critical to finding the right curriculum for her district's students. She set out to build a team of representatives from each school in her district and created an application process to solicit participation. The selected teachers would join her in the review process, bring information back to their individual schools, then relay their fellow educators' perspectives back to the steering committee. Ultimately, Olivares-Torres recalls, "Teachers voted Amplify was our choice for middle school." The committee was impressed with Amplify ELA's rigor, cohesion, and balance of digital and print components.

Olivares-Torres was thoughtful in her approach to Lake County's first year of implementation. She led with a few key strategies:

1. She began by introducing teachers to the digital elements of Amplify ELA, noting, "The digital platform has everything that you could need." Over time, the district has offered a blended model to account for different teaching styles and increased familiarity with the print materials.
2. Believing that teachers need to be sufficiently trained by the start of the school year, Olivares-Torres set up Amplify's Launch professional development for Lake County teachers to participate in over the summer. She also ensured they had access to additional professional development throughout the year, with emphasis on connecting the state's new standards to Amplify ELA.
3. To enhance administrative support, Olivares-Torres led monthly curriculum check-ins to gauge teacher feedback and recommend adjustments.

# Impact

Since the implementation of the program, teachers have expressed enthusiasm for many of Amplify ELA's digital elements, including the Vocab App, which helps students learn parts of speech, synonyms and antonyms, etymology, and meaning in a fun way.

In terms of professional development, Olivares-Torres feels that teachers have what they need. She focuses on supporting new teachers in learning the program and implementing it with fidelity.

Students are truly riveted by Amplify ELA. Olivares-Torres shares that students adore the curriculum's *Frankenstein* unit with its compelling graphic novel, engaging visuals, interesting writing prompts, and dynamic peer discussions. She adds that they also devour *Summer of the Mariposas*, a retelling of *The Odyssey* about five sisters who embark on a transformative journey to Mexico. Students who are of Mexican heritage are seeing themselves, their cultures or traditions, in a book," Olivares-Torres observed. student engagement leads to student achievement. "This was the first year that we have seen growth in every single grade level in all of our schools. It was amazing."

Olivares-Torres gives most of the credit to her teachers. "They were willing to just go all in with the curriculum. And I think that's what's showing the growth. They're not battling it, [treating it] as something we told them to do. It's what's best for kids. ... And that's showing in the data."



## Amplify ELA Flex Days

Approximately every fifth lesson, Amplify ELA gives teachers built-in time for any necessary differentiation, re-teaching, and/or extension work. During Flex Days, teachers can use reporting insights to assign a student or group of students an activity designed to support an identified area of need. Teachers can also use this built-in flexibility to continue a discussion, reteach a concept or section of text, or extend students' knowledge of the unit's key topics.

“The students really enjoy the Vocab App because it feels like they’re playing a game. Teachers knew their middle school kids would love that. One of the features teachers highly value is the reporting component. They appreciate all the data that they can access in real time. Being able to analyze that data to make instructional decisions for Flex Days or in the classroom, or for common formative assessments, or their summative assessments, is something they find very useful. And really, truly, they love the texts: that they are representative, that they are engaging, and that they mirror a lot of the social studies texts or thematic units they use.”

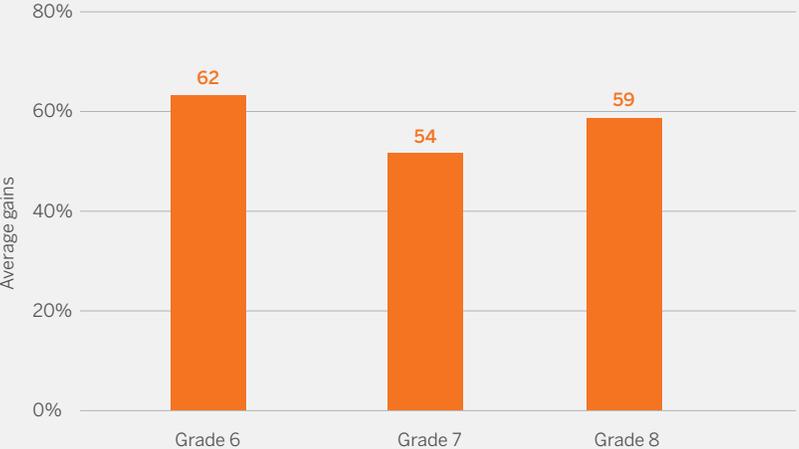
— Neysa Olivares-Torres, 6–12 ELA Program Specialist



# Student gains

According to the Florida Department of Education's Learning Gains by School report for the 2023–24 school year, Lake County Schools demonstrated significant progress. More than half the students in each middle school grade achieved learning gains in English Language Arts. Specifically, 61.74% of sixth graders, 53.95% of seventh graders, and 58.58% of eighth graders experienced academic growth.

**Lake County School District average percent of students with learning gains for 2023–24**



These figures highlight the positive impact of the Amplify ELA program. They underscore its effectiveness in enhancing student learning outcomes and driving achievement across all grade levels in the district.

Moreover, after many years as a B-rated district, the district achieved an A rating in 2025. “Years of hard work, persistence, dedication, and resilience have brought us from a B to an A district!” reflects Olivares-Torres. “This achievement represents more than a letter; it’s a testament to and celebration of our district’s collective commitment, relentless effort, and unshakable belief in our students’ ability to succeed.”

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 [amplify.com/ela](https://amplify.com/ela)

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