



CASE STUDY

**Orangeburg County  
School District,  
South Carolina**



**“The best way to close an achievement gap is to not start with one.”**

**Dr. Shawn Foster, Superintendent**  
Orangeburg County School District

# How Orangeburg Achieved

## Its Highest 3rd Grade Reading Scores Ever

Orangeburg, South Carolina, is a small city nestled between Columbia and Charleston. Like many rural areas, Orangeburg has faced fiscal challenges. In 2019, this resulted in three small school districts consolidating to become **Orangeburg County School District**. Together, they embraced the mantra of “We are one!”

### The district consists of:

**9,700**

PreK-12th grade students

**12**

Elementary schools serving students in grades PreK-5

**100%**

Of schools are Title I schools

### Student Population

74% Black/African American  
17% White/Caucasian  
5% Hispanic/Latino



## The Challenge

### Committing to Early Learning

Dr. Shawn Foster was named Orangeburg County School District's first superintendent in June 2020 with a deep commitment to investing in early learning. In his words, *"The best way to close an achievement gap is to not start with one."*

In 2021, when the South Carolina Department of Education offered low-performing districts the opportunity to use Waterford Early Learning in their PreK programs, Dr. Foster jumped at the opportunity.

He saw firsthand how Waterford could meet the needs of children at all levels. *"To have a program that can build a foundation for those who have gaps in their foundation and also propel students who are ready to soar spoke volumes for us."*

*"When I came to Orangeburg, I looked at our KRA data. Only 18% of our students were entering kindergarten ready to learn. But through the implementation of Waterford, and our commitment to fidelity, we're happy to report now the **readiness rate has grown to 40.56%.**"*

Furthermore, for the first time, **Orangeburg has outperformed the state average.**



## The Solution

### Building on Success

Because of the immediate growth Orangeburg experienced with their PreK students in 2021-22, they adopted Waterford district-wide for PreK-2nd grade the following year.

The first cohort of students to use Waterford in PreK had the opportunity to use it for four consecutive years: PreK-2nd grade.

### The result?

**Consistent increases in the number of students meeting or exceeding expectations.**

*"Oftentimes, we look at year-over-year data, which is often apples to oranges. So we look at our growth. What does my longitudinal data say? We're making sure we're looking at sustaining success, that kids are not falling behind. We are staying true to that data point."*



## The Results

### Meeting Critical Early Learning Milestones

Since their first year of implementing Waterford Early Learning, Orangeburg has seen impressive gains in the critical early learning milestones of kindergarten readiness and 3rd-grade reading scores.

**Percent Change from 2020-2021 to 2024-2025  
in Kindergarten Readiness Scores and 3rd-Grade  
Reading Scores**

**+115%**

Students Demonstrating Readiness on  
Kindergarten Readiness Assessment

**+123%**

Students Meeting or Exceeding Expectations  
on 3rd Grade SC Ready Assessment

Orangeburg's first group of students who used Waterford in PreK through second grade took the 3rd Grade SC Ready Assessment.

### The result?

*"We've seen the **greatest gains in third-grade scores that we've ever seen**. So it works. I'm not taking anything from an outstanding teacher. A teacher has to be the one who implements with fidelity. We have the expectation district-wide of what we will do with utilization."*

### Putting Children on a Path to Success

The real measurement goes far beyond a test score.

*"We're just not talking about numbers on a piece of paper. We're talking about a child's life and the opportunities that he or she may have for the rest of their lives."*

### Bring These Results to Your District

Visit [Waterford.org](https://www.waterford.org) to learn how to bring Waterford early learning solutions to your community.

