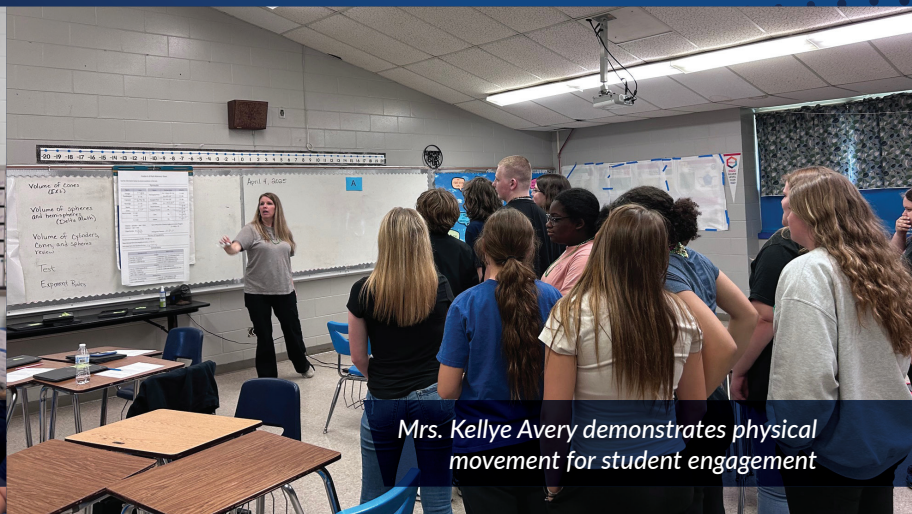


*Mrs. Amber Gilliland reviews proficiency scales with her class*



*Mrs. Kellye Avery demonstrates physical movement for student engagement*

# Bankhead Middle School

**CORDOVA, ALABAMA**

Bankhead Middle School sought a way to better support students most at risk to create a positive learning environment for all. Through the strategic use of HRS principles, the school has seen measurable improvements by adapting programs and practices to meet specific needs and using data to continually monitor and enhance initiatives.

# Bankhead Middle School

CORDOVA, ALABAMA



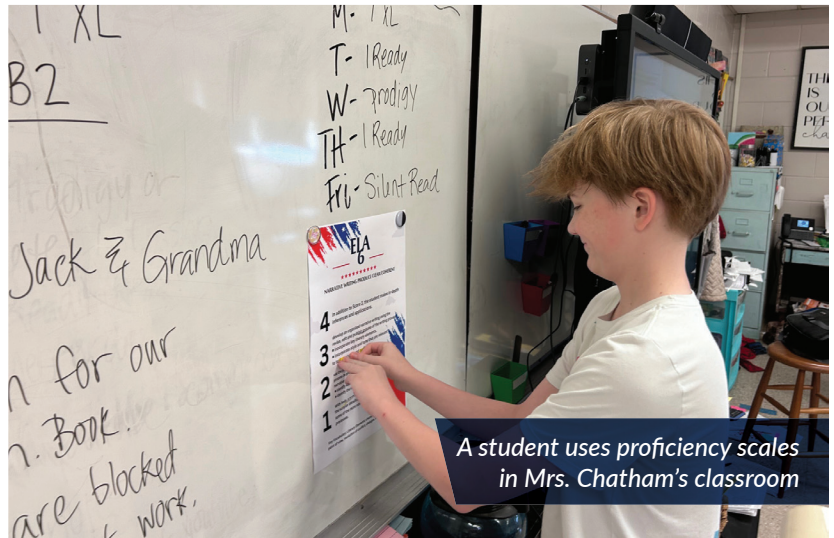
## DEMOGRAPHICS

- › 243 students
- › 61.3% free or reduced lunch
- › 1.7% English learners
- › 23.1% students with special needs

## RACIAL/ETHNIC PERCENTAGES

- › 88.5% White
- › 6.6% Black
- › 3.7% Multiracial
- › 1.2% American Indian/Alaska Native

Bankhead Middle School in Walker County, Alabama, serves 243 students, grades 5 through 8. Dedicated administration, staff, and classroom teachers work to "develop the whole child to ensure success." Since beginning work with the HRS framework, Bankhead has achieved certification at levels 1 and 2.



## ► CHALLENGE

Bankhead Middle School is a traditionally high-performing school, with reading and math scores that rank above district and state averages. Never satisfied with status quo, Principal Amber Freeman and her team at Bankhead continue to seek ways to not only maintain their strong results, but also to improve and ensure that every student shares the school's success.

When district leaders brought the High Reliability Schools (HRS) framework to her attention, Freeman recognized its potential to support and structure her school's initiatives. HRS Level 1, which focuses on a safe, supportive, and collaborative culture, was especially impactful at the middle school level, where students undergo significant social, physical, and academic changes in a short span of time.

Bankhead's faculty and staff sought to assist students most at risk—those facing challenges with behavior, home life, or attendance that impacted their academic performance. Believing these students would benefit from more individualized support and personal connections, they designed and implemented a teacher-student mentoring program.

Bankhead's leaders also aimed to improve the instructional capacity of their teachers. HRS Level 2 emphasizes effective teaching in every classroom. To ensure consistency and a common understanding of instructional practices and expectations, Bankhead focused on developing and mastering their own instructional model.

## ► IMPLEMENTATION

Bankhead educators customized their mentorship program and instructional model to fit their unique needs rather than using out-of-the-box solutions. Grounded in research, the HRS framework supports this adaptive approach grounded in research and emphasizes continuous monitoring and improvement—practices that Bankhead leaders have also adopted.

*All data and people mentioned in this story represent solely the time frame in which Marzano Resources worked with the school or district and the timeframe in which the school or district committed to implementing processes and practices set forth by Marzano Resources. Building and district leaders and staff featured in Evidence of Excellence stories may have changed.*

“We feel like proud parents.”

—Amber Freeman / Principal, Bankhead Middle School Cordova, Alabama

## ► IMPLEMENTATION *(continued)*

The school's mentorship program, “Boosting Motivation and Success” (BMS), began informally and evolved by adapted data-driven models to fit students' needs. Students with discipline or home life challenges who are not already receiving other services are referred by teachers, and mentors choose their mentees. Mentors meet weekly with one or two students, focusing on patience, positivity, and high expectations to foster positive relationships that motivate improved behavior, attendance, and academics. The program continues to be refined to maximize mentor impact, including shifting attendance-related support to the school counselor.

For instruction, Bankhead adapted 16 elements from Dr. Robert Marzano's New Art and Science of Teaching (NASOT) model, aligning them with the state teacher evaluation system. Teachers take ownership by mastering and presenting elements. Their work is supported by Avanti, a library of professional learning videos made by teachers for teachers, as well as further professional development from Marzano Resources associates. Individual growth goals, Avanti's virtual platform, collaborative learning rounds, and scheduled collaboration time helped teachers improve their skills and collectively ensure student success.

## ► RESULTS

While Bankhead leaders recognized their initiatives were making a positive difference, they sought to quantify these impacts more precisely, as encouraged by the HRS certification process. “We had the realization that we needed to put some numbers to it,” Freeman said.

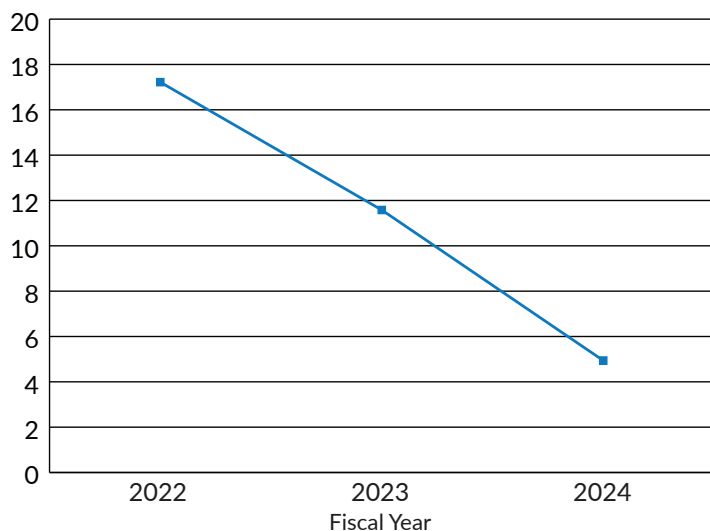
For the mentorship program, data was collected on discipline, academic achievement, and attendance. Since the 2021–2022 school year, 96% of participating students experienced growth in at least one area, and 76% improved in two or more areas. Academic improvement was the most significant, with 77% of mentees raising their letter grades in at least one subject.

To monitor implementation of their instructional model, Bankhead tracked the use of model elements during classroom walk-throughs. By 2025, all elements were observed schoolwide, with teachers demonstrating steady progress.

These improvements in student support and instruction contributed to gains in state accountability measures and student achievement. Chronic absenteeism dropped from 17.2% in 2022 to 4.9% in 2024—well below the Alabama state average of 14.84%. Among the cohort of students who completed 5th through 8th grade at Bankhead from 2021 to 2024, proficiency on the Alabama Comprehensive Assessment Program (ACAP) increased from 43.1% to 66.7% in English language arts and from 34.7% to 36.6% in math.

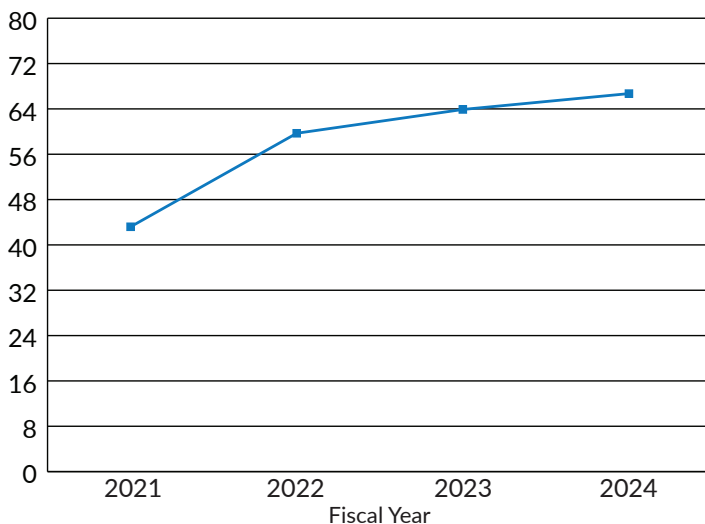
Implementing, monitoring, and refining initiatives within the context of the HRS framework has allowed Bankhead Middle School to maintain and improve high standards for the students they serve. “We feel like proud parents,” Freeman said.

**Chronic absenteeism at Bankhead Middle School**



Source: <https://reportcard.alsde.edu>

**ELA proficiency at Bankhead Middle School  
(grade level cohort)**



# Transform teaching with research-based practice

Marzano Resources is dedicated to helping K–12 educators advance student achievement. Built on Dr. Robert J. Marzano's 50 years of education research, Marzano Resources supports teachers and administrators through customizable on-site professional development, educator events, virtual coaching, books, videos, and online courses. Our associates and authors are thought leaders in the field of education and deliver research-based guidance for all major areas of schooling, including curriculum development, instruction, assessment, student engagement, and personalized competency-based education.

Here are just a few ways we can help you achieve your goals—whether you're teaching online or on site:

## Books and Videos

Browse our specialized K–12 resources to discover proven strategies on the most critical topics in education—from assessment and grading to competency-based education, technology, and student engagement.

## Events

Explore our workshops and conferences to find your perfect fit. Our experts will help you maximize classroom engagement, assess student growth, foster a standards-based learning environment, and more.

## PD Services

Bring Dr. Marzano and his associates to your school or district. Choose from on-site or virtual options to plan a dynamic one-day session or a series of trainings. Just tell us your goals, and we'll tailor the experience for you and your team—or you can choose a carefully designed staff development option based on our most popular topics.

## High Reliability Schools Certification

Be recognized as a High Reliability School. For schools and districts that have attained one or more levels of reliability, Marzano Resources offers formal certification to share with your community and stakeholders.

## High Reliability Teacher Certification

Our multileveled High Reliability Teacher certification process recognizes the advancement of a teacher's pedagogical skills and knowledge in three specific areas and four online courses. This program empowers educators to grow professionally in instruction, assessment, and feedback; improve student achievement; develop expertise; and expand career opportunities.

**Learn more**  
[MarzanoResources.com](https://MarzanoResources.com)

## Critical Concepts

Analysts at Marzano Resources have identified, as objectively as possible, a focused set of learning progressions for each K–5 grade level in the content areas of English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. Maximize your instruction with this invaluable resource.

## Avanti

Avanti is an online resource that blends relevant, timely professional development and customized professional learning video playlists with actionable strategies that teachers can use immediately. The platform features more than 250 expert videos, each just three to five minutes in length, that help teachers hone their craft in topic areas like student engagement, relationship building, direct instruction, learning goals, and assessment.

## Global PD Teams

Empower your teams to best support student success. Global PD Teams is your one-stop digital resource for professional learning by renowned experts in preK–12 education. With one building-wide site license, every team member can access practical strategies and professional guidance that will strengthen their collaborative work to ensure high levels of learning for all.