

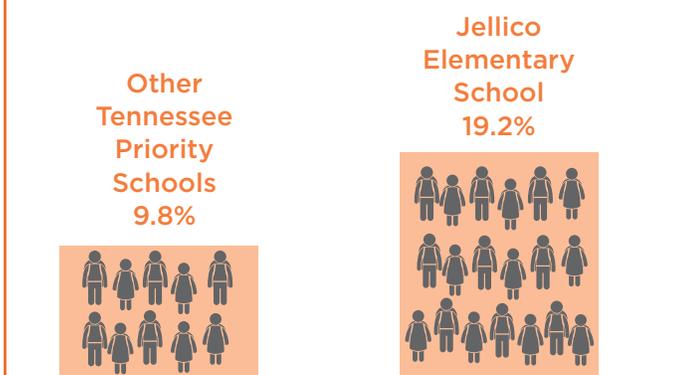


SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT | CLIENT SUCCESS

# Jellico Elementary: An Appalachian school on the rise

## Student Success Rate Beats Peers

Combined ELA & math proficiency rates



## Services McREL provided:

- Power Walkthrough® classroom observations and coaching
- Student engagement strategies
- Instructional technology strategies
- Classroom Instruction That Works® professional learning and coaching

## Annual Change in Success Rate



“We were lucky to partner with McREL in helping us identify some great teaching practices.”

— Kenneth Chadwell, principal, Jellico Elementary School

“McREL has been a huge help in converting an often big, vague idea into specific action steps that we can implement.”

— Jason James, assistant principal

# Achievement and morale climb at a “priority” elementary school

## The Challenge

Vanishing jobs, shrinking middle class, loss of optimism—explanations for Jellico Elementary School’s descent into “priority” status are easy to find.

Still, after Kenneth Chadwell agreed to become principal of the school in Campbell County, Tennessee, in summer 2018, he was shocked by how distressed the place was, with its dark cinder blocks, inadequate lighting, and overall lack of vibrancy. “Even more than the low test scores or the outdated practices, the school had no heart. It had lost its way, its soul, its purpose. Teachers weren’t happy, students looked defeated, and everyone was just going through the motions.”

## Strategic Solution

Chadwell and Assistant Principal Jason James started with some basics: new paint, new lighting, no more storing disused equipment in empty classrooms. They had friendly chats with teachers and made sure students overheard. “We found things that we could praise teachers, students, and staff for. As this continued, so did improvement in the culture,” Chadwell said.

James, along with instructional coaches Amy Davis and Tammy Baird, amplified Chadwell’s choose-your-attitude approach. “Our academic coaches were simply phenomenal in being the ‘tip of the spear’ in trying to help with the culture of the building,” James said. “The faculty and staff started to organize simple attempts at team building with after-school potluck dinners. Our coaches got into classrooms to model lessons for our teachers and build those relationships needed for true collaboration to take place.”

With school culture on the mend, the stage was set for McREL to introduce professional learning on instructional and leadership practices. After consulting with school and district leaders, McREL proposed several capacity-building initiatives based primarily on the **Classroom Instruction That Works** strategic categories of “creating the environment for learning” and “helping students develop understanding.” Led by Cheryl Abl, one of McREL’s CITW consultants, the professional learning and analysis services included:

- Classroom visits using **Power Walkthrough**, a McREL mobile app that helps school leaders and teachers see how often their entire school is using specific instructional practices.
- Three schoolwide professional learning days focused on student engagement, learning communities, and high expectations of both students and educators.
- Teacher rounds to form “critical collegueship”—a professional learning environment in which teachers observe, discuss, and learn from one another’s practices.

- Support for literacy specialists teaching phonics and guided reading to K–2 teachers.

“The Jellico team is focusing on the right strategies to support their students’ learning and staff morale is clearly on the upswing,” said Abl. “Kids are responding with excitement and curiosity about their learning.”

## Results

Student attendance is surging at Jellico Elementary, and the school’s performance on standardized tests is now outpacing its peer schools. Progress will have to continue before the school can be removed from “priority” status, but they are on the right track.

“So many wonderful changes have happened at our school,” said literacy coach Baird. “Several classrooms are using flexible seating and we no longer have students sitting in rows. We now have common planning times that allow for more productive PLCs. The lower grades have an uninterrupted literacy block. The overall feel of the building is much more positive.”

Added math coach Davis: “Students in our building are more engaged. Teachers seem to be working together more. I have seen more laughter and smiles throughout the building by adults and children. Many teachers that once felt defeated have been rejuvenated. Everyone is working as hard as they can for our kids.”

## Next Steps

With English language arts scores on the way up, fine-tuning Jellico’s math instructional practices is next on the agenda. The reason this work can begin at all is “a testament to our faculty’s hard work to get out of their comfort zones,” said assistant principal James.

Nor is this a single-school project: The Campbell County district has brought McREL into another of its elementary schools to work on supporting teacher knowledge and classroom practices.

“Jellico Elementary is one example of what can happen when hard work is combined with the instructional support provided by McREL,” said Lori Adkins, the district’s elementary supervisor.

“McREL has given our teachers practical strategies to apply in their classrooms. They model the strategies, give feedback after observing the strategies, and offer suggestions on how to adjust strategies to best fit the classroom teacher and student needs. I have seen a complete transformation in the lower grades and it is amazing.”