

Case Study

Poway Unified School District

At a glance

- Poway Unified School District (PUSD)
- San Diego County, California
- 33,000 students in 25 elementary schools (K-5), six middle schools (6-8), four comprehensive high schools (9-12) and one continuation high school. PUSD is the third largest school district in San Diego County.
- NWEA partner since 1998
- Three times a year, all elementary and middle school students in grades 2 – 8 take NWEA's Measures of Academic Progress® (MAP) assessment in language usage. One of Poway's elementary schools also uses MAP for Science.
- 16 schools use MAP for Primary Grades, designed specifically for students in kindergarten through 2nd grade.

“NWEA’s MAP™ assessments have allowed us to measure and promote growth for all of our students. If you honor growth you will consistently do what is best for all kids. Having a test that adapts to them allows students to see when they make progress and connect it to the work they’ve been doing.”

LINDA FOOTE, *Instructional Technology Specialist* | Poway Unified School District | San Diego, California

Poway Unified Revolutionizes Meaningful Instruction

HOW ONE OF CALIFORNIA’S LARGEST AND MOST DIVERSE DISTRICTS INDIVIDUALIZES INSTRUCTION FOR EVERY STUDENT.

Poway’s vision for education is that all students will graduate college-ready. With a strong focus on rigor, relevance and relationships, Poway ensures that every student is engaged in meaningful work, appropriate for their level. They are encouraged to think critically and become self-assessors, while setting and achieving their academic goals.

A major component of the district’s vision of college readiness is their teachers’ ability to individualize instruction for every student. Poway does so with the help of Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) and its suite of computerized adaptive assessments.

Poway’s Challenges

Getting to a point where so many of Poway’s students are benefitting from using an adaptive assessment didn’t happen overnight. Linda Foote, a Poway instructional technology specialist, recalls having to spend time educating teachers about the benefits of using MAP assessments.

Some of the feedback regarding the introduction of MAP assessments included:

- High-performing schools feeling that no change was needed.
- Title 1 schools welcoming the use of a computerized adaptive assessment to engage students with different backgrounds and challenges.
- Kindergarten teachers challenged with how to approach achieving academic growth with their young students.

“Before using MAP,” says Foote, “we were missing the full picture of how to teach kids who were gifted and talented, or struggling to learn, or were English language learners.” NWEA’s suite of MAP assessments has helped Poway to address these and other challenges on the path to helping all of their students achieve academic growth.

Individualizing Instruction

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ENCOURAGES EFFECTIVE TEACHING & LEARNING

Even though a team of IT and testing coordinators at Poway created a training program to familiarize all teachers with the technology needed to deliver MAP assessments, the district sent Foote to an NWEA workshop on differentiated instruction using MAP data. She returned to Poway and helped create a professional development program to help teachers make sense of the valuable data they get from MAP assessments, so they can be more effective in the classroom.



“MAP encourages me to find out what words mean, like radius or perpendicular. Every time I find out what a word means, I see my MAP scores getting higher.... When the questions get harder, I feel proud, but when I realize the questions are too hard, I am determined to learn more.”

POWAY STUDENT



Foote now offers two to four day-long professional growth courses each year on the use of MAP data to improve student learning. Schools in the district often request personalized, full-site trainings on the use of MAP assessments during the district’s two professional growth days each year.

Poway also offers a MAP “best practices” course in which they train a group of trainers from each school four times per year. Foote manages Poway’s central online hub for everything MAP related at www.pusdmap.com, where she and other district leaders and teachers post best practices, lesson plans, teacher resources and more. In addition, Foote and her fellow educators can now connect with other NWEA partners online at NWEA’s SPARK Community, which launched in the fall of 2009.

GROWTH FOR KIDS “OUTSIDE THE BUBBLE” TOO

In today’s proficiency-driven accountability climate, many districts, schools and teachers struggle to recognize or honor growth for students who fall “outside the bubble.”

Foote describes one Poway student named Bruce, who was making excellent progress according to his MAP scores; however, this student wasn’t making “adequate yearly progress” (or AYP) as mandated under the No Child Left Behind Act because he was scoring below California’s proficiency level on the state test.

Bruce’s teachers utilized his MAP data to determine which interventions would most significantly support his growth, and then diligently applied this information to his instruction. Within a year, Bruce was scoring in the proficiency range on his state tests.

One strategy Poway employs to help students like Bruce who may struggle to learn, as well as those who are consistent or in need of extra motivation, is to offer special instructional days in which students are grouped by their scores on the MAP assessments. These are called “RIT” days, which is derived from the Rausch Unit – the unit of measurement that forms the foundation for the longitudinal scale underlying every NWEA assessment.

“Our students love RIT days,” says Foote. “They really enjoy being surrounded by other students who are similar in terms of academic ability. It increases their self esteem and they’re willing to take greater risks to learn.”

EVEN KINDERGARTNERS GET IN ON THE ACTION

Poway’s Kindergarten teachers are able to engage even the youngest of learners in their own academic success. One teacher gives each of her Kindergartners their own folder, grouped by their MAP RIT ranges. These folders contain what each student is ready to learn, as projected by the MAP for Primary Grades assessment. The students spend one hour each week working on their own academic goals. “They arrive at the door asking if they’ll be able to work on their personal goals for the day,” says Foote. “It’s astonishing.”

THE RESULT OF ADAPTIVE ASSESSMENT? GROWTH FOR ALL

“We weren’t expecting to see such consistent, major growth for our students across the board,” says Foote. “But now that we know what our students are ready to learn before we even begin teaching them, growth is inevitable – even for our gifted and talented and Title I students.”

Thanks to Poway’s focus on adaptive assessment, every student in the district knows what his or her academic learning goals are and what they need to do to achieve those goals.

“A few of Poway’s teachers have their students write their learning goals on their desks in the morning with white board markers. This strategy helps students focus and self-assess,” says Foote. “When students know what they need to learn and set meaningful goals, it takes some of the mystery out of learning and makes them partners in the process. I have students come up to me asking when they can take their MAP test again because they recognize that they’ve made progress and are ready to move on to their next learning goal!”

The meaningful, individualized instruction that comes as a result of implementing MAP assessments makes all the difference in the classroom and even high-performing students are challenged to keep growing academically. Using an adaptive assessment has truly strengthened Poway’s culture of college readiness.

TO LEARN MORE

To learn more about NWEA’s assessment solutions and programs, including Measures of Academic Progress, visit www.nwea.org.

To learn more about Poway Unified School District, visit www.powayusd.com.