

Case Study

TurnAround Schools & the No Excuses University Network

At a glance

- TurnAround Schools, founding company of the No Excuses University Network
- Six states
- 25,000 students in 41 schools
- 23 of the 41 schools use NWEA's MAP assessments
- NWEA partner since 2006

“NWEA is an ideal partner for us because they ‘get it’. They get that a test must show results about students, must be aligned to the content of state standards, and also must be segmented in areas that can help drive instruction.”

DAMEN LOPEZ | *Founder, TurnAround Schools and the No Excuses University Network*

Partnering to Prepare ALL Students for College

VISION

TurnAround Schools was founded on the following principles:

1. Every child has the right to be prepared for college.
2. It is the responsibility of adults in the school to develop exceptional systems that make that dream a reality.

The founders of TurnAround Schools and the No Excuses University (NEU) Network believe they have the opportunity to shape how students view their future. By planting the seed at an early age that they can go to college they hope these students will continue to work hard at achieving this goal throughout middle and high school. By becoming engaged in their own learning, these kids understand that they have control over their own education. There is no excuse for lack of effort.

THE PARTNERSHIP

Before founding TurnAround Schools, Damen Lopez was the principal at Los Peñasquitos (aka “Los Pen”) Elementary School in San Diego’s Poway Unified School District.

During his time at Los Pen, Lopez came up with a plan to prepare every single one of his students for college – no excuses. In fact, the program was called the No Excuses University and it paired each Los Pen classroom with a four-year institution to expose students to a culture of higher education. At its core, the program was designed to help build a bridge for all students to attend college – especially students who come from families who believe a college education isn’t even a remote possibility.

A major component of the program was to make sure every Los Pen student understood what his or her own learning goals were, in addition to every classroom setting their own learning goals to be achieved as a team. Lopez and his team of dedicated teachers at Los Pen relied on NWEA’s Measures of Academic Progress™ (MAP) assessments to help their students identify, and achieve, their academic goals.

“Since I left Los Pen to create the No Excuses University Network and TurnAround Schools, I have seen MAP play a very important role in helping schools create ‘exceptional systems’ around assessment,” says Lopez. “Without it, it would be very hard to achieve academic growth for all students at Los Pen and at the schools within the No Excuses University Network.”

Real Data Powers Immediate Feedback

Without the data and real-time feedback NWEA provides to educators within the NEU Network, Lopez says it would be very hard to achieve academic growth for all students. In fact, many schools within the Network had no tool to help measure student growth prior to using MAP.

TurnAround Schools, educators within the NEU Network and NWEA believe that every student must be recognized for his or her individual academic growth – no matter what his or her personal background may include.

“In the end, we don’t share notions about what we think will work, we share data about what is working,” says Lopez. “MAP is an assessment that has given us data to show positive change for kids of all backgrounds, from all areas of our nation.”

DAMEN LOPEZ | *Founder, TurnAround Schools and the No Excuses University Network*



KID-CENTRIC APPROACH TO TEACHING GETS STUDENTS INVOLVED

The No Excuses University Network of educators believes in a fundamental shift in education, which is placing the child at the center of his or her own learning. They share this vision for kid-centric education with NWEA.

Lopez recalls an encounter with a Los Pen student named Edison. One day, he was walking through the hall and was stopped by Edison. Lopez asked Edison how he was doing and the boy replied with a huge smile, “Good, Mr. Lopez.”

“As he began to walk away I asked him: ‘Wait a minute, Edison. How do you know that you are doing good?’ He immediately said, ‘Because I just got a 201 on my MAP test in reading. I went up 17 points from my winter score and the area I grew in the most, literal comprehension, was also my goal area!’ I was speechless. This was a third grader who happens to speak English as a second language and lives in poverty... it blew my mind. NWEA’s assessments remind us that assessments are for the student, not for the teacher.”

TEACHERS AND SCHOOLS RISE TO THE OCCASION

It’s not just the students in the NEU Network who benefit from using MAP.

Kerri Kutzner, a fourth grade teacher at Los Pen, credits the data and real-time feedback she receives from NWEA for a surge in confidence in her abilities as a teacher, especially when talking with parents. “Instead of giving general feedback like ‘your child is struggling with reading,’ I can now pinpoint exactly what reading skills a particular child is struggling with,” she says.

“Ninety-nine percent of the time, the area the class works on as part of their goals shows the most growth,” she says.

“I loved MAP as soon as I started using it because it broke down the big categories of reading, math and language into specific strands,” says Kutzner. “It also allowed me to point out areas where the student was strong, so I wasn’t always focused on the weak spots.”

Not only have teachers in the No Excuses University Network transformed their teaching methods, but entire schools have been able to leverage MAP results to make drastic improvements in the education they provide students. One example is Ann Fox Elementary in Hanover Park, IL, an NEU member since 2005.

Reading specialist Amy Czerniak was excited to begin partnering with NWEA. “Prior to MAP, Illinois Standards Achievement Test was the only assessment administered to all students,” she

says. “We didn’t have a measurement that monitored individual progress over time or an assessment from which we could make instructional decisions.”

She says her biggest challenge as an educator today is “ensuring all students have an equitable education.” Czerniak credits becoming part of the NEU Network with transforming Anne Fox from a place where “individual classrooms were working as islands to a unified system with a common goal – preparing all students for college.”

The numbers don’t lie. According to Principal Myers, Anne Fox has moved from 64% of students meeting or exceeding state standards in 2005 to 94% of students meeting or exceeding standards in 2008. According to Myers, that kind of growth wouldn’t be possible without the real-time data provided by NWEA’s MAP assessments.

Conclusion

Implementing a whole new philosophy regarding education is difficult. But with the help of NWEA and the use of MAP assessments in the classroom, educators within the No Excuses University Network can more easily provide a kid-centric approach to education. This approach helps every student develop an appreciation for – and investment in – their own learning.

“As a principal, I was an active observer and participant as I watched my teachers at Los Pen use NWEA’s assessments with great success,” recalls Lopez. “Rather than just telling my staff to use MAP, I decided to walk the journey with them and let them decide for themselves that these assessments were a useful tool. It wasn’t a top-down approach. And because it came from them and not me, MAP is an assessment that is valued by our teachers. When you get assessments that are valued by teachers, they become assessments that drive instruction.”

TO LEARN MORE

For more information about TurnAround Schools and the No Excuses University Network, visit www.turnaroundschools.com.

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