



CASE STUDY | MEASURES OF ACADEMIC PROGRESS

Crawford AuSable School District

In Michigan, data-driven instruction earns a rural district national acclaim

Bringing a school district from lagging to leading takes strength, skill, and a united vision. Over the last eight years, northern Michigan's sprawling Crawford AuSable School District (CASD) has set itself apart by using a teamwork-driven approach designed to move every pre-K – 12 student closer to college and career readiness. While today's CASD still serves a financially vulnerable community—a fact that contributes to the district's status as one of the lowest-funded in the state—rising student achievement has earned it both state and national recognition.

Joseph Powers, superintendent at Crawford AuSable School District since 2005, states that integrating Measures of Academic Progress® (MAP®) interim assessment data into the district's instructional and programmatic planning has played a pivotal role in the district's transformation. CASD began partnering with Northwest Evaluation Association™ (NWEA™) to implement MAP in fall 2006.

"NWEA is the absolute backbone to our success," emphasizes Superintendent Powers. He continues, "NWEA and MAP helped us begin our journey towards data analysis and creating a culture of data. We have worked together to embrace the use of data to drive instruction, and by doing that, CASD has achieved great results with student performance." After eight years using MAP data to help drive significant growth for students in grades two and up, the district decided to begin using MAP for Primary Grades (MPC) with its K – 1 students and its second grade non-readers in 2014.

School Snapshot

School district size and location: 520 square miles in rural northern Michigan

Student population: Approximately 1600 students (grades pre-K – 12)

Economic markers: 61% free and reduced lunch; lowest-funded level in the state with the lowest foundation allowance (state funding level) in Michigan; regional intermediate school funding is the second-lowest in state

MAP usage: Implemented MAP in fall 2006; MAP for Primary Grades implemented fall 2014

Featured recognition:

- Scholarships awarded to 2014 graduates: Over \$800,000
- Center for Michigan/Bridge Magazine Academic State Champs: Best traditional (inclusive) school district in state (2014); 2nd Best traditional (inclusive) school district in state (2013)
- Top Ten in the state for ACT® improvement (2012)
- Michigan Department of Education: Top performing rural district (2013 and 2012); Top 5% Reward Schools: Grayling High and Grayling Middle; Beating the Odds Schools (awarded for highest academic achievement as compared to peers in the State): Grayling Middle and Grayling Elementary
- Mackinac Center for Public Policy Context and Performance Report Card 2013 and 2012: "A" ratings for district's elementary, middle, and high school schools
- U.S. News and World Report, Best High Schools: Grayling High (Silver Medalist 2014 and 2013; Bronze Medalist 2012 and 2011)
- Newsweek, America's Best High Schools 2013: Grayling High
- Education Week (2014): Named CASD one of the most productive schools in the nation
- College Board Advanced Placement National Honor Roll: (529 schools total): Grayling High School (2014 and 2013)



Using MAP data to help maximize each student's learning

Since they began using MAP, the district's performance on Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) tests has improved by a dramatic 9.24 percentage points compared to state proficiency averages: from -3.5 in 2005-6 to 5.7 in 2013-4. "Some schools just try to bring everybody up to the middle, or try to teach to the middle," shares the superintendent. "MAP is the tool that allows us to say, 'Every kid has to have growth.' In our district, it's not about bringing every kid up to a minimum level. It's about taking each kid to his or her highest levels."

The improved state summative test scores accompany growing accolades, including recognition as the state's top-performing rural district and "A" ratings for the district's elementary, middle, and high schools by the Mackinac Center for Public Policy. In 2014, Center for Michigan, a non-partisan public policy group, also rated CASD the top traditional district in the state.

The district's honors appear even more impressive when placed in context.

- During Superintendent Powers' tenure, CASD has had to cut \$7.5 million. Their current budget is \$15 million.
- Since 2000, 100 personnel positions have been eliminated; 200 staff remain.
- The majority of the district's 1600 students come from economically disadvantaged homes, with 61% qualifying for free or reduced lunch.
- Students live across 520 square miles and converge at Grayling High (9 – 12), Grayling Middle (6 – 8), or Grayling Elementary (K – 5). The elementary school also educates children 0 – 5 via the district's CASD Great Start Readiness Program Preschool and two community-based early learning programs.

Exploring solutions that prepare all students for college and careers

District demographics contribute to CASD making college and career readiness a school improvement measure. Says Superintendent Powers, "Our long-term strategy is to get our kids successful in post-secondary. Does that mean all university? No, but it means university for a lot of them." Using MAP data to inform their K – 12 classroom instruction keeps educators focused on maximizing each individual student's learning—and their options. The data led them to identify areas for improvement, especially in the elementary grades. "Together with our Board, we used our MAP data to focus our energies at the early levels. Armed with data, we have made strategic, organizational decisions that have led to our students' individual successes," adds the superintendent. "We've dedicated our system to early interventions—and it's all based upon individual student data."

Gina Brunskill, principal of Grayling Elementary and former third grade teacher, explains how messages reinforce data-informed instruction and programming. "From kindergarten on, we say 'when you go to college' or 'when you go to a trade school' or 'when you extend your education beyond high school'. When, not if. We let them know the expectations. Either you go to a trade school, you go into the military, or you're going to go to college."

Along with high expectations, MAP data fuel educator-student conversations. Tools that forecast scores on college readiness tests earn their keep at CASD, where doing well on tests that influence college admission and scholarships can change lives. From grade 8 on, the district turns to the NWEA College Readiness Linking Study, which correlates MAP scores against those of EXPLORE®, PLAN®, and ACT®.

With college tuition a daunting barrier for so many of their students, Superintendent Powers underscores the importance of giving those they serve every advantage



possible. While most high schools around them have cut their Advanced Placement program because of financial difficulty, Grayling High encourages students to challenge themselves with one or more of their eight AP classes. “Having an AP program where students can earn up to 60 or so free university credits matters, and how our kids perform on the ACT matters.” In 2014, the wider CASD community celebrated a milestone reflective of all the hard work by educators and students alike: graduates earned a record \$800,000-plus in scholarships.

Implementing top-to-bottom changes to support student growth

The superintendent notes MAP data are part of CASD’s broader solution. “Using MAP data effectively is a very integral part of what we did—and what we do. But we also instituted professional learning communities and started educating our Board of Education on how to also be data analyzers.” Administrators, teachers, and the Board of Education all discussed four books deemed integral to the CASD system structure and strategic plan.

1. Jim Collins’ *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap...And Others Don’t*. Used to help people commit to using data to drive student achievement.
2. Ruby Payne’s *Framework for Understanding Poverty*. Used initially with existing staff and currently as part of the district’s mentorship program for new staff; helps CASD better serve students and families living in poverty.
3. Robert Marzano’s works. The district embraced Marzano’s frameworks for their philosophy and used them to create a guaranteed and viable pre-K – 12 curriculum. The district uses MAP data as a measure of their curriculum’s implementation and to ensure a “guaranteed and viable curriculum” on an annual review basis.
4. Mike Schmoker’s *Results Now: How We Can Achieve Unprecedented Improvements in Teaching and Learning*.

Used to confront what CASD terms the “brutal facts” of instruction, eliminate the isolation of classroom teachers, and help create Professional Learning Communities.

District Data Administrator Cyndi Powers, who also teaches seventh grade language arts and science, recalls: “When we first started with NWEA, staff had to be trained in how MAP data were relevant to student learning and teaching, and students had to understand what their MAP RIT scores meant. Teachers received NWEA professional development, buildings had leaders to assist with questions, and principals provided—and continue to provide—staff development time.”

Today, all teachers report their students’ data to their principals, have written goals of student achievement, and use strategies/interventions within their classrooms to meet the targeted goals. To help colleagues understand the value of data-informed instruction, CASD:

- begins every Board of Education meeting by allowing anyone to discuss student achievement
- begins every administrative meeting looking at student achievement by building
- addresses noted concerns and improvements
- discusses the interventions in place
- provides ongoing NWEA professional development

It’s a dynamic process that keeps the administrators focused on individual student growth, professional development needs, and using their limited resources as wisely as possible. Powers shares that in their K – 5 building, highly structured, individual student data meetings happen three times a year; MAP scores are one of the cornerstones of the data. “We talk about every child at all three of our meetings. We start by looking at student strengths and where we need to work, and we color code student information. If you’re blue you’re exceeding expectations. If you’re green you’re meeting expectations; yellow signals ‘Oh, boy. Let’s see what we can do for you.’ And pink? ‘Oh my goodness, we need to intervene now.’”



The thrice-yearly meetings lead to a variety of discussions.

Step 1: Conversations with teachers, specialists, special education team: Informs allocation of resources inclusive of staff strengths and time as well as building-wide programming and staffing; in spring, it also covers next-year student placement

Step 2: Conversations with individual teachers: Involves setting measurable achievement goals for each student (involves district data administrator and/or assistant principal)

Additional data-focused conversations: Determines best use of paraprofessional and specialist time and skills. Specialists, including special education teachers, are responsible for specific grade level interventions (design, allocation, and implementation)

Crafting new challenges designed to help all students grow to greatness

After years of marked improvement, the district has no plans to stop inventing and improving. “We’re at our peak. Do we keep climbing into the clouds or not?” muses Superintendent Powers rhetorically, having already set his sights on increasing K – 1 students’ growth by implementing MAP for Primary Grades. Says the superintendent, “We want the K – 1 teachers to start embracing the same process we’re using to elevate our older students’ learning levels. To help do that, we moved a very successful third grade teacher down to first grade because she understands how to use MAP data.”

Brunskill thinks teachers will be stunned by the results of data-informed instruction. “I believe strongly in the work supported by the National Association for Developmental Education. But I also believe developmentally

appropriate means that each child has his or her abilities and achievement taken into consideration.”

She continues, “Before our building was pre-K – 5, we had multiple buildings. And we saw incredible growth with our grade 3 – 5 students, growth that came down to using the MAP Learning Continuum to really and truly guide our instruction. We set goals with students. We set goals with teachers. Recently, one of our kindergarten teachers came to me to talk about students who had all their letters down, including all their uppercase. We talked about how you can use the MPG Learning Continuum to go further with children who are ready for the next step, and how that is developmentally appropriate. This is a big breakthrough.”

Cyndi Powers finds the district’s backing of MAP interim assessments meshes well with her personal philosophy as a teacher and data director. “I don’t care if students are in the bottom of a level or if they’re at the top of the level, they need to grow. I help the district use MAP RIT scores and historical data to schedule our students’ classes. We want to make sure they’re in the best place for learning.”

His staff’s statements resonate with Superintendent Powers, who points out that partnering with NWEA allows them to target not only each student’s achievement gap, but their whole grade level achievement gap. “Benchmark data and standards tell some of the story, but what’s powerful is growth. MAP assessment data aren’t our only data point, but they’re the only ones that we feel good about in terms of measuring growth.” Together with his entire team, he’s determined to fulfill the district’s strategic plan for educational excellence and its collective vision: *Growing to Greatness* by preparing students to succeed.

Learn more about MAP at [NWEA.org/assessments/MAP/](https://www.nwea.org/assessments/MAP/).

NWEA has nearly 40 years of experience helping educators accelerate student learning through computer-based assessment suites, professional development offerings, and research services.