

# Umatilla School District, OR



## Data conversations spark crucial changes in a vulnerable Oregon district

For some 300 miles, the Columbia River marks the state line between Washington and Oregon. It meets the Umatilla River and the small Oregon town of the same name just before it veers north into Washington.

The Umatilla School District is also small, but it's mighty. "I meet with new staff upfront and I tell them the honest truth: Our students need the very best educators. They cannot settle for less," says Heidi Sipe, the district's superintendent.

"We have the second-highest English language learner population in Oregon and we usually have the highest student poverty population," she explains. "And we're in a rural setting to top it off."

So when Heidi and others in the district noticed a big gap between performance in the classroom and state scores, they knew there was more work to do.

### When the numbers don't add up

Umatilla was one of the first districts in the country to adopt Common Core, and they did so because they believed it could help level the playing field for their students. They expected performance in the classroom to then be a good indicator of performance on the state test and of college and career readiness. But that's not what happened.

"The only kids passing the state test had a 90% or better in their classroom work," Heidi says. "And we had a number of students who were graduating with their associate of arts degree through our early college programming who hadn't passed either. That just didn't make sense."

Worse yet, there was no room for improvement. By the time most students got the results of their state test, a new school year had begun. "What do you do for instructional approaches with that?" Heidi asks.

### Benefits abound

Determined to reverse these trends, the district brought in MAP® Growth™ in 2018. They know substantial gains on state scores will take time, but some immediate payoffs are buoying them in the meantime.

For starters, Umatilla educators can now compare students against national norms, and proficiency projections have made it easier to see whether they're on track to do well on the state test.

"If you're only comparing your students to your students, you miss out on how far behind they can get as a group," Heidi says. "It's been really important for us to see not only growth but also achievement."

**“We’re giving students the really hard task of becoming better learners and we’re giving them the tools it takes to do it. When they see themselves meeting their goals, or almost meeting them, it all comes together for them.”**

**Heidi Sipe, Superintendent**  
Umatilla School District, OR

Because MAP Growth is an interim assessment given multiple times a year, it’s also been easier for teachers to modify their methods midstream when needed. They can better identify and support special ed students and, with MAP® Spanish, assess the many native Spanish speakers in their own language.

The district finally has a consistent set of data and reports, too. Those are critical for monitoring student growth accurately and setting learning goals—something the district never had the tools to do before.

### Conversation catalyst

The biggest MAP Growth boon by far has been the game-changing conversations it’s started. Discussions about dire reading scores, for example, led Heidi and her team to discover their literacy plan wasn’t being executed in the same way throughout the elementary school.

“We have a core team of teachers at each school, and those teams get together quarterly,” Heidi explains. “We look at data, set the school’s goals, and monitor.”

Those classrooms performing far below their peers? Turns out they weren’t using the literacy plan at all.

The difficult conversations that ensued led to an overhaul of the plan to more closely align with students’ needs. And it led to changes in how turnover is handled so that all new teachers know how to follow and implement the plan.

### Keeping the bar high

Heidi and her team will keep talking and tackling problems as they crop up. They’ll also continue to be big believers in challenging students to reach their potential.

“MAP Growth is a great way to do that,” Heidi says. “We’re giving students the really hard task of becoming better learners and we’re giving them the tools it takes to do it. When they see themselves meeting their goals, or almost meeting them, it all comes together for them.”



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## District snapshot

UMATILLA, OR



### STUDENTS

**1,360**

### ECONOMIC MARKERS

**100%**

QUALIFY FOR A FREE LUNCH

### DEMOGRAPHICS

**70%**

HISPANIC/LATINX

**57%**

EVER ENGLISH LEARNERS\*

### PRODUCT USE

IMPLEMENTED MAP GROWTH IN

**2018**

\*Ever English learners are any students who have ever been classified as English language learners, even if they have achieved fluency in English.