

Memphis Elementary School

Memphis, Michigan

A Michigan elementary school taps the power of data to effect positive change

About an hour's drive north of Detroit, the small city of Memphis, Michigan, straddles the border between Macomb and St. Clair counties. With about 1,180 residents, Memphis is a place with deep community roots—the kind of place where the local schools are full of kids whose parents once sat in the same classrooms.

Susan Hankins embodies this multigenerational hometown spirit. After attending public school here from kindergarten all the way through twelfth grade, Susan eventually became the principal of her alma mater, Memphis Elementary School, which serves about 400 students from pre-K through fifth grade. The school offers on-premises daycare and provides free or reduced lunch to 42% of its students.

Now in her fifth year as principal, Susan has been focused on using data to drive instruction from the start of her tenure. That effort got a boost three years ago, when Memphis Elementary started using MAP® Growth™ to conduct interim assessments of student learning. In that time, MAP Growth has informed and fueled the school's quality improvement initiatives—and helped change the school's culture for the better.

“It was a gradual evolution and a big culture shift all at once,” says Susan. “If we look at where we were five years ago and all the things we're doing now, it's incredible. And it all started with data.”

Driving instruction, informing interventions, and reckoning with learning loss

As a new principal, Susan pored over Memphis Elementary's existing assessment data, trying to determine whether the school was getting the information it needed to effectively plan for academic interventions and enrichments. At the time, the school was using primarily subjective, teacher-led assessments, which—though valuable in their own right—left an opening for a more standardized, objective approach. The school embarked on a search for a new assessment solution, and after conversations with school leaders in other districts who spoke highly of NWEA®, the Memphis Community Schools District began using MAP Growth.

The value of MAP Growth in driving more effective, targeted instruction soon became apparent to Susan and her teachers. In addition to gaining new insights into the school's performance relative to other districts, Susan found that MAP data helped inform the school's ongoing initiatives to advance student learning. For example, the school's student assistance team—developed through a multi-tier system of support (MTSS) process—was now able to confidently identify students performing below the 30th percentile and plan WIN (What I Need) interventions for this group.

“We work diligently with our teachers to dive into our MAP data,” says Susan. “I'm lucky that I have a passionate school improvement team that likes to dig into the data as soon as our scores come in, looking for trends that we can spot.”

One notable trend in 2020 was the learning loss that followed the pandemic-related shutdown in the spring and the abrupt transition to remote learning. With MAP data in hand, combined with a special report from NWEA on COVID-related learning loss, Memphis Elementary School was able to identify concerning dips in its math percentiles, especially among younger learners. The data drove the school's efforts to develop whole-group instruction centered around what the students were missing, supporting Susan's overarching goal of providing all students with full access to both the core curriculum and any appropriate interventions or enrichments.

Sometimes, achieving this goal means pumping the brakes on the regular curriculum and dedicating more time to filling in learning gaps. For example, when Memphis Elementary recently administered MAP Growth to fifth-graders in conjunction with the Delta Readiness Screener, the school found that these students were missing key knowledge about how to use fractions. High-quality assessment data helped ensure that these students got the focused instruction they needed in order to move forward in math.

Fostering a data-centric school culture

Thanks in large part to Susan's focus on data-driven instruction, the school improvement team at Memphis Elementary has grown significantly over the last several years and now comprises a quarter of the school's teaching faculty. The team meets frequently and places special importance on the meetings it holds after each MAP round, when the team examines the data, discusses the apparent trends, and makes plans to disseminate key information to teachers.

In addition, the team designates one member at each grade level to take a deeper dive into the data and lead the analysis and discussion of what the data shows for that grade level. Susan's ultimate objective with this work is to empower teachers. "We can identify the overall trends," she explains, "but it's the individual teachers who can drill down further into the data to see what exactly that trend looks like in their own classrooms. We want each teacher to be their own best resource for data."

Students, too, are engaged in the task of understanding and working with data—particularly those students who are receiving interventions. The school encourages students to become familiar with their own data and to set goals for themselves. Letting kids see their own data was a real eye-opener at Memphis Elementary School, as Susan explains:

"We noticed that one of our interventionists, who's also on the school improvement team, had students who were achieving a lot of progress. We asked her, 'What are you doing with your students that we might not be doing elsewhere?' Her answer was simple: 'I let them look at their RIT score. I let them see their percentiles. And I tell them, here's where you are now and here's where you could be with a little more work.' Those conversations get results."

For Memphis Elementary School, the rewards of high-quality assessment data have been the result of ambition mixed with patience. Although Susan came into her role wanting to make rapid progress, she has heeded the advice of her mentors, who told her, "You have to go slow to go fast." So, in addition to rolling out MAP Growth and standing up a robust school improvement team, Susan has engaged teachers in a continuous dialogue, asking them to complete surveys and introducing new responsibilities when she's confident they have the bandwidth and willingness to take them on.

"As with everything in education, this is a work in progress," she says. "We will continue to strive for continuous improvement by building off our successes, growing from our mistakes, and using student data to drive positive changes."



Snapshot

Memphis Community Schools Memphis, Michigan

STUDENTS

836

PRODUCT USE

IMPLEMENTED MAP GROWTH IN

2018

ECONOMIC MARKERS

30.6%

QUALIFY FOR FREE LUNCH

DEMOGRAPHICS

Students with an IEP: 135



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