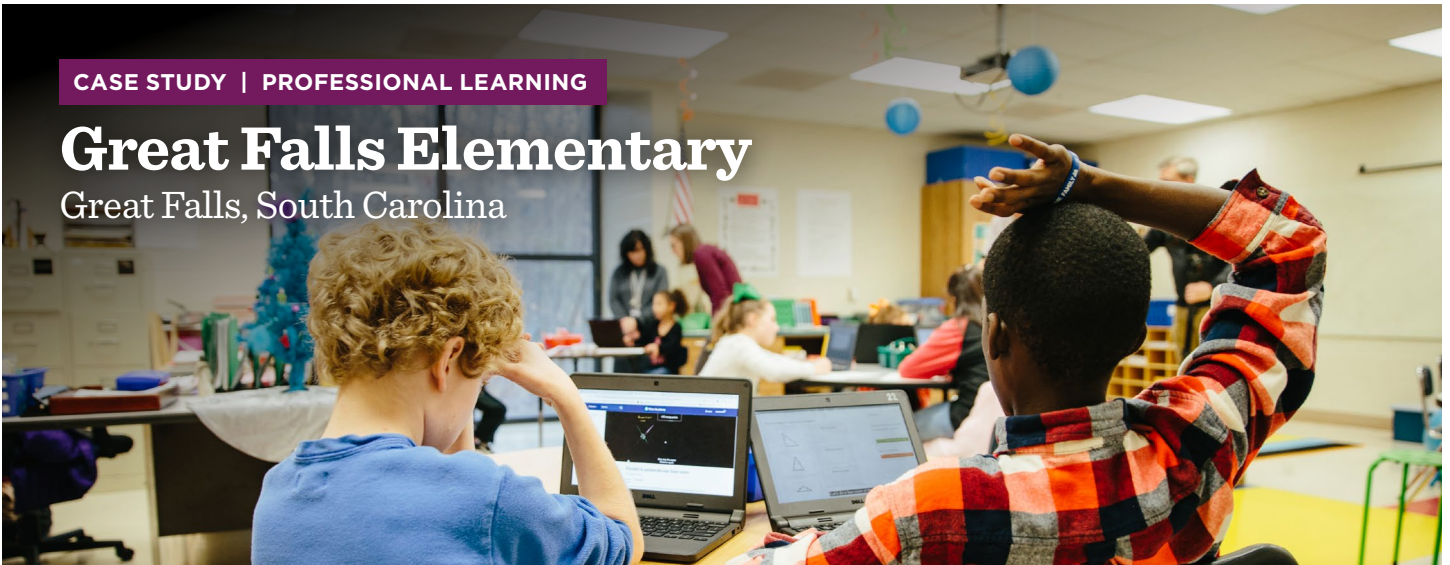


Great Falls Elementary

Great Falls, South Carolina



How a professional learning partnership helped support student growth in South Carolina

Roughly 40 miles north of Columbia, South Carolina, sits the tiny town of Great Falls. Once home to a bustling textile industry, it suffered when the cotton mills closed down in the early '80s. While the town still hasn't recovered—nearly 30% of the population lives below the poverty line—recent plans to reroute the nearby Catawba River promise to create enhanced recreational opportunities and boost tourism.

There's a similar sense of hope at Great Falls Elementary School. This Title 1 school in the Chester County District serves 320 pre-K-5 students. When principal Tammy Taylor arrived in 2016, she saw huge potential at the surface—and some big cracks underneath. "I could tell it was a really great school," she says. "Wonderful staff and amazing kids, really good parents. However, no one seemed to expect very much from the kids. I think the lack of expectations over time created a lack of effort on the part of the children."

Finding the path forward

Tammy immediately dove into all the data points she could find to better understand what was happening. The school was already using MAP® Growth™, so she started there. "Our end-of-year state summative data for three consecutive years had increased, and it looked really impressive," she remembers. "But when I started to dissect the data that was more formative, like MAP, and look at students' grades holistically, I saw large gaps in my first, second, and third grades; the kids were nowhere near ready for grade-level instruction. It was glaringly clear that my school had a readiness issue."

She also discovered a major divide: The majority of the school's resources were going into the higher, tested grades while the lower grades were largely unsupported. There was an overall lack of trust among the adults in the two groups as well. They weren't discussing data with each other, and Tammy noticed an underlying attitude that only the high-achieving kids were capable of success. She realized that a culture change was needed. Tammy shifted teachers around and put new protocols in place, resulting in a lot of tough conversations and a near-complete staff turnover. The goal was to create a data-rich culture at the school—one that centered on all students and increased accountability for both teachers and kids.

"It was like a light bulb went off for the entire team at the same time. We were able to understand how a child's overall score is impacted by a low score in a particular goal area, and what we needed to do about it."

Tammy Taylor, Principal at Great Falls Elementary School
Great Falls, SC

Putting the pieces in place

Tammy had a plan, but she knew the school would need help to get there. Then, NWEA's Brooke Mabry came in for district-wide professional development. "Brooke's job was to help us as a district understand the tools that NWEA offered." Tammy says. But she spotted an opportunity to get specific about her school's needs. The school's instructional leadership team spent every lunch break with Brooke, building a relationship that would help make Tammy's vision of a data-centric culture a reality.

"My team's conversations shifted from a discussion of our students' RIT scores to a focus on standard deviations and figuring out how to help teachers address the major gaps we were seeing," recalls Tammy. "It was like a light bulb went off for the entire team at the same time. We were able to understand how a child's overall score is impacted by a low score in a particular goal area, and what we needed to do about it. At the end of the four or five days that Brooke was there with us, we had an entirely new perspective on our MAP Growth reports."

Turning gaps into growth

The collaboration continued over the next year, evolving from Brooke walking the school's staff through their MAP results to teachers leading those conversations and analyzing their own data. And while the journey is still underway, there's one clear sign that Great Falls Elementary is on the right path: actionable data has become a driving force across all grade levels. The leadership team now has weekly data meetings with the primary and upper-grade teachers to keep everyone aligned. Since teachers know exactly where students are in their learning, they can quickly see who requires additional help or interventions, and the teachers have the support they need to meet those students' needs.

Having data and processes in place to help the kids who need it most has created a culture of higher expectations for all, and Tammy has seen a healthy competitive spirit among students, too. "It's so rewarding to see the kids notice how much they've grown," she says. "We give them stretch goals each MAP administration. The kids are beginning to want to do well."

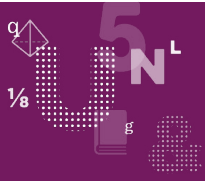
So how about those students who first sparked Tammy's efforts? "That cohort of students where we made all the shifts is now in first grade," she says. "I have no doubt that the majority of them will be second grade ready next year. Even in the midst of this pandemic, we're seeing tremendous growth with our kids, which proves we're definitely moving in the right direction."



NWEA is a not-for-profit organization that supports students and educators worldwide by providing assessment solutions, insightful reports, professional learning offerings, and research services. Visit [NWEA.org](https://www.nwea.org) to find out how NWEA can partner with you to help all kids learn.

© 2021 NWEA. NWEA and MAP are registered trademarks, and MAP Growth is a trademark, of NWEA in the US and in other countries.

APR21 | KAP6852



School Snapshot

**Great Falls Elementary,
South Carolina**

PRE-K-5 STUDENTS

320

PRODUCT USE

IMPLEMENTED MAP GROWTH IN

2004