

Crawford AuSable School District, MI

Data-driven instruction earns a rural district national acclaim

Over 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, rising student achievement has earned it both state and national recognition.

Joseph Powers, superintendent at Crawford AuSable School District since 2005, states that integrating MAP® Growth™ assessment data into the district's instructional planning has played a pivotal role in the district's transformation. CASD began partnering with NWEA® to implement MAP Growth in fall 2006.

"NWEA is the absolute backbone to our success," emphasizes Superintendent Powers. "NWEA and MAP Growth 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."

Using MAP Growth data to maximize student learning

Since they began using MAP Growth, 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. "Some schools just try to bring everybody up

to the middle," shares Powers. "MAP Growth 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."

Other accolades include 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.

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 1,600 students come from economically disadvantaged homes.

Preparing students for college and careers

Superintendent Powers says, "Our long-term strategy is to get our kids successful in postsecondary." Using MAP Growth data to inform their 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. "We used our MAP Growth data to focus our energies at the early levels," the superintendent says. "We've dedicated

our system to early interventions—and it's all based upon individual student data.”

Gina Brunskill, principal of Grayling Elementary, explains how messages reinforce data-informed instruction. “From kindergarten on, we say ‘when you go to college’ or ‘when you go to a trade school.’ When, not if. We let them know the expectations.”

Along with high expectations, tools that forecast scores on college readiness tests earn their keep at CASD, where doing well on tests that influence college admissions and scholarships can change lives.

With college tuition a barrier for many 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, Grayling High encourages students to take one of their eight AP classes. “Having an AP program where students can earn up to 60 or so free university credits matters,” Powers adds.

Implementing top-to-bottom changes

“Using MAP Growth 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 be data analyzers,” Superintendent Powers says.

District data administrator Cyndi Powers recalls: “When we first started with NWEA, staff and students had to understand what RIT scores meant. Teachers received NWEA professional development, buildings had leaders to assist with questions, and principals provided staff development time.”

Today, all teachers report their students’ data to their principals, have written goals of student achievement, and use strategies within their classrooms to meet the goals.

Helping all students grow to greatness

After years of marked improvement, the district has no plans to stop improving. Superintendent Powers has set his sights on increasing K-1 students’ growth. 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.”

Brunskill thinks teachers will be stunned by the results of data-informed instruction. “We saw incredible growth with our grade 3-5 students, growth that came down to using the Learning Continuum to really and truly guide our instruction.”

Cyndi Powers finds the district’s backing of MAP Growth 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.”



District Snapshot

CRAWFORD AUSABLE
SCHOOL DISTRICT, MI



PRE-K-12 GRADE STUDENTS

1,600

ECONOMIC MARKERS

61%

OF STUDENTS QUALIFY FOR
FREE OR REDUCED-PRICE LUNCH

PRODUCT USE

IMPLEMENTED MAP GROWTH

2006

IMPLEMENTED MAP GROWTH K-2

2014

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