

Atlas Preparatory School, CO



How Atlas Prep uses MAP Growth to support students in poverty and help them grow

There are many barriers to learning: Poverty. Food insecurity. Mobility. Access. Atlas Preparatory School in Colorado Springs, Colorado, attempts to remove these barriers and provide stability, structure, and support—for kids and their parents. How do they know if they're on the right track and students are learning? Simple: MAP® Growth™ from NWEA®.

Stability is foundational

Stability is crucial for a school that enrolls students coming from high mobility backgrounds—and serves students living in poverty. “It’s typical for our students to have attended three or four different schools by the time they come to Atlas. They come to us really far behind, where they just haven’t had the same sort of structures and supports that allow them to be in a place where they are learning at the same rates as other students,” says Casey McComsey, Chief of Staff at Atlas Prep.

Atlas aims to turn this around, offering support in many forms, such as free school supplies, free uniforms, free transportation, a food pantry, and housing assistance for families. In addition, Atlas is focused on helping students grow—no matter where they are.

Measuring progress

“One of the best things about MAP Growth is that it gives you a stable measure over time,” says Erin Wahler-Cleveland, a teacher who lobbied for the school to use

the MAP Growth assessment. McComsey agrees. “You can really see year to year how students have grown. Because of MAP Growth, we can make stable claims about what’s happening with student learning.”

Grade-level independence and quick, reliable results are additional MAP Growth attributes that help Atlas educators drive growth with their students. “We want to grow our students as much as possible from where they’re starting, and meet them where they are. And really, we don’t have another choice. If we provide a one-size-fits-all approach or curriculum, we’re not serving our mission, which is to serve the average kid and family in poverty,” says McComsey.

MAP Growth data also enables Atlas to create targeted plans for students. “We use MAP Growth to see what each student’s goals should be and what we can do to change their pathway,” says Wahler-Cleveland. Being able to quickly identify which students are on track and which students have regressed helps Atlas to determine if their decisions and programs are effective.

One way MAP Growth helped Atlas at the school level was in recognizing summer learning loss. Instead of moving forward, MAP Growth data suggested that students were losing the first month of school to re-teaching. So Atlas

acted—they started a 3-week, tuition-free summer enrichment program. Many low-income students would not otherwise have access to a structured summer program, and the entire faculty leads programs in outdoor education, college preparation, and athletics.

“We are altering the trajectories and pathway possibilities for our students. MAP Growth allows us to show students and families the growth that they are making and what it means for their future.”

Casey McComsey, Chief of Staff
Atlas Prep
Colorado Springs, CO

Going Beyond

At Atlas, they ask students to “go beyond” to achieve more today than yesterday, and student growth has been impressive—exceeding what NWEA norms establish as average growth. In the 2015-16 school year, Atlas students in 6th-10th grades demonstrated growth ranging from the 92nd to the 99th percentile of all schools nationally in mathematics, reading, language usage, and general science. In the 2016-17 school year, the majority of all Atlas 5th-8th grade students met or exceeded typical growth goals across all subjects.

“MAP Growth showed us a way to move forward. We can identify students that need help very quickly—and then be flexible with how we group students and differentiate learning,” says Wahler-Cleveland. “It’s not just a score,” adds McComsey. “It helps us see what students should be working on—and what content we should be teaching to help them grow. Whether you’re achieving at the 90th percentile or the 10th, everyone is working hard toward their own growth goals.”

And more than their impressive growth, Atlas aims to prepare students for life after high school—and beyond. “What matters is how we can help our students grow and get them to a place where they’re ready for high school, college, or the workplace,” says McComsey.

At Atlas, their ultimate vision is to use education to transform their students’ lives. As McComsey explains, “We think about what it’s going to look like to turn this around...To make sure that there is a structural change where our graduating kids have the talents to be successful—and make a generational shift out of poverty.”



School Snapshot

CHARTER SCHOOL

COLORADO SPRINGS, CO



5-12 STUDENTS

900

LEARNING NEEDS

31%

OF STUDENTS ARE ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

ECONOMIC MARKERS

91%

OF STUDENTS QUALIFY FOR FREE OR REDUCED-PRICE LUNCH

PRODUCT USE

IMPLEMENTED MAP GROWTH IN

2011

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