

Midland Public Schools, MI



How one Michigan district achieved alignment with trustworthy data

Dubbed “The City of Modern Explorers,” the tight-knit community of Midland, Michigan, sits at the heart of the Great Lakes Bay region, about 125 miles northwest of Detroit. Midland Public Schools, a district of 11 K-12 schools and 7,798 students, is known for innovation and a commitment to student learning. So it’s no wonder a few educators-turned-explorers started Midland’s MAP® journey by piloting and exploring everything the solutions had to offer. The result: teachers and administrators working in alignment to meet students’ needs and communicate more broadly with parents and caregivers.

Getting on the same page

Prior to implementing MAP assessments in Midland, the district’s lack of a unified solution was frustrating for teachers. Schools across the district used a variety of assessments for K-8 students, depending on the season, grade, or building. While that resulted in plenty of data, the data often lacked relevance and was next to impossible to monitor over time.

“I think that in Midland, teachers were ready for something like NWEA® that was all-encompassing,” says Margaret Doan, principal at Plymouth Elementary School. “It was a broader lens because what we had, at least at the elementary level, was a lot of small assessments sprinkled throughout the year, but they were very focused on one particular skill. NWEA gave us a bigger picture, and teachers were ready to have fewer assessments that could give better information than what we had.”

To ensure continuity and commitment from the top down and the bottom up, district staff work hard to ensure educators leverage MAP® Growth™ and MAP® Reading Fluency™ data to improve instruction and meet the unique needs of Midland students.

“We created a whole plan, and we aligned our resources, and had several meetings about how we are going to support this to make sure when we get to that place that

[teachers and administrators] have the resources and the knowledge they needed,” says Dr. Alison Cicinelli, the district’s secondary curriculum and instructional specialist.

Ann Sheffer, Midland’s MTSS coordinator, adds, “We’re building that structure and that system along the way, so we’re creating written processes for in-district purposes but then also to make sure that, again, our teachers and our administrators are supported.”

That alignment and unified sense of purpose extend from the building level to the grade level, with teaching teams analyzing and applying data to get every student the support, intervention, and enrichment they need.

“Teams really took it away. They started planning together, they started reading the data. We also try to look at trends school-wide, so we did that as a school-improvement team,” Margaret says. “The biggest ways we’ve used it are at a grade level, to specifically inform instruction and better align the grade level because there’s multiple classes, and also to better align what we do as a school. Now we’re starting to see what that looks like on a K-5 path.”

With teachers feeling empowered, Midland has been able to use their data district-wide to help their K-8 students reach new goals.

“We’ve integrated it into a lot of different pieces,” Alison says. “We try to make sure that there’s an alignment with how we’re using the data, how we’re supporting students, how we’re supporting teachers, how we’re supporting buildings, and trying to align all those pieces together in a way that works.”

That alignment has been key to Midland’s continued success, whether it’s using one assessment for the K-8 path or giving grade-level teams the common data they need to spot trends and make decisions.

Improving teacher practice to help students grow

With a unified assessment system for K-8 students in place, teachers and administrators have focused their attention on using their MAP data to inform and improve instruction. When Tiela Schurman, principal at Jefferson Middle School in Midland, implemented MAP Growth in her building, she and her team were immediately impressed by the high-quality data that allowed teachers to get a clear view of students' needs and where they might require additional support or interventions.

"Teachers have been using it in their PLCs [Professional Learning Communities] to identify gaps that they're seeing in their instruction. They also use the data to almost validate what they're seeing in the classroom with specific students," Tiela says. "Another component is when administrators say teachers should differentiate instruction, that's a hard, daunting task for teachers, particularly at the secondary level when they have 150 students a day. So with this data, when they're teaching a specific standard, they already have the report, and they can easily group the students."

Immediate growth data multiple times each year also means teachers have the opportunity to support students wherever they are in their learning in that moment, in contrast with state summative data that often arrives too late to support a student with unfinished learning.

"With NWEA, there's very tangible, specific data that they can use right then and there. It's not too late. You can still make an impact on a student," Tiela says.

With consistent scoring and reporting, even students coming to Midland from outside the district can demonstrate what they know and what they're ready to learn with MAP reporting from their previous school.

As Tiela notes, "A lot of our neighboring districts use NWEA, even some of the parochial schools. And it's fabulous that once we get their record, we can look at this to help develop some plans for incoming students as well. So you have this common language, and, I mean, we even get kids from out of state with NWEA scores, and so that's been quite lovely when identifying interventions, or enrichments, or even placement."

School and families: One united team

Not only did MAP assessments improve alignment within and across Midland schools and promote data literacy to improve outcomes for students, but easy-to-read reports and plentiful resources also enhanced communication with parents and caregivers. Midland teachers learned best practices for using the purpose-built reports found in MAP assessments as conversation starters for family conferences about student performance and growth goals.

"Giving them those talking points and actually helping families understand the difference between a percentile and growth was really helpful," Tiela says.

Having the tools and resources to thoroughly explain the "why" and "how" of MAP assessments and data fosters commitment and ideally creates a more relaxed, positive testing experience for the student, especially when testing remotely.

"We have to let it be as organic and authentic of an experience for the child as possible to get organic, authentic data to help students really grow. Like, real growth, not pretend, on paper, 'This is going to get them into Harvard.' That's not the case," Tiela says. "This is going to help them grow as an individual. And I think frontloading it with that conversation is humongous."

With high-quality solutions from the MAP Suite of assessments and a laser-focus on applying trustworthy data to improve practice, educators in "The City of Modern Explorers" continue to live up to the name, seeking new ways to align teachers and families while improving learning outcomes for all students.



District snapshot

MIDLAND, MI



K-12 STUDENTS

7,798

PRODUCT USE

IMPLEMENTED MAP GROWTH IN

2018

nwea

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