

Keller Independent School District

Keller, Texas



How a commitment to professional learning helped a Texas district respond to the pandemic

Even before the upheaval of the 2020–21 school year, the Keller Independent School District had been dealing with change. The Texas district had evolved from largely rural to largely not and saw a sharp uptick in economically disadvantaged students. And according to Assessment Coordinator Jennifer Clairmont, school leaders had voiced that the universal assessment the district had been using was no longer adequate. Too generic to convert into actionable data, that assessment focused more on identifying gaps in basic skills than on providing insight into areas of growth for all students.

After a group of Keller principals gathered to select a new assessment program and chose MAP® Growth™, MAP® Skills™, and MAP® Reading Fluency™, Jennifer got on the phone. She wanted to talk to people who had used the MAP® Suite of assessments before—principals, administrators, secretaries, and teachers—and discover what worked and why in their implementation.

One thing was clear: Successful schools made sure training was integrated throughout the staff, rather than deployed top-down from the administrative or district-wide level. Diversifying training would also serve as an insurance policy, Jennifer learned: If only one person was an expert, what would happen if that person left?

The goal was to implement at the local level and ensure each student population's unique needs were met. Principals and “trainer of teachers” (TOT) teams at each school—along with influencers on the staff—had potential for major impact as instructional leaders for the MAP Suite.

An ongoing conversation about what works

Thirteen schools were ultimately selected to start using the assessments, out of 34 K–8 schools in the district. This first cohort would additionally include all the district's bilingual students. The initial focus was on getting students tested; staff would be trained on reports and data once that had been accomplished.

NWEA Professional Learning Consultant Shannon Weaver came in to coordinate training, along with nine consultants assigned to Keller's pilot schools. The professional learning community (PLC) offered to each campus focused on the specific needs of the location. “It's all about what our campuses need,” says Jennifer. “What do they want? What else can we do to help them along this journey?”

Shannon describes how the relationship between the PLCs and campuses was built to meet teacher needs: “It's that idea that we'd really get to know them, and what's working, and be able to have conversations with them around the data points,” she says. That conversation would continue to shape the path forward: “What have you done? What direction do you want to go in? And then, what would that look like?”

Two years in, the program's success has depended on the partnership and relationship between each school and their consultant. “Being able to pick up the phone and email anytime, and always get a quick response back, has been something that I've never experienced before,” says Jennifer.

Pivoting in a pandemic

The close partnership between consultants and schools was crucial when the COVID-19 pandemic brought all schooling—and professional learning—online. The initial cohort, just entering their second year with the MAP Suite, had to adapt. So did the second cohort of 21 schools, which had yet to undergo training. Instead of multiple-day in-person sessions, abbreviated online meetings were scheduled to get principals and TOT teams ready. But the switch to an entirely virtual model also created a new opportunity. Because they no longer had to meet physically, teachers and staff from the first cohort were able to help virtually train the new schools, an idea that came organically from staff.

The district also developed MAP mentors, a list of go-to internal MAP experts who could be called upon—by anyone—when questions came up. It was a crucial part of keeping the process moving, even in the face of unexpected challenges. “The mentors sit in, even virtually,” says Shannon. “When we were onsite, they participated and were interactive the whole time. And even now, in our virtual PLC, they are in every one. I think just building that capacity from inside is growing the whole district.”

In an ideal world, though, Jennifer says there’s no substitute for in-person, hands-on training, held during multiple-day sessions. “It’s worth the return on investment.”

Continuing the work to keep data meaningful

Keller’s initial goal with the MAP Suite—to customize assessment and training to ensure each school and student gets the most relevant, actionable data—has paid off: With both the first and second cohort, the MAP Suite has led to an increase in student goal setting on campus.

As the district looks to year three and beyond, there will continue to be an emphasis on drilling down into data and growth for all students. They hope to bring more administrators into the fold, dig into curriculum and instruction, and expand on personalized learning paths. As the MAP Suite has expanded in the schools, Shannon says, “People want to know more.”

When teachers were asked what’s made MAP training successful, one response kept coming up. “It was having that consultant, their expert NWEA consultant, on hand,” says Jennifer. “They take calls, they’re truly a partner. And even virtually this year, it has been the number one comment that that’s the key to success.”

Despite the unusual challenge of rolling out a new assessment program during a pandemic, the district has largely kept to their original three-year plan. As of the 2020–21 school year, all 34 K–8 schools are using MAP. “We still somehow keep moving forward despite all the hurdles,” Jennifer says, “and I definitely know it’s because of all the support from our NWEA partners, teachers, TOTs, and campus leaders.”

Snapshot

Tarrant County, TX

STUDENTS

35,352

STAFF

4,000

ENROLLMENT

181%

INCREASE OVER 25 YEARS

ECONOMIC MARKERS

28%

ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED



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