

# Floyd County Schools

Floyd County, Georgia



## In Floyd County, Georgia, professional learning maximizes the value of MAP data

When MAP® Growth™ came to Floyd County Schools four years ago, it was a big change for this small district in northwest Georgia, nestled in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. Barbara Smith, the district's director of school improvement and professional learning, knew that in order to have a real shot at improving student outcomes, MAP would need to be accompanied from the start by plenty of support.

"We brought MAP to Floyd County Schools because we lacked formative assessment data and we were rather data-poor at the K-2 level," says Barbara. "We knew MAP could fill in these gaps, but we needed to make sure the data was truly valuable to our teachers."

At the time that MAP was implemented district wide, Floyd County Schools was already facing a number of challenges familiar to other districts, including a high poverty rate (more than half of students receive free or reduced lunch), increasing numbers of English language learners with special instructional needs, and closure and consolidation of buildings due to declining enrollment. As the district continues to work through these challenges, says Barbara, its top priority is bringing more of its students up to grade level—and helping them maintain that growth.

To gain traction on this priority, Floyd County Schools built on its successful rollout of MAP Growth with a customized professional learning program developed in partnership with NWEA®. Through frequent communication and a collaborative series of workshops for district educators, Floyd County Schools and NWEA are maximizing the value of assessment data in the district and giving teachers new tools to promote student learning and growth.

### Evolution of a partnership

Today, the relationship between Floyd County Schools and NWEA includes the district's leading role as a collaborating partner in the GMAP Consortium, a small group of Georgia school districts working with NWEA on a through-year

assessment solution for the state. But several years ago, when the district faced the task of implementing MAP for the first time, those bonds had yet to be built. Barbara was determined to ensure that teachers came to think of MAP Growth not just as a test, but as a powerful instructional tool. And she knew that professional learning in partnership with NWEA would help them get there.

"Without professional learning, MAP scores are just numbers on a graph," says Barbara. "But when teachers really understand what those numbers mean, when they can put them into practice to inform their small groups and their decisions on where a child needs to go next, then the potential of MAP becomes a lot more clear."

As Barbara and her colleagues began to engage with their account representatives at NWEA, a collaborative process unfolded—an "organic" rapport, as Barbara describes it—that was based on frequent, informal communication. Several of the district's teacher leaders were especially enthusiastic about the new partnership and didn't hesitate to approach NWEA with ideas and requests for information.

Through this back-and-forth, Floyd County Schools and NWEA were able to align on the district's professional learning needs, resulting in a series of custom half-day workshops held in early 2020. The workshops built on the foundation that Barbara had established with the "Kickoff Classic," an annual conference for all 1,200 district staff held before the start of each school year. With the new learning series, teachers were able to dive deeper into the inner workings of MAP Growth and share strategies for maximizing the value of MAP data.

In addition to breakout sessions organized by grade level and subject matter, each workshop included MAP presentations led by visiting partners from NWEA. The goal was to facilitate small-group exchanges that allowed for plenty of freewheeling discussion.

“Our partners from NWEA wanted to keep the sessions intimate,” says Barbara. “They felt that was a better approach than presenting to big groups. Our teachers agreed, because they were able to ask a lot more questions, pull up their own data for the group to discuss, and work in collaborative teams.”

**“We spent a lot of our time talking about the data we were getting, the growth we were seeing, and whether our kids were grouped appropriately and getting the right interventions.”**

**Barbara Smith, Director of school improvement and professional learning**  
Floyd County Schools, GA

### **Building a culture of learning and accountability**

In Floyd County Schools’ first year of partnership with NWEA, an unplanned stint as acting principal for one of the district’s K–2 schools gave Barbara a firsthand view of the potential of MAP Growth to move the needle on student achievement and change a school’s culture around assessment.

“Those teachers had never had a measure that was like MAP,” Barbara recalls, “and they fell in love with it immediately. I was sold on it, too. We spent a lot of our time talking about the data we were getting, the growth we were seeing, and whether our kids were grouped appropriately and getting the right interventions.”

Barbara and her teachers also used MAP data to inform their goal-setting activities, support students with test-taking strategies, and develop new materials to shore up some of the school’s instructional weak points. The work paid off: During Barbara’s year at the school, it showed the most growth in reading and math of any school in the district.

That said, Barbara’s goal at Floyd County Schools goes beyond elevating the performance of individual schools. She describes a district where teachers are encouraged to learn from each other and share best practices, while determining for themselves what works best for their own needs. “We’re always looking internally at what’s happening in the district and how we can do it better,” she says. “It’s an attitude of, ‘If it works for you, maybe it’ll work for me—after I put my own spin on it.’”

As for the district’s professional learning activities, including the workshop series developed in partnership with NWEA, Barbara believes that frequent communication, a strong focus on assessment data, and follow-up with teachers help ensure success and lasting impact.

“We always try to survey our teachers after any big initiative to get their impressions,” says Barbara, “and we try to embed an accountability piece into everything we do so that we know teachers are taking what they’ve learned back to their classrooms and using it.”

### **Current and future state of professional learning**

In the wake of pandemic-related disruptions at Floyd County Schools last year, Barbara has reluctantly cut back on some of the district’s professional learning activities, including the in-person workshops with NWEA and the annual Kickoff Classic conference. These days, the district is focusing more narrowly on dealing with unfinished learning and addressing the uptick in social and emotional issues among students. But Barbara is eager to get back on track with professional learning—especially given the challenges of the past year.

“Without targeted professional learning, we will cease to move forward,” she says. “As we plan for the return of our virtual learners back into the classroom, we know that many of them will be behind in their learning. We have to have a plan to meet their needs. Our work with NWEA has really focused our direction based on data, and I’m hopeful that we can soon pick up where we left off.”

## **District Snapshot**

### **Floyd County, GA**

#### **STUDENTS**

**9,216**

#### **SCHOOLS**

**18**

#### **PRODUCT USE**

IMPLEMENTED MAP GROWTH IN

**2018**

#### **WORKSHOPS**

**10**

CUSTOM WORKSHOPS IN  
JANUARY 2020



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