

Minnesota Principals Academy – Action Learning Project
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Ensuring One Year of Academic Growth
For the Top Performing Students
Abstract

This Action Learning Project was initiated to analyze student academic performance. As we have analyzed the data over the past few years, we have discovered some of the top performing students in each grade are not making one year of academic progress. In the fall of 2015, I had a classroom teacher ask for support because she had 4 students scoring in the 96 percentile on their NWEA Map assessment in Math. She wanted to know what tools we have available to support her students so they can make 1 year of growth.

Vision: Provide appropriate learning opportunities to ensure top performing students are making appropriate academic growth.

Background/Context:

During the 2015-2016 school year Becker Primary School was using the Everyday Math program 2007 edition as our instructional curriculum. We were trying to determine the best strategies and techniques to provide the appropriate academic challenge for students who were performing above grade level in math. We discussed the possibility of accelerating these students up 1 grade for math as math has a linear progression of topics. However, we were aware of the long-term impact this could have on academic programming as those students moved up through the grades.

What We Did:

In the fall of 2016, we adopted the Everyday Math 4 (EM4) for K-5. We had a consultant for Everyday Math come out to provide an overview of the program for the staff in August and also in November. There were several new components in EM4 that were different from the previous edition. EM4 has online resources for differentiation. This would allow the teacher to assign more challenging activities for students who are ready for this material. The new program also has open response and reengagement lessons. This is where students explain their strategy for solving math problems. The research supports the importance for students to write in math to deepen their learning.

In February of 2017, we worked with a consultant from NWEA to analyze test data. We have been using the Map for Primary Grades (MPG) for our building. Our Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) shared concerns with him that the top performing students didn't have any recommended skills to teach from the test results. The consultant recommended that students scoring 200 or higher in second grade should be taking the MAP 2-5 so the student data will have the suggested instructional skills.

Implications for practice:

When I started this project, I was focusing on how to ensure top performing students are making 1 year of academic growth. I was thinking we would need to explore potential accelerated programs or start ability grouping. In the fall of 2016, our district adopted the Everyday Math 4 (EM 4) program for K-5th grade. This program has an online feature that provides math games to reinforce skills. These math games provide an opportunity to differentiate learning to help the top performing students to be challenged appropriately to deepen their learning. EM 4 also has open response lessons to challenge students to write about their mathematical thinking. During the Minnesota Principal Academy, we discussed the research from the book How People Learn. This research supports the need for students to write in math in order to gain a deeper conceptual understanding of mathematical concepts so they will be able to apply these skills as they solve problems. We will continue to provide staff development and training to support classroom teachers to incorporate students writing about their thinking of math and also to differentiate instruction to help students deepen their knowledge.

We will use the NWEA Student Growth Summary Report to review our building's program in order to make instructional decisions to help all students to grow as a learner. We will also look at the strand data to identify areas of strength and areas for improvement to help students to master the concepts and procedural skills needed to reason and solve problems effectively