

Minnesota Principals' Academy -- Action Learning Summary
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Improving Middle Schoolers' Reading Ability

This project is about ensuring that all Greenbush-Middle River middle school students read well. Fall 2014 was the first time any of the district's eighth graders had an ACT EXPLORE composite score in the 10th national percentile, and that year six students were in this category. This district's high school and elementary schools generally have very high MCA proficiency rates and MMR scores, but the same is not true for GMR Middle School. Since the MCA-III began in 2013, GMR's middle school reading scores are similar to state proficiency rates, yet this district has no EL students, and the student population is quite homogeneous. From 2013-2017 the percentage of middle school students with disabilities ranged from 23-27%. Students who are one or two grade levels behind in reading will not be successful in their high school. In addition, they need to be highly literate regardless of their post-secondary plans.

Vision: All students will leave middle school prepared for 9th grade reading on a path to career and college readiness.

Background: There is one experienced English teacher for all grade 6-8 students. The teacher is very familiar with CCELA standards and designs lessons to embed standards. The teacher had been using good practices such as writers' workshop, literature circles, reading informational text and reading in the zone of proximal development. However, there is so much to address in the standards that it can't all be done in English classes. Content area teachers must also require a high degree of reading and writing from students.

What we did:

- The English teacher produced a detailed, week-by-week curriculum map to ensure that all standards are addressed. It was discovered that novels which had been assigned to the whole class were below the expected Lexile level for MCA-III. Some whole-class novels and literature circle selections were replaced with higher Lexile books.
- Most writing had been short journal writings, personal responses to reading, or opinion pieces. The teacher added longer, highly structured and information-based writings.
- Other than note-taking, very little writing occurred in content area classes. Social studies students had been producing news article summaries every three weeks. Science, social studies and health teachers developed writing assignments to replace some unit summative assessments.
- In the past, English students had been required to complete Study Island reading lessons on their own. Starting in 2016, the English teacher included weekly class time for Study Island lessons with teacher cues. In addition, each week the teacher projects a Study Island reading passage for students to model comprehension strategies. (Study Island is a web-based resource matched to CCELA standards.)

- The English teacher added weekly direct vocabulary instruction based on word families with related root words.

What we found out: MCA-III and Renaissance Place STAR assessment results improved somewhat in 2017.

MCA-III	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013
6th grade	77	69	59	55	54
7th grade	76	49	58	47	63
8th grade	60	49	51	67	46

MCA-III	2017	Same class 2016	Same class 2015	Same class 2014	Same class 2013
6th grade	77	81	73	70	(no MCA)
7th grade	76	69	80	79	63
8th grade	60	49	59	80	50

STAR assessment	Average scale score 2017	Average scale score 2016	Average scale score 2015
6th grade	895	725	733
7th grade	868	844	881
8th grade	933	922	No data available

Eighth graders took the ACT Aspire in fall 2016, with 45% of students “Ready” or “Exceeding” standards for college and career readiness. (There is no longitudinal comparison because 8th graders had been taking the ACT EXPLORE until 2016.)

Challenges to address:

- Content area teachers have not fully embraced their responsibility to teach literacy. Writing practice -- with variety in length, purpose and audience -- has a powerful impact on reading skill. This is a growth opportunity for our teachers. Beginning in the 2017-18 school year, the district reorganized to eliminate middle school and shift to a 7-12 high school. As a result, some teachers have been assigned to new grade levels, requiring professional development about ELA standards.
- The gap in reading skill starts to widen in 4th and 5th grades. The district struggles to find time and resources for the extra time and safety nets needed to support struggling readers.