



At Westfield Washington Schools, Summer R.O.C.K.S.

by Cindy Keever, executive director of student support programs and Dave Mundy, executive director of learning systems, Westfield Washington Schools, Westfield, IN

Westfield Washington Schools (WWS), an Indiana suburban district of more than 6,000 students, began their continuous improvement journey in 2005. Although student achievement was strong, the district wanted to move to a more systematic approach that would support its mission and vision, and help meet a district goal for world-class learning.

World-class, continuous quality growth is defined for WWS students as “sustained, non-interrupted learning” leading to increasingly higher levels of achievement. The goal was to prepare our students to compete with those from the most successful U.S. schools as a preparedness indicator for the yet undefined, ever-changing future experiences awaiting them in post-high school, global settings.

WWS had been benchmarking against the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) assessments, the nation’s largest growth research database, since 2001. The NWEA assessment is a triannual measure in each of three content areas: reading, language and math. The assessment provides an equal interval measure, called RIT, across a continuum of learner objectives aligned to state and national standards. Each student in each test administration is assessed to a mean RIT for that test, and a fall assessment sets a “typical” growth expectation for fall to spring learning. The district goal for second through eighth grade students is that learning is continuous and growth is uninterrupted.

Ongoing data analysis of the pattern of student growth is part of the district’s review/improve (R/I) approach to continuous improvement. Through those studies, WWS found its students failing to retain fall-to-spring gains over the summer, returning in the fall at learning levels below those reached that previous spring. The pattern was typical of that in the United States where most students fall more than two months behind over the summer, according to the National Summer Learning Coalition.

The continuing trend, in spite of attempts at providing summer support, indicated that our traditional summer learning methods were clearly not closing the gap of summer learning loss. And, as with the national studies, WWS at-risk students were typically falling even further



behind. Teachers identified the root cause to be that summer interventions were not accessible to all, were not sufficiently providing clear data for determining alignment to standards and were not adequate for reducing the summer learning gap.

The district's review of previously offered interventions included paper and pencil packets, on-site interventions for select students and grade specific, computer-based experiences. Although there had been some gains in small samples of interventions, they didn't make an adequate impact on our students. The district needed an enhanced summer outreach that could be brought to scale for students in grades kindergarten through eight.

Reducing summer learning loss

In response, WWS teachers created its Summer Reviewing Online Content K-8 Standards (R.O.C.K.S.). This solution would allow students to manage summer learning at their own pace, would be accessible from any summer location (home, daycare and vacation), would be interesting and engaging enough to compete with other student summer activities, and could collect the data needed to identify activities that had the biggest impact on learning aligned to teacher-identified essential standards.

The solution also had to address the district's need to provide the service on a scale capable of reaching all students through a cost-effective delivery system. The teacher team considered technology support as a cost-saving, paperless approach with the technical capability of real-time, precise data collection. Moodle was emerging as a teacher-friendly, student-pleasing instructional tool in WWS classrooms. So the team explored the capacity of this open-source platform for its summer program.

A first attempt, offered to the fifth and sixth-grade students, provided summer quizzes through Moodle that students were able to complete at their leisure. The goal for a paperless solution was met, but there still was no monitoring of the effectiveness of the program. Teachers obtained very little data because students did not return to the site after they finished each quiz. This was not a significant improvement. During grade-level meetings, faculty meetings and brainstorming with colleagues, teachers increased their understanding of Moodle as an instructional support and discussed the opportunities for improved outreach. The teacher team



working to create a WWS summer learning experience grew from the core of these knowledge-building activities.

In the next cycle of improvement, a direct link between online learning and reduced summer learning loss was validated through the district's analysis of the performance of the incoming fifth-grade pilot in 2010. The analysis included a comparative study of students who participated in Summer R.O.C.K.S. and those who did not. Sample sizes of participants were small; however, across all content areas—reading, math and language—participating students had significantly less learning loss than those who did not participate.

Two particularly encouraging trends emerged. When students of similar ability level were compared as participants and non-participants, lower-performing students demonstrated even greater reduction in summer learning loss than the full district group. And students of all ability levels not only reduced summer learning loss in reading, but actually gained in reading levels.

The team determined that Summer R.O.C.K.S. showed the greatest promise as a summer enrichment activity that could effectively support the most students. The team goals for improvement were to increase participation in grades kindergarten through eight, to build a larger offering of standards-aligned online experiences and to redesign the program in ways that would encourage participation for more weeks in the summer.

Seeing results

Results from the Summer R.O.C.K.S. 2011 experience indicate that the success of the early pilot was being replicated across more grade levels and with more students. An R/I of the 2011 summer experience showed that more than 1,000 WWS students participated at some level in the summer, up from a little more than 500 in 2010. To determine the impact on summer learning loss, the R/I cycle studied participants who had worked in more than 10 experiences over the summer. There were 293 students doing so. Those students had retained learning at 40.1% greater levels.

As an affirmation of results, the team also reviewed the students' levels of learning through the district's formative assessment process, which tests students in the spring on grade-level essential standards and upon return in a fall retest of those standards. The results showed similar gains in six out of 10 assessed grade levels and content areas. In this study,



R.O.C.K.S. participants showed particularly strong improvement on the district's math formative assessment.

Summer 2011 participants demonstrated either growth or less summer regression in six of the seven monitored grade levels. Contributing to the 40.1% improvement in the composite study, results for math showed a decrease in summer learning loss of 15.1%, in reading of 52.5% and in language—only available for grades two through eight—a reduction of 17.5%. The data supported the team's belief that summer learning loss could be reduced.

Through the use of innovative, web-based tools, the team developed an outreach for engaging young minds over the summer months and greatly affected the district vision of continuous growth for all. The team is committed to expanding the R.O.C.K.S. offering in the summer of 2012. Team goals include meeting the challenge of increasing the overall numbers of participants, attracting seventh and eighth-grade participants through better selection and design of activities offered for that age group, and increasing the choice of student activities at all grade levels. The goal is even greater reduction of summer learning loss in grades kindergarten through eight in the core content areas of reading, math and language.