



# Middle School Girls Excel in Math with IXL

Excel Academy, Washington D.C.



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"It's amazing to see the success these kids have. IXL is very practical and easy to use as a teacher, and some of our best successes have come out of it."

*Jerry Dudley,  
7th and 8th grade math teacher*

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Seventh and 8th-grade students at the all-girls Excel Academy are making strong gains in math thanks to IXL. Math teacher Jerry Dudley says IXL Math is helping his students fill learning gaps and master grade-level skills. He says, "IXL Math really puts more meaning into how you implement your lessons. It reinforces skills and transitions smoothly into a lesson. I can't imagine teaching without it."

## The Challenge: Meeting the Needs of All Learners

Excel Academy is a preK-8 public magnet school in urban Washington D.C. As an urban all-girls school, Excel Academy strives to instill confidence, accelerate learning, and provide leadership opportunities to set students up for college and career success.

Jerry teaches two sections each of 7th- and 8th-grade math, with more than 100 students in total. His students come to the classroom with a wide range of skill levels, meaning many students are missing prerequisite skills they need to successfully master grade-level content. Jerry needed a solution that would make it easier to monitor progress towards learning goals and differentiate instruction for learners with different needs.

## An Easier Way to Teach and Learn

Jerry had used IXL Math in another school district before he joined Excel Academy and loved how easy it was to integrate into his teaching. He was hooked when he saw the growth his students achieved. When he came to Excel, he was thrilled to discover that IXL was already in place. "I swear by this program," he says. "If anyone tells me we need to use something else, I say, sorry, no, we've got to use IXL."



Jerry integrates IXL Math into his daily lessons, which makes lesson planning faster and easier. After teaching a lesson, students are given time to practice the skill on IXL. He says, “Everything you need is right there. Diagnostics, Common Core standards ... I can do a mini-lesson and then find the IXL skills that are aligned to my learning objectives. It really helps the lesson flow and reinforces the learning.” He uses IXL as an exit ticket after a lesson, for independent practice, as homework, and as remediation for students missing prerequisite skills. He also uses it to help students brush up on skills they will see on high-stakes assessments. Altogether, students spend about 30-40 minutes on IXL each day between class time and homework time.

The IXL Real-Time Diagnostic lets him monitor student progress, identify skill gaps, and adjust his instruction to meet the needs of the class or small groups. He uses IXL Analytics to group students for tiered small-group instruction. “Students can see their own reports, so they can see exactly where they need to practice and what they need to work on next. They like to see how much they’ve grown,” he says. IXL Analytics has also made data talks with his instructional team easier—all of the information he needs to understand his students’ progress is right there.

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“IXL is definitely a game changer for me. It really makes a teacher’s life much easier and more enjoyable. If you just take the time to understand the program and use it, you’re going to see the results. I love it.”

*Jerry Dudley, 7th and 8th grade math teacher*

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## Making Gains in Math Proficiency—Even in a Pandemic

Jerry says that for IXL Math, “the proof is in the pudding.” His students have continued to grow and make gains, even during the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite having technology and internet access challenges to overcome, his students continued to learn and make progress with IXL while working from home. Seventh-grade students averaged 4% gains above their expected growth, and 8th graders achieved 19% gains above their expected growth this past semester, completing more than 63,000 math problems as a group. “I have to give the girls the credit,” he says. “They have really been working hard this year.”

He says the real-time feedback that his students get from IXL goes a long way towards keeping them motivated. IXL Math tells them instantly whether they have gotten a problem right or wrong and provides immediate reteaching, so students understand why their answer was incorrect. Students can complete as many practice problems as they need to master a skill. They can also go back and review prerequisite skills that may be holding them back. The IXL Real-Time Diagnostic provides an individualized action plan for each student so they know exactly what they need to work on. Students love the certificates they earn when mastering new skills.

Jerry’s students are also demonstrating more confidence in their learning. Students who have mastered a skill will volunteer to help peers or students in younger grades. He also sees more of them raising their hands in class to participate.



By the beginning of March 2021, his students had mastered 477 skills and demonstrated proficiency in 978, completing more than 900 hours on IXL. Jerry says, “As an educator, I am looking at the mountaintop—I want to see my kids climbing that mountain and excelling. Every week, we look at the class reports for IXL together, and I say to the girls, take a look at this bar graph, see how far you’ve come. Let’s keep growing—show me those skyscrapers!”

## A Model for Success at Excel Academy

Here’s how 7th- and 8th-grade math teacher Jerry Dudley is using IXL in his classes:

- Jerry assigns skills aligned to the lesson he is teaching each day. Students practice on IXL immediately after he completes direct instruction. IXL Live Classroom allows him to monitor how students are doing as they work.
- Students are required to get a SmartScore (IXL’s proprietary scoring system that measures how well a student understands a skill) of 80 or above on assigned skills. If they do not demonstrate proficiency during class time, they can continue to practice for homework.
- Students complete the IXL Real-Time Diagnostic at the beginning of the year and answer a few diagnostic questions each week for progress monitoring and updated skill recommendations. They work on skills recommended by the diagnostic during independent practice time.
- Jerry uses IXL Analytics to adjust his instruction and group students into three instructional tiers. Students move between tiers as they master skills.