



Individualized Instruction Propels Learning Growth

Rolling Acres Middle School, Peoria Unified School District, Illinois



“When used with fidelity, there is nothing better than IXL. Nothing will give you a more accurate snapshot of your students.”

*Liz Arvin, 7th Grade Math Teacher,
Rolling Acres Middle School*

Middle school teachers Liz Arvin and Cara McGee wanted a better way to differentiate instruction for students with diverse learning needs. IXL Math and IXL English Language Arts gave them the tools they needed to individualize learning for every student, monitor progress towards learning goals, and accelerate progress for students of all ability levels. Based on their success, Peoria Public School District 150 has since implemented IXL for students across the district.

The Challenge: Large Classes and Diverse Learning Needs

Rolling Acres Middle School is a 5-8th grade school in Peoria. Just over half of their 365 students are considered low income, and about 18% have an Individualized Education Program (IEP). The school faces many of the challenges shared by urban schools nationwide and has been classified as an “underperforming” school based on state test scores. Class sizes are large, with 28 or more students per class and a wide range of ability levels.

Liz, who teaches 7th grade math and history, says, “Even if you exclude the IEP students who are working with an inclusion teacher, we might have students ranging from a 2nd-grade math level to a 9th or 10th grade level in a single class. With such a wide range of ability levels, teaching down the middle isn’t going to cut it.”

Cara, who teaches 7th-grade English language arts and 8th-grade social studies, explains, “Every year, schools have less funding and fewer resources, and teachers are asked to do more and more. Teachers have always been responsible for Tier I intervention, but now we are expected to provide Tier II intervention as well. How can you do that effectively in a classroom of 28 to 30 students?” (Tier I intervention is defined as providing supports and differentiation for all students within the classroom; Tier II intervention is targeted support for students needing additional help.)

Liz and Cara knew they needed a more efficient way to individualize learning for their students, so they turned to IXL. Following a pilot, they shared the results with their principal, who then signed up for a whole-school pilot the next year.



"It's easy to find skills that correlate to what we are doing in the classroom—for example, if we are working on narrative point of view, I can assign related skills in IXL. It's also correlated with *Collections*, which is awesome. I can assign skills in IXL that go with the stories we are reading."

*Cara McGee, 7th Grade English Teacher,
Rolling Acres Middle School*

An Easier Way to Individualize Instruction for Every Student

IXL has helped both Cara and Liz meet individual learning needs for their students while reducing their workloads. Cara uses IXL English Language Arts as a supplement to her ELA textbook program and to reinforce the standards she is teaching. Liz uses IXL Math to launch a lesson and then assigns skills correlated to the concepts they are covering in their *Eureka Math* program.

But the real power of the program lies in the IXL Real-Time Diagnostic and IXL Analytics. Both teachers count on the data generated by IXL to identify and meet individual learning needs. Liz says, "The real-time data is really important. We get our NWEA [benchmark] reports three times a year, and by the time we get the data, it is already out of date. With IXL, I can see progress daily." Over the first couple of weeks of the school year, students complete about 10 questions a day in the IXL Real-Time Diagnostic. The diagnostic pinpoints their skill levels across several learning strands and provides a suggested learning path for each student.

Liz uses IXL to help her group students for small-group instruction and intervention. While she is working with a group of students, the rest of the class can stay focused on their individualized learning paths in IXL. She says, "IXL allows me to have more powerful small-group sessions based on data. And my other students are engaged with something meaningful and individualized. I'm not just printing off busywork worksheets for them to do."

Cara especially loves the Live Classroom report, which allows her to monitor her students while they are working. She says, "My students love the live chat feature! It lets me chat with students as they are working. Kids who normally aren't as engaged are 'on it' now because *boom!* the teacher sent them a message."

"When you have 90 kids, it's really tough to gauge everyone's skill levels. With IXL, you can see every day how their skills are changing and evolving and get a clearer picture of exactly what each student is capable of."

Liz Arvin

"With Live Classroom, I know exactly what they are doing and who might need a little help in the moment. IXL isn't something you just throw kids on as busy work. We are interacting with them through IXL and using the data."

Cara McGee



Data-Driven Instruction Accelerates Growth for All

The individualized, data-driven approach enabled by IXL has paid dividends for Liz and Cara's students. The first year, they used the program only with their 7th graders. They noticed a big difference in their students' performance on the NWEA winter benchmark. Most years, only 40-50% of students have met the end-of-year targets by the mid-winter assessment. After implementing IXL, 62% of 7th graders met their end-of-year targets for reading, and 67% of them met the targets for math by winter. Fifth and 6th graders, who were not using IXL that year, did not show comparable improvements.

The following year, 8th graders were not yet using IXL—but students who had used IXL in 7th grade still showed accelerated rates of mastery on the district benchmark assessments. Liz says, "The gains they made stayed! They were still excelling in 8th grade at higher levels than we had seen before."

Best of all, the results held for both ends of the spectrum—students who were advanced as well as students who were struggling. Cara explains, "One of the things that stood out was how well our advanced students did. Typically, you see them kind of stop progressing or even dip a bit on the mid-year and end-of-year assessments. With IXL, they are continuing to make gains." Liz adds, "With IXL, we can meet the needs of students at both ends of the spectrum. We can provide intervention for students falling behind and enrichment for students who have already mastered grade-level standards. And it's really almost foolproof. If they spend time in the program, they are going to benefit from it."

In 2020, Liz and Cara were asked to present the results of the pilot to the Board of Education. Peoria Public School District 150 has now purchased IXL Math and IXL English Language Arts for all students.

A Model for Success at Rolling Acres Middle School

Here's how Liz Arvin and Cara McGee are using IXL for remote learning at Rolling Acres Middle School:

- During the first two weeks of the school year, students focus on answering questions in the IXL Real-Time Diagnostic. This provides baseline data and a suggested individualized learning path for each student.
- Liz and Cara both use IXL to supplement their classroom teaching and textbook programs, assigning skills correlated to the standards they are covering each week.
- Liz uses data from IXL Analytics to group students for small-group intervention. During this time, other students are working on their individualized skill recommendations in IXL to fill knowledge gaps.
- Cara uses IXL to help students practice standards that she doesn't have time to cover in class and brush up on skills before their high-stakes assessments.
- Both teachers use Live Classroom and the Live Message feature to monitor what students are working on and respond right away if a student needs redirection or support.