

Turning Practice into Progress Through Connected Learning



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Decatur Public Schools
Educating for Success

Location:
Decatur,
Illinois



Grades: K-12



Number of Students: 7,700



School Characteristics: Public, Suburban, Title I



Subjects: IXL Math
IXL English Language Arts
IXL Science
IXL Social Studies
IXL Spanish

IXL Connects Assessment, Instruction, and Practice to Make Progress Visible

Decatur, Illinois makes up a vital part of the Central Illinois corridor between Springfield and Champaign-Urbana with about 70,000 residents. Throughout Decatur Public Schools, many students enter the classroom below grade level and struggle to see a clear path toward academic success. IXL helps make that path more visible by connecting assessment, instruction, and practice in one place. With immediate feedback, personalized skill pathways, and clear progress tracking, students use IXL to better understand their learning and take greater ownership of it, while teachers can focus their time on meaningful instruction where students need targeted support.

The Challenges

Decatur has a diverse student population with a wide range of academic needs, including many students performing below grade level on the IAR state test. Teachers endeavor to deliver grade-level instruction while struggling to find time for manually building individualized learning paths for students who are behind. Extra planning time and administrative burdens only get heavier as the need increases to differentiate instruction, monitor student progress, and respond to learning gaps in real time. At the same time, many students have low visibility into their own progress, making it harder for them to stay engaged or take an active role in their learning.

In a district with over 7,700 students, instructional practices and tools can be difficult to keep consistent across classrooms and schools. While some educators use digital resources with ease, others rely on more traditional materials, making it difficult to ensure a consistent experience for students or to track progress in a timely way. Data from benchmark assessments such as STAR and FastBridge provide data points in time, but those insights were not always easy to connect to daily instruction or targeted intervention. Instructional Technology Coordinator Mike Coziahr notes: “Things were just not connected... some schools would have this, some schools would have that. You couldn’t get good data. We wanted to just connect it all together.”

Decatur needed a way to connect assessment, instruction, and practice so teachers could target support and students could make meaningful progress.

The Solution

To address these challenges, District 61 adopted IXL to connect instruction and student learning, and to tie together assessment and practice in a way that is both accessible and actionable for teachers and students.

IXL integrates formative assessment into the flow of daily instruction for Decatur teachers. They can see how students are performing in real time, identify areas of need, and align practice more directly to those gaps. Students then receive immediate feedback and clear indicators of progress, helping them better understand where they need to focus and get extra support. This approach creates a more continuous view of learning to give teachers and students ongoing visibility into skill development. The goal is to allow instruction and practice to stay in constant alignment with current needs. Stephen Decatur Middle School Principal Curtiss Lindsey says, “It is a game-changer to have a resource like IXL that is being utilized in and beyond our advisory period. We are starting to implement IXL into everyday instruction so it is part of our school culture, with students getting recognition when they win the weekly leaderboard. Using IXL is like giving each student a coach to fill gaps.”

Jill Hubbard of Montessori Academy for Peace says, “Instead of assigning worksheets or workbook pages, I select standards-aligned questions to assign students as practice. Students receive instant feedback on their answers, and I can easily see if a specific question was challenging to the group and go over that question together.”

IXL also helps streamline the work of planning, grading, and progress monitoring. With key information organized in one place, teachers can more easily access the insights they need without pulling from multiple systems or creating materials from scratch. Kelli Murray, Teaching and Learning Strategist, says, “When teachers use IXL with fidelity, standards are simple to find along with ways to fill missing foundations skills.”



Here's how teachers are using IXL at Decatur PS 61

- Teachers use IXL to reinforce core instruction with targeted skill practice aligned to grade-level standards and existing curriculum.
- Students engage in personalized skill pathways based on benchmark assessments such as STAR and FastBridge, helping target both grade-level content and foundational gaps.
- Teachers monitor student performance in real time, using live data to provide immediate support through small group or individual instruction.
- Students receive immediate feedback as they work, allowing them to correct mistakes, build understanding, and stay engaged in the learning process.
- IXL provides consistent opportunities for skill development and reinforcement to prepare for tests like preACT and ACT in high school.
- Teachers use IXL's built-in resources to streamline planning and progress monitoring, reducing the need to create materials and analyze data across multiple systems.
- Some teachers are exploring IXL's new generative AI tool *Spark Studio* that can create with easy prompts and customizable tools. Teachers mention creating and differentiating comprehension questions, fun choice boards, and reading quizzes for grade-level novels.



The Results

In classrooms where IXL is used consistently, teachers are seeing meaningful shifts in both student engagement and learning behaviors. With clearer visibility into their progress and immediate feedback on their work, students are becoming more confident in their abilities and more active participants in the learning process. Rather than working through assignments passively, many students are beginning to recognize where they are struggling, ask questions, and stay engaged as they build their skills.

Teachers report that having real-time insight into student performance allows them to respond more quickly and effectively. Instead of waiting for benchmark data or grading completed assignments, they can identify challenges as they arise and provide targeted support in the moment. This has made it easier to differentiate instruction and focus attention where it is needed most. According to survey responses from 37 IXL users in the district, 97% use IXL for skill practice and 81% utilize IXL's Progress & Growth analysis reports. Johns Hill ELA teacher Stephani Martin says, "I love how I can individualize the IXL skills for each student's needs quickly and easily. IXL offers Skill Plans that are aligned to state standards so you can choose the exact skills your students need. I use it daily as a bell ringer activity to reinforce skills for extra practice to prepare for state testing."

Across the district, usage data reflects strong and consistent engagement. As of April in the 25–26 school year, about 7.6 million total questions were answered by students with an average of 32 questions per student per week. Students had practiced more than 281,600 skills, achieved proficiency in over 144,300 skills, and mastered more than 118,100 skills. The average student gains at least one new skill proficiency in both Math and ELA every month through IXL, with each of those skills having been carefully selected to match that student's exact need.

Educators are seeing major gains in efficiency through IXL, with teachers reporting an average of 49 minutes saved per day on planning, grading, and data analysis—time that can be redirected toward instruction and student support. In a district where time and resources are often stretched, that shift is helping make targeted, data-informed teaching more sustainable. Administrators report saving about 43 minutes each day because they use IXL efficiently as well. All in all, IXL saves the district roughly 76,400 hours of work per school year.

Using IXL tools, teachers report saving an average of 49 minutes per day and administrators 43 minutes, which translates to roughly 76,400 hours saved districtwide over a school year.

Early indicators point to positive academic momentum throughout the district. ISBE data from 2025 shows improvements on IAR state assessments for grades 3 through 8. IAR Math Growth reached 44.4, up by 2.8 from 41.6 in 2024, and IAR ELA Growth hit 42.2, up by 3.4 from 38.8 in 2024. While multiple factors certainly contribute to these outcomes, IXL is supporting a more consistent, connected approach to skill development and monitoring progress.

Most importantly, IXL is giving students a way to take greater ownership of their own learning. “IXL gives students a way to review or learn standards they struggled with,” says Olivia Mannlein, a third-grade teacher at Parsons Elementary. “This platform is one worth keeping.”

“In the last couple of years, I’ve seen students really focus on IXL. They know what it means, what they want to achieve, and what it takes to get there. What we’re starting to see now is them taking that same determination and applying it to other areas.”

– Mike Coziahr, Instructional Technology Coordinator,
Decatur SD 61

Supporting Decatur's Roadmap 2030 Goals

Goal 1: Improve Student Achievement

- Supports personalized skill development and targeted practice aligned to standards, helping students build proficiency and make measurable progress

Goal 2: Create Effective Learning Environments

- Provides immediate feedback and adaptive pathways that keep students engaged and actively involved in their learning

Goal 3: Promote a Positive Workplace Experience

- Streamlines planning, grading, and data analysis, helping reduce workload and support teacher effectiveness

Goal 4: Increase Family and Community Engagement

- Extends learning beyond the classroom with accessible practice tools that families can support at home, and promotes effective communication around goals for students, teachers and parents

Goal 5: Ensure Fiscal Stewardship

- Saves instructional and administrative time and consolidates multiple functions (assessment, practice, and progress monitoring) into a single platform, supporting efficient use of resources

Teacher Praise for IXL

• Dennis Robinson, Middle School Science Teacher at Hope Academy

IXL is a great resource to have, especially when it comes to quality independent skill learning to fill the missing gap in the content the students need. I utilize the arena often and have it updated every quarter so that students can see their growth as well as pinpointing new areas to focus on. I also really enjoy utilizing the prebuilt skill plans based off of the STAR or FastBridge scores, as this helps us ensure that we are teaching the content needed for those tests. I also utilize the IAR plans as well to ensure that the kids are prepared prior to the state test. IXL is a great resource when utilized correctly. Every IXL skill is laid out in an easy format with a lesson to go along with each and almost every one of them also has a video to help guide students.

• Michelle Brown, Grade 5 Teacher at Hope Academy

Having IXL has been a game changer in my student engagement, classroom behavior, data tracking folders, and overall success in raising their scores. I am able to gather data for each standard to create small groups and help students get instant scores for their data tracking folders, and students instantly get grades for their standard-based report cards. IXL has impacted student engagement (behavior issues have decreased more than 50% in my room), and students are focused on their grades (3, 2, or 1). The quality of my instruction has changed with IXL due to student engagement and accountability. I use sight word practice, CVC, and vowel practice for RTI minutes. Students are able to practice these skills individually and in small groups. My students beg for Group Jams in IXL!

• Michelle Davis, ESL Teacher at Johns Hill Magnet School

It's quick and easy to use IXL. It doesn't take too long for the kids to get the hang of working out how to navigate around. Students can repeatedly practice the same thing and no one else knows, so it helps me differentiate my instruction while keeping kids' self-esteem intact. It also doesn't take too long for me to throw together a Group Jam or a Quiz. I keep finding new ways to use IXL. I mostly use it in Math, but also in English with my English Language Learners.