



Student-Directed Learning with IXL Leads to Gains for All

Ritenour School District, St. Louis County, Missouri



"IXL allows us to be more strategic and intentional with instruction. We're not just giving them willy-nilly practice or games. There is so much alignment to the standards we are teaching."

Michael Nobile, Coordinator of Curriculum and Federal Programs, Ritenour School District

When Ritenour School District began their journey in competency-based learning (CBL), they needed a tool that would empower students to work independently towards learning goals while making it easier for teachers to monitor progress and understand individual needs. They're using IXL Math and IXL English Language Arts to support students and teachers. The result? A more student-directed learning environment that maximizes learning gains for all.

The Challenge: Closing Learning Gaps and Differentiating Instruction

Ritenour School District serves a diverse population of students in the suburbs of St. Louis. A majority of their students live below the poverty line, and they have a significant population of English Learners (ELs), primarily from Spanish- and Arabic-speaking families. Chelsea Forste, a 2nd-grade teacher at Buder Elementary, says, "We are very student-centric. We look at the child as a whole—not just academics, but also social-emotional and other needs. We want to meet them where they are and help them get where they need to go."

The district started piloting IXL in a few schools during the 2018-2019 school year. At the same time, some schools were piloting a competency-based learning (CBL) model, in which students are assessed based on their mastery of standards. Michael Nobile, the district Coordinator of Curriculum and Federal Programs, explains, "In a traditional model, learning is rigidly paced out, and everyone proceeds at that pace whether you've mastered skills or not. With CBL, you lay out the learning pathway ahead of time, and all students progress along that pathway. It's really a shift in power from the teacher to the student. We say this is where you are going, here are the tools, and we'll help you along the way." IXL was one of the tools they chose to support the transition to CBL.

When the pandemic hit in the spring of 2020, Ritenour decided to take IXL district-wide to support virtual learning. Michael says, "There was a real sense of urgency to make sure kids had opportunities to practice skills and make progress towards standards online. IXL gave us a way to continue instruction and track mastery of standards while kids were working from home." Now that students are back in the classroom, teachers continue to rely on IXL to assess progress and enable student-driven instruction.



A Playlist for Student-Directed Learning

IXL allows students to move towards mastery at their own pace with individualized instruction and practice. In Rachel Thomas's 6th-grade math class at Ritenour Middle School, she has created CBL "playlists" for students, which provide an ordered list of IXL codes aligned to the standards they are expected to master. She uses IXL to assess mastery and see which students are ready to move on to the next level. She also uses IXL for Tier 2 intervention, pulling out small groups of students to work on skills recommended by the IXL Real-Time Diagnostic.

Maggie Greenlaw, a 4th-grade teacher at Marvin Elementary, uses IXL to enable independent, student-directed learning within a CBL model. Students have folders with proficiency scales showing them the progression of skills they need to master within IXL. Students are assigned to one of four levels at the beginning of the year based on their initial diagnostic results. If they master all the skills on their first scale, they can start working their way through the next. Maggie says, "They don't need me to tell them what to do next. They are obsessed. They love to show me the codes they are working on and the progress they have made."

Chelsea's school has not yet moved to a formal CBL model, but she is also using IXL playlists with her 2nd-graders. Each student has a "Learning on my Level" binder with their IXL playlist. She has posters in the back of her classroom with the priority standards and the corresponding IXL codes. When students master a new skill, they can put their names on the poster. During small group instruction, Chelsea sometimes uses the IXL Group Jams, which allow all students in the group to work on the same problem at the same time. She loves how IXL encourages her students to take charge of their own learning. She says, "I overheard one student say to another, 'You don't need to ask Mrs. Forste what to do because this is about you.'"

The IXL Effect: Igniting a Fire for Learning

With IXL, students know exactly where they are in relation to mastery of their grade-level standards—and what they need to do to improve. Giving students insight into and control over their learning journeys facilitates growth for students at all points in the spectrum. In Maggie's 4th grade class, one student tested substantially below grade level in both reading and math at the beginning of the year. With the help of IXL, this student exceeded his end-of-year growth targets in the first semester and set new ones that will bring him close to grade-level mastery. Another student who started the year above grade level is challenging herself with advanced skills in IXL. Maggie says, "She's continued to make growth, something I don't always see in students like her. When she becomes curious about a topic we haven't learned yet, she knows she can search on IXL and learn how to do that skill."

Student progress in IXL translates to gains in the classroom and on benchmark assessments. Michael compares IXL use to scores on Evaluate, their district benchmark assessment. He says, "It's clear in looking at the data that schools and teachers who implement IXL consistently have an advantage when it comes to the benchmark. IXL allows me to dig deeply into the data so we can find those correlations to celebrate success and suggest next steps."

Rachel says, "This year, my students have shown the most growth I have ever seen on Evaluate—and it's because they are using IXL. They can see for themselves where their gaps are and what they need to do to close them." She had a number of students who demonstrated 90% or more mastery of grade-level math standards as of February, and she anticipates recommending a record number of students for pre-algebra next year in 7th grade.



Meet the Teachers



"IXL is my teaching assistant. It's like having another person in the classroom who can be working with one group of students while I am working with another."

Maggie Greenlaw, 4th-Grade Teacher, Marvin Elementary



"With IXL, nobody is left behind. So often, we're teaching only to the middle or focused on filling in gaps for students who are behind. IXL supports growth for all subgroups."

Rachel Thomas, 6th-Grade Math Teacher, Ritenour Middle School



"If you're looking for something to give teachers confidence in teaching and students confidence in learning, IXL is what you need. My students want to learn, and they have confidence in their ability to get to the next level."

Chelsea Forste, 2nd-Grade Teacher, Buder Elementary

A Model for Success at Ritenour School District

Here's how Ritenour School District is using IXL to support competency-based learning:

- Teachers use the IXL Real-Time Diagnostic to determine student learning needs and monitor progress towards individual growth targets.
- Teachers create "playlists" of IXL codes mapped to their standards. Students can work on skills at their own pace and their own level.
- IXL's Learn with an Example feature and video tutorials enable independent learning. Students can fill in gaps by working on skills recommended by the IXL Real-Time Diagnostic or challenge themselves by working on skills from higher grade levels.
- Teachers step in to provide individual assistance and small-group instruction. IXL Group Jam supports small-group instruction by allowing all students to work on the same problems at once.
- The reports in IXL Analytics allow teachers and administrators to monitor progress and identify learning needs at the individual student, small group, class, grade or school level.