



# Targeted Practice for Math Success



**Heather Swallow**

Middle School Math Teacher



Southern Aroostook  
Community School  
Regional School Unit #50



Location:  
Dyer Brook, Maine



Grades:  
PreK-12



Number of students:  
300



School characteristics:  
Small rural public school



Subjects:  
Math, English Language Arts,  
Science

## Aligning Practice and Assessment with Instruction

Heather Swallow has taught math at nearly every grade level—and IXL Math has been one of her primary tools for years. As the sole middle school math teacher for her small rural school, she now counts on IXL Math for targeted practice and assessment aligned with her daily curriculum. Students are also catching up on missing math skills or working ahead toward individual goals with their personalized Diagnostic Action Plans.

## The Challenges

Heather teaches one sixth grade, one seventh grade, and two eighth grade classes following the EngageNY curriculum, which follows a spiraling scope and sequence aligned with the Common Core State Standards. Managing lesson plans, assignments, and assessments for all three grades can be challenging. Her students also tended to be resistant to traditional homework assignments.

At the same time, many of her incoming middle school students were behind grade level in one or more core math strands or missing specific skills required to advance in the grade-level curriculum. Heather needed a way to efficiently diagnose knowledge gaps and help students catch up. Other students needed more challenges and were ready to work on more advanced skills.

Heather needed an easier way to assign and manage daily assignments, assess student mastery, and meet individual student needs.

## The Solution



IXL Math provides the targeted practice and support Heather's students need to accelerate mastery of grade-level skills and address any knowledge gaps. Heather first started using IXL Math as an elementary school teacher and later carried it to the high school level before taking her current role in middle school in 2018. "I've always pushed to make sure we still have it," she says.

With IXL Math, it's easy for Heather to assign practice aligned with her EngageNY curriculum. Students can practice as long or as little as needed to demonstrate mastery of the topic. The SmartScore (IXL's proprietary scoring system that demonstrates how well a student has mastered a skill) gives her instant insight into how well students understand the topic—no manual grading required. Heather appreciates how much time she saves as a teacher on creating, curating, managing, or grading pencil-and-paper assignments.

### Here's how Heather is using IXL Math in her middle school math classrooms:

Heather uses IXL with her middle school math students to support daily instruction. Students work on IXL Math in class three to four times per week, and aim for a SmartScore of 90 on each skill.

Heather uses the IXL Real-Time Diagnostic to collect baseline data on student mastery levels and monitor their growth over the school year. IXL provides an individualized action plan for each student based on their diagnostic data. This allows students to work independently to catch up on grade-level skills or work ahead for extra challenge.

Students update their IXL Real-Time Diagnostic monthly. They can work on skills recommended in their individualized action plan during a daily intervention/study period.

Heather also uses IXL Group Jams as a teaching tool; she can pull up the IXL skill aligned to the Engage NY lesson she is teaching that day and let students work together using the Group Jam before practicing independently. The Live Classroom tool allows her to monitor how her students are doing during practice time, so she can intervene if students are struggling.



## The Results



With IXL Math, Heather can give each one of her students exactly what they need. “I’m really seeing big jumps in personal growth for a lot of my students, and it’s all tied to how much they are using IXL” Heather says.

How IXL is transforming Heather’s classrooms:



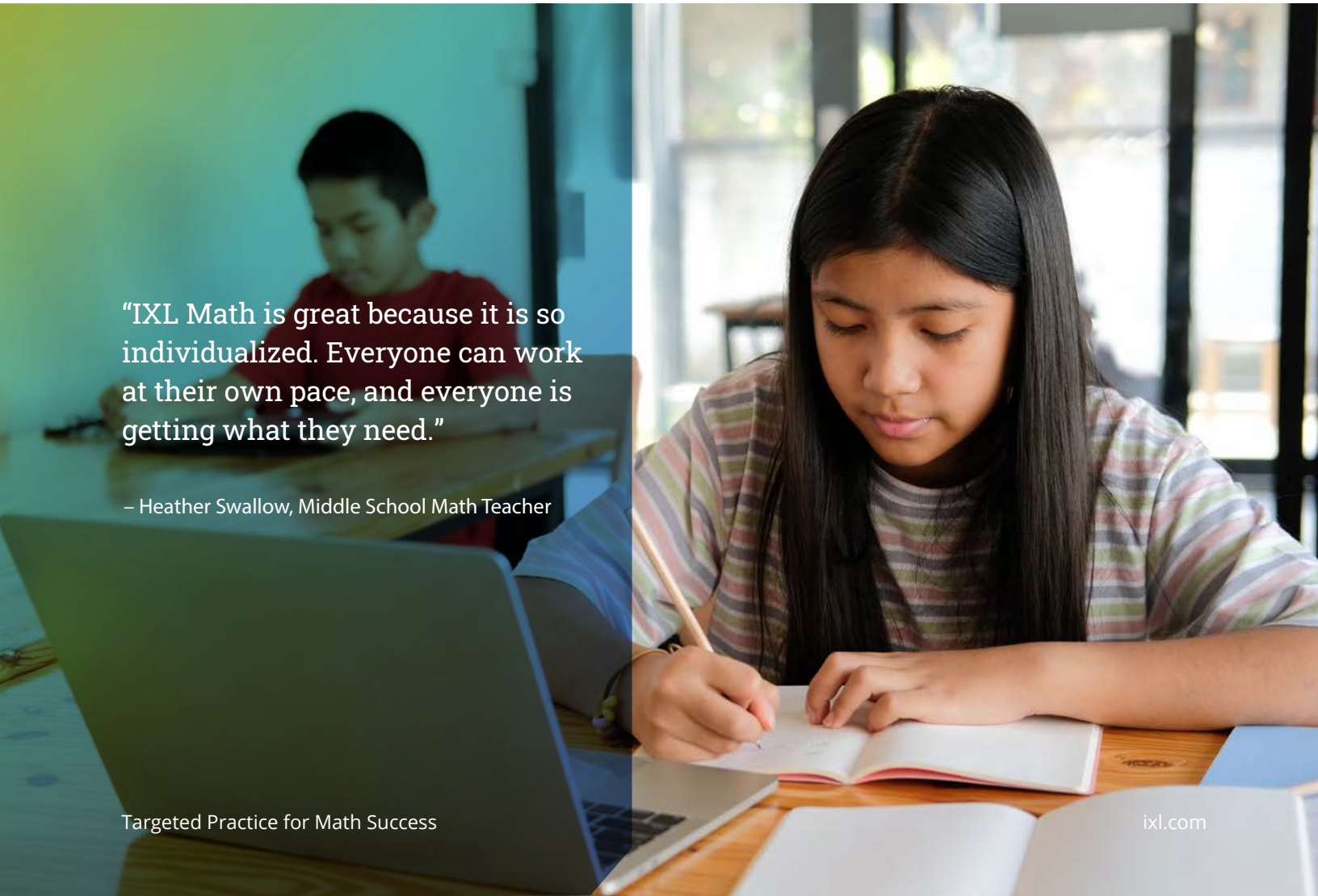
She sees a direct correlation between time spent practicing in IXL Math and the growth students achieve in the program. Growth in IXL Math is also strongly correlated with students’ NWEA benchmark scores.



Most students who started the year behind grade level had caught up or mostly caught up by the time they took the spring benchmark assessment.



Students are taking ownership of their own learning! The immediate feedback students get in IXL contributes to efficient learning and skill growth. If students are struggling to master a skill, they get a mini-lesson that explains exactly where they went wrong and what they need to do differently the next time.

A photograph of a classroom. In the foreground, a young girl with long dark hair is sitting at a desk, focused on writing in a notebook. She is wearing a striped shirt. In the background, another student is visible, also working at a desk. The room has large windows and a bright, airy atmosphere.

“IXL Math is great because it is so individualized. Everyone can work at their own pace, and everyone is getting what they need.”

– Heather Swallow, Middle School Math Teacher