

SUCCESS SPOTLIGHT

Kansas School District Improves State Math Scores by Five Percentage Points

Blue Valley School District

After their first year in a new Grades K–8 mathematics program using *i-Ready Classroom Mathematics*, Blue Valley Schools in Overland Park, Kansas saw student growth at all levels across their 30 elementary and middle schools.

Blue Valley Schools had good state test scores overall, but the student achievement gap was getting wider, and high-achieving learners weren't being challenged. "We were seeing a downward trend in our data, which meant students weren't learning as much as they had been before, and that's our number one job: to support and extend learning," said Adam Wade, director of academic programs and accountability. They needed a new instructional approach to accelerate change in their math program. With deep research, strategic professional learning, and thoughtful collaboration, Blue Valley built a program administrators, teachers, students, and parents are excited about.

STUDENTS

22K

GRADES

Pre-K–12

PRIMARY LANGUAGES

102

"We wanted a program where students were the focus, where the teacher's there to help and guide, but students are the ones finding, solving, and discovering on their own."

—Jennifer Taylor, District Coordinator for Grades K–8 Mathematics

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Rooted in Research

When Blue Valley set out to make this instructional shift, they had two priorities: They wanted the latest research on math instruction to guide them and student engagement to be at the center of their program. Before developing a curriculum and selecting a resource, they built a research review and professional learning component into their adoption cycle. Based on the [National Council of Teachers of Mathematics' *Catalyzing Change*](#) research, the Blue Valley team decided that a conceptual understanding approach would best serve their students because it emphasizes learners doing math instead of receiving math, ensuring learners are the focus with teachers as their guide.

A New Approach to Adoptions

The Blue Valley team knew it would take thoughtful planning to make this shift and enable all their math teachers to succeed. They took a measured approach by focusing on the research, building their curriculum, and selecting a resource to support it. With professional learning folded into every step of the process, Blue Valley developed a framework for success in managing this districtwide change.



Planning Strategically

Although the 2022–2023 school year was the first year using the new mathematics program in every Grades K–8 classroom, Blue Valley started with a philosophical shift well before the adoption process. They conducted professional learning on the latest research and *Catalyzing Change* book and enlisted willing and able teachers to be early adopters of these classroom practices. They also created a math cadre to lead the resource review process, consisting of three math teachers from each building. The cadre reviewed and discussed the resources available to recommend to the final two district leaders based on a rubric aligned with their new instructional goals and curriculum. Teachers then had the final say in the resource selected, which was essential to ensuring their philosophy would transition into practice.



Prioritizing Professional Learning

Ensuring strong professional learning for their teachers was a top priority for the Blue Valley team as they embarked on a new and innovative approach. They recognized that their teachers needed support to implement a conceptual-based approach in the classroom, so they began by offering optional training sessions to early adopters. Over time, more teachers joined in, resulting in a groundswell of support and practical examples to draw from. By the time they reached the adoption year, 120 teachers were trained and could serve as mentors to their peers.

To further support their teachers, they implemented a tiered professional learning schedule. The math cadre received new concepts a month ahead of the teachers, while the teachers were given a month's notice for the next module. This allowed everyone ample time to process the information, ask questions, and prepare.

In addition to their district's professional learning plans, the *i-Ready* team provided invaluable support to the teachers. They hosted workshops and worked closely with teachers to review available data and share best practices. With the math cadre, instructional coaches, and principals, each building had at least five highly trained individuals who could support others.



Building Strong Partnerships

Blue Valley attributes much of their success to collaboration with other departments, their community, and the *i-Ready* team. They thought about every team that might be impacted and devised plans to include them, such as bringing the SPED team in early to discuss how the new program can support their teachers. One of their most successful activities was family math nights, when they invited families to see the new math activities their learners would be doing and why Blue Valley was taking this approach. They created an internal marketing plan, producing dozens of Math Minutes videos, emails, and collateral to help their teams absorb the new information. Monthly check-ins with the *i-Ready* team gave project leaders a regular forum to discuss big-picture ideas and the nuts and bolts of their implementation. They describe their partnership with *i-Ready* as “unparalleled,” noting that the *i-Ready* team genuinely understood math, always had answers to questions big and small, and were empathetic and professional.

Putting the Plan into Practice

Blue Valley ultimately chose *i-Ready Classroom Mathematics* because it would deliver the necessary rigor for students, a robust personalized instruction component, and plenty of support to help teachers best utilize *i-Ready* and its data. The district built strong feedback loops with their teachers to understand how the new program was going in practice and were responsive to their needs, even adjusting their elementary scope and sequence midyear to better equip their teachers. They ensured all students using *i-Ready Personalized Instruction*, which differentiates lessons to place every student on a path to success, also had access to the core curriculum. They administered the *i-Ready Diagnostic* three times throughout the year, enabling teachers to identify which learners needed help, and their comprehensive professional learning plan meant teachers had materials ready to support.

“*i-Ready* makes it easier for us to use data with the readily available teacher resources and with the Diagnostic taking you from point A to point B. The more steps we can remove when thinking, ‘What do I do with this information?’ the more likely we are to use that information.”

—Adam Wade, Director of Academic Programs and Accountability

Teacher Reactions: “What went well this year that you’ll keep doing?”

“The learners were able to rise to the ability of *i-Ready*. I was not anticipating that. I will keep pushing learners!”

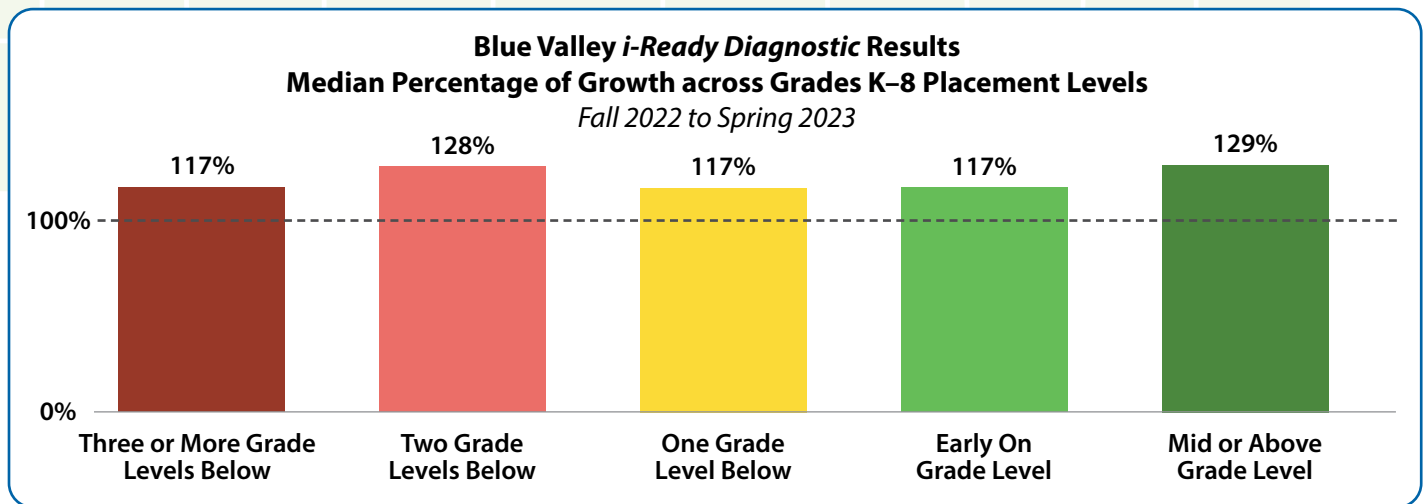
“Trusting that my students could do a lot of the higher-level questions. It did take more time, but it was awesome to see.”

“Rigor—although some of the problems were challenging, now having loved them, I feel more educated in how to implement them.”

Growth at Every Level

Blue Valley quickly saw their students succeeding in the more rigorous conceptual learning program. “We really didn’t know what to expect in the first year, but this outpaced all of our expectations,” said Jennifer Taylor, district coordinator for Grades K–8 mathematics. “The metric that floored us all was seeing the growth after the fall *i-Ready Diagnostic*—everyone grew!” Between the fall and spring Diagnostics, the data showed improvement in all student levels, with at least 117 percent median growth in every level. Blue Valley’s state test scores also jumped from 51 percent of students scoring at Level 3 or higher* to 56 percent after just one year with their new program.

Taylor and the team have been “blown away” by the positive feedback from teachers, who say they’ve grown so much as teachers and that their students are happy about math. Blue Valley attributes their success with this curriculum change to teamwork and collaboration.



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*Level 3 indicates that a student shows an effective ability to understand and use the mathematics skills and knowledge needed for Postsecondary Readiness.
https://ksreportcard.ksde.org/assessment_results.aspx?org_no=Z0029&rptType=2