IXL and MTSS: Supporting the Needs of All Students

Richardson Independent School District in Richardson, Dallas, and Garland, Texas

"IXL enables better collaboration across campuses. It allows us to see what is working and what isn't and set shared goals for our students. It is one of the tools that allows us to have those shared conversations and move forward together toward a common district vision."

Laurel Dickson,
Director of MTSS

Richardson Independent School District (RISD) implemented a Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) model across their 54 school buildings to ensure that every student has the support they need to succeed in school and beyond. They turned to IXL to align data and support across all of their campuses and provide the tailored instruction students need to maximize growth.

The Challenge: Finding a Common Language and Data to Support MTSS

As a large district with more than 39,000 students, providing systematic supports for all students is a top priority. RISD covers North Dallas, Richardson, and Garland, Texas, and has students from a diverse range of backgrounds who speak more than 70 languages.

Laurel Dickson, the Director of MTSS, was tasked with the creation and implementation of a coordinated MTSS program across the district. She works closely with Amber Lambert, the Director of Intervention and Enrichment, to put programs in place that meet the needs of all students. Laurel explains, "One of our challenges in a big district is maintaining continuity across our learning communities. Having a common language and common data across all of our campuses and feeder patterns is critical. We need to be talking about challenges and goals in the same way in order to move together toward a common vision."

In the past, they had many different assessment, instructional, and intervention programs in place at different schools. This made it difficult to compare data and evaluate program efficacy and learning needs between schools. Laurel says, "When there are multiple platforms doing similar tasks, the data you get is different—you're comparing apples and oranges. You have to do a lot of work on the back end to get any kind of meaningful data comparison." In 2019, when they decided to align support

and data collection across all of their schools, they chose IXL Math to support instruction for K-10. During the spring of 2020, the district added IXL reading when schools moved to at home learning for the remainder of the year. The addition of IXL Reading proved to be very beneficial for both students and educators.

Tailoring Instruction Within an MTSS Model

The MTSS framework has three tiers: All students receive high-quality classroom instruction (Tier 1), students who need extra support participate in targeted small-group intervention (Tier 2), and a small subset of these students receives intensive, individualized one-on-one support (Tier 3). IXL helps teachers and intervention specialists unify instruction and support across all three tiers. Laurel says, "We have implemented IXL at every campus and set common expectations for usage and data analysis. We all meet and talk about the data and set goals together."

All students use the IXL Real-Time Diagnostic to set baseline data and monitor growth throughout the school year. The diagnostic provides the data that teachers and intervention specialists need to make instructional decisions and identify students in need of additional support or enrichment.

Teachers may use IXL as part of Tier 1 instruction to introduce or reinforce a lesson and provide opportunities for students to practice the skills they are working on in class. The elementary schools all have an intervention period built in for Tier 2 and Tier 3 instruction when students work at their own level in IXL. Teachers can work with individual students and small groups during this time, knowing that all students are receiving targeted practice and instruction. Students may be working on missing skills from prior grades, continuing practice on grade-level skills, or getting additional challenge with skills from higher grades. If they move to a different school, their data and their tailored instruction go with them. Amber says, "With the mobility we see in our district, having everyone on the same platform really helps. Students can leave one campus and go to a new one and pick right up where they left off with their skills practice and their data."

Students spend about 15 minutes each week updating the diagnostic so that skill recommendations are always current. Laurel says, "Students really like that IXL is tailored to their needs, and not just a blanket 30 minutes with everyone doing the same thing. It's just the right amount of challenge, so they're not bored, and they're not frustrated. And they can take as much or as little time as they need to demonstrate mastery of a skill."

Helping All Students Connect, Learn, Grow and Succeed

IXL is helping RISD meet their vision of helping all students "connect, learn, grow and succeed." It gives teachers actionable, understandable data and tools to tailor instruction for all students within the MTSS model. Amber says, "Before, teachers just had our benchmark data. They would say, 'OK, I have all this data, but how do I address all these different needs?' Now, they have a resource they feel comfortable with that answers the question, 'how do I meet the unique needs of all my students?'"

Laurel adds, "When you have a class of 25 or more students at different levels, IXL is a relief. You're not having to make multiple lesson plans for Tier 1, 2, and 3 instruction. Teachers know that when students are on IXL, they are getting exactly what they need."

IXL is helping the district meet their goals for student growth. Laurel says that the growth shown in IXL mirrors the growth they see on their district benchmark assessments. "When we get together and look at the data, we talk about 'The IXL Effect.' When students are keeping up with the diagnostic and working on their recommended skills, we see the growth."

A Model for Success at Richardson ISD

Here's how teachers and administrators are using IXL across Richardson ISD:

- IXL Math and IXL English Language Arts are used by all students in grades K-10.

- Students complete the IXL Real-Time Diagnostic at the beginning of the school year. They spend a few minutes each week keeping the diagnostic current.

- Teachers may use IXL to introduce or reinforce a lesson during Tier 1 instruction. Students can spend as much or as little time as they need practicing assigned skills.

- Most students use IXL during an intervention and enrichment period. Students can work on their personalized action plans in IXL while teachers provide targeted small-group or individualized intervention to other students.

- IXL supports both students needing intervention and those needing additional enrichment. All students can continue to grow, whether they are working below, on, or ahead of grade level.

- Teachers use the reports in IXL Analytics to plan instruction and identify students in need of Tier 2 or 3 support. The data allows teachers and intervention specialists to work together on a unified learning plan for all three tiers of instruction.

- IXL is also used to facilitate data-driven team discussions and cross-campus collaboration.