

Moving Beyond the Standard Curriculum with IXL Math

ROSCOMMON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, ROSCOMMON, MICHIGAN



Roscommon is a rural district in the heart of northern Michigan, surrounded by lakes and national park land. Second grade teacher Scott Mayes turned to IXL in 2012 to give his students extra support in math and expose them to concepts that were not yet covered in their standardized math curriculum.

A Standardized Curriculum, with Unstandardized Students

Scott's district uses a highly standardized curriculum that is comprehensive, but does not allow much room for deviation from the daily plan. Differentiating for students with non-standardized needs was difficult. In addition, some concepts covered on state assessments and district benchmarks were not addressed by the curriculum until after the tests were over.

Scott says, "Without IXL, differentiation was a real struggle. I had to find time after the day's assignment was done to figure out who needs help in what and then how to go about doing it. I don't have any aides in my classroom, so it was all up to me. I had to have different activities at different levels, determine who needed each one and then grade them all. It was a lot of work."

"With IXL, my kids are really pushing each other to learn more. Kids who are working ahead like to show the class what they are doing, and then everyone gets excited and wants to try it, too. It's given me an opportunity to enrich my instruction with topics that have not yet come up in the curriculum."

- Scott Mayes, 2nd Grade Teacher

Differentiation Made Easy with IXL

In 2012, Roscommon Elementary School purchased a school license for IXL Math. Since then, Scott has become an enthusiastic convert. “It’s such an easy tool for differentiating between ability levels. Students who are struggling to master what I’ve taught that day can get extra practice, and students who need more of a challenge can move ahead,” he explains.

Scott’s class accesses IXL at school each day after their whole-class math lesson using a class set of iPads. Scott sometimes assigns specific skills to students who are struggling to master the district curriculum. Students who do not need remediation are allowed to explore freely and work ahead at their own pace.

His students especially benefit from the immediate feedback and detailed explanations provided when they get an answer wrong. Scott says, “It gives them a different way of looking at the same topic that I am covering in class. Every student learns differently, and the way I am teaching it up on the board may not reach everyone. The more ways they have to look at the same task, the better.”

A Measurable Impact on Scores—and Enthusiasm!

Daily practice with IXL has paid dividends for Scott’s students. “I’ve really seen strong gains since implementing IXL. My class is consistently above average for student growth in math on our district benchmarks.” On their most recent NWEA benchmark assessment, 83% of Scott’s class achieved their growth targets—the highest score in their grade level.

Scott attributes these results to the additional support, practice, and enrichment offered by IXL. “It accelerates their learning,” he says. With IXL, students are able to go above and beyond the scripted curriculum and get exposure to math concepts that have not yet been covered in class. This gives students a leg up on benchmark assessments and standardized tests. For example, all of his students completed the first few multiplication lessons on IXL well before the topic was covered in their textbook. This familiarity allowed them to answer some additional questions on the district benchmark and provided a strong foundation when they were ready to cover the material as a class.

Case Study

Perhaps the biggest change Scott has seen is in students' attitude and enthusiasm for math. His students love to show him the trophies and awards they earn in IXL. He supplements the IXL awards with a weekly drawing for small prizes. Students earn coupons for the drawing by getting a SmartScore (IXL's proprietary scoring system that measures how well a student understands a skill) of 100 on IXL skills. "They really love working in IXL and are always excited to show me when they have earned their 100," he says.

But the students' motivation goes beyond the prizes. Scott says his students are excited by the learning itself and love showing off what they have learned to the class. "It's exciting for them when they can show the class how to do something that I haven't taught yet," he says. That love of learning is sure to carry his students far.

A Model for Success at Roscommon Elementary School

Here's how 2nd grade teacher Scott Mayes is using IXL in his classroom:

- Students receive daily whole-class math instruction using a district-selected scripted curriculum.
- When they are finished with the day's assigned math lesson, students access IXL on one of the class iPads.
- If students are struggling, Scott will assign them an IXL skill related to the day's curriculum or their areas of need. Students who have mastered the assigned curriculum are free to work ahead and explore IXL skills at their own pace.
- On average, students spend about 50 minutes per week (10 minutes per day) working in IXL during class time.
- Scott's students get points for demonstrating mastery on IXL lessons, which they can redeem for coupons weekly. Each Friday, Scott uses the coupons in a drawing for fun prizes he purchases at a dollar store.