

RTI Made Easy with IXL

THORP ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, SCHOOL DISTRICT OF THORP, WISCONSIN



Thorp Elementary is nestled in a rural community of 1,000 residents in northern Wisconsin. Thorp serves 40 students per grade level, and many of these students are high-need, with 60 percent of students qualifying for free and reduced lunch and a wide range of ability levels in each grade. The school implemented IXL in 2013 to support their Response to Intervention (RTI) program. Third grade teacher Alyece West was one of the first to embrace IXL for both regular classroom instruction and RTI.

Responding to the RTI Challenge

Thorp Elementary uses an RTI model to support students who are behind grade level in reading and language arts. The school receives extra funding from the state in addition to Title I funding to help them keep class sizes low and provide their students with additional academic support. Students are divided into Tier I, Tier II, and Tier III intervention groups based on their results on the STAR reading assessment. During intervention time, students from all three 3rd grade classes are divided by tier among the three regular 3rd grade teachers and two intervention teachers.

Alyece's Tier II group has 10 students. Typically, she works with groups of three to five students for direct instruction while the others spend time practicing specific skills. Before the district adopted IXL, it was difficult to keep students on task and engaged during their independent work time. Alyece and her colleagues needed a more meaningful and productive solution that would support independent learning during small group rotations. "We needed a way to keep them accountable for their learning when they are not working directly with a teacher," Alyece explains. "Without a program like IXL, classroom management in an RTI model can be a real challenge."

Case Study

“There are never complaints when it is IXL time. The students are great about hopping right on and doing what they need to do, and they really enjoy doing it.”

-Alyece West, 3rd Grade Teacher, Thorp Elementary School

The IXL Answer

Alyece began using IXL Language Arts to reinforce and extend the lessons in her basal reading program. Each week, she introduces a specific lesson such as possessives or opinion writing. She assigns skills on IXL that align with her lesson plans. “It really lines up well with my curriculum,” she says. “It’s easy to find the skills on IXL that coordinate with what I am teaching.” Sometimes, she also projects IXL on an interactive whiteboard for whole-class instruction, and students take turns answering questions in front of the class.

During intervention periods, students complete their IXL assignments using iPads or Chromebooks. Students who are struggling can work on their specific areas of need and reinforce skills from lower grade levels. “Our basal program can be a little overwhelming for many of our students,” says Alyece. “With IXL, they can really focus on those areas where they need support.” While they do not have an RTI program for math, Alyece also uses IXL Math for whole-class instruction and individual math practice. IXL helps Alyece scaffold her math instruction and address individual learning needs. “It’s easy to go up or down a grade level to help students catch up on skills they missed or work ahead for more challenge,” she says.

Alyece uses the real-time reports from IXL Analytics to monitor what students are working on and make sure they are staying on track. She also uses IXL Analytics to see where her students need extra practice or additional direct instruction. The Trouble Spots report helps her organize her Tier II intervention groups and decide what to work on in her small group instruction. She sends the reports to her principal to keep him informed of student progress. Alyece and her colleagues are also using the IXL reports to coordinate instruction and monitor learning trends across grade levels.

Case Study

Better Engagement and Steady Improvement

Reaction from the students has been overwhelmingly positive. Alyece says her students love earning prizes on IXL and watching their SmartScores (IXL's proprietary scoring system that measures how well a student understands a skill) improve. "My students are really competitive," Alyece says. "They love to see how many skills they have mastered and how much time they have spent on the program." High scorers are announced each week on the school announcements. On Fridays, students who have mastered their math skills have an opportunity to play math games.

IXL has become an important part of the RTI program at Thorp Elementary. Students are staying more engaged and getting more value out of their independent work time during their intervention period. Immediate feedback and step-by-step explanations help students work more independently.

Best of all, students are making real progress—Alyece has seen improvement on both state testing and the STAR reading assessments. She attributes the students' progress in large part to the additional practice and support they are getting on IXL.

A Model for Success at Thorp Elementary School

Here's how 3rd grade teacher Alyece West is using IXL in her classroom:

- Students access IXL in the classroom using iPads or Chromebooks during independent work time.
- For reading, students use IXL in small group rotations as part of the school's Response to Intervention (RTI) program.
- Students use IXL Math during regular classroom time.
- Some students use IXL before class, in free periods, or at home for extra practice.
- Alyece uses the reports in IXL Analytics to monitor progress towards standards and plan direct instruction for her RTI small groups.
- Alyece talks to students individually about their progress in IXL and rewards students who have completed their IXL work with special activities on Fridays.
- Teachers review the IXL reports together in their Professional Learning Communities to analyze trends across grade levels and coordinate instruction.