



A Special Education Report

Marietta City Schools See Impressive Gains with iLearn Math

Increasing math achievement levels is a challenge at virtually every school, especially with **special education** students. The Marietta City School System has found a solution to this challenge with iLearn Math, a teacher-friendly Web-enabled system that provides computer-optimized instruction for every student.

A suburb of Atlanta, Marietta City has 7,500 students in its school system. Approximately 1,100 students are in special education, and 80 percent are economically disadvantaged.

Says Mary Aksentis, Director of Special Education, "One of our high school teachers was concerned that so many special education students coming from the middle school had gaps in their learning. He felt he was not able to educate them in the best way, because it took so much time to individualize for them. He approached us saying he had heard about iLearn math at a conference. We were impressed because it was not a grade-level based program, but a skills-based program."

Advantages over textbook based instruction

The system purchased iLearn Math for Marietta Sixth Grade Academy, Marietta Middle School, and Marietta High, and saw immediate benefits. Says Ms. Aksentis, "What we found with iLearn is that teachers can focus on the particular skills that students need, [whereas] the traditional textbook never allowed students to catch up."

Rodney Ulmer, a seventh-grade teacher at Marietta Middle School agrees. "In the [traditional] classroom, it's very difficult to monitor progress for everyone. Working from the text, I felt overwhelmed trying to get around to each student and give them the help that they needed. iLearn frees me to spend more time with one student or a couple of students with specific problems."

Students respond to computer-optimized learning

iLearn Math's computer-optimized instruction greatly appeals to students. Says Mr. Ulmer, "I've had numerous students who in a year have gained so much confidence. They say, 'Mr. Ulmer, I passed a section, I passed a test!' Never, in any other circumstance, have I seen them care so much about passing or trying to repair errors or mistakes."

He offers an anecdote. "There was one student who was having academic and behavior difficulty in his former

math class. We saw great progress by the end of the year. He actually completed the iLearn Math program. In large part, he was helped by the individualized nature of the program. I think in his former class he had been beaten down by not seeing much accomplished. But with iLearn Math, he was seeing immediate feedback. He saw he had a second chance."

Teachers save valuable time

"Teachers see the program as very easy to implement," says Ms. Aksentis. "The assessments are already built in, and they're not having to grade papers all the time. Since students move at their own pace, it doesn't require teachers to do 10 or 12 individual lesson plans every day. Teachers are able to track students weekly and really pay attention to who is moving quickly. If a student is struggling they can stop and help them more."

Benefits for administrators

Ms. Aksentis adds that iLearn offers advantages to administrators, as well. "What I like in terms of accountability is that you don't have to wait to the end of the year to find out if students are doing better. If a student is not progressing, you can stop and reevaluate the reasons they aren't doing as well...before we get to the end of the year test results."

Significant achievement gains

According to Ms. Aksentis, "the majority of the students- 88 to 90 percent- made at least two years growth in one year."

Says Andre Touchard, Eighth Grade Principal at Marietta Middle School, "We saw gains up to two and three grade levels in a year. The program was so individualized in the way it captured all the needs of the students. Throughout the year, we really saw gains in kids that had floundered for so many years before."

The last words belong to Mr. Ulmer. "This year I had a total of 32-33 students. Out of those, at least half were able to complete the iLearn Pre-Algebra program and move on to Algebra. Students who didn't complete the entire program still made great progress. I feel great because of that. You see the difference. You see the growth. You see the confidence."