



OCTOBER 2016

A Midwestern District Moves the Needle

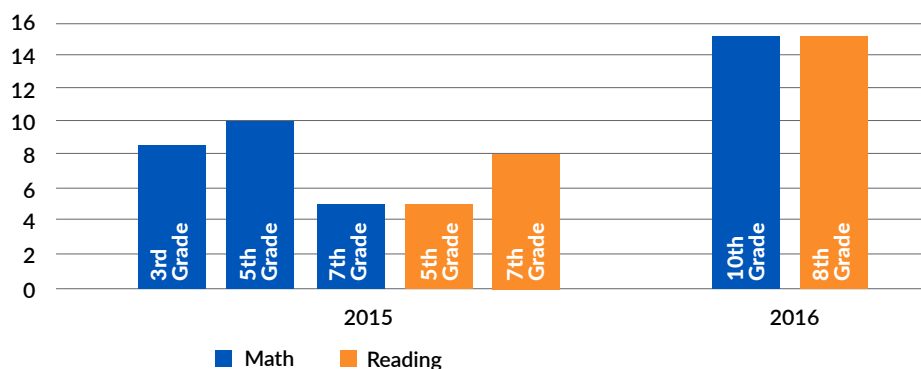
CASE STUDY

**DEMONSTRATION
SCHOOL FOR RIGOR**

By Learning Sciences International

Quick View

State assessment data comparison



A Minnesota School District Moves the Needle

Princeton Public Schools had been working on school improvement for two years and, although elementary students were performing well, middle and high schools were still falling short. Superintendent Dr. Julia Espe could see that teachers and principals needed guidance in planning and delivering rigorous instruction, so she partnered with Learning Sciences International on a Demonstration Schools for Rigor initiative.

As a Demonstration District, Princeton schools would model the change process at all levels, but first the hard work had to be done. Throughout the year:

- Teachers improved planning, collaboration, and classroom pedagogy
- PLCs created assessments, planned units, and mapped out lessons
- Administrators scheduled time for planning and visiting classrooms
- All worked together to analyze formative classroom data
- Administrators and coaches attended Leadership Academies

Princeton Success Now Recognized Throughout the State

The initiative was an enormous success. After one year, third graders had increased their reading scores by 9%, fifth graders by 10%, and seventh graders by 5%. Fifth graders raised their math scores by 5% and seventh graders by 8%. And the good news kept coming. State assessment data for 2016 showed double-digit growth for tenth-grade reading and eighth-grade math.

The district has gained notoriety throughout Minnesota for its innovative and effective approach to school improvement. A popular local program, Life to the Max, even featured Princeton’s Demonstration Schools on an episode aired in May, 2015.

“We are making progress this year that I have never seen in my whole career. I’ve been in many districts and seen many programs, but I cannot believe what I’ve seen this year. Even so early in their training with this instructional model.”
- Princeton Public Schools Superintendent Dr. Julia Espe

Challenges

Middle and high schools were falling behind on achievement

Overcoming a resistance to second-order change

Teachers needed help increasing instructional rigor

The Approach

Training on the *Essentials for Achieving Rigor* instructional model of instruction

Leadership academies for school and district leaders

Groundwork and support for a cultural shift to embrace change

The District Is Now...

Showing substantial growth on state assessment scores

Improving reading and math outcomes for middle and high school students

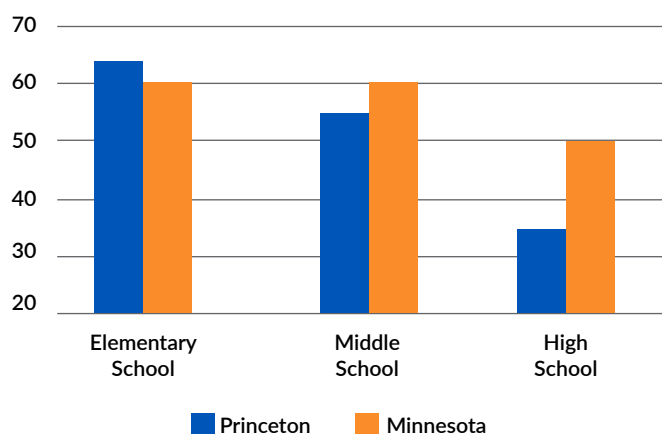
Modeling its progress for other area districts to visit, observe, and replicate

A Midwestern District Moves the Needle

When Dr. Julia Espe took over as Superintendent of Princeton Public Schools, the student achievement numbers indicated room for improvement. Although the elementary school was performing slightly above the statewide average for math and reading in 2013-14, the middle and high schools were falling short.

Having spent 15 years in school leadership, Espe realized the teachers and principals needed guidance in planning and delivering rigorous instruction and determining the impact of instruction on student learning. She decided to partner with Learning Sciences International on a *Demonstration Schools for Rigor* initiative for her district. Princeton schools were among the 17 Minnesota schools participating as Demonstration Schools that year.

2013-2014 Math Proficiency at Princeton Public Schools



PRINCETON SCHOOL DISTRICT DEMOGRAPHICS

Student Population:	3,269
Number of Schools:	4
Number of Teachers:	189
Percent Eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch:	25%

Princeton Schools	Grades	Students	Teachers
North Elementary	PK-2	756	48
South Elementary	3-5	709	43
Middle School	6-8	780	39
Senior High School	9-12	1,024	59

Source: NCES

“We have to grow. We expect kids to come into our classrooms and be ready to learn. We expect them to be all in,” says Espe. “Because if we’re not all in, if we don’t have that growth mindset, then we’re not going to move the needle.”

The District had already been working on school improvement for two years. Teachers and administrators were familiar with many of the essential pedagogical strategies in the Marzano Center Essentials for Achieving Rigor model. They had trained on Learning Sciences Marzano Teacher and School Leader Evaluation Models and attended Leading Forward Leadership Academies to support that implementation. Espe knew the Demonstration Schools initiative would build on that learning.

In a Demonstration School for Rigor, all teachers plan and deliver lessons that require all students to learn complex content while working at increasing levels of autonomy as they take ownership of their learning.

“We have to grow. We expect kids to come into our classrooms and be ready to learn. We expect them to be all in,” says Espe. “Because if we’re not all in, if we don’t have that growth mindset, then we’re not going to move the needle.”

The Initiative

Princeton set forth with preparations to function as a Demonstration District, where its schools would model the change process at elementary, middle, and high school levels. The initiative was comprised of three pillars:

1. *Marzano Center Essentials for Achieving Rigor*, an evidence-based model of instruction that sparks rigorous, standards-aligned pedagogy
2. *Leadership Academies* for school and district administrators to ensure clear and aligned leadership objectives in a tightly coupled system

3. Groundwork and support for a cultural shift to embrace second-order change and the growth mindset needed for deep, sustained results

Teachers worked to improve planning, collaboration, classroom pedagogy, and reflection. Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) were devoted to collaboratively creating goals and scales, planning units aligned to standards, mapping out lessons, and creating common assessments. Administrators scheduled time for planning and visiting classrooms. All worked together to analyze formative classroom data and shift instructional strategies as necessary. Espe and her principals, assistant principals, and teacher coaches also received intensive support through Learning Sciences Marzano Center Leadership Academies.

“We are making progress this year that I have never seen in my whole career.”

The progress became evident very early on. As Espe toured classrooms, she saw that teachers were regularly using formative assessment strategies to track student learning and make immediate shifts in instruction. Students were collaborating, demonstrating their knowledge, and measuring their own progress. The initiative was working.

“We are making progress this year that I have never seen in my whole career,” says Espe. I’ve been in many districts and seen many programs, but I cannot believe what I’ve seen this year. Even so early in their training with this instructional model.”

Results

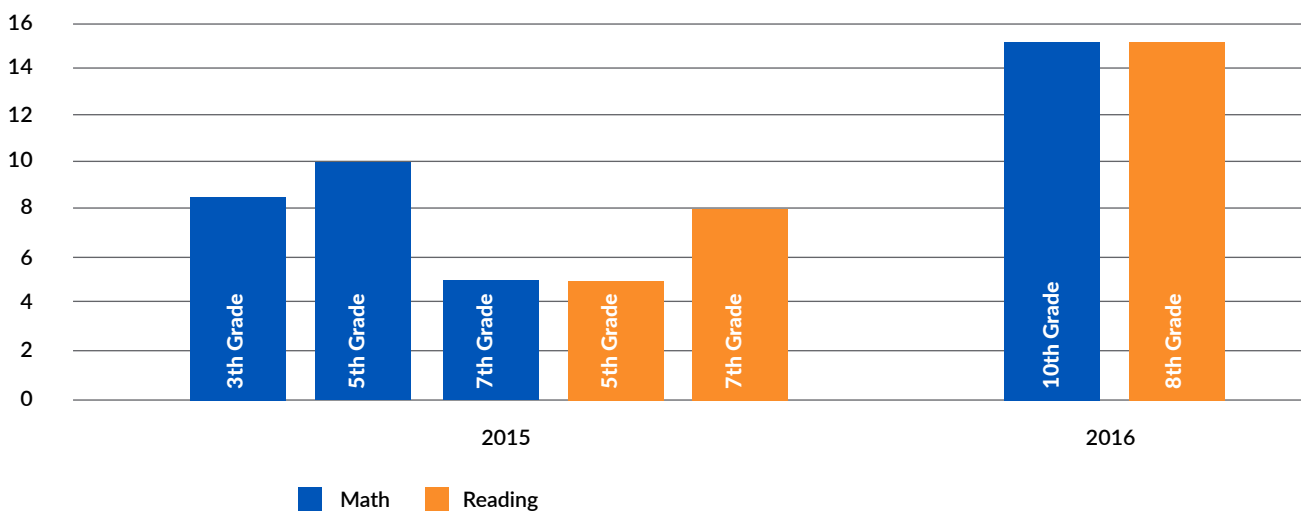
At the end of 2015, Princeton received fantastic news. Third graders in the district had increased their reading scores by 9%, fifth graders by 10%, and seventh graders by 5%. There were also promising gains in math. Fifth graders had improved their math scores by 5% and seventh graders by 8%.

And the progress continued. State assessment data for 2016 shows double-digit growth for tenth-grade reading (an increase of 15.3%) and eighth-grade math (an increase of 14.6%).

The Demonstration School initiative definitely paid off for students in the Princeton School District. These schools have demonstrated a readiness for accelerated transformation of leadership, teaching, and learning, and may now become resources for the entire state and beyond as models of high-quality leadership and instruction. Demonstration Schools for Rigor

The Demonstration Schools for Rigor initiative develops model schools across the United States that function as learning laboratories and demonstration sites, places where other educators can visit to see rigorous teaching and learning in action. With a focused alignment of leadership development, coaching, and technology supports, Demonstration Schools have become the model for innovations in 21st century school improvement.

State assessment data comparison



To learn more about **Demonstration Schools**
for Rigor, call us at **877.411.7114** or
visit us online at **LearningSciences.com**

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