



How Two Michigan Administrators Closed the Achievement Gap

CASE STUDY

**Marzano Center Essentials
for Achieving Rigor**

By LSI Marzano Center

Quick View



Closing Critical Gaps With Essentials for Achieving Rigor

Although Kingsley Area Schools had seen upticks in student achievement after implementing the *Marzano Teacher Evaluation Model*, the gap between the highest and lowest achieving students at the middle school was wider than in most Michigan schools. For that reason, Kingsley Middle School was designated a Focus School.

After examining data and finding that teachers needed help increasing instructional rigor, Kingsley administrators decided to implement the *Marzano Center Essentials for Achieving Rigor* model of instruction. The training included training and coaching on:

- Research-based instructional strategies to increase rigor
- Standards-based planning and peer collaboration
- Improving the conditions for learning
- Using criteria for success supported by student evidence
- Leveraging real-time data for reflection and action
- Helping students build autonomy and own their learning

Substantial Gains After One Year of Essentials

At the end of the year, Kingsley was already seeing improvement. In comparison to other Michigan students, Kingsley showed gains in both ELA and math. Their ELA scores were 14% higher than they had been the previous year and their math scores were about 6% higher. And the district had another great accomplishment to celebrate: Kingsley Middle School was taken off the Focus Schools list.

The *Essentials for Achieving Rigor* helped Kingsley Middle School get back on a path to whole-school success very quickly. Learn more about how this effective, research-based instructional model is changing the trajectory for other schools throughout the United States.

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- Kingsley Area Schools
Superintendent Keith Smith

Challenges

Large achievement gap put middle school on Focus list

Teachers needed guidance to increase classroom rigor

Many staff members were resistant to change

The Approach

Deep training on Essentials for Achieving Rigor

Ongoing implementation of the Marzano Teacher Evaluation Model

Coaching and support for teachers and school leaders

Significant Progress

Middle school removed from Focus Schools list

ELA and math growth scores improved significantly

Math and ELA scores were higher than they had been the previous year

KINGSLEY AREA SCHOOLS DEMOGRAPHICS

Student Population:	1,454
Number of Schools:	3
Number of Teachers:	78
Percent Economically Disadvantage:	42%

Source: MI School Data

At Michigan’s Kingsley Middle School, students were performing at high levels. The district had been implementing the Marzano Teacher Evaluation Model, and leaders were improving their ability to accurately determine teacher effectiveness in each classroom. Many schools in the district were already seeing overall increases in student achievement.

But Kingsley Area Middle School had a unique problem. Although nearly half of its lowest-performing students scored as proficient on the state assessment, the gap between them and the highest achievers was much greater than in the vast majority of Michigan schools. As a result, Kingsley Middle was identified as a *Focus School*.

Principal Vaughn White and Kingsley Area Schools Superintendent Keith Smith looked at the data and determined that, to close the achievement gap at Kingsley Middle School, educators had to increase instructional rigor in their classrooms. To do that, they needed training, coaching, and practice on instructional strategies that would require students to tackle cognitively complex tasks—to deepen students’ understanding so they could apply their knowledge to authentic, real-world problems.

The school decided to implement the Marzano Center Essentials for Achieving Rigor, a model of instruction designed to do all of these things.

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Rigor Doesn't Mean Working Harder

Many staff members were understandably hesitant about stepping into the unknown. It was hard to see the full picture at the beginning of the process, and teachers didn't want to attend training on topics they thought they had already mastered. What they were doing looked good and was getting results. But as they started to feel the effects of the support structures extending from the model, they became noticeably clearer and more intentional in their classrooms.

"Sure, we can see the research proving it is best practice, but it's still unsettling to change something that is, for the most part, working" explains Smith. "I'm really glad we took this step because undoubtedly, our teaching and student learning has improved as a direct result of it."

And a whole new perspective about implementation had emerged. "After the first session, teachers were eager to attend the professional development because they understood the value of it," says Smith. "This process has really opened up the building to a collaborative culture. Teachers are very proud of their teaching and excited to share it with others."

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The Initiative

Staff members took part in intensive training on the Marzano Center Essentials for Achieving Rigor. LSI and Dr. Robert J. Marzano developed this model of instruction to help teachers build expertise on strategies that are the most likely to give students the higher-order thinking skills they need to master rigorous standards. The training included training and coaching on:

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The RigorWalk Process

Periodic *RigorWalks*—diagnostic walkthroughs the school leadership team conducted with LSI expert consultants—also provided insight and actionable data to measure the level of rigor in each classroom, as well as the progress each teacher was making throughout the year.

Smith says he was humbled by the school's first RigorWalk. "After visiting 26 classrooms, it was clear that we weren't expecting or allowing for much rigor from our students. In some respects, we were getting in the way of rigor. There were many opportunities to extend the rigor of a lesson that frankly were not being capitalized on."

Vaughn agrees. "As an administrator, I believe teachers did not have a fundamental understanding of rigor. In fact, I might say that the word gave most of us a lot of concern as it related to harder, more intense work. We were relieved to find out that rigor doesn't mean harder, but is related to merging of complex thinking and autonomy."

"I'm seeing a lot more participation in class, a lot more [students] asking questions if they don't know something. They know I'm checking into what they know. It's been very positive for me in the classroom. I've grown, and I know they have, too."

Results

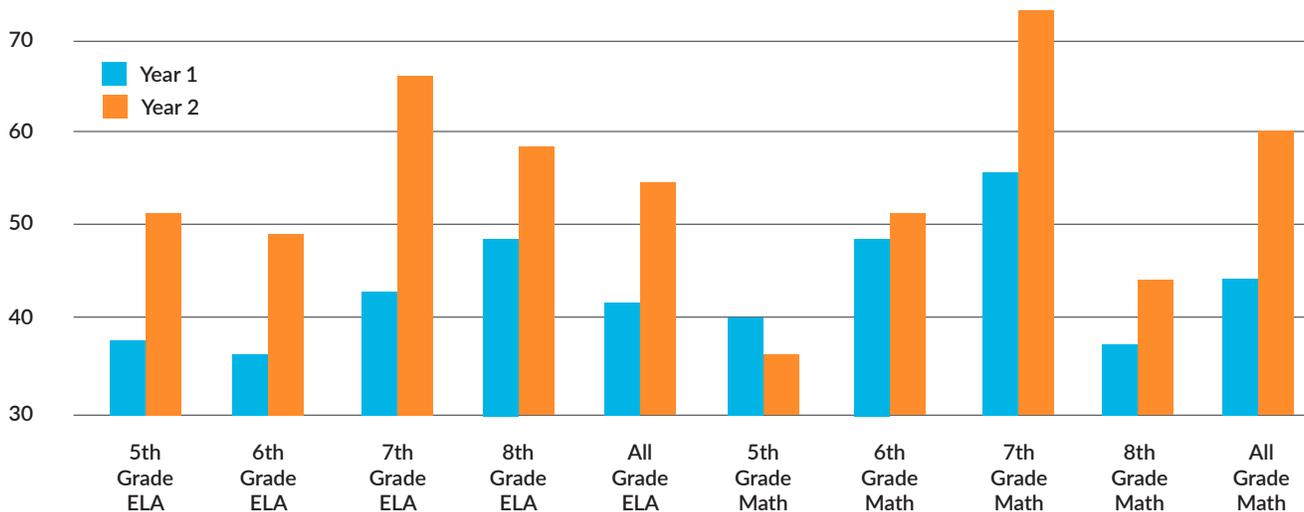
At the end of the year, Kingsley was already seeing improvement. In comparison to other Michigan students, Kingsley showed gains in both ELA and math. Their ELA scores were 14% higher than they had been the previous year and their math scores were about 6% higher.

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“The Essentials training allowed us to close the achievement gap between our top and bottom achieving students in very short order,” says Smith.

“While we had very good teachers engaged in what appeared to be the right work, we couldn’t get there ourselves. The training went back and cleaned up things that we understood and kind of were doing but missed the mark slightly. Small changes have had tremendous results.”

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Overall Student Growth Percentiles (SGPs) rose dramatically for Kingsley Middle School students.

To learn more about Marzano Center Essentials for Achieving Rigor call us at 800.979.3316 or visit us at MarzanoCenter.com