

Goochland County Public Schools, VA



A Virginia district embraces data to help the students who need it the most

Goochland County is nestled just outside of Richmond, Virginia. With bucolic landscapes up close and the Blue Ridge Mountains off in the distance, this farming community offers small-town living and easy access to the city. “It’s the best of both worlds,” says Sean Campbell, coordinator of student data for Goochland County Public Schools.

Goochland has long been a study of contrasts, with some parts of the county boasting multiple helipads while others lack basic indoor plumbing. The school district is its shining star, achieving high marks on state tests consistently. Administrators could have easily told themselves they were doing everything right. But they thought they could do even better, and they wanted to catch the kids who were falling through the cracks. Their mission? To maximize the potential of every learner.

Digging into the data

While Goochland schools have a history of high performance on state assessments, district administrators believe that you don’t get a complete picture of student learning with achievement measures alone. So in 2013, the district developed the Balanced Assessment Project, which prioritizes individual student growth over traditional achievement measures. That’s also when they brought in MAP® Growth™ and MAP® Skills™ to start backing their beliefs with data.

“We were all in,” says Sean. “We were one of the first counties in Virginia that really embraced MAP assessment data. We wanted to find out what we can do that is better for our students and the families we serve.”

To create an equitable learning environment for all students, Goochland uses MAP data to find—and close—any gaps. For example, before bringing in MAP they could see that many economically disadvantaged students and students with disabilities were failing state assessments. Once they started building up data, they spotted a trend: students in these groups consistently showed increased growth once they hit grades 3–6, and they ended up growing at a greater rate than the average student.

This insight helped uncover the key issue: these kids were coming into kindergarten with weaker skillsets than their peers. Understanding the cause helped administrators shift their perspective away from the mindset that these kids were failing—and that they were failing these kids. This shift, along with the slow but steady improvements in math and reading they’re seeing in the data for these groups, keeps educators focused on the positive impact they’re having as they continue to introduce solutions like bolstering the preschool program and partnering with Head Start to create more opportunities for early learning.

“We have embraced, wholeheartedly, this notion of growth, and growth over achievement. Because if you’re focusing on growth, achievement comes naturally.”

Sean Campbell, coordinator of student data
Goochland County Public Schools, Goochland, VA

Data that drives discussions

MAP data guides conversations about individual students, too. Every quarter, Goochland’s principals and executive leadership team get together to discuss what they’re seeing. Because MAP Growth is an interim assessment given throughout the year, they can easily identify any regression from fall to winter to spring and then dig down to the individual level, using all the information they have about that child. Maybe the family is going through a divorce, or there are signs of a learning disability. “MAP data helps us shine a flashlight on those areas,” explains Sean. “Can the school counselor become involved to help offer a social-emotional component? What kind of resources, what kind of intervention does this child need to help them be successful?”

Another recent area of focus has been summer regression. “You see this wonderful growth between fall and spring, and then you see that slide, that summer slide,” Sean laments. “It almost looks like a lightning bolt.”

Analyzing the data across several years helped determine which groups were most affected, leading to efforts like providing meals over the summer, offering books to read during the break, and hiring a family engagement coordinator who works with children at risk because of socioeconomic status. “Last summer was our first summer where we really dove in deep to concentrate on those kids, and we were just at the point of saying, ‘Okay, let’s see what the data shows us,’” recalls Sean. And then COVID-19 hit.

Tools to take on an uncertain future

The district had two days to throw a plan together before schools closed down due to the pandemic and, like the rest of the world, they’re facing a lot of unknowns. But Sean finds comfort in the fact that they’ll have data to guide them through the uncertainty. “Fall is going to be interesting,” he muses. “I know there are going to be gaps when we reconvene. I’m looking forward to seeing how we unpack that data, so we can identify those gaps and make targeted instruction for those kids.”

Sean’s attitude reflects the district’s overall spirit. Going all in on the data has resulted in a culture of continuous improvement at Goochland, as well as a preference for proactivity. “That’s a nice place to be,” says Sean. “We have embraced, wholeheartedly, this notion of growth, and growth over achievement. Because if you’re focusing on growth, achievement comes naturally.”



District snapshot

GOOCHLAND, VA



STUDENTS

2,625

ECONOMIC MARKERS

26.15%

OF STUDENTS QUALIFY FOR
FREE OR REDUCED-PRICE LUNCH

DEMOGRAPHICS

13.5%

OF STUDENTS ARE STUDENTS
WITH DISABILITIES

PRODUCT USE

IMPLEMENTED MAP GROWTH
AND MAP SKILLS IN

2013

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