RIVET EDUCATION

The Power of Dynamic Professional Learning to Launch a New Curriculum

A Wisconsin Story

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Rivet Education visited Mount Horeb Area School District (MHASD) in southern Wisconsin in February 2022 to observe the implementation of its new math curriculum—Bridges of Mathematics—and how its partnership with local professional learning provider Cooperative Educational Service Agency 2 (CESA 2) was supporting its work. Rivet was particularly interested in learning from this partnership, given that CESA 2 is a professional learning partner featured in the Wisconsin Professional Learning Partner Guide. Similar to Rivet's national Professional Learning Partner Guide (PLPG), this customized state-level version, created by Rivet, helps Wisconsin school and district leaders quickly identify organizations that specialize in providing high-quality, curriculum-based professional learning.

Over the course of two days, Rivet's team observed multiple classrooms, sat in on model lessons and coaching sessions, and interviewed several teachers and students. What we saw is an innovative approach to launching and supporting a high-quality curriculum through the use of dynamic, job-embedded high-quality professional learning that is already showing early signs of success. MHASD's model, which relies heavily on peer-to-peer coaching and in-the-moment, responsive professional learning, has increased teacher collaboration and confidence and grown students' beliefs in their ability to succeed in math.

This case study highlights key components of the partnership between MHASD and CESA 2—a powerful model for how an outside expert can serve as an extension of a district's professional learning team to ensure that all teachers within the system have the necessary tools and support to skillfully launch high-quality instructional materials.

A Commitment to High-Quality Instructional Materials in Wisconsin

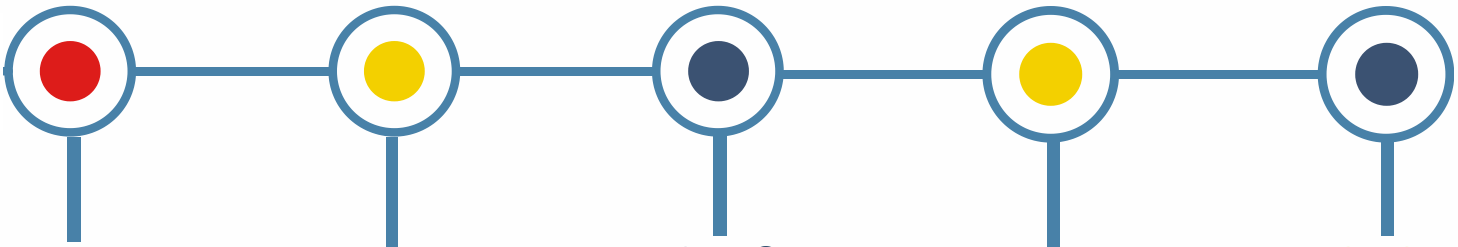
Across the country, too few students leave their K–12 experiences equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to succeed. A key contributing factor in this crisis is that many students spend too little classroom time on meaningful work. Instead, they spend time working on assignments that ask little of them and do not reflect grade-level expectations. [1]

This is not due to a lack of effort on the part of teachers, schools, and school systems. Rather, school and school system leaders often struggle to pinpoint the strategies necessary to quickly impact students' instructional experience at scale. However, an increasing body of research shows that students learn more when teachers use high-quality instructional materials (HQIM). [2] Additional research shows that these improvements in learning can be greatly enhanced if the instructional materials are paired with high-quality professional learning. [3]

With this research in mind, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) made a commitment in 2017 to begin scaling the use of HQIM across the state. Recognizing that it alone could not support school districts in the adoption and implementation of HQIM, DPI began working with CESAs in 2019 to train them on how to effectively support districts' review, selection, and implementation of HQIM. CESAs serve as regional support centers in Wisconsin, providing educational support services to districts in a variety of areas and creating a link between school districts and the DPI.

In 2020, thanks to the generosity of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, DPI collaborated with Rivet Education to design, build, and launch the WI-PLPG. Since its release in February 2021, Rivet has worked with DPI to provide additional training to CESAs on successfully supporting the implementation of HQIM and on how to become a certified provider in the WI-PLPG. As a result of these efforts, Rivet added CESA 2, CESA 7, and the Mathematics Institute of Wisconsin into the WI-PLPG in July 2021. The WI-PLPG currently lists 42 organizations that provide high-quality, curriculum-aligned professional learning services in Wisconsin.

SCALING HQIM IN WISCONSIN



2017
Joined CCSSO's Instructional Materials Professional Development network

2018
Points school systems to HQIM through EdReports

2019
Launched Quality Matters PD series with Instruction Partner to train CESAs on the Curriculum Support Guide

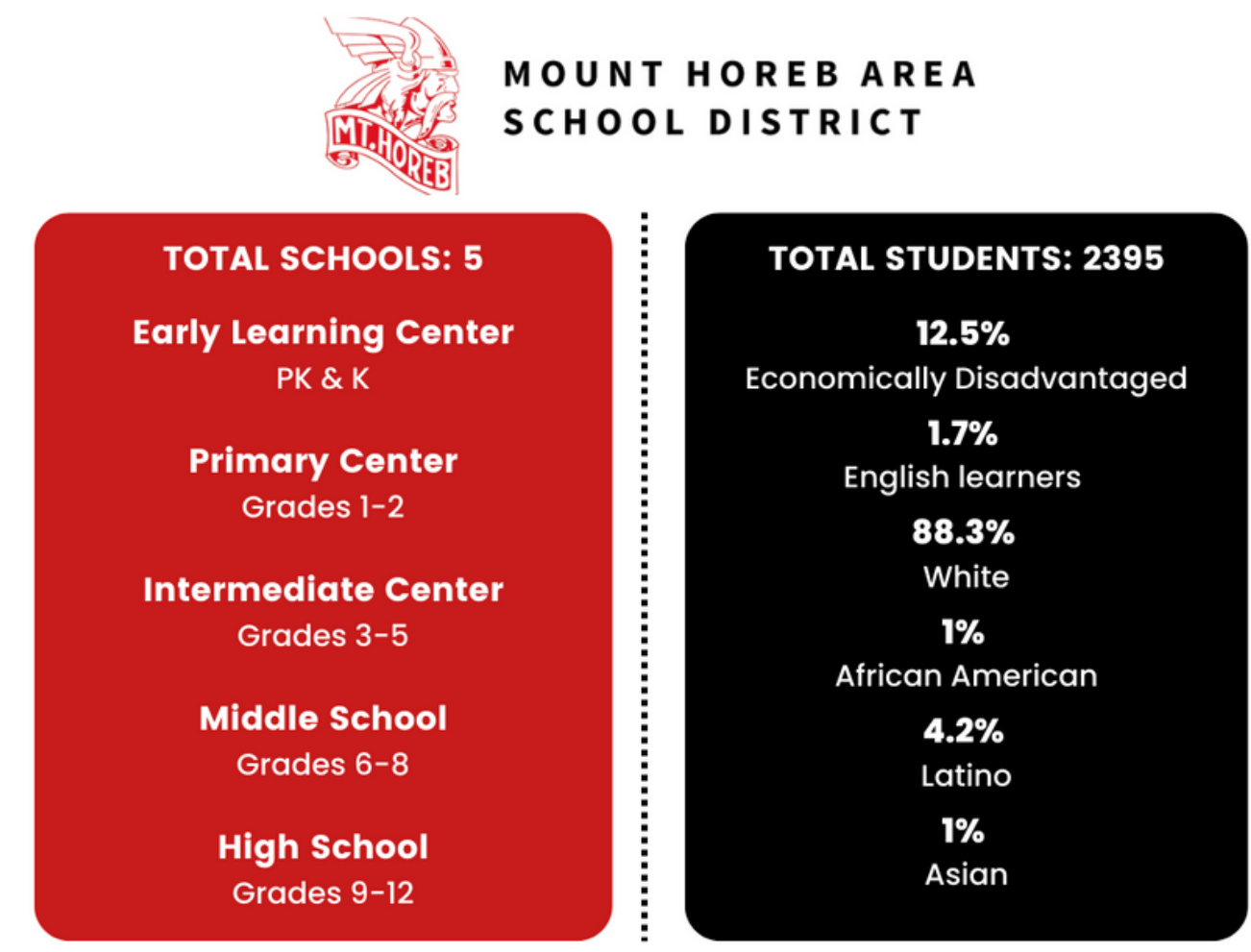
2020
Partnered with Teaching Lab on the Quality Matters PD series to train CESAs on HQIM implementation support

2021
Launched Wisconsin Professional Learning Partner Guide in partnership with Rivet Education

Meet the Team

Mount Horeb Area School District

Mount Horeb Area School District (MHASD) is a small, rural school district in southern Wisconsin. In partnership with its community, MHASD is dedicated to nurturing, educating, and challenging its students to be productive, responsible, and self-fulfilled members of society. The district serves 2,400 students in grades PK-12 across five schools all located within the village of Mount Horeb.



During the 2020-2021 school year, MHASD received a district performance score of 73.9, meaning it "Exceeds Expectations," according to the state of Wisconsin's school accountability system. [4]

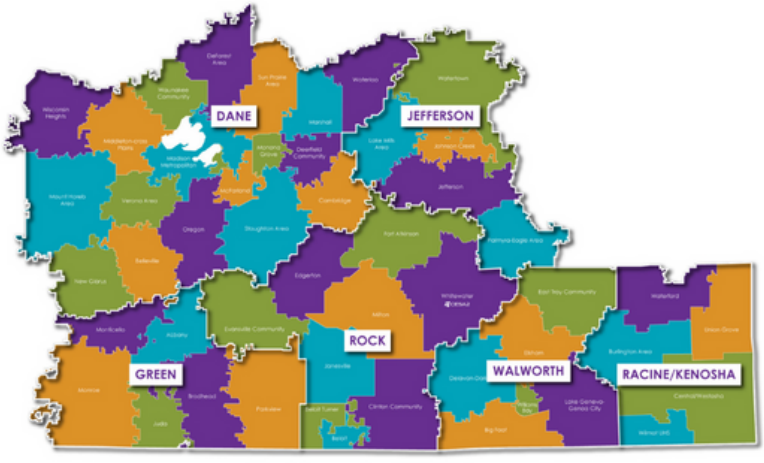
Cooperative Education Service Agency 2 (CESA 2)

CESA 2 provides educational services and support to 74 school districts throughout the South-Central region of Wisconsin. The CESA 2 team collaborates with state, district, and school leadership teams to personalize and guide the selection and implementation of standards-aligned, culturally responsive educational materials and resources that support continuous improvement goals and promote equitable outcomes for all students. It provides innovative and effective professional development and instructional coaching informed by implementation science that has a strong, positive impact on education systems and student success.

Driven by belief in the power of HQIM to reduce inequities in classrooms, CESA 2 began participating in a variety of DPI-hosted training to develop its own skill in supporting the adoption and implementation of HQIM. In 2019, the CESA 2 team attended a training on how to use Instruction Partner's Curriculum Support Guide to assist school systems in the selection and adoption of HQIM, and in 2020, it participated in an implementation cohort with Teaching Lab. By July 2021, CESA 2 had sufficient expertise in adopting HQIM to pass Rivet's rigorous evaluation process and became a certified provider in the Wisconsin Professional Learning Partner Guide for adoption services. Six months later, it applied to be featured in the WI-PLPG for services to support the launch and ongoing implementation of HQIM. It passed, and as a result, is certified to support three phases of HQIM implementation—adoption, launch, and ongoing implementation.

CESA2

Innovative Thinking. Tailored Delivery.



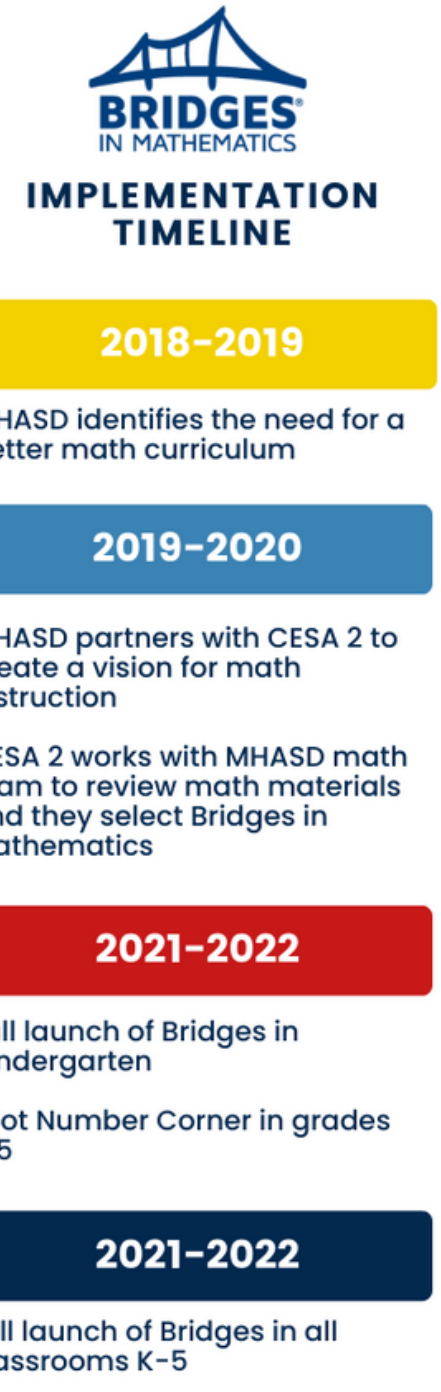
Catalyst for Change

In 2018, educators in MHASD began to notice that while students were faring well on the state assessment in mathematics, they were struggling on more challenging math assignments that required them to explain their thinking and demanded a deeper, conceptual understanding of math.

"*A new math specialist came into the district and started talking with teachers and observing students during math lessons,*" said Sarah Straka, MHASD Director of Instruction. "*What she observed was that our students weren't learning the mathematical concepts behind the tasks they were working on every day in class. She then began to ask questions about our math curriculum and suggested we needed to make a change.*" After more digging, MHASD realized that this was in large part due to the fact that the math curriculum guiding its teachers' daily instructions did not emphasize the skills students needed to be successful in math.

MHASD decided that providing its teachers with high-quality instructional materials (HQIM) was an important first step to improving outcomes for students. It also decided that educators at all levels of its system would benefit from additional expertise to select and effectively implement the new HQIM, so it engaged CESA 2 for help.

In 2019, it brought in CESA 2 to initiate conversations with a small group of K–5 math teachers about what good math instruction might look like and create a coherent academic vision for math instruction in their schools.



CESA 2 followed these conversations with training on the mathematical practices and meetings during professional learning communities (PLCs) to assess student work and discuss how HQIM plays a role in student learning and instructional practice.

Later that year, the MHASD math team began reviewing high-quality math curricula, or those rated "green" on EdReports, with support and guidance from CESA 2. After a thorough review, the team selected The Math Learning Center's Bridges in Mathematics in January of 2020. Due to the COVID pandemic and district-wide virtual learning, the district decided to only launch the full Bridges curriculum in Kindergarten during the 2020-2021 school year. Grades 1–5 used Number Corner, a component of Bridges that provides students with daily 20-minute, skill-based workouts in addition to Everyday Math, its existing curriculum. Full implementation of Bridges in grades 1–5 did not occur until the 2021–2022 school year.

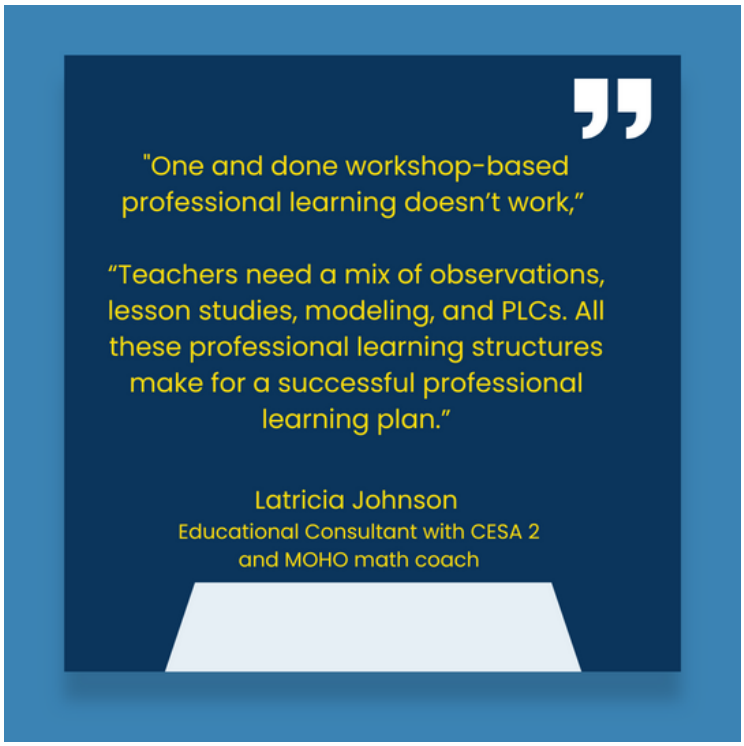
An Innovative Partnership

Building the Professional Learning Plan

MHASD strengthened its partnership with CESA 2 at the start of the 2021–2022 school year to fully support the implementation of Bridges. However, the professional learning plan it devised to launch the new HQIM wasn't the traditional multi-day workshops to which districts often default. [5] Due to a substitute teacher shortage created by the COVID pandemic and a belief that training workshops alone won't adequately prepare teachers to skillfully use their new HQIM, MHASD and CESA created an innovative launch plan that relied on peer-to-peer coaching and in-the-moment and responsive professional learning.

"*We knew we had to be flexible in our learning models for teachers,*" said Straka. "*The job-embedded professional learning that we developed with CESA 2, which research shows actually changes teacher practice, was key for us in order to truly meet the needs of our teachers.*"

There is a growing amount of research and evidence to support MHASD's approach. For example, a recent study of the professional learning marketplace conducted by Rivet Education and Benenson Strategy Group found that teachers want curriculum-based professional learning led by experts that is responsive to their needs, collaborative, and ongoing. [6] Multiple studies also highlight that this type of professional learning—which is inherently anchored in the context of teachers' everyday work—improves teachers' abilities to engage students with rigorous content and grows teachers' understanding of relevant content and content pedagogy. [7]



Knowing the research, MHASD's leadership and CESA 2 were committed to leveraging a variety of structures to provide teachers with the support they needed to skillfully implement Bridges.

Launching Bridges

Implementing a new HQIM is a marathon, not a sprint. MHASD and CESA 2 recognized that reaping the maximum benefit of the Bridges curriculum would require patience and the sustained and deliberate effort of educators at every level of the system. In August of 2022, CESA 2 kicked off the professional learning plan by working with K–5 teachers to review Wisconsin's revised mathematical shifts and standards for mathematical practices.

"*We knew the first few months were going to be tough for teachers*," said Straka. "*Bridges has a lot of materials that teachers have to master quickly. There was also a new language and approaches that we had to learn.*" Straka and CESA 2 knew that in order for teachers to feel confident in their instruction and to see early success with Bridges, MHASD would have to clearly communicate what teachers should know and be able to do during the first few months of implementation.

First, "*we looked at how the shifts and mathematical standards were present in Bridges and the changes that this requires in how students interact with math*," said Steven Mijajlovic, Math Instructional Coach with CESA 2. "*We then looked at the connectivity between lessons, units, and modules within a grade and the progression of skills across multiple grade levels.*"

Then, CESA 2 worked with teachers to understand the logistics of the HQIM. They helped teachers familiarize themselves with the multiple binders they would be using in both Number Corner and the full lessons and the corresponding materials and manipulatives. Grade level teachers also worked together to divide up the pre-work for each unit so that one teacher wouldn't be solely responsible for pulling together all of the materials for each lesson.

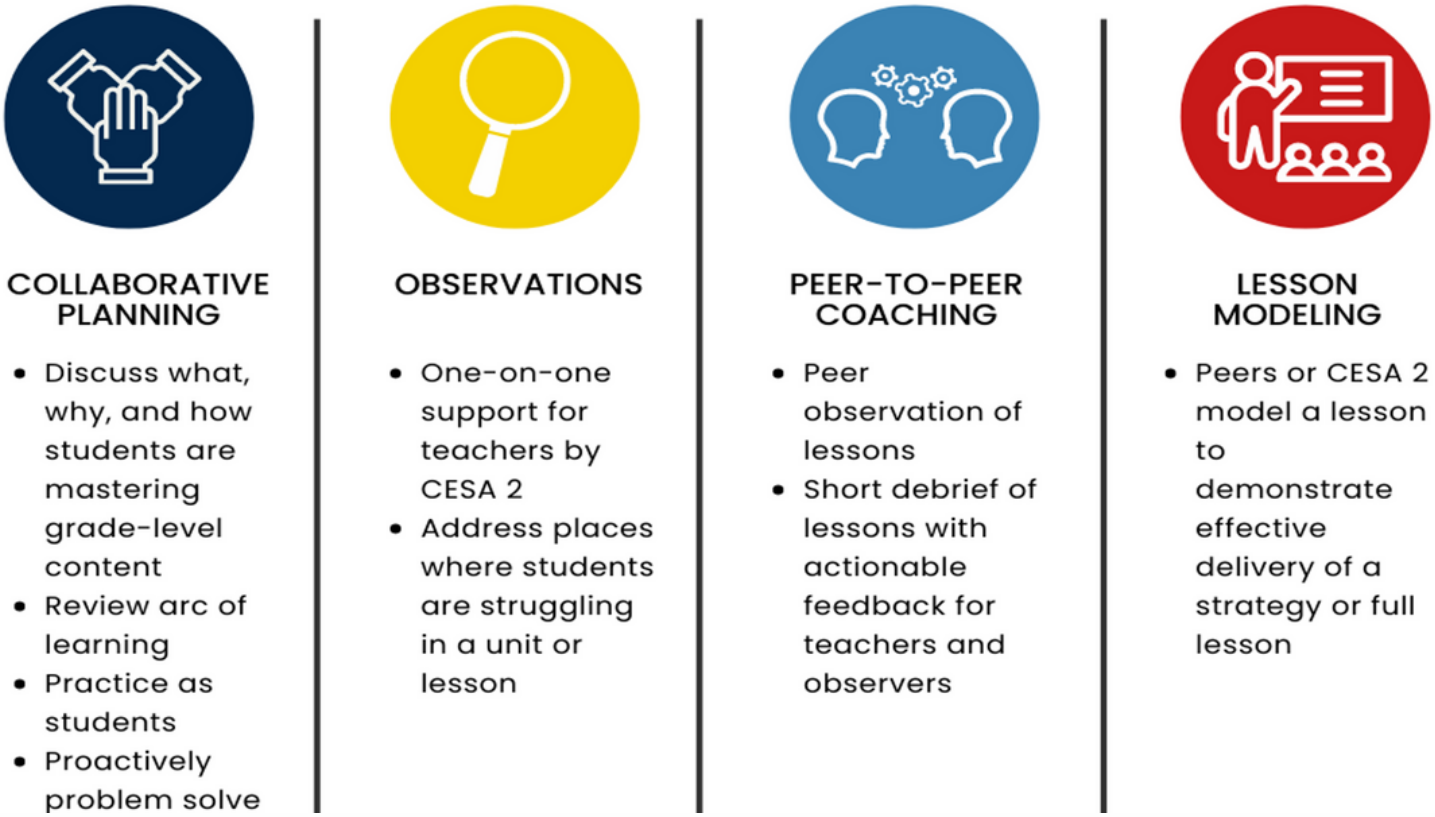
"We then focused on getting clear on what we want students to know and do in classrooms on a regular basis and gave teachers a framework for effective planning and implementation that would achieve these student goals," said Mijajlovic.

Applying a backward design approach to help teachers understand and internalize the way Bridges units are designed, CESA 2 started by engaging teachers in understanding the curriculum: What is the arc of learning across a unit? A module? What supports are embedded in the Bridges Teacher Guide to support teachers as they guide student learning? They also spent the first couple of months having teachers practice problems as students to anticipate where their students may struggle, proactively problem-solve these issues as grade-level teams, and discuss the thinking prompts.

Providing Ongoing Support

CESA 2 used feedback from professional learning exit tickets, surveys, and informal conversations with teachers and school and district leadership to evolve its professional learning plan over the course of the school year to better meet teachers' needs. This meant using the following multifaceted approach.

A COMPREHENSIVE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING PLAN



Every teacher that Rivet spoke to during its visit to MHASD was extremely appreciative of the level of support that they were receiving from their district and CESA 2. Specifically, they valued the collaborative planning time that they were given to work as grade-level teams and the one-on-one time they had with CESA 2 to reflect and receive feedback on their practice.

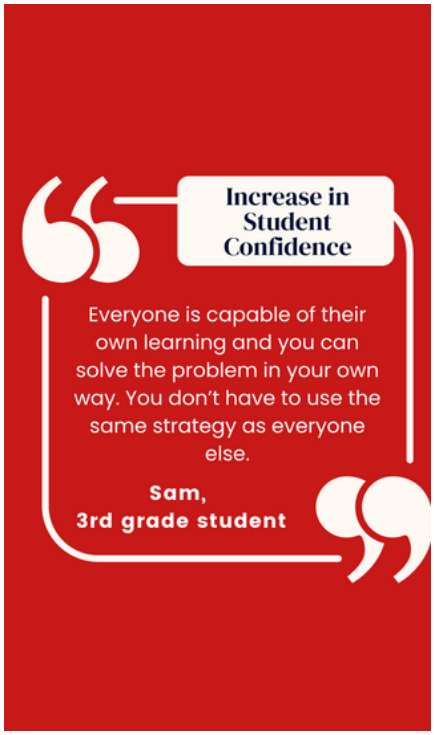
"Yesterday, Steven observed my math lesson and gave me feedback on the success of the gallery walk that I had used in the lesson," said Ashley Maring, a 3rd-grade math teacher. *"I then admitted that I was struggling to hold students accountable for meaningful conversations when they were in pairs, and he gave me a great strategy to better structure their time together that I could immediately use in the next day's lesson."*

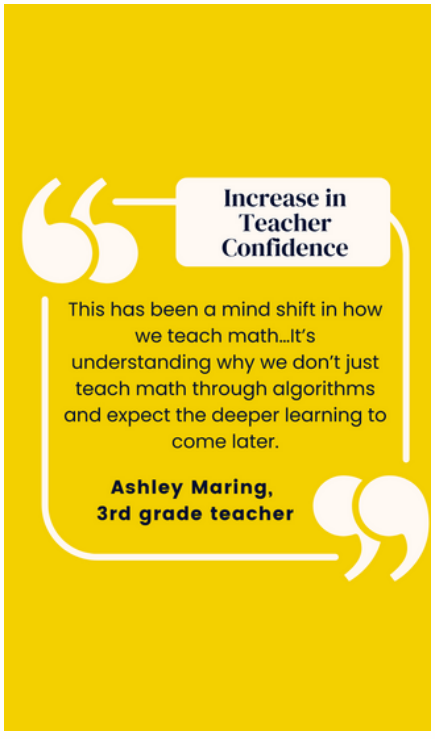
But teachers in MHASD are not just learning from CESA 2; peer-to-peer observations allow teachers to learn from one another, new and veteran teachers alike.

"Last month, I got to watch one of my colleagues teach a lesson I had taught that morning, which was really valuable," said Melissa Gervassi, 5th-grade math teacher and 25-year veteran. *"Having the time to reflect on what [my colleague] did and debrief the lesson together is critically important. That's when I get to take it all in, make it my own, and take it back to my classroom."*

The Initial Impact

While only in their first year of implementation of Bridges, Mount Horeb's multifaceted professional learning plan is producing big results. Its K–5 math team is confident in their practice, willing to learn and grow as educators, and changing how students identify with math.





When observing classrooms during the visit in February, Rivet leadership had a hard time discerning new teachers from veteran teachers.

"I sat in on one of Ms. Calvert's 1st-grade lessons about counting penguins, and the students were engaged and confidently choosing strategies to solve the problems that worked best for them," said Annie Morrison, Rivet Education Co-Founder. *"She was a facilitator of a conversation rather than the person doing all the teaching. I would not have known that this was her first year of teaching, much less her first year with a new HQIM, had someone not told me."*

Rivet also observed a high level of student engagement and positive energy in math classrooms across the district. *"These students were loving math. They were proud mathematicians,"* said Morrison.

As one 3rd grade student put it, "It makes me feel good to know that I am good at math and that I can help other students learn math." This energy is recognized by faculty and staff across the district.

"I have seen tremendous changes in my students over the past two years," said Kirk Nichols, a Kindergarten teacher. *"I hear them using numbers and talking about math all day long. It's so powerful to see them enjoying math and solving problems."*

Key Findings

The HQIM-aligned professional learning plan being executed by MHASD, with the support of CESA 2, is grounded in best practices for adopting and launching a new HQIM and can serve as a national model for other school systems across the country that are about to embark on this journey. Here are steps taken by MAHSD and CESA 2.

1 Identify the problem

MHASD discovered that students weren't developing the conceptual understanding of math called for in their state standards or the mathematical shifts and practices. It recognized that adopting a high-quality math curriculum that included research-based content, content pedagogy, and support for both students and teachers was the fastest way to change this.

2 Identify a qualified partner to help

MHASD knew that the work of adopting and implementing a new curriculum would not be easy. They made the strategic decision to enhance its team's capacity and expertise by expanding its partnership with a vetted organization—CESA 2—who could help develop and successfully execute a plan for making this shift.

3 Create a content-specific vision for strong teaching and learning

CESA 2 worked with MHASD leadership and members of the K–5 math team to describe what they wanted students to know and be able to do in math in their district and what teachers' instruction should look and sound like.

4 Select a high-quality instructional material aligned to the vision

MHASD reviewed multiple HQIM and selected Bridges in Mathematics which was the most aligned to its academic vision for math.

5 Create a plan to ensure all educators receive initial and ongoing support to use materials effectively

MHASD created a professional learning plan that embodies the characteristics of HQPL and is customized to the unique needs of teachers and students to ensure the skillful use of Bridges.

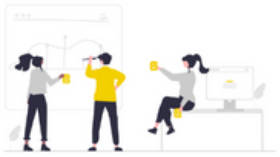
6 Execute the plan and monitor progress

MHASD continues to leverage a variety of structures to ensure teachers receive ongoing and dynamic HQIM-aligned professional learning that includes PLCs, coaching, and workshops. Both district leadership and CESA 2 regularly seek feedback from teachers and school leaders to make adjustments to the professional learning plan.

About Rivet Education

Rivet Education defines high-quality curriculum-aligned professional learning and creates tools and services that support state and local education agencies in putting that definition into practice for teachers.

OUR SERVICES



Scale High-Quality Instructional Materials and Professional Learning

Create the conditions that accelerate positive change in classrooms across your K-12 system.

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Search for and select a partner to support the adoption or implementation of high-quality instructional materials.

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Assess Professional Learning Plans

Conduct a review of your professional learning plan and system and get feedback for improvement.

CONTACT US TO START YOUR DIAGNOSTIC NOW

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RIVETCONNECT (Launching Aug 25)

Founded in 2019 by members of the team that led nationally renowned reform efforts in Louisiana, Rivet Education is the only company in the U.S. to offer school districts a free, online tool that provides comprehensive and objective analysis of professional learning providers.

Have questions about one of our services? Contact us at info@riveteducation.org.

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