Carver Road Middle School

Balancing Accountability with Meaningful Practices

GEORGIA

MC SUCCESS STORIES
Educators at a suburban middle school aimed to balance state accountability requirements with meaningful teaching and learning practices. But they needed a tech solution that was as forward-thinking as they were.

Carver Road Middle School chose MasteryConnect to support their balanced approach to compliance- and formative-based student learning. Read about how they use MasteryConnect to

- power professional learning communities
- drive the formative assessment process
- empower students’ ownership of learning

**AN INTERVIEW WITH**

**TIFFANY TAYLOR, PH.D.**

**PRINCIPAL**
Like many educators in Georgia, the team at Carver Road Middle, a 2016 Model School, sought a way to balance meaningful teaching and learning with state accountability requirements. Achieving this balance can be difficult if educators shift focus away from best practices, but Carver Road is rising to the challenge.

With support from MasteryConnect, Carver Road Middle teachers and students find balance through the power of collaboration, formative assessment, and student ownership, which helps everyone reach the high expectations of the school.

**POWERING PLCs**

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are only as successful as the time and support provided by administration to implement them. To support PLCs, the administration at Carver Road has adopted organizational and technical solutions that ensure teachers have necessary time and resources.
Dr. Gregory Gardner and Ms. Naja Douglas, Assistant Principals, and Ms. Angel Pugh, Academic Coach, are vital to the organizational success of PLCs. They facilitate meetings, keep teams focused on data, and provide timely and meaningful feedback. On the technical side, MasteryConnect helps teachers easily and effectively collaborate around relevant data at both the content and department level.

Carver Road Middle organizes instruction around three flexible student learning groups—mastery, near mastery, and remediation—which are determined by daily checks for understanding delivered through MasteryConnect.

“"In the past we didn’t have the data to support what kids needed, and we didn’t know exactly who the kids were,” explains Naja Douglas, Assistant Principal. “With the three mastery levels in MasteryConnect, we can now identify each student’s level of understanding for any particular standard.”

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—NAJA DOUGLAS
Grade-level content teams then meet each day to plan for these groups and the instructional adjustments needed for each. They use a variety of MasteryConnect teacher reports—including Item Analysis, Tracker (Classroom) Comparison, and Teacher Comparison—to identify student misconceptions, ensure accurate alignment and levels of complexity between assessments and instruction, and plan future instructional strategies.

In addition to daily grade-level teams, department teams collaborate monthly to plan vertically across grades six through eight. Content teachers come together to share strengths and weaknesses and plan instruction based on student results in MasteryConnect.

“We can’t talk about next steps if we don’t know where we are,” says Tiffany Taylor, Ph.D., Principal. “MasteryConnect empowers us to visualize where we are. It provides the engine for conversations about student learning and student growth.”

MasteryConnect is the engine for conversations about student learning and student growth.

—Tiffany Taylor, Ph.D.

Special Education teachers participate in department meetings so they can collaborate and analyze student data. Teachers who may not have common planning time with special education teachers get the opportunity to look at data across the general and special education classrooms. These data-driven conversations about student growth provide powerful support for general education teachers as they plan inclusive instruction for these students.
One of the biggest barriers to the successful implementation of the formative assessment process is the tug-of-war of time. Pacing guides designed to ensure annually tested standards are addressed in each classroom often conflict with the rate of student learning, which doesn’t fit neatly into annual testing schedules. Carver Road recognizes this conflict and leverages MasteryConnect to help balance the two.

**Balancing Student Needs**

Carver Road partners with the Georgia Institute of Technology to implement project-based inquiry learning, a challenging curriculum. Some students struggle more than others to learn the content. The curriculum includes pre- and post-assessments designed by the college to meet the needs of Georgia’s Student Learning Objective (SLO) requirements, but it includes little in the way of formative assessments to help struggling students.

Carver Road’s technology teacher bridges the gap through the creation and delivery of regular formative assessments through MasteryConnect. “Our technology / STEM teacher recognized a need for more timely data than the pre- and post-assessments could provide,” explains Dr. Taylor. “She uses formative assessments delivered through MasteryConnect to unpack the standards in order to meet the needs of all students in her classroom.”

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“As an organization we are constantly learning and growing.” —Tiffany Taylor, Ph.D.
Carver Road Middle School teachers also address advanced students’ needs. Enrichment teams are held for an hour each day in addition to core classes. Teachers look at multiple sources of data (including previous years’ end-of-grade scores, grades, and formative data in MasteryConnect) to place students in teams:

**TEAM 1**: Math (8 weeks)  
**TEAM 2**: Science Literacy (rotates with Team 3 after 4 weeks)  
**TEAM 3**: Social Studies Literacy (rotates with Team 2 after 4 weeks)

At the end of each eight-week session, teachers re-assess student levels of understanding and revise team placements based on this data. In addition to day-to-day interventions, this approach ensures students’ needs are continuously met on a broader level. It also highlights the school’s commitment to the formative assessment process and organizational intervention.

“As an organization we are constantly learning and growing; 2015-2016 was our first year for implementing flexible enrichment teams in order to meet the needs of our students,” says Dr. Taylor. “We plan to learn from the year and improve on the process, like incorporating more robust approaches to enrichment.”

**Balancing Teacher Needs**

“Inherent within MasteryConnect is the ability for teachers to learn from each other and from their students,” explains Dr. Taylor. “Teachers can clearly see student misconceptions, analyze them, and then improve instruction to fix them.”
This insight into student learning supports teacher growth at Carver Road Middle, according to Dr. Taylor: “MasteryConnect provides a safe place where teachers can grow as professionals.”

One of Carver Road Middle’s primary goals is to foster a positive school climate and culture. “Teachers and school leaders hold a high expectation for students and a belief that our students can reach these expectations,” says Dr. Taylor. Two key components of this goal are a focus on ownership of behavior and ownership of learning.

Ownership of Behavior

Carver Road educators recognize that learning happens when students feel safe, both physically and emotionally. They promote PBIS—S.O.A.R., which encourages students to be successful, optimistic, actively involved, and respectful.

Teachers and administrators model these behavioral expectations and create opportunities for consistent positive feedback on students’ efforts to achieve them. This approach creates a safe environment and empowers students to focus on their learning.

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1 Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports
Ownership of Learning

Students don’t only own their behavior, but they also own their learning. One way teachers at Carver Road Middle help students do this is by providing mastery learning sheets for each unit. Students track their mastery of the unit’s standards and work to ensure mastery of all standards.

“The mastery learning sheets act as study tools for students and as communication tools for parents,” explains Dr. Taylor. “With MasteryConnect, conversations among students, parents, and teachers are centered around student learning and student growth.” Students strengthen problem-solving skills and growth mindsets as they track their own learning through these mastery learning sheets.

CONCLUSION

As a Title I school, Carver Road has high expectations for learning. Georgia’s switch to a new standardized assessment system means more rigorous measurement of standards. But, with help from MasteryConnect, the teachers and administrators at Carver Road Middle find balance in the power of collaboration, formative assessments, and student ownership of learning.
MasteryConnect provides formative assessment and competency-based learning solutions to educators around the world. MasteryConnect combines professional development with its web and mobile platforms, including Socrative, to help teachers identify student levels of understanding in real time, target students for intervention, and use assessment data to inform instruction. We now serve over 2.5 million teachers and 21 million students in more than 85% of U.S. districts and 170 countries.

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