Junction City
KENTUCKY

Moving Students Forward with Competency-Based, Intentional Instruction
Teachers at Junction City Elementary were differentiating instruction for students in need of intervention, but they wanted a better way to target students who were excelling.

Administrators at Junction City Elementary selected MasteryConnect to help them support targeted instruction for all learning levels.

Read about their commitment to intentional instruction and how MasteryConnect helped them

› transform Gifted and Talented instruction.
› redefine teacher collaboration.
› personalize learning for every student.
In rural Kentucky, educators at Junction City Elementary are committed to providing results-oriented instruction that focuses on the success and achievement of each student, regardless of their level of learning upon entering kindergarten.

“Many of our students enter kindergarten already behind where they need to be,” explains Ellen Casey, third grade math teacher. “In order to help make the gains we need, our school goal is to make 1.5 years of growth each year.”

To provide this level of instruction, Junction City educators needed a better way to track formative data, then use it for intentional instruction. Administrators originally selected MasteryConnect to help teachers track student learning of standards across grade levels, but they soon found they could use the platform to move both struggling students and advanced students.
The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) emphasis on student proficiency created a focus on bringing students who were behind to a set level. “During the era of No Child Left Behind we were expected to teach all students to the same proficiency level,” explains Betty Jo Davis, curriculum coach and intermediate special education teacher at Junction City Elementary. “Our teachers differentiated instruction to meet the needs of struggling students, but students who excelled weren’t receiving the targeted instruction they needed. Our high-achieving students weren’t growing because teachers were only assessing them on what they already knew.”

During the NCLB era, Junction City Elementary administrators implemented a weekly review, so teachers could coordinate with support staff to focus on individual students. Teachers retaught concepts using different instructional approaches, and they pulled in below-grade standards to support students as needed.

Once Junction City teachers began using MasteryConnect to track student levels of understanding, however, they soon shifted from an instructional focus on struggling students to one that encompasses all students, including those already in mastery. Teachers now add above-grade standards to their Mastery Trackers in order to more sensitively personalize learning for excelling students.
The structure at Junction City helps facilitate this competency-based approach. Grades three through five are departmentalized, with one teacher teaching all three sections of a given subject. This structure provides the opportunity to flexibly group students according to their levels of mastery (but doesn’t ability-group students). Teachers review data weekly to adjust instruction and move students.

Ellen Casey is the third grade math teacher at Junction City, but that doesn’t limit her to just third-grade standards. “I teach second, third, and fourth grade standards based on student levels of understanding,” she explains. “Students who show mastery of standards on pre-assessments move into the next grade’s standards rather than doing busy work for concepts they already understand. MasteryConnect makes it possible for me to easily pull in above-grade standards to track the progress of these advanced students.”

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—ELLEN CASEY

Before 2015 Junction City used a traditional approach for pulling out students for Gifted and Talented instruction. Under this model, students receive targeted instruction during one 30 to 45-minute session per week, which didn’t provide enough time to meet the needs of these students. To better serve high-performing students within their regular classes, the school adopted an integrated model that draws on collaboration between Kristina Grubb, the Gifted and Talented resource teacher, and general education teachers.
When I sit down to plan with teachers, they share their data from MasteryConnect so we can look together at which particular students need challenging enrichment opportunities for targeted standards,” explains Grubb. “This new model has been extremely beneficial for students, but also for teachers, who have gained a better understanding of how to differentiate for high-performing students and ensure that they are being challenged on a daily basis in both reading and math.”

“Teachers share their data from MasteryConnect so we can look together at which students need challenging enrichment opportunities.

—KRISTINA GRUBB

When Kristina is unable to meet face to face with teachers, they add her as a collaborator to their Mastery Trackers and initiate virtual conversations around the data. Kristina works with teachers to create more challenging assignments and exit slips, helps them add higher order thinking questions to lessons, and explores additional resources to include in their instruction.

Teachers also access resources for high-performing students through MasteryConnect Assessment and Resource Pins Communities, creating units based on above-grade standards and finding corresponding assessments and resources. Emily Dartt, a fifth grade reading teacher, is finding encouraging results. “I am very pleased with how my high-performing students are progressing,” says Dartt. “I feel that this new approach has given them an opportunity to feel a little uncomfortable—yet challenged. The students are responding very well!”
Teacher teams at Junction City don’t look like traditional teams, due to the school’s structure of departmentalization. But this structure provides unique opportunities for collaboration.

1 Horizontal Collaboration Across Schools
Junction City Elementary was the first elementary in the district to implement MasteryConnect. In 2015-2016 the other two elementaries also implemented the platform. Now departmentalized teachers can deliver common formative assessments across schools through MasteryConnect and engage in virtual data-driven conversations about student learning and best instructional practices. “Collaborating on a traditional grade-level team is not always practical because we each teach different subjects,” says Casey. “But through MasteryConnect we can reach across schools to meaningfully collaborate over data with our same-subject colleagues.”

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2 Vertical Collaboration Across Grades
Departmentalized teachers can also collaborate vertically with above-grade and below-grade colleagues as they support students in these standards. Teachers work together to ensure that student learning is seamless as they advance at a personal pace through above-grade, below-grade, or at-grade standards. “In order to best support my high-performing students,” says Casey. “I collaborate with our fourth grade math teacher to vertically align the third and fourth grade standards and to share resources aligned to these standards.” Teachers easily share and access these resources for vertically aligned standards through MasteryConnect.
The 2015-2016 school year marks the first year of implementation of an intentional approach toward integrated Gifted and Talented instruction at Junction City Elementary, but they are already seeing the positive impact.

Teachers are collaborating across schools, across grades, and with Gifted and Talented resource teacher Kristina Grubb to create better instruction, better questions, better assessments, and better conversations around student learning at all levels.

Boyle County, Junction City Elementary’s district, is not a compliance-based district, so administrators there understand that teacher investment in policies and practices is important, as it encourages meaningful implementation of these policies and practices. “Teachers have worked hard to implement enrichment opportunities for students,” explains Davis. “It’s a lot of work, but no one would turn back after seeing the student growth. MasteryConnect is not something teachers are willing to change. It inspires us all to constantly improve our approaches to teaching and learning.”

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Learn more about how MasteryConnect can help you with standards-based grading, data-driven instruction, formative assessment, and teacher collaboration.

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