

# Northwest Local School District

## DataMap Helps District Change the Conversation on SLOs – from Compliance to Student Growth

Northwest Local School District (NWLSLSD), located in Hamilton County, Ohio, serves approximately 9,400 students from pre-K through grade 12. As part of its Continuous Improvement Plan, the district implemented Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) at the start of the 2013-14 school year.

Jenny Blust, Director of Curriculum Services and Brenda Miller, Assistant Director of Curriculum and Instructional Accountability at NWLSLSD, created a set of guiding



Jenny Blust, Director of Curriculum Services

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principles to help define strategies for student growth and achievement. However, without a tool to help streamline the process and give teachers access to meaningful student data, SLOs were failing to bring about the positive change desired.

“A survey of our teachers after the 2014-15 school year revealed many pain points,” said Blust. Teachers said having to enter student data into spreadsheets, sharing and revising PDFs by email, locating trend data, and losing or misplacing documents were among their top challenges.

Blust agreed that the use of spreadsheets and PDFs complicated the process. “Not only was it hard to manage all of these separate documents, but we had to support files across different platforms and software versions. And when documents came back to us, we saw a lot of errors as a result of manual data entry.”

### The DataMap Difference

Within a year of launching ProgressBook DataMap as the district’s data warehouse and SLO management tool, NWLSLSD noted many improvements. Chief among them was teacher satisfaction. In a new survey, 93.3% of teachers said DataMap improved their experience with the SLO process.

“Having that single login and being able to quickly switch over to DataMap from GradeBook made things really convenient,” Blust said. “Teachers no

longer have to manually enter student names, test scores or growth targets. They



**District Profile:** 9400 students; 13 schools

**Challenge:** Prior SLO process was complicated, time-consuming and prone to errors. Teachers had difficulty finding trend data; they wanted more control over selecting SLOs and setting growth targets. Principals were left out of the loop.

**Solution:** ProgressBook DataMap

### Results:

- **93.3%** teachers said DataMap improved their experience with SLO process
- **87.3%** teachers felt that reviewer feedback via DataMap helped them move forward
- More than **70%** of targeted at-risk students met or exceeded growth target

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More importantly, DataMap helped teachers improve the quality of their SLOs. “Before DataMap, our teachers had a hard time finding and using trend data for setting growth targets. They had no good way to access how students scored last year on a district assessment, for example, or in specific content areas. And how much did they grow from fall to spring?”

### Empowering Teachers

DataMap not only gives teachers access to student assessment data, it also makes it easy for them to analyze the data and explain their rationale as to why a specific growth target is appropriate and rigorous, Blust said. When the team compared SLOs submitted before DataMap to those written just a few months after launching the solution, the differences were drastic.

Among the many examples, Blust described how one teacher struggled through the SLO process in year one, submitting three short sentences and vague statistics for



*Brenda Miller, Assistant Director of Curriculum & Instructional Accountability*

Baseline and Trend Data. Using DataMap a year later, the same teacher was able to give detailed data, including specific scores and averages for current students vs. previous students.

“This teacher was actually able to look at secondary data in DataMap, and drill down on subgroup data to say how well these students are doing and what the trends are there,” she said.

Of course, the real definition of success throughout the goal-setting SLO process has to do with measurable student growth. DataMap enabled NWLSD to incorporate its own pre-assessments and common assessments into the SLO process for those non-tested subjects. And by arming teachers with detailed information on student progress (by standards, by subgroups, etc.), it gives educators the confidence to set rigorous growth targets and close achievement gaps.

“When we first asked teachers to set elevated growth targets for below-grade level students, we met with a lot of resistance,” Miller said. “We had to push our teachers and this process allowed us to do that. Remarkably, feedback from our last survey showed that more than 70% of those targeted kids met or exceeded their growth targets.”

**“DataMap gives us the ability to provide constant feedback and raise the bar on expectations.”**

### Better Feedback & Involvement

By providing a centralized communications portal, DataMap has also helped to facilitate better reviewer-to-teacher feedback, which leads to higher quality SLOs. At NWLSD, the curriculum team and reviewers are committed to providing teachers with valuable feedback, both constructive and positive.

“DataMap gives us the ability to provide constant feedback and raise the bar on expectations,” Miller said. “We were excited to learn from a recent survey that

## Northwest Local School District SLO Guiding Principles

1. **Pre-assessment is a valuable instructional practice** and all students in courses for which we have district SLO assessments available will participate in the assessments.
2. **Teachers need to know and understand their student data** in order to be able to identify appropriate growth targets that will demonstrate their impact on student achievement.
3. **Teachers need to set targets** that require all students to demonstrate meaningful growth. Tiered targets are encouraged.
4. **Targets must make meaningful progress toward closing existing achievement gaps.** Students below grade level must demonstrate more growth than those on or above grade level in order to move our district forward.
5. **Building administrators should be involved in the SLO process** with their teachers from start to finish.

## SLOs Before and After DataMap

*"We noticed a significant improvement in the quality of our SLOs in 2015-16. We believe that the improvement was directly related to our use of DataMap."*

- Easy access to baseline and trend data for students
- Less time spent entering student names, scores, etc.
- Teachers were empowered to set their own growth targets
- On-going feedback loop with review committee
- Involvement of our building principals in the process

87.3% of teachers felt like the feedback they received this year really helped to move them forward."

According to Blust, principals are now actively involved in the SLO process as well, which was not the case before DataMap. "What a missed opportunity in terms of making sure that ultimately the performance side and the growth measure side of evaluation were in alignment," she said. "Today, principals are able to see the SLO as soon as it moves from draft status to proposed, and they are inserting themselves into the conversation."

DataMap has enabled NWLSD to bring special education teachers and intervention specialists into the SLO loop as well. "We control access by user role, so we were able to make sure that our intervention specialists could see all of the data for their students, including SLO baseline data put in by the student's classroom teacher," Blust said.

### Changing the conversation

According to Blust and Miller, DataMap has enabled the district to live by its five guiding principles and improve the overall SLO process. "We've all heard the buzz that SLOs may go away," Miller stated. "At NWLSD, we wanted to make sure that this process of looking at data and setting appropriate goals for students, which is a strong instructional practice, was one that stayed around."

Blust added, "Instead of talking about compliance and how to meet SLO requirements, we wanted to change the focus of our conversation to student growth and achievement. Using DataMap as our tool, we've had a lot of success making that happen."



## DATAMAP 5-STEP SLO PROCESS

