

Research Results

Leadership Professional Learning Moline–Coal Valley Case Study

Study Profile

District:

Moline–Coal Valley School District 40

Grades:

K–12

Evaluation Period:

2021–2026 school years

Study Conducted by:

HMH

Outcome Measures:

- 5Essentials
- MAP Growth

Using 5Essentials and MAP Growth to Drive Improvement

Over the past several years, Moline–Coal Valley School District 40 in Illinois has developed and implemented a districtwide improvement approach that integrates organizational-conditions data, student growth data, and replicable adult learning routines. Rather than treating climate, culture, instruction, and academic growth as separate improvement priorities, the district has worked to connect them into a coherent operating framework. This case study details how Moline–Coal Valley uses the 5Essentials Survey and NWEA® MAP® Growth™ together to diagnose needs, monitor progress, recognize success, and scale promising practices across schools.

The district's approach is organized around several mutually reinforcing components. PACE (People, Achievement, Community, and Environment) provides a coherence structure for district and school planning. The 5Essentials Survey provides a diagnostic lens on the organizational conditions that support improvement. MAP Growth provides repeated evidence of student achievement and growth. Implementation routines such as Mapping Success, learning walks, and rubric-based feedback help educators translate data into action. Together, these components form a system for moving from data review to collective learning.

A central feature of the district’s work is Mapping Success, a recognition and learning routine that identifies classrooms where 70% of students meet or exceed projected growth targets on MAP Growth. The routine began as a way to make student growth visible and celebrate classroom success, but over time it evolved into a structure for learning from effective practice. When classrooms meet the district’s growth threshold, teachers and leaders have a structure in place to examine what instructional decisions, routines, and supports contributed to those results.

The district has also deepened its work around Ambitious Instruction. Through a partnership with the Center for Model Schools, Moline–Coal Valley implemented professional learning, classroom observations, and cross-campus learning walks using the Rigor Rubric and Learner Engagement Rubric. The learning-walk process emphasized building the capacity of observers rather than evaluating the observed, giving teachers and leaders a shared language for thoughtful work, academic discussion, student engagement, and high-level questioning.

How we organize schools is critical for student achievement. Improving schools entails coherent, orchestrated action across all five essential supports. Put simply, there is no one silver bullet.

—Anthony Bryk, Organizing Schools for Improvement, *Phi Delta Kappan*, April 2010, p. 25

Findings suggest that the district’s improvement routines are associated with meaningful progress in both organizational conditions and student outcomes. Districtwide, mean fall-to-spring MAP growth rose from roughly the 40th conditional growth percentile in 2021 to the low to mid-50s in subsequent years, moving the district from below the national average to slightly above it. The 2026 5Essentials® summary rates the district Strong in Effective Leaders, Collaborative Teachers, Involved Families, and Ambitious Instruction, with Supportive Environment rated Neutral. Several schools demonstrate especially strong profiles, including Franklin, Bicentennial, and Hamilton as standout elementary improvement stories and Wilson Middle School illustrating how the instructional work can scale to secondary schools.

District Context

Moline–Coal Valley School District 40 serves students across elementary, middle, and high school, and alternative settings in Moline, Illinois. The district’s improvement work has unfolded across a diverse set of buildings, including large elementary schools, two middle schools, a comprehensive high school, and an alternative high school. This variation shows the approach was designed to work across very different settings.

The district serves a racially, linguistically, and economically diverse student population. Located in the Quad Cities region along the Mississippi River, the district covers a footprint that includes urban neighborhoods, parts of Coal Valley and Milan, and areas connected to the Rock Island Arsenal. According to the 2025 Illinois Report Card, the district enrolls 7,209 students. Its student body is 42.4% White, 30.9% Hispanic or Latino, 14.0% Black, 8.2% two or more races, and 3.9% Asian. Nearly one in five students (19.7%) is an English learner, 15.0% have an Individualized Education Program, and 61.9% are low income, defined as students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, living in substitute care, or whose families receive public aid.

District at a glance (2025 Illinois Report Card)

- Location: Moline, Illinois (Quad Cities region); serves Moline, part of Coal Valley, part of the Rock Island Arsenal, and a small portion of Milan
- Enrollment: 7,209 students

- Student demographics: 42.4% White, 30.9% Hispanic or Latino, 14.0% Black, 8.2% two or more races, 3.9% Asian
- 61.9% low income; 19.7% English learners; 15.0% with IEPs
- Schools: 10 elementary, 2 middle, 1 comprehensive high school, 1 alternative high school
- Students in the MAP Growth analysis: approximately 10,660 unique students across 2021–2026
- Core improvement tools: PACE framework, Illinois 5Essentials Survey, NWEA MAP Growth, Mapping Success, Ambitious Instruction learning walks

The improvement challenge

Like many districts, Moline–Coal Valley had no shortage of data, but the challenge was to connect and use those data to improve practice. MAP Growth provided evidence of student achievement and growth, while the 5Essentials Survey provided a snapshot of the organizational conditions that shape teaching and learning. The district’s challenge was to connect them in a way that helped educators answer practical improvement questions such as: What conditions are helping or hindering improvement? Which students are growing? Which classrooms and schools are showing strong growth? What can other educators learn from those examples?

Early district routines focused on summarizing performance, including data-wall displays of fall-to-spring MAP Growth results by building, grade level, and subject. Those routines helped make performance visible, but district leaders recognized that visibility alone was not enough. The district needed to move from performance monitoring to collective learning. They needed to not only identify where growth occurred, but to understand what teachers and leaders did to produce that growth.

The 5Essentials work addressed a complementary challenge. School climate, culture, leadership, collaboration, family engagement, and ambitious instruction can be difficult to quantify using achievement data alone. By using 5Essentials alongside MAP Growth, the district could examine both outcomes and the conditions that support those outcomes. This pairing was especially important because district and school leaders recognized that academic growth and school conditions were intertwined rather than independent.

What makes it onto our PACE Goals gets done—and what gets done becomes part of our district practice moving forward.

—Dr. Rachel Savage, Superintendent, Moline-Coal Valley School District

Improvement Framework and Theory of Action

PACE as a coherence structure

PACE functioned as the district’s organizing framework with four pillars: People, Achievement, Community, and Environment. These pillars gave leaders and educators a common way to describe priorities and align action. District leaders describe PACE as a coherence structure that helped schools connect multiple initiatives and data sources to a common set of priorities. Over time, the district began aligning school improvement planning more intentionally to PACE and to the 5Essentials framework, creating stronger links between district goals, school conditions, instructional routines, and student outcomes. As district leaders deepened their use of 5Essentials, PACE provided a bridge between district goals and the specific organizational conditions measured by the survey.

Table 1. How the district connects PACE pillars to the 5Essentials framework

PACE Pillar	5Essentials Connection	Improvement Implication
People	Effective Leaders Collaborative Teachers	Build leadership capacity, shared expectations, and adult collaboration
Achievement	Ambitious Instruction	Use student growth evidence to monitor progress and strengthen instruction
Community	Involved Families	Strengthen trust, communication, and shared responsibility for improvement
Environment	Supportive Environment	Create safe, supportive, and academically demanding learning conditions

5Essentials as a diagnostic for school conditions

The Illinois 5Essentials framework and survey gave the district a diagnostic lens for examining the organizational conditions that support school improvement. District and school leaders used the survey to examine Effective Leaders, Collaborative Teachers, Involved Families, Supportive Environment, and Ambitious Instruction. The framework helped leaders move beyond anecdotal interpretations of culture and climate by providing structured evidence about how educators, students, and families experienced the school environment.

The 2026 5Essentials district summary suggests meaningful progress in this area. At the district level, Moline–Coal Valley was rated Strong in Effective Leaders, Collaborative Teachers, Involved Families, and Ambitious Instruction, with Supportive Environment remaining Neutral, indicating continued opportunity for improvement. Several buildings showed especially strong profiles. These patterns provide a current organizational-conditions backdrop for interpreting student growth trends and are examined in detail later in this case study.

MAP Growth as a repeated indicator of growth and achievement

MAP Growth provided the district with repeated student growth and achievement evidence across the school year. The district’s use of MAP Growth began around 2015 with a building-level focus and grew into a districtwide approach by 2020, so MAP results were already a familiar shared reference for teachers and leaders when the routines described in this study began taking shape. Early routines centered on visibility, including data-wall displays tracking fall-to-spring results by building, grade level, and subject. Schools then built practices to make the data trustworthy and actionable. Leaders motivated teachers and students during testing windows to ensure that scores reflected genuine effort, staff built their skills in interpreting growth reports during protected professional learning time, and grade-level teams used MAP results to sort students by skill strand and to target instruction. At Franklin, for example, weekly Wednesday sessions were devoted to interpreting MAP and 5Essentials results, and results were displayed publicly to keep growth visible to students and staff alike.

Focusing on whether students met individualized growth projections gave every classroom a meaningful target regardless of where students started, which mattered in a district where most students are low income and starting points vary widely. That orientation is what made the data a foundation for recognition and learning. When the question is “whose students grew?” rather than “whose students scored highest?”, strong practice can be observed and emulated anywhere in the district.

Mapping Success as a bridge from recognition to learning

Mapping Success is the district routine that most clearly connects MAP Growth data to adult learning. The routine grew from a desire to move beyond simply reporting data and instead use growth results to identify, celebrate, and learn from strong classroom practice. In its current form, Mapping Success examines classroom-level growth-target attainment and recognizes classrooms where 70% of students meet or exceed projected growth in reading or math.

The most important feature of Mapping Success is that recognition is not the endpoint. When classrooms meet the threshold, the district uses those examples as opportunities to ask probing questions: What instructional adjustments supported growth? What practices can other teachers learn from? How can classroom success become system learning? In this way, Mapping Success transforms student growth data into a mechanism for professional learning and collective efficacy building.

Ambitious Instruction and learning walks as instructional routines

The district's Ambitious Instruction work added another layer of implementation support. Beginning in 2023–24, Moline–Coal Valley partnered with the Center for Model Schools to deliver professional learning around Ambitious Instruction, including a Teacher Leader Academy and rubric-based classroom observations. In 2024–25 and 2025–26, the district expanded cross-campus learning walks using the Rigor Rubric and Learner Engagement Rubric. These routines gave administrators and teachers structured opportunities to observe instruction, identify trends, and discuss next steps.

A key implementation principle was that learning walks were intended to build capacity for the observer, not evaluate the observed. This distinction matters because it frames classroom visits as collective learning rather than compliance. The learning-walk process created opportunities for teachers and leaders to develop a shared understanding of thoughtful work, academic discussion, student engagement, high-level questioning, and other aspects of ambitious instruction.

Working theory of action

The working theory of action is that improvement occurred not through any single tool, but through disciplined routines that connected tools to adult learning. 5Essentials helped the district understand the conditions that support improvement. MAP Growth helped the district understand student achievement and growth. Mapping Success helped the district identify and learn from classrooms producing strong growth. Learning walks and rubrics helped the district strengthen instructional feedback and shared practice. But the critical step was not adopting these tools; it was building durable processes that turned data into conversations, conversations into action, and action into organizational learning. Together, these components formed a cycle of continuous improvement: diagnose conditions, monitor growth, identify success, study practice, and scale learning across the system. The tools supplied the evidence; the routines used the evidence to change adult practice.

Timeline of the Work

The district's improvement system was not introduced all at once. It developed over several years, beginning with the introduction of a recognition routine and gradually adding diagnostic, instructional, and cross-campus components. The timeline below summarizes the major phases of the work.

Table 2. Timeline of the district’s improvement work, 2021–2026

Year	Milestones
2021–22	Mapping Success begins; the district moves beyond data-wall displays toward recognizing and learning from classroom growth. (Districtwide MAP focus had developed from a building-level effort starting around 2015 toward a districtwide approach by 2020.)
2022–23	Stronger, more intentional tying of 5Essentials to PACE and to school improvement planning.
2023–24	Center for Model Schools Ambitious Instruction work begins; Teacher Leader Academy launched and rubric-based observations introduced; 54 formal and 60+ informal classroom observations. (Moline named an Innovative District.)
2024–25	Learning walks scale across the district: about 240 classroom observations over 16 days, using both the Rigor Rubric and Learner Engagement Rubric. (Hamilton named a Model School; Moline again named an Innovative District.)
2025–26	Learning walks continue and expand with strategic campus pairing: roughly 300 classroom visits over 17 days; updated 5Essentials evidence arrives. (Wilson Middle School and Franklin Elementary named Model Schools.)

Methods and Data Sources

This case study draws on an analysis and integration of student-level data, classroom-level data, organizational-conditions data, and implementation artifacts. The sources are summarized below.

Data sources

- Student-level MAP Growth: Reading and Mathematics, 2021–2026, with fall, winter, spring, and prior-spring fields, including RIT scores, standard errors, achievement percentiles, and conditional growth percentile (CGP) metrics computed against 2025 norms. The extract covers approximately 10,660 unique students.
- Mapping Success classroom-level file: seven winter and spring reporting windows spanning 2022–23 through winter 2025–26, with school, grade (K–12), teacher/classroom, subject-specific growth-attainment percentages, and student counts. Spring 2025–26 NWEA class-level assessment exports for 15 schools (using the 2025 norms) were provided by the district. The attainment analyses reported here use the K–5 subset. The supplied threshold flag identifies records meeting the cutoff in both subjects; recognition eligibility was recalculated using reading or mathematics, with an operational cutoff of $\geq 69.5\%$.
- 5Essentials data: the district’s 2026 school-by-school analysis of the 5Essentials and the number of rating “jumps” since 2025, alongside full 5Essentials reports for the district and selected schools.
- Implementation artifacts: a Mapping Success one-pager and narrative, Ambitious Instruction correspondence and board/principal updates, school narratives, and photographs of recognition materials.

Analytic approach

School-level MAP trends were computed by assigning each record to its spring testing school and averaging available fall-to-spring conditional growth percentiles across reading and mathematics records within each school and year. The conditional growth percentile expresses a student’s growth relative to academically similar students nationally, so a value near 50 indicates growth at the national average. Mapping Success attainment was computed separately for reading and mathematics by dividing the summed number meeting growth targets by the summed number tested within the K–5 subset. The combined summary is the arithmetic average of those two subject-specific rates, not the percentage of individual students meeting targets in both subjects. The district’s 70%

recognition threshold was tabulated separately as a count of qualifying classrooms. The 5Essentials profile and rating jumps since 2025 came from the district's 2026 analysis.

Two additional analyses were conducted to strengthen the outcome evidence. First, a fixed cohort was constructed of the students present in the district in every year from 2021 through 2026, and that group's achievement percentile was tracked over time, including a within-student comparison of each cohort member's 2021 and 2026 standing. Cohort membership was fixed at 2,094 students with records in all six years. Annual figure values average available student–subject achievement percentile records, so the valid-score sample varies by year. The paired analysis included 1,862 students with valid endpoint averages in both 2021 and 2026; each endpoint average used the student's available reading and mathematics percentiles. Second, to benchmark organizational conditions externally, the district's schools were ranked against all Illinois schools in the 2024–25 statewide 5Essentials data file by computing composite scores for each of the 5Essentials and locating the district's average within the statewide distribution.

Districtwide Findings

5Essentials: Organizational conditions

The district's 2026 5Essentials analysis shows broad strength across most of the 5Essentials, with one clear area for continued growth. Districtwide, Moline–Coal Valley was rated Strong in Effective Leaders, Collaborative Teachers, Involved Families, and Ambitious Instruction, and Neutral in Supportive Environment. At the school level, the picture is more varied and, in several buildings, notably strong. The table below summarizes the 2026 profile and the number of rating jumps each school made since 2025.

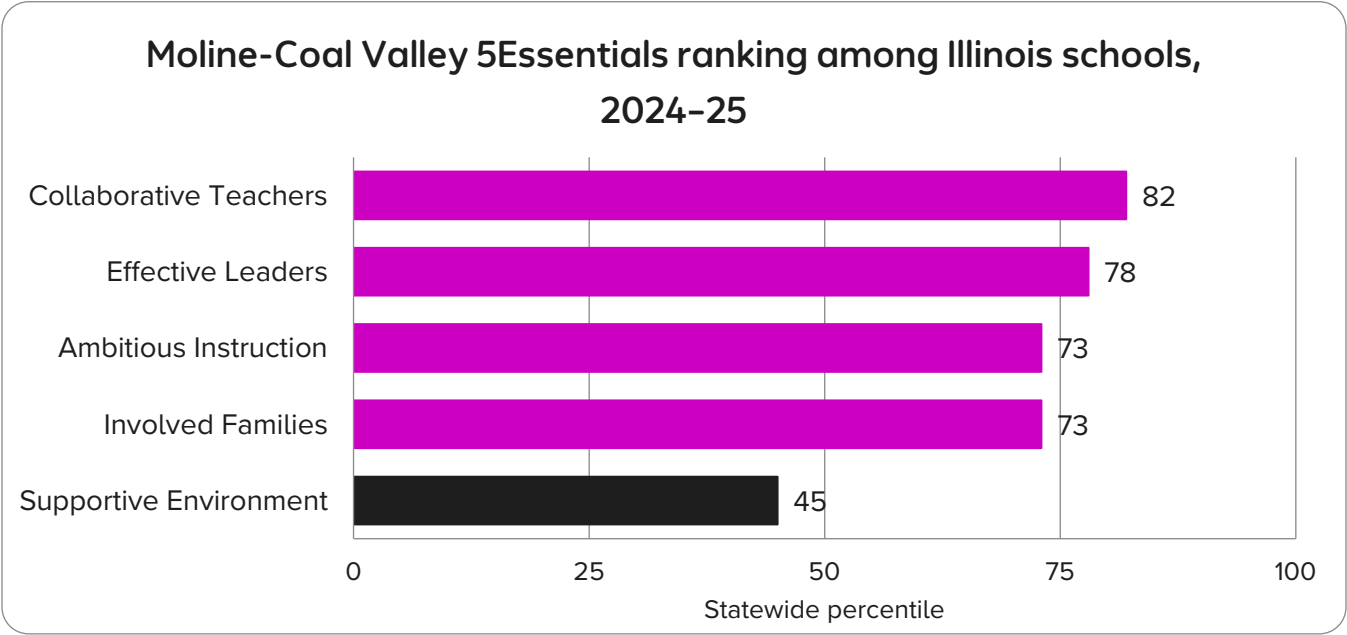
Table 3. 2026 5Essentials ratings by school and rating jumps since 2025

School	Effective Leaders	Supportive Environment	Collaborative Teachers	Involved Families	Ambitious Instruction	Jumps since 2025
Jane Addams	Very strong	Strong	Very strong	Very strong	Very strong	+5
Bicentennial	Strong	Strong	Strong	Strong	Strong	+1
Butterworth	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Strong	Neutral	+2
Franklin	Very strong	Strong	Very strong	Very strong	Strong	+3
Hamilton	Very strong	Neutral	Very strong	Strong	Neutral	+2
Lincoln-Irving	Strong	Neutral	Strong	Neutral	Strong	+5
Logan	Strong	Weak	Strong	Neutral	Neutral	0 (lost one)
Roosevelt	Strong	Strong	Strong	Very strong	Strong	+5
Washington	Very strong	Neutral	Strong	Strong	Strong	+7
Willard	Very strong	Neutral	Strong	Strong	Neutral	+3
John Deere	Strong	Neutral	Strong	Strong	Strong	+1
Wilson	Strong	Neutral	Strong	Strong	Neutral	0 (maintained)
Moline HS	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	0 (maintained)
District	Strong	Neutral	Strong	Strong	Strong	+1

Two patterns stand out. First, several schools posted large year-over-year gains: Washington made seven rating jumps, and Jane Addams, Lincoln-Irving, and Roosevelt each made five. Second, the pattern of strength is uneven across the 5Essentials. Effective Leaders and Collaborative Teachers are strong or very strong in most buildings, while Supportive Environment is the most common neutral rating, and was identified as a shared area for continued attention.

An additional analysis ranked the district’s schools against all Illinois schools in the 2024–25 statewide 5Essentials data file. This analysis confirmed that Moline–Coal Valley sits well above the state median on four Essentials and below it only on Supportive Environment.

Figure 1. Moline–Coal Valley’s composite rank on each of the 5Essentials among all Illinois schools (2024–25 statewide 5Essentials file).



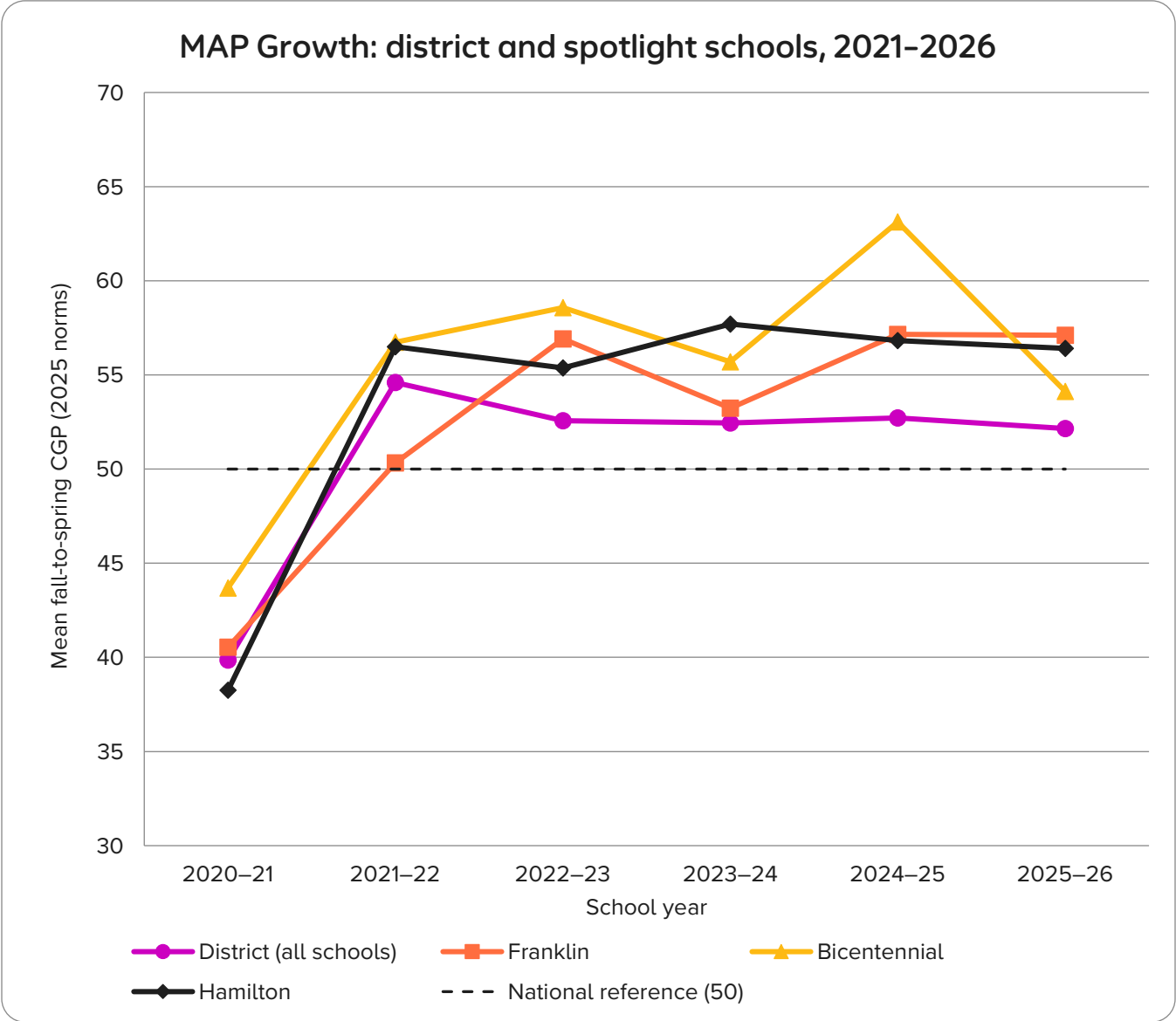
The district demonstrates strength in Effective Leaders (about the 78th percentile statewide), Collaborative Teachers (about the 82nd), Ambitious Instruction (about the 73rd), and Involved Families (about the 73rd), with Supportive Environment (about the 45th) as a clear growth area. Within Supportive Environment, the Safety measure ranks lowest, near the 41st percentile statewide. When a self-assessment and an outside benchmark agree this closely, each lends credibility to the other. (Bicentennial Elementary did not appear in the 2024–25 statewide file and is therefore not represented in this comparison.)

In a 2025 board update, leaders identified the district’s highest-scoring measures as Parent Influence on Decision Making, Quality Professional Development, Instructional Leadership, Program Coherence, and Teacher-Teacher Trust, and their lowest as Safety, Quality of Student Discussion, and Teacher Influence. The measures that had improved the most since the prior survey were Teacher-Parent Trust (+17), Parent Involvement (+13), Teacher-Teacher Trust (+13), Instructional Leadership (+13), and Quality Professional Development (+13). This internal accounting mirrors both the 2026 composite ratings and the statewide benchmark demonstrating broad strength in leadership, collaboration, and family engagement, with safety and student discussion identified as priorities for continued work.

MAP Growth: Districtwide achievement and growth trends

Districtwide MAP growth improved markedly after 2021 and then remained above the national average in subsequent years. Mean fall-to-spring conditional growth percentile increased from 39.9 in 2021 to 52.1 in 2026, remaining above 50 in each year from 2022 onward. Because a conditional growth percentile (CGP) near 50 represents growth at the national average, this trajectory indicates that the district moved from below-average growth to consistently at or above-average growth. The improvement appeared in both subjects: reading growth increased from 40.7 to 53.0 CGP, and mathematics growth increased from 39.0 to 51.4 CGP, between 2021 and 2026.

Figure 2. Mean fall-to-spring conditional growth percentile for the district and three spotlight schools, 2021–2026. The dashed line marks the 50th-percentile national-average benchmark.



The first-year jump should be read cautiously. The 2021 figures reflect a period of pandemic disruption, so part of the subsequent increase represents recovery as well as improvement. What is more notable is the sustained position above the national average in the years that followed, across both subjects and most buildings. The next section examines the data more deeply, by following the same students over time.

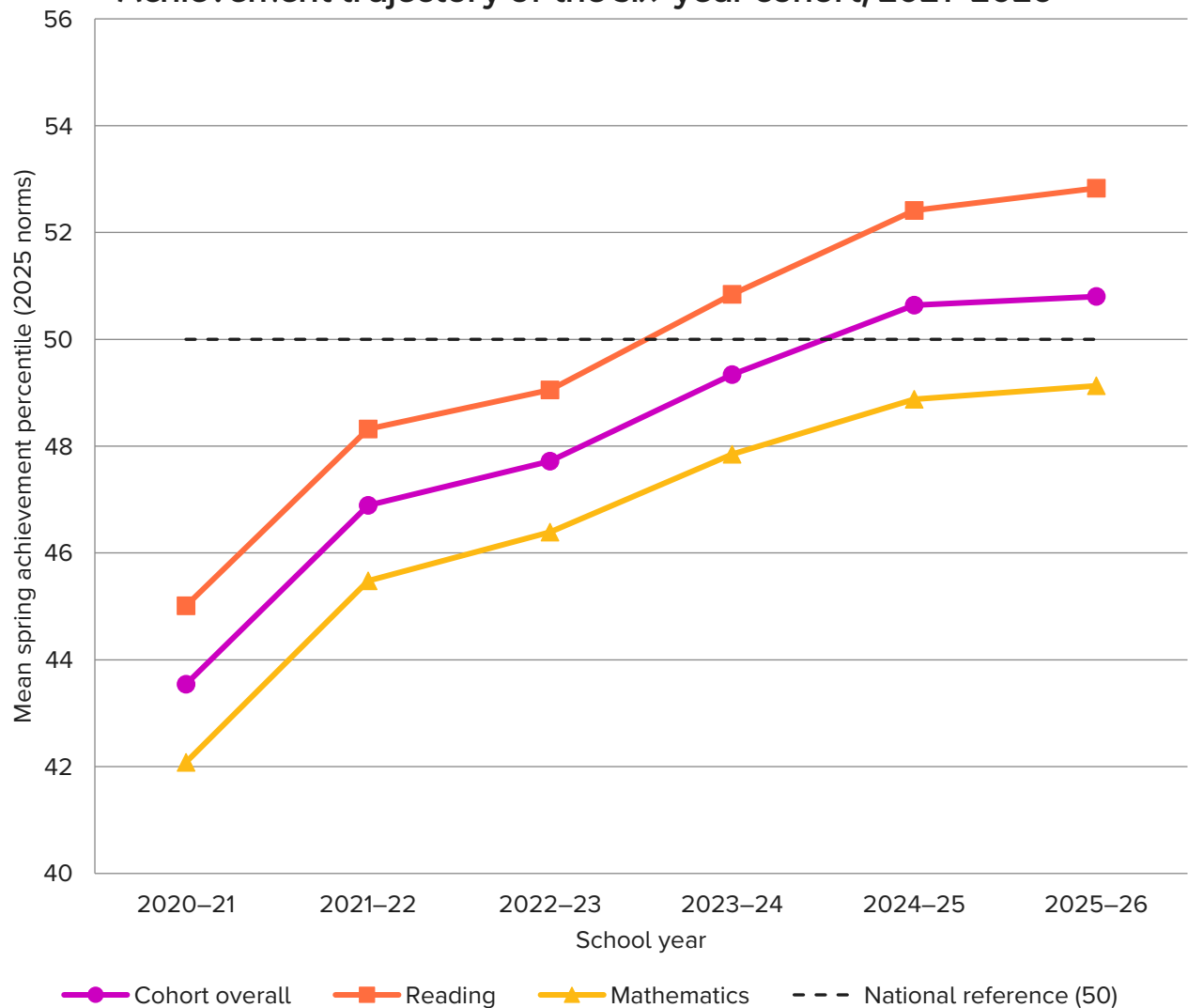
Students who stayed: A six-year cohort

The overall trends above pool different students in each year, which raises the possibility that the gains could be the result of enrollment shifts, such as lower-performing students leaving the district and higher-performing students entering the district, rather than real growth within students. To address this directly, an analysis isolated the approximately 2,100 students who were present in the district in every year from 2021 through 2026 and followed that single, fixed group over time. Following a fixed group reduces the influence of enrollment turnover, although missing scores and available subjects can affect the annual means.

Within this cohort, students climbed the national achievement distribution year after year. The cohort's mean MAP achievement percentile rose from the 44th percentile in 2021 to the 51st in 2026. Because achievement percentiles are measured against a fixed national norm, a rising percentile means these students were steadily outpacing their peers nationally. They were not merely growing from year to year but gaining ground relative to students across the country.

Figure 3. Mean spring MAP achievement percentile for the fixed six-year cohort (students present every year, 2021–2026). The dashed line marks the 50th-percentile national median.

Achievement trajectory of the six-year cohort, 2021–2026



Among 1,862 cohort students with valid achievement percentile averages in both 2021 and 2026, the mean gain was 7.3 percentile points, and 67.4% improved their percentile standing. The share at or above the national median increased from 42.6% to 53.5%, meaning that, as a group, these students moved from below average to above average relative to the nation while attending district schools. The cohort analysis cannot attribute the gains to any single program, but it provides evidence that improvement also occurred among students who remained in the district, rather than relying solely on changing annual enrollment. This analysis demonstrates that a stable group of students measurably improved its standing over the same years the district’s improvement routines matured.

Mapping Success: Student growth attainment

The share of students meeting or exceeding their growth targets rose meaningfully across the four years of Mapping Success testing windows. Each K–5 classroom was weighted by the number of students, so that larger classrooms count proportionally. The average of the student-weighted reading and mathematics attainment rates increased from approximately 46–49% in the 2022–23 windows to 68% in spring 2025–26. The gain was strongest in mathematics, where the student-weighted attainment rate climbed from about 50% to 72%; reading

rose more modestly, from the mid-40s to about 63%. This upward trend is consistent with the districtwide focus on MAP Growth attainment and with the expansion of the district’s instructional routines over the same period.

Table 4. Share of K–5 students meeting or exceeding projected MAP growth, by subject and testing window. Computed from classroom-level student counts in the Mapping Success file. The spring 2025–26 row was computed from the district’s spring 2025–26 NWEA class-level exports and counts students with a fall score.

Testing window	Students meeting growth in reading	Students meeting growth in math	Average of reading and math rates
2022–23 Winter	45%	52%	49%
2022–23 Spring	43%	50%	46%
2023–24 Winter	46%	62%	54%
2023–24 Spring	45%	70%	57%
2024–25 Winter	46%	65%	56%
2024–25 Spring	45%	67%	56%
2025–26 Winter	61%	70%	65%
2025–26 Spring	63%	72%	68%

The district’s own recognition threshold is deliberately more demanding. Mapping Success recognizes a classroom only when 70% or more of its students meet their growth targets in reading or math. To meet this threshold, a typical class of 25 would need at least 18 students to clear the target. By that strict definition, the number of K–5 classroom records meeting the recognition threshold increased from 35 of 177 (19.8%) in winter 2022–23 to 88 of 150 (58.7%) in winter 2025–26. These patterns suggest that the district’s most recent Mapping Success results reflect broader student-level growth as well as an increase in classrooms meeting the district’s demanding recognition threshold.

Ambitious Instruction: Learning-walk dosage

The district’s instructional observation work expanded steadily across three years. Beginning with a Teacher Leader Academy and 54 formal and 60+ informal observations in 2023–24, the work grew into a structured, cross-campus learning-walk routine of about 240 observations over 16 days in 2024–25 and roughly 300 visits over 17 days in 2025–26. The campuses that hosted the learning walks used both the Rigor and Learner Engagement Rubrics, and principals received trend feedback and possible next steps after each round.

School Spotlights

The following school spotlights illustrate different improvement patterns within the same district system. The three lead vignettes —Franklin, Bicentennial, and Hamilton — were selected because each shows strong MAP growth, high Mapping Success attainment, and a strong 5Essentials profile over the study period, though each followed a different path. Wilson Middle School illustrates how the instructional work extended into the secondary level. Each spotlight follows the same arc: context, starting point, what the school did, what changed, and why it matters.

Franklin Elementary School

Franklin Elementary is the clearest turnaround story based on the data. In the spring of 2022, Franklin was among the district’s lowest performers on both the 5Essentials Survey and MAP Growth. On the 5Essentials instrument,

the school was rated “partially organized for improvement,” the second-lowest designation. On MAP Growth, only 38% of students met or exceeded their reading growth targets and 48% met or exceeded their math growth targets.

Franklin’s principal describes a deliberate, systematic approach to improvement. It began with building leadership capacity to analyze and act on data from MAP Growth and 5Essentials, which was supported by district 5Essentials coaching from Dr. Victor Simon. The principal slowly built staff buy-in through targeted conversations and a Building Leadership Team. Weekly 45-minute professional learning sessions were devoted to interpreting MAP and 5Essentials data, with staff using the “jigsaw method” to master each of the 5Essentials in small groups and set school improvement plan goals tied to each. The school treated data-collection windows as high-energy, celebrated events to motivate students to give their best effort, displayed results publicly, and used grade-level planning to sort students by skill strand and target instruction.

They [5Essentials] are heavily intertwined and are great ways to quantify “success” beyond the anecdotal, which is particularly difficult to do in regards to measuring climate and culture.

— Grant Putnam, Principal, Franklin Elementary School

By the spring of 2026, Franklin had moved to the highest 5Essentials designation. The school achieved “well organized for improvement” status with all 5Essentials rated green and with very strong ratings in Effective Leaders, Collaborative Teachers, and Involved Families. On MAP Growth, 65% of students achieved their growth target in reading and 81% of students achieved their growth target in math. Franklin’s mean fall-to-spring conditional growth percentile rose from about 41 in 2021 to 57 in 2026, and its mean achievement percentile climbed from the mid-40s to the mid-50s.

Bicentennial Elementary School

Bicentennial’s mean fall-to-spring CGP increased from 43.7 in 2021 to 63.1 in 2025, before declining to 54.1 in 2026. Growth remained above the 50th-percentile reference, while mean spring achievement percentile increased from 52.5 to 60.6 across the six-year period.

From winter 2022–23 through winter 2025–26, the average of its student-weighted reading and mathematics attainment rates was 63.6%, one of the highest rates in the district. Its 2026 5Essentials profile is strong across all five Essentials, including a strong rating in Supportive Environment, which was the district’s most common area of relative weakness. The school went through a leadership transition, and 2025–26 is best understood as a transition year: achievement held steady while growth softened to a CGP of 54.1, still above the national average.

Hamilton Elementary School

Hamilton Elementary is the district’s largest elementary building, serving approximately 573 students with a staff of about 92. Nearly 60% of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, 17.3% receive special education services, and students speak 17 different languages. Hamilton has had consistent leadership for more than a decade, making it a strong example of how the district’s routines operate at scale and over time. In 2022–23, the school was rated neutral in four of the five Essentials.

Hamilton paired ambitious instruction with strong social-emotional support and family engagement. Instructional shifts in mathematics included adoption of new curricula, productive-struggle practices, flexible grouping, aligned Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions, and Kagan cooperative learning structures that increased mathematical discourse. The school built systems for instructional walkthroughs, standards alignment, data meetings, and student-centered coaching with two instructional coaches, and it invested heavily in belonging, relationships, and emotional safety. Hamilton earned RAMP designation from the American School Counselor Association for its counseling program.

School improvement has never been about a single program or initiative.

—Lynsy Oswald, Principal, Hamilton Elementary School

Hamilton moved from neutral in four Essentials to strong or very strong across all five in 2023–24. By 2026, Hamilton remained Very Strong in Effective Leaders and Collaborative Teachers and Strong in Involved Families, with Supportive Environment and Ambitious Instruction rated Neutral (Table 3). During 2023–24, 79% of students met their math MAP growth goals, and the school sustained high math growth in the years that followed. Hamilton’s mean fall-to-spring conditional growth percentile rose from 38.3 in 2021 to 56.4 in 2026 across a large K–5 sample, and the average of its student-weighted reading and mathematics attainment rates was 59.7% across the available Mapping Success windows. Hamilton was named a Model School in 2024–25.

With intentional work, Hamilton moved from being neutral in four areas [of the 5Essentials] during the 2022–2023 school year to achieving strong or very strong ratings across all five areas in 2023–2024.

— Lynsy Oswald, Principal, Hamilton Elementary School

Hamilton illustrates strong results alongside the district’s improvement routines in a large and diverse building. Its emphasis on coupling ambitious instruction with social-emotional support also illustrates the district’s view that conditions and achievement move together.

Wilson Middle School

Wilson Middle School is the strongest secondary example of the district’s instructional work. Wilson was named a Model School in 2025–26, and its leadership lineage connects directly to the success of the district’s elementary schools. Bob Beem, a former Wilson principal who later oversaw secondary schools, was a mentor who impressed upon new leadership at Franklin that “achievement can only move so far without the climate and culture of a school being strong.”

Wilson demonstrates that the instructional routines can scale beyond the elementary grades. Consultant feedback singled out both middle schools and the high school for an openness to the learning-walk process not found at every secondary school. Wilson’s inclusion also signals that the district’s coherence work is intended to scale across K–12, even where specific recognition routines were originally designed for elementary settings.

It was embedded in the teachers that this was NOT an evaluation, but simply a learning opportunity for everyone involved, which involves TRUST!

—Tom Ferguson, Principal, Wilson Middle School

Deep Dive: Mapping Success as an Improvement Routine

Origins

Mapping Success grew out of a need to move beyond simply looking at data. Before Mapping Success, the district used a traditional data-wall approach that tracked fall-to-spring MAP Growth results by building, grade level, and subject. That approach provided a clear snapshot of performance, but it stayed at a summary level. It showed where the district was, but not how to improve. The shift began at Washington Elementary, where the focus became not just reviewing MAP data but using it, and then recognizing the results when that use led to student growth. That work produced the Patriot of Learning Leaders (POLL) awards, built from classroom-level data and recognizing both student and classroom success across multiple measures of progress.

Over time, the recognition routines moved from celebrating success to fostering conversations and learning opportunities. Teachers began asking what was working, how instruction was being adjusted, and what practices were leading to growth. That shift from recognition to reflection is what led to the development of Mapping Success as a districtwide routine.

Figure 4. Mapping Success “Destination Growth Award” certificates prepared for distribution, organized by school. The awards recognize classrooms in which a high share of students met or exceeded their projected MAP growth. (Photograph provided by the district.)



Operational design

Mapping Success uses MAP Growth projected growth targets in reading and math. In the winter window, attainment reflects fall-to-winter projected growth; in the spring window, fall-to-spring projected growth. It identifies classrooms where 70% or more of students meet or exceed their projected growth (operationally, a cutoff of approximately 69.5% with rounding). Each student's projected growth target follows NWEA's standard definition: an individualized target based on prior performance and national norms. The classroom metric reflects the percentage of students who met or exceeded that target within a given testing window. District leaders describe the benchmark as intentionally high, so that recognition reflects exceptional impact.

Mechanism: From recognition to learning

The most important feature of Mapping Success is that recognition is not the endpoint. When classrooms meet the threshold, the focus shifts to understanding the instructional decisions behind the result. Teachers are given a platform to share what they did, how they adjusted instruction, and what made the difference. This routine turns individual success into collective learning. From a district perspective, the routine brings consistency to how growth is recognized and discussed and reinforces the expectation that strong results should be studied, shared, and scaled.

Evidence

The data show a clear upward trend in student growth over four years. As reported previously, the average of the student-weighted reading and mathematics attainment rates increased from roughly 46–49% in the 2022–23 windows to about 68% by the 2025–26 spring window, with the largest gains in mathematics. The number of K–5 classroom records meeting the reading or mathematics recognition threshold increased from 35 of 177 (19.8%) in winter 2022–23 to 88 of 150 (58.7%) in winter 2025–26. Student-weighted attainment was strongest at schools such as Bicentennial, Franklin, Hamilton, and Jane Addams (around 60–64% from winter 2022–23 through winter 2025–26).

Deep Dive: Ambitious Instruction and Learning Walks

Rationale

The district’s Ambitious Instruction work aimed to strengthen instruction and instructional feedback loops. Working with the Center for Model Schools, the district designed a multi-year plan that began with professional learning for teacher leaders and grew into a structured, cross-campus observation routine. The goal was to give administrators and teachers a shared language for what ambitious instruction looks like and structured opportunities to observe it, identify trends, and discuss next steps.

Professional learning

The partnership itself grew from the district’s existing strengths. When NWEA joined HMM and the Center for Model Schools in spring 2023, Moline–Coal Valley—with its long track record of using MAP Growth and the 5Essentials survey—was invited to merge the Center’s instructional work with that foundation. The district set an explicit goal: move the Ambitious Instruction metric on the 5Essentials Survey from Neutral to Strong, with particular attention to student discussions and academic personalism, with a plan to use the Center’s Rigor Rubric in the first semester and the Learner Engagement Rubric in the second to sharpen feedback to teachers.

The work began in 2023–24 with a series of professional learning sessions on “Building a Culture of Ambitious Instruction” for principals, instructional coaches, and teacher leaders. That year the Center conducted 54 formal observations using the Model Schools rubrics, along with more than 60 informal observations with campus administrators, almost all focused on the Rigor and Learner Engagement rubrics. Leaders reported that the overwhelming majority of classrooms at all levels were positive and showed a strong learning culture. These observations, together with what the deputy superintendent and principals were seeing, informed the design of the learning-walk process that followed. In 2024–25, professional learning expanded to include an August overview for all teachers, four sessions with instructional coaches, two with principals, and an Administrators Academy in June 2025.

Learning walks

Over the next two years, learning walks scaled into a districtwide routine. In 2024–25, teachers and administrators partnered across campuses over 16 days of learning walks, dividing each day so that participants observed at their own school and visited another. By the end of the year, the work amounted to roughly 22 campus visits and about 240 different classrooms, using both the Rigor and Learner Engagement Rubrics. In 2025–26, the process continued with strategic partnering of schools and a literacy emphasis (reading, writing, and academic discussion across the curriculum) reaching roughly 300 different classrooms. After each round, principals received trend feedback and possible next steps rather than individual evaluations.

Table 5. Ambitious Instruction observation and learning-walk activity by year. Sources: Moline–Coal Valley board report (Feb. 2025) and administrator updates (Aug. 2025, Feb. 2026).

Year	Observation activity	Focus
2023–24	54 formal observations; 60+ informal observations with administrators	Teacher Leader Academy; PD for principals, coaches, and teacher leaders; Rigor and Learner Engagement rubrics
2024–25	16 days of learning walks; ~22 campus visits; ~240 classrooms	Cross-campus partnering; Rigor and Learner Engagement Rubrics; principal trend feedback
2025–26	~300 classrooms	Strategic campus pairing; literacy emphasis (read, write, discuss); many principals begin internal walks

Guiding principle and observed themes

The key principle that anchored the work was that learning walks were meant to build the observer, not evaluate the observed. This framing positioned classroom visits as capacity-building rather than compliance, and the consultant reported that the vast majority of teachers gave positive feedback about the process and were eager to visit other campuses and classrooms. Many principals adopted the process for internal walks with their own teachers, and work samples and planning improved around the rubrics as comfort grew.

We continually discuss how this is about building up the observer and not evaluating the observed.

— Dr. Robert Thornell, Center for Model Schools

Across visits, observers attended to common markers of ambitious instruction. These included indicators from the Center’s Rigor Rubric: thoughtful student work, academic discussion, students explaining and justifying their thinking, and high-level questioning. Observers noted that the majority of classrooms had students applying knowledge rather than only recalling it, that small-group and flexible instruction created openings for higher-level questioning, and that even tasks that looked simple could become rigorous when teacher questioning pushed students to explain and justify their reasoning. The district connected this work to a broader literacy frame—reading generous amounts of text, writing frequently, and participating in purposeful discussion—and to the Rigor/Relevance Framework’s emphasis on moving student work from recall toward application and transfer.

The district paired this progress with candid self-examination. Drawing on broader research, leaders acknowledged that a large share of classroom work historically sits at the level of recall and reproduction, with relatively little learning reaching transfer. The district used this understanding to motivate its focus on thoughtful work and higher-order tasks rather than as an evaluation of any single teacher or building. As one consultant put it, the aim was to improve the system that surrounds good teachers, not to evaluate individuals.

A bad system beats a good person every time.

— W. Edwards Deming, quoted in the district’s administrator update

Cross-Case Themes: What Seems to Matter Most

Across the district and its schools, several themes recur. They are presented here as patterns observed in this descriptive case study, not as tested causal claims.

Coherence mattered

PACE, 5Essentials, MAP Growth, school improvement plans, and instructional routines reinforced one another rather than competing as separate initiatives. The district’s progress is best understood as the product of these tools and routines working together, not any one of them alone.

Recognition became powerful when paired with reflection

Mapping Success and its predecessor, the POLL awards, show that celebration alone is not an improvement mechanism. The movement came when recognition prompted teachers to ask what worked and to share effective practice, converting individual classroom success into collective learning.

Instructional improvement was operationalized

Rubrics, learning walks, and trend feedback gave the district concrete ways to define, observe, and discuss ambitious instruction. Abstract goals became observable behaviors—academic discussion, student justification, high-level questioning—that educators could build toward together.

Conditions and growth appear intertwined

School leaders repeatedly described climate and culture as inseparable from achievement, and the data are consistent with that view: schools with strong 5Essentials profiles tended also to show strong MAP growth. The case study does not establish the direction of that relationship, but it does show leaders treating the two as a single initiative.

Leadership stability helped, but routines may help through transitions

Hamilton's decade-plus of stable leadership coincided with strong, sustained results. At the same time, Bicentennial's experience raises a related question: during its leadership transition, achievement held steady and 5Essentials ratings stayed strong, while growth softened. Whether established routines help a school hold its ground through a transition, and how long a new principal needs to see growth, is worth examining in future work.

Lessons for Other Districts

Moline–Coal Valley's experience suggests several practical lessons for districts seeking to use organizational-conditions data and growth data together.

1. Learn both tools deeply before expecting staff to use them well. Franklin's turnaround began with leaders building genuine competency in interpreting 5Essentials and MAP, supported by coaching, before asking teachers to act on the data.
2. Use 5Essentials to prioritize conditions, not just diagnose them. The district treated the survey as a roadmap for which “levers to pull,” setting improvement-plan goals tied to specific Essentials rather than filing the results away.
3. Make MAP meaningful through motivation, interpretation, and instructional response. Strong data depend on motivated test-takers; useful data depend on educators who can interpret results and adjust instruction in response.
4. Turn success into shared practice, not just celebration. The shift from recognition to reflection, and asking recognized teachers to share what they did, is what made Mapping Success an improvement routine rather than an awards ceremony.
5. Build common instructional language through observation and feedback. Learning walks worked because they built up observers and produced trend feedback, giving the whole system a shared vocabulary for ambitious instruction.
6. Protect time for adults to learn from data together. Dedicated, recurring professional learning time—weekly in some buildings—was necessary for the work to happen.

Conclusion

Moline–Coal Valley's progress came not from any single tool, but from the repeatable routines that connected its tools into a system. PACE provided coherence; 5Essentials diagnosed the conditions for improvement; MAP Growth supplied repeated evidence of student growth; Mapping Success recognized and studied effective classroom practice; and learning walks built a shared instructional language across campuses. What distinguishes the district's work is what it built around those tools: durable processes for turning data into conversations, conversations into action, and action into organizational learning. The tools were available to many districts, but the routines that made them add up to system-level improvement are what sets Moline–Coal Valley School District apart. They established structures for diagnosing need, recognizing success, studying the practice behind it, and spreading that learning across the system.

The evidence assembled here is descriptive and practice oriented. It documents a district whose districtwide MAP growth moved from below the national average to consistently at or above it. A district where a fixed cohort of students measurably climbed the national achievement distribution over six years. A district where student-weighted growth-target attainment rose substantially across reading and mathematics. And a district whose organizational strength is corroborated by results on the 5Essentials survey. This study does not isolate the cause of those changes, but it provides a portrait of how coherent routines, sustained over several years, helped a district turn data into adult learning and adult learning into better conditions and outcomes for students.

Limitations

This is a descriptive, correlational case study; it does not establish that any single program caused the observed changes.

The current MAP extract does not include student demographic fields, which limits equity-focused analysis.

Mapping Success attainment in this study is reported as a student-weighted rate, using classroom-level student counts provided by the district. The district's recognition threshold is a classroom-level measure requiring at least 70% of students to meet growth targets in either reading or mathematics. It is distinct from the subject-specific student-weighted attainment rates reported in this study.

Findings should be interpreted carefully across measures and years, recognizing that several improvement efforts were underway simultaneously.

References

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Data Sources

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District implementation records. Moline–Coal Valley board report (Feb. 2025), administrator updates (Aug. 2025, Feb. 2026), and the Mapping Success one-pager.

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