



Technical Assistance in Microsoft Math Partnership Schools and Districts

The Microsoft Math Partnership provides districts and schools with valuable technical assistance through a collaborative effort by the Puget Sound Educational Service District (PSESD), the American Institutes for Research (AIR), and the University of Washington. These technical assistance providers support the MMP districts by engaging them in whole-group, research-based professional development. Additionally, these providers differentiate support by meeting with each district to determine what specific needs their schools might have beyond whole-group professional development. The technical assistance provided by MMP is also unique because it addresses local needs of the districts, such as specific expertise on Washington State standards, but also provides a broader national perspective when necessary, which is primarily provided by AIR. Over the last few years, technical assistance contractors helped provide targeted support in a variety of areas.

Main areas of targeted technical assistance for MMP districts and schools:

- Curriculum alignment with standards and the development of curriculum pacing guides
- Creating, administering, scoring, and revising common assessments
- Developing and revising course placement criteria
- Support around instructional practice and coaching techniques

Curriculum Alignment with Standards and the Development of Curriculum Pacing Guides

In Year 3 of the initiative, Partnership districts continued to make progress in the area of curriculum alignment. Much of this work is supported by technical assistance through MMP. Some of the Partnership districts are in the midst of curriculum adoptions and many of the districts are working on aligning existing curriculum to new state math standards. One teacher talked about this work stating, “Part of our work included looking at the state standards and making sure what we taught was aligned with the state standards.” Some of the districts are using technical assistance to help them with this work. One person shared, “[We have] been doing standards alignment. I work with that particular group and bring back information from that to the building.” In collaboration with math coaches and district math specialists, MMP technical assistance providers assisted districts and schools in revising the scope and sequence of their math courses, in creating pacing guides for courses, and in providing a state and national context for aligning curriculum with standards.

Creating, Administering, Scoring, and Revising Common Assessments

Another key area of technical assistance being provided to MMP schools over the course of the grant is around common assessments. All of the MMP schools and districts are now in the process of developing common benchmark and summative assessments. Technical assistance provided through MMP is helping districts and schools establish buy-in from teachers regarding the need for common assessments, which in many cases is leading to teachers having more conversations around assessment and the importance of collaboratively analyzing student work.

“One of the things that has come out of the grant is realizing the need for common assessments. It really has formulated a framework for our district.”

~ Principal

In several districts, MMP technical assistance providers are helping to develop teacher teams who are creating common assessments along with scoring rubrics. These teacher teams are then piloting these assessments, analyzing the assessment results using the scoring rubrics, and revising the assessments.

“We are taking an assessment item and calibrating our scoring technique and then looking at trends and why kids did not get something right.”

~ Coach

The technical assistance around common assessments provides districts with a sustainable and replicable process to continue building common assessments with the help of teacher teams. Additionally, technical assistance providers are helping to review and edit these assessments, and are providing valuable advice around the most effective ways to create questions for these assessments and to create scoring rubrics. Coaches and math specialists are also learning how to lead these teacher teams through this process with the help of the technical assistance providers.

Developing and Revising Course Placement Criteria

One of the most frequently cited policy changes occurring in the MMP school districts in Year 3 of the grant is revisions to course placement guidelines. Technical assistance providers are helping districts in this work by engaging district and school personnel in conversations around course placement and providing examples and advice on how to do this effectively. In some districts, technical assistance providers helped establish new guidelines for student placement in math courses across school levels (e.g. 5th grade to 6th grade). In some cases, these revisions are allowing larger numbers of students' access to high-level math courses.

Previously, many of the districts placed students in math courses by teacher recommendation alone; now many of the districts are assessing readiness for certain math classes using more formalized assessments in addition to teacher recommendations.

Support around Instructional Practice and Coaching Techniques

Grant participants consistently mention the instructional support provided by coaches as being one of the most important components of the Partnership. Technical assistance providers are working to support coaches in a variety of ways. In some cases, technical assistance providers are observing in math classrooms with the coach and occasionally with a larger team consisting of school and district personnel. Technical assistance providers are then debriefing the observations with coaches and teachers. In some cases, the debrief sessions focus on instructional strategies used, while in others, the sessions focus more on the curriculum being taught. Technical assistance providers are also having conversations with coaches to identify classrooms in need of more support and are having conversations around how to best provide the needed support.

Overall, the technical assistance provided to MMP schools and districts as part of the grant helped support the overall MMP objectives of 1) developing common assessments, 2) increasing pedagogical skills of administrators, coaches, and teachers, and 3) increasing college and workplace readiness by increasing student enrollment in higher level math courses.

In general, the key takeaways regarding the technical assistance provided by the grant included:

- 1) Establishing a common understanding of grant activities by providing whole-group professional development
- 2) Providing differentiated support for each district and school
- 3) Utilizing local and national expertise as necessary