



Middle School

# Closing the Gap and Then Some

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## Introduction

### Closing the Gap and Then Some

Students who fall behind academically face challenges that extend beyond the next score on an assessment. Significant gaps may prevent a student from graduating, from performing well on college entrance exams, and from acquiring the basic literacy and numeracy skills necessary for successful adulthood. Students who tend to have the greatest gaps are also those who tend to have labels: English language learners, students with disabilities, minorities, and economically disadvantaged.

We know who the students are that not keeping up with their peers academically and we know how to help them. Explicit instruction in their areas of deficiency, accommodations, scaffolding, and frequent measurement of progress to inform instruction collectively fill the gaps that may otherwise limit a student's future; however, it is not enough to fill gaps. Students must also gain ground. Put quantitatively, struggling students must advance more than the average student growth in a given school year if they are to catch up with their peers.

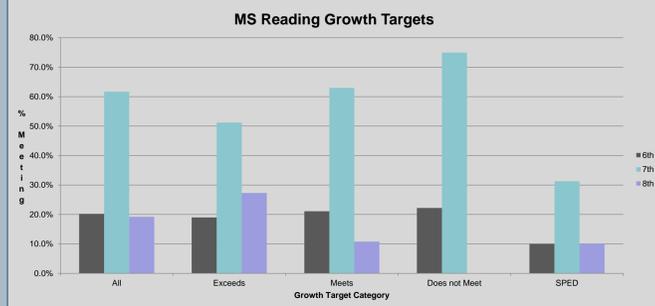
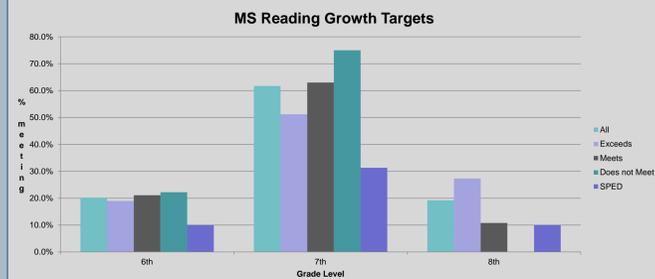
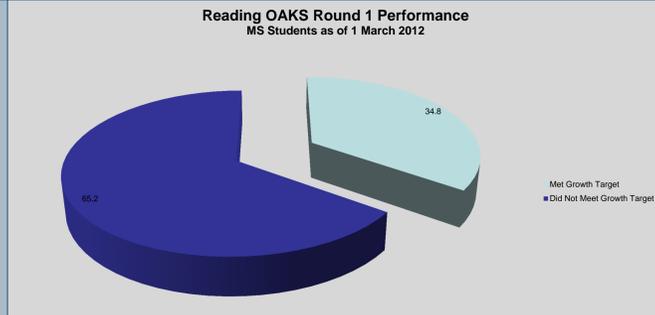
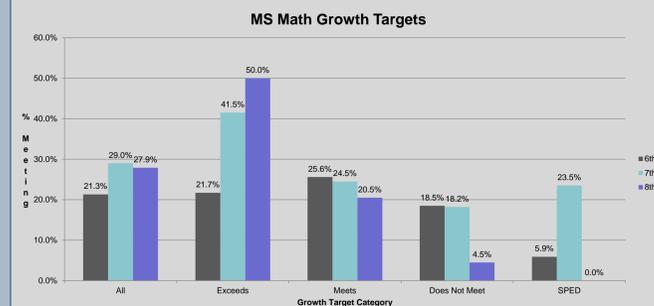
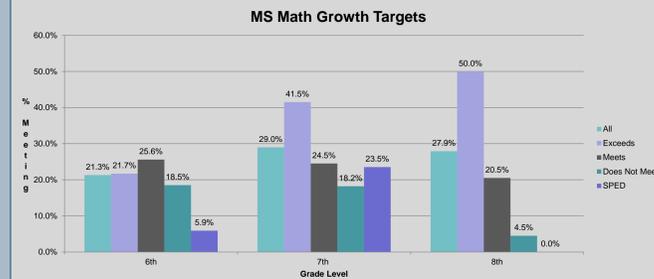
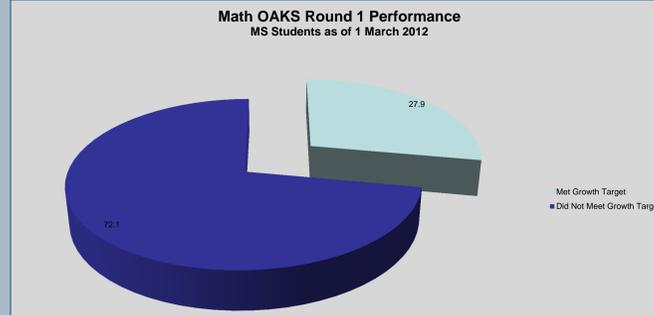
## Theory

Historically, minority students, English language learners, students in poverty, and students with special needs have struggled to achieve grade-level performance in reading and math (Center for Education Policy, 2009); however, many schools have been able to raise achievement in these subgroups by following a few critical practices. These practices include: 1) a focus on standards; 2) a rigorous curriculum; 3) extra help in the form of interventions or tutoring; and 4) effective teachers (Jung and Guskey, 2009; Rowan, Hall, and Haycock, 2010).

Meta-analysts and researchers such as Marzano (2009) and Wenglinsky (2004) investigated further the depth of teacher effectiveness in closing the achievement gap. Marzano (2009) identified nine high-yield instructional practices and an additional 32 strategies that relate to effective teaching and improve student outcomes. Wenglinsky (2004) focused his study exclusively on high poverty schools and determined that purposeful use of instructional strategies such as those identified by Marzano reduces or eliminates racial academic performance gaps within schools.

Studies show that a higher level of education leads to greater satisfaction with life (Salinas-Jimenez, Artes, and Salinas-Jimenez, 2011) and potentially less unemployment (Bishop, 1994, as reported in Salinas-Jimenez, et al., 2011). The urgency in closing the achievement gap between subgroups and the general school population extends far beyond the desire to help students succeed academically. Students who fail to graduate with the literacy and numeracy skills necessary for a successful adult life, or who fail to simply graduate, generally have a reduced quality of life and tend to require more support from federal and state governments to survive.

## Current Math and Reading Data



## Middle School Intervention and Instructional Strategy Focus

At the Middle School, we will focus on the following intervention and instructional strategies to increase student outcomes and close the gap for our subgroups. All teachers have committed to fully support the identified interventions and employ the high-five instructional strategies.

### Interventions

- Intervention classes for all students who do not meet OAKS benchmarks in math or reading
- Homework Club as an added, after-school support for struggling students
- IEPs written to standards
- Regular and rigorous progress monitoring and data analysis

### High-Five Instructional Strategies

- Explicit vocabulary instruction
- Skimming and scanning
- Reciprocal teaching
- Two-column notes
- Summarizing

There are many variations of the above strategies. The exact form of the strategy is not as important as the employment of the strategy. For example, explicit vocabulary instruction may be accomplished via the teaching of word parts, word webs, or categorizing and must include both word definitions as well as strategies for independently defining words. Two-column notes may include a summarizing component and summarization may be written, drawn or in a multi-media presentation.

## Contact Information

For further information, please contact Suzanne West, [suzanne@uoregon.edu](mailto:suzanne@uoregon.edu).

## Calculating Growth to Close Gap

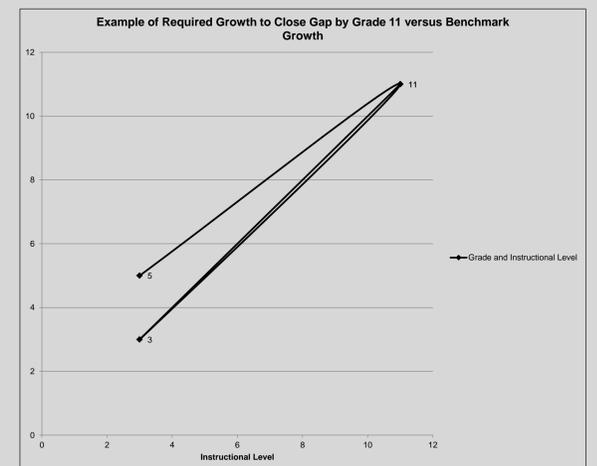
To calculate the required growth to close an achievement gap for a given student, a simple division formula is used:

**current instructional level to grade 11/years to grade 11**

For example, a grade 5 student who is receiving instruction at a third-grade level must gain 1.33 years of instruction each year to be as prepared as their classmates for the grade 11 math or reading OAKS.

$$8/6 = 1.33$$

A line chart illustrates the difference in academic growth required by a student who is academically on track versus a student who has fallen behind.



A student who fails to make gains at the rate necessary to be on par with their classmates by grade 11 risks failing to obtain the literacy and numeracy skills necessary to successfully enter adulthood.

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