



IXL Builds Confidence and Motivation for Middle School Learners

St. George Catholic School, Baton Rouge, Louisiana



“With IXL, my students can see where they have skill deficits and what they need to work on next. I am able to differentiate my instruction for them in ways I never would have been able to before.”

*Wendy Bridevaux,
6th grade math teacher*

Students at St. George Catholic School have closed skill gaps and gained confidence with just 10-15 minutes per day on IXL. Sixth-grade teachers Alaina Reed and Wendy Bridevaux say IXL has helped them differentiate instruction and nurture a growth mindset for their students. Alaina says, “IXL gives you such huge results with minimal teacher prep time. Everything is there for you—analytics, reporting; they’ve even loaded the standards and textbook correlation. Why wouldn’t you use something that is so easy for teachers and so helpful for students?”

The Challenge: Closing Learning Gaps and Differentiating Instruction

St. George is a PreK-8 Catholic school with a reputation for academic excellence. While the school is large—serving 1,100 students—they strive to create a close-knit community with lots of individual support and attention for students. Wendy teaches five sections of 6th-grade math, three of which use an advanced curriculum based on 7th-grade standards. Alaina teaches English Language Arts (ELA) for the same 6th-grade cohort.

The school initially purchased IXL Math to provide additional math practice and support. In 2020, they expanded to implement IXL English language arts, science, and social studies. Wendy says that when they first implemented IXL, they only required a certain amount of time on the program each week—and many students failed to challenge themselves. Since they have switched their focus to skills mastery instead of time spent in the program, they have seen student growth soar.



“The confidence they develop in IXL translates to the classroom. Students who previously never spoke up in class are now raising their hands and answering questions.”

*Alaina Reed,
6th grade English language arts teacher*

IXL gives teachers at St. George a tool to identify and address learning gaps from previous years and from missing class instruction during the COVID year. It also helps differentiate instruction for students at all points of the spectrum. Alaina says, “I had one student who tested lower than his grade-level on the diagnostic. With IXL, I am able to give him the differentiation he needs to build his skills. His growth has been substantial, and he is now on-level with his peers and excelling.” IXL was especially helpful during the COVID-19 disruptions, when many students missed most of an entire quarter’s growth. Wendy says that IXL has “helped to fill gaps” for incoming 6th graders.

Building Confidence as Learners

Wendy and Alaina use the same classroom model for their math and ELA students. On Mondays, students “step into the IXL Arena” to work in the Real-Time Diagnostic. On Wednesdays and Fridays, they work on the skills recommended by the diagnostic. On Tuesdays and Thursdays, they work on teacher-assigned skills aligned with their classroom curriculum. Alaina says the predictable routine helps keep students on track and reduces the loss of instructional time. “They know to open their Chromebooks and start working independently at the beginning of class while I’m setting up, so I’m not wasting any instructional time. Those 10 minutes at the beginning of class are enough for them to get the skills practice they need.”

Both Wendy and Alaina appreciate the way IXL has helped their students build confidence as learners. Wendy says, “I had a student whose self-confidence was so low at the beginning. When he started seeing mastery on IXL, he went from saying ‘I can’t do it,’ to walking around the class helping other students.” Alaina has seen similar results. The parents of one student with weaknesses in reading comprehension were surprised and delighted to learn that he has become a leader in the class.

A Learning Community Built on a Growth Mindset

Alaina and Wendy credit IXL’s success to the way it individualizes instruction for each student. Students work at their own level, so they are always challenged but never frustrated. And every student can see their mastery levels improve and celebrate their success, no matter where they are starting from. Alaina says, “We focus on growth. It doesn’t matter where they start. We celebrate their growth, whether they are working on a 4th-grade level or a 10th-grade level. No one else has to know what level they are working at.”



This emphasis has fostered a growth mindset among 6th graders at St. George. And that mindset translates into real results. Over the first semester of the 2020-21 school year, students gained 37 points in math and 114 points in ELA (equivalent to about a quarter of a grade level and a whole grade level, respectively).

Wendy and Alaina also appreciate the collaborative learning environment that IXL enables. They use Live Classroom to monitor students as they are working and to identify students in need of extra support. Often, that support comes from their peers. Students who have mastered a skill are proud to be able to help others.

Wendy says, “IXL is easy to implement and makes it easy to monitor progress and organize your instruction. There wouldn’t be enough hours in the day to do this level of differentiation for 100 students without IXL. If you use IXL with integrity and fidelity, you’re going to see the results.”

A Model for Success at St. George Catholic School

Here’s how 6th-grade teachers Wendy Bridevaux and Alaina Reed are using IXL in their math and English language arts classes:

- Students use Chromebooks to work on IXL for 10 minutes at the beginning of class every day. This keeps students busy with something meaningful and productive while teachers take care of administrative tasks and get set up for instruction.
- On “Maintenance Mondays,” students “step into the IXL Arena” to answer questions in the Real-Time Diagnostic to keep their diagnostic levels and skill recommendations up to date.
- “Teacher Tuesdays and Thursdays” are devoted to skills aligned to the lessons they are teaching that week. Students are required to get a SmartScore (IXL’s proprietary scoring system that measures how well a student understands a skill) of 80 or above in math and 90 or above in English language arts.
- “Rec Skill Wednesdays and Fridays” provide time for students to work through their individualized skill recommendations, which are suggested by IXL based on their Real-Time Diagnostic scores. Students are required to get a SmartScore of 90 or above on recommended skills.
- Students can continue to work on IXL during free time or at home if they do not earn their required SmartScore during their time in class.