

SCHOOL TURN-AROUND SUCCESS: A CASE STUDY OF RED MESA JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Red Mesa Unified School District (RMUSD) was identified in 2016 by state and federal education officials as a district in need of intensive instructional intervention, and continues to be identified as needing improvement today. As part of the district’s turn-around strategy, RMUSD contracted with the Center for Student Achievement (“The Center”) to provide school improvement and turn-around services to all teachers and school leaders in the district.

The Center began working with RMUSD administrators and staff in the spring of 2017, initially focusing on building relationships and conducting a needs assessment. Early in the 2017-18 school year the Center shifted its focus to working to implement standards-based and data-driven instructional planning. As is often the case with school improvement efforts, early adopters emerged; the Red Mesa Junior High School (RMJH) teachers began implementing these strategies, resulting in significant academic improvement. AzMERIT math scores for RMJH improved by nearly 30 percentage points in 2018, compared to the prior year. As a result of this significant change in proficiency and growth, RMJH grew from a “D” to a “B” rating in the 2018 A-F accountability model.

BACKGROUND

RMUSD’s reach is geographically significant, and comprises the entire northeast corner of the state of Arizona, roughly 2,000 square miles. As part of the Navajo Nation, 100 percent of the student body and much of the school staff are Native American. The district educates about 550 students at five separate school sites. Red Mesa Junior High School (RMJH) serves grades six through eight and is co-located with the high school, just south of the Utah border (shown at the top of the map).

THE CENTER'S WORK WITH RMUSD

The Center started its work, as usual, with a needs assessment of existing practices; the Center utilized its Quality Standards for Academics and Leadership during this evaluation. Through a multi-day district-wide evaluation, multiple areas for improvement were identified. After review and consultation with district leadership, RMUSD was enrolled into a **Quality Schools Program (QSP)+** program model, allowing them not only access to the QSP support, but also to additional resources for classroom teachers and instructional leaders.



Red Mesa Unified School District

RMUSD worked with several key staff members from the Center during the 2017-18 year. Jessica Makowske, their lead trainer, focused on teachers’ professional learning. Sid Bailey, Director of Leadership Development, focused on supporting principals and district-level leaders. Additional trainers

were also deployed when needed for specialized support. This cadre of staff worked cooperatively with district and school personnel to provide on-site support. Support was provided to all five RMUSD campuses, with varying levels of implementation; RMJH is highlighted here because of their success in both implementing their learning into practice, and the resulting improvements in student outcomes.

“Jessica is an amazing lady with an abundance of ideas and knowledge! I feel comfortable working with her.”

-Wanda Deswood, Teacher, RMJH

The Quality Schools Program is grounded in the Center’s Quality Standards and research relating to effective schools, school improvement, and impactful professional learning for teachers and leaders. The program synthesizes the research on the key factors that impact student academic achievement (Hattie, 2016) to create focused, meaningful improvements for schools. The support provided to all schools is customized and differentiated based on the specific needs of the school and the context of their work; however, our expectations for quality remain the same. All professional development and follow-up coaching sessions occur at the school site. Additional coaching and support also occurs via phone, email and video with trainers/coaches providing additional resources and tools to teachers and leaders as needed.

The Center implemented the Quality Schools Program for RMJH in a customized and tailored way through pacing, culturally-responsive adaptations to the program. The Center prides itself on our ability to integrate research based best practices into the existing efforts of our partner schools. Specifically, at RMJH we leveraged their existing curricular tools and assessment practices (Beyond Textbooks, Classroom Textbook sets, and Daily Math Warm-ups) to support teachers. These materials had been purchased previously by the district, rather than starting over, their trainer worked with teachers to see how they could all be used together to improve teaching and learning.

The cornerstone of the Quality Schools Program is high-quality professional development and coaching that is designed to increase teacher efficacy, and to ensure students master Arizona’s College and Career Ready Standards. Teachers received the following training and coaching sessions:

- **Effective strategies:** Teachers focused on student engagement and classroom management and with this information, were able to see small, tangible, every-day wins in their classroom. Teachers saw that their actions allowed them to increase student engagement, decrease problematic student behaviors, and increase readiness to learn.
- **Unpacking standards:** Teachers learned to conduct standards-analysis and to develop scaffolded daily learning objectives. With a new focus on daily learning goals, teachers were able to easily see if a student had mastered his or her objective for the day.
- **Data-driven instructional planning:** Continued success was found through analyzing student data, using ATI- Galileo Benchmark assessments. Teachers received training regarding how to effectively identify deficiencies in previously taught standards. Teachers were taken through a step-by-step method to look at each standard, identifying why students scored the way they did, and identifying a concrete re-teach plan with re-testing dates given to administration.
- **Collective Efficacy:** Teachers were coached throughout the year to engage in collaborative conversations about their own reflections and data use. Specifically, teachers analyzed previous

teaching strategies, how they might assist one another to improve instruction, and what they were going to do collectively to increase student learning.

“The best part of our training session was having Jessica (and Cindy) model the way they break down a standard to create their daily objectives. I’m a visual learner so this was very helpful.”

-Maribelle Harvey, Teacher, RMJH

Throughout this entire process, site leadership stood beside their teachers and offered support and cheered on their efforts. Instructional leaders focused on resources to aid teacher learning: providing teachers with time and additional pay to attend trainings afterschool and on weekends. Teachers took on leadership roles as well, passing their knowledge and training along to instructional assistants and long-term substitute teachers, of which RMUSD has many, so that they too could support student learning.

“Having the Center for Student Achievement as part of our team has been an instrumental addition to our continuous school improvement process, both for teachers and for administration. Their collaboration with our team and guidance for all is grounded in practical and researched based strategies and techniques that address administrative responsibilities and classroom teacher responsibilities.”

-Blane Baker, Principal, RMJH

THE RESULTS

As previously mentioned, the most noticeable impact on student learning was experienced by the teachers at Red Mesa Junior High (RMJH). The results that follow are from RMJH’s benchmark assessment tool, ATI’s Galileo, which is designed to track student progress and to predict how students might do on AzMERIT (Arizona’s standards-based assessment), and AzMERIT scores from 2014-2015 to 2017-2018 school years.

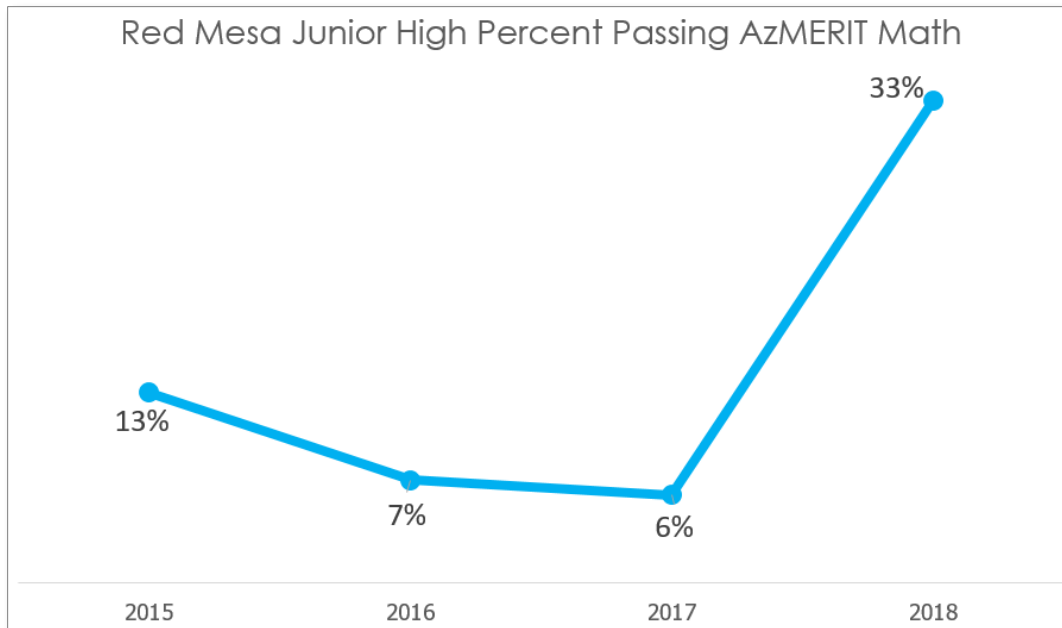
RMJH administered Galileo assessments during the 2017-18 school year using a pre-test/post-test design, including several benchmark assessments throughout the year. The following table presents the results of the percentage of students passing the reading and math assessments, for all grades combined at RMJH. For the purposes of these scores, passing means that students earned at least an 80 percent correct on the assessment. Results from the benchmarks indicated that 41 percent of students, across all three grades passed the math post-test.

Galileo Benchmark Scores and AzMERIT Predictions, All Grades (2017-18 School Year)

	Pre-Test	Benchmark 1	Benchmark 2	Benchmark 3	Post-Test	Prediction to pass AzMERIT:
Reading	24%	21%	26%	28%	22%	31%
Math	18%	11%	19%	29%	41%	26%

In addition to the passing rates on benchmarks, Galileo reports the likelihood that a student will pass the AzMERIT exam. This score is based on each individual student’s performances throughout the year on the series of benchmark assessments administered. In 2017-18, 26 percent of students were predicted to pass the AzMERIT math test in spring 2018.

A longitudinal analysis of RMJH’s math data, for all grades tested, demonstrated that prior to the start of the Quality Schools Program academic performance was low. As a matter of fact, only six percent of all students passed math in the 2016-2017 school year. The Center had just begun working with RMUSD administrators and staff in the spring of the 2016-2017, to prepare teachers for the intensity of the work in the 2017-18 school year. These data also demonstrate that after one full year of support, training and coaching the math scores, for all grades, increased by nearly 30 percentage points. Overall, RMJH’s AzMERIT passing rate in 2018 was 33 percent, higher, yet consistent with predicted passing rate (26 percent) from Galileo.

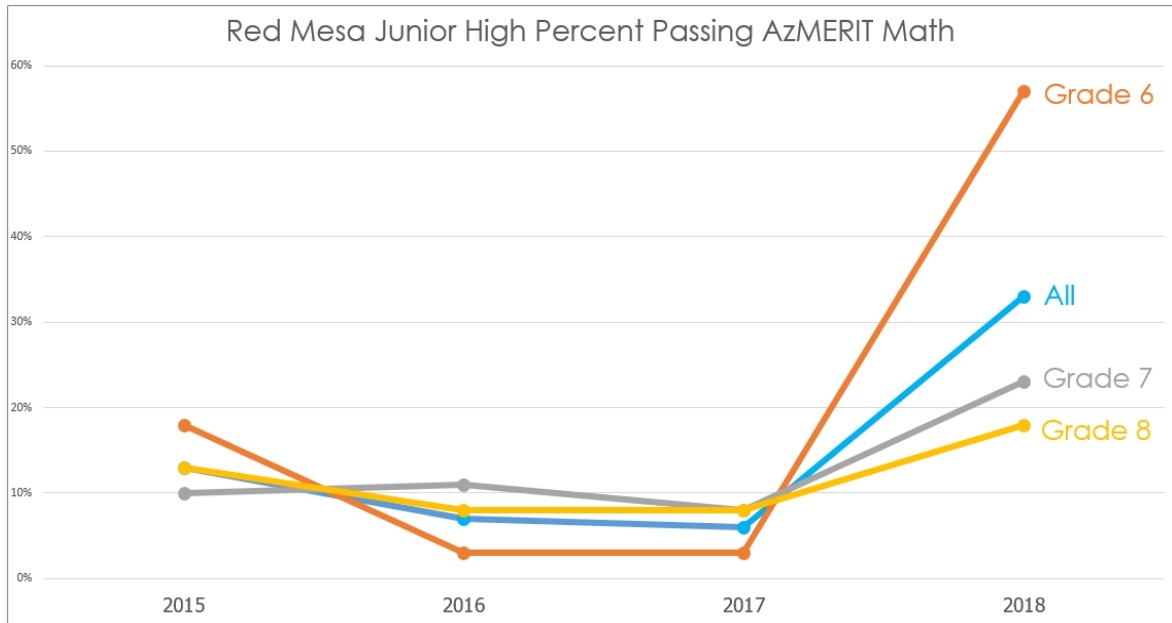


In particular, RMJH’s grade 6 math teacher was very receptive and adaptable to new methods and the flow of benchmark assessment data; she changed her pacing and expectations, and her students responded accordingly. Results from the 6th grade math benchmarks indicated that the majority of students (85 percent) passed the post-test, and that 63 percent of the students were predicted to pass the AzMERIT in spring 2018. These data also provide evidence for the effectiveness of the teacher training and coaching, in particular the iterative process of reflecting, analyzing data and providing data-driven instructional responses, i.e., interventions based on this information. The results demonstrate that between benchmark 1 and benchmark 2, this teacher made significant adjustments to their instruction after analyzing her students’ performance.

Galileo Benchmark Scores and AzMERIT Predictions, Grade 6 (2017-18 School Year)

	Pre-Test	Benchmark 1	Benchmark 2	Benchmark 3	Post-Test	Prediction to pass AzMERIT:
6th Grade Math	19%	7%	37%	59%	85%	63%

Results of AzMERIT math scores indicate a significant increase in 2017-18 school year, in grade 6. Given the students' performance on the benchmark tests, this outcome was expected. The math achievement on the 2018 AzMERIT is consistent with the predicted results from Galileo for grade six; with 57 percent of 6th graders passing, compared to the predicted rate of 63 percent.



NEXT STEPS

It would be naive to believe that the RMJH will continue to grow and achieve greater heights, simply because of one good year and one dedicated math teacher. School reform is hard work and takes a toll on staff. RMJH started the 2018-2019 school year with multiple new teachers, a new principal and a new superintendent. However, that isn't stopping teachers.

Those early adopters spent their summer engaged in professional development that focused on organizing, planning and implementing for the upcoming year. Teachers were focused on developing a professional learning communities (PLC) system to support their long term substitutes, and ensure that they were also able to also create growth opportunities for students. Teachers developed a system for integrating tier two vocabulary and on-demand writing assignments. Lastly, they focused on increasing student engagement through data tracking at the classroom level. RMJH teachers have taken a grassroots approach, and have set a goal of moving their school to an "A" rating by the end of the 2018-2019 school year.

We believe that those teacher leaders, the early adopters, will encourage and guide their colleagues to implement the strategies that are taught through the Quality Schools Program. Moving forward we anticipate a continuing and growing effort on the part of the instructional staff. As more teachers develop and refine their abilities to write and deliver aligned daily objectives and skills, while keeping their standards and expectations of student success high we expect to see student achievement and performance continue to improve.



ABOUT US

Center for Student Achievement

The Center for Student Achievement, an LLC of the Arizona Charter Schools Association, is a non-profit organization designed to support teachers and leaders to improve educational outcomes by providing access to high quality research and actionable data tools, professional development, and results-oriented coaching. Our mission is to improve student achievement in all schools.

The Center works with schools across Arizona to increase student achievement; regardless of their location, size, grade configuration, educational philosophy or model. Our signature school improvement initiative, the Quality Schools Program, provides partner schools intensive, onsite support to create *Professional Learning Communities* that effectively implement standards aligned and data informed practices in their school.

For more information about the Center for Student Achievement or our programs please contact Dr. Ildi Laczko-Kerr, Chief Academic Officer at ildi@azcharters.org or 602-944-0644, or please visit centerforstudentachievement.org/.

Assessment Technology Incorporated

Assessment Technology Incorporated (ATI), established in 1986, is the leading provider of instructional improvement and effectiveness technology assisting today's educators in their mission to enhance learning. ATI's flagship applications, Galileo K-12 Online and Galileo Pre-K Online, provide educators with tools and services designed to enhance learning at all stages of development from infancy through the 12th grade. Both applications are built on the principles of science, supported by a commitment to research and guided by a vision that everyone should benefit from the opportunities and transformations of technology.

Galileo K-12 Online Instructional Improvement and Effectiveness System is a comprehensive, research-based, and standards aligned system designed to serve students, educators, parents, and administrators. The system provides an array of user-friendly curriculum, assessment, instructional effectiveness, and reporting tools all of which yield data important in decision making focused on promoting student learning. The system provides robust item banks, multiple assessment types and real-time data reporting. Galileo's all in one application is also backed by responsive support and customized professional development. Use of Galileo facilitates advancements in teaching strategies including the integration of curriculum and formative assessment, and the implementation of instructional effectiveness initiatives across multiple content areas.

For more information contact ATI at GalileoInfo@ati-online.com, 877.442.5453, or please visit us at ati-online.com.