

CASE STUDY

J. HENRY HIGGINS MIDDLE SCHOOL



SCHOOL PROFILE

J. Henry Higgins Middle School

1 King Street Ext.

Peabody, Massachusetts 01960

Principal Todd Bucey

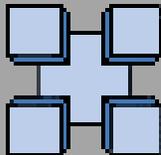
Serving grades 6 – 8

Enrollment 1,400

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More than 30 years of service to the educational community, coupled with its powerful, flexible, customer-driven products and services, makes Computer Resources a leader in school management software. Their MMS for Schools software is used by public schools and districts of all sizes, and by charter, faith-based, and private schools across the country. The company's team of dedicated professionals includes former educators, as well as technical specialists, and skilled personnel who understand how schools operate efficiently and effectively.

Challenges

The Massachusetts Department of Education has encouraged the acceptance of the Common Core as the curriculum framework for their schools. The Common Core consists of universal benchmarks that are expected to be met by all students when they reach a certain grade level. These benchmarks ensure that every student graduates with a body of knowledge that will allow them to communicate, function, and thrive in the world today.

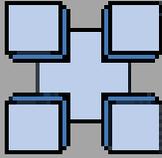
Since the acceptance of Common Core, school administrators across Massachusetts have begun to seek measures that will ensure their students meet the Common Core requirements. With more than 1,400 students and 100 education professionals, J. Henry Higgins Middle School in Peabody has the largest student population of any middle school in Massachusetts. Higgins principal Todd Bucey has set an important goal—to define a strategy to ensure his students reach the benchmarks of the Common Core.

Technical situation

Until recently, it seemed logical that a student's letter grade on a report card or progress report should reflect whether he or she met the depth of knowledge required at their grade level. Like most students, those at Higgins typically received a traditional grade: an 'A' or 'B' meant that students were meeting their knowledge requirements, a 'C' or 'D' meant that they needed to work harder, and an 'F' meant that they failed. Additionally, students could receive a higher grade for the completion of projects such as: turning in all their homework, staying after school for extra help, or class participation. These increases to their grade could be awarded without regard for whether a student had become competent in the subject being taught in class.

Traditional grading does little to ensure that a student meets the Common Core standards for competency. "We must move away from that. Grades can no longer be based on whether a student did their work, but on whether they understand the concepts being taught. We need grading that truly reflects a student's competency—not just a letter or a number," Bucey said.

The change in how grades are determined is timely. In the 2014-2015 school year, Massachusetts students will use the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) testing that will link their assessments with the Common Core Standards. PARCC will help ensure that students are ready for the world beyond the classroom. Bucey believes that his students will succeed in the future if he begins to implement standards-based grading that embraces the tenets of the Common Core today. He can achieve his goal using the functionality available in his existing MMS for Schools student information system.



Products and services used:

The MMS for Schools student information platform is Computer Resources' flagship product. Its comprehensive Gradebook provides online access to communications from school administrators, homework information, and student grading information, including the standards-based grading rubrics that will indicate mastery of Common Core standards. The staff of Computer Resources is committed to partnering with schools to fulfill their goal of tracking student performance that reflects subject knowledge.

MMS for Schools

Student Information Platform

By Computer Resources LLC

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Barrington, NH 03825

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Solutions

Standards-based report cards are designed to engage students more fully in their academics. Bucey has already begun to lay the groundwork for grading that reflects the adoption of the Common Core. Taking full advantage of technology, Bucey, who roams the corridors of Higgins with an iPhone in hand, first plans to eliminate the need for quarterly progress reports by providing real-time grade information to parents and students online 24/7. Initially, Bucey hoped that 50% of his student households would register for online accounts that could be used to view detailed grading data. He not only met this goal, but after one year since launching his plan, more than 70% of households are participating online to view student progress.

With students and parents who are currently accustomed to viewing grades online, Bucey has begun to add standards-based language to the Higgins report cards. He plans to initially present the standards-based report cards in addition to the traditional letter grades. With the inclusion of the standards-based data, students are likely to discuss the benchmarks at home, as well as in the classroom. This granular detail will demonstrate evidence of a student's strengths and weaknesses in each particular discipline within a subject. Instead of a single letter grade, students will have hard data that shows exactly where they needed to improve to meet the standards of Common Core—and they will receive this information in the form of the MMS Gradebook that they were already comfortable accessing online.

By engaging students and parents with online access to these detailed knowledge measurements in the MMS Gradebook, teachers can focus on helping each student to improve in the specific areas of knowledge where he or she is lacking. Students will no longer spend time in the self-directed learning of an intervention block where they may lose their focus. They will now have concise information on what aspect of a subject they need to grasp before they are deemed competent. "It's less about the grade and more about the knowledge," Bucey said. "Without the MMS Gradebook, this would be impossible."

Benefits

Already the adoption of the Common Core and migration to standards-based grading is changing the way Higgins students look at their schoolwork. Their standards-based report cards answer the age old question, "How am I doing?" by showing where students are competent and where they need to improve. For teachers, gone are the days of letting a student pass without attaining adequate competency in a subject. Students now take an interest in becoming competent because they can see where they need to focus their attention. With standards-based grading, failure is not an option--students must work until they are proficient, and the rubrics provide teachers with the necessary tools to ensure that they correctly identify what aspect of a subject a student must improve.

"You can tell that the students are more engaged when you hear them saying the teacher is a pain in the neck for making them do the work until they are competent," Bucey said. When a student is not adequately competent, teachers at Higgins use a scheduled intervention block of time to ensure that students are brought up to the level of competency they are expected to achieve. If a student is missing assignments, the missing work is readily evident and can be handled accordingly. The breakdown of the assignments and the standards for each aspect of course knowledge are comprehensively displayed in the MMS Gradebook.

"It's an easy process to add standards to the MMS and include them in the Gradebook," Bucey said. At this time, Bucey has applied standards-based grading in mathematics to Higgins grading and hopes to apply standards-based grading to English courses next, followed by the science courses. Ideally, the implementation of standards-based grading will alleviate mismatching between the student, homework, the subject, and the teacher. With students in grades 6 through 8, there is not an extreme difference in how each individual perceives grading. With the support of their parents and teachers, most students strive to improve and become competitive in their quest for knowledge. Using this approach to standards-based grading, educators at the largest middle school in the state deign to personalize a student's education without a vast expenditure of overhead.