

# Case Study: Groton Central Schools

## HOW ONE NEW YORK SCHOOL DISTRICT SAW ACADEMIC GAINS FROM SUPPORTING ITS EARLY CAREER TEACHERS

Groton Central School District's (GCSD) mission statement is clear: *“Empower all students to reach their fullest potential and thrive in a diverse, ever-changing world.”* What's even more clear is the path GCSD takes to achieve this mission.

The story of GCSD's tremendous success details a clear but simple formula for student academic growth. Strategic planning + individualized teacher support = student success. Following this approach, GCSD has become an exemplar of how districts can provide support for early career teachers to build self-confidence and make incredible impacts on student learning and growth.

### GROTON CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT'S STRATEGIC VISION

GCSD is located in Groton, NY, a rural community in upstate central New York. Including surrounding communities, the district serves just over 5,000 residents. Although the village of Groton is a rural community, its close proximity to cities like Ithaca creates a student body that reflects both rural and suburban backgrounds. The district also serves an economically diverse community, with almost 50% of the student population identified as economically disadvantaged.

**In 2015, GCSD implemented a 5-year strategic plan with the goal of improving teacher instruction and increasing student outcomes by shifting toward student-centered learning.** Ultimately, the district sought to create meaningful, collaborative, and diverse learning environments for each student to thrive.

### CHALLENGES

At the time that the strategic plan was created, **30% of the district's teaching force was considered early-career**, which poses opportunities—and challenges. Early career teachers can often be more malleable in their practices, since they don't have a breadth of experiences and instructional strategies from which to draw.

But because of this inexperience, early career teachers also need more specific and intentional professional support. The combination of a large percentage of early-career teachers and the introduction of an ambitious district strategic plan presented a unique challenge.

Thankfully, a year into implementing the strategic plan, GCSD's Superintendent, Margo Martin, recognized a hurdle: **most early-career teachers in the district were putting their efforts into classroom management rather than student-centered instructional strategies.** Martin understood that these teachers needed individualized support to address both their classroom and instructional needs in order to achieve the district's strategic goals.

## SOLUTION

Superintendent Martin saw a **clear solution to this challenge: job-embedded professional learning and one-on-one coaching to support early career teachers in both classroom management techniques and student-centered instructional strategies.**

While the solution was clear, it posed another issue: GCSD did not have the internal capacity to provide this level of personalized professional support. Eventually, GCSD chose to partner with BetterLesson because of the breadth of professional offerings: one-on-one coaching by expert coaches, thousands of virtual, on-demand courses, asynchronous instructional resources, and more.

Through GCSD's partnership with BetterLesson, early-career teachers were able to receive individualized support to enhance their approaches to classroom management and to help align their instruction with the district's strategic plan. The results of this partnership were incredibly heartening and teach us an important lesson: **when early-career educators receive the professional support that they deserve, their impact on student learning can be tremendous.**

## OUTCOMES

### Early Success

During the first year of GCSD's partnership with BetterLesson, there were 18 teachers receiving professional support. By the end of that school year, the district noticed both qualitative and quantitative evidence of the participating teachers' growth.

Qualitatively, **teachers were observed to have more effective and engaging classroom management strategies, leading to classroom environments more conducive for collaborative learning.** Because of this, teachers were able to facilitate student-centered activities and deepen student engagement with academic content.

Superintendent Martin affirmed this when she shared:

**“This is the kind of environment Groton is trying to foster in its classrooms. Centers-based learning is a way to differentiate instruction & provide information to kids at the level they're at. [BetterLesson Coaching] has helped teachers learn how to personalize learning for students.”**

Quantitatively, **after the first year, benchmark assessments demonstrated significant gains in both English Language Arts and mathematics scores, further validating the success of providing individualized support to newer teachers.** As a result of this success, by the 2018-2019 school year, the partnership was expanded to provide professional support to 37 teachers in the district. Since then, the success of this partnership and the early-career teachers involved has continued and grown.

### Continued Success

In the 7th year of GCSD and BetterLesson's partnership, the 2022-2023 school year, teachers continued making huge shifts in their instructional confidence and impact. This sustained level of growth is a testament to the dedication and hard work of GCSD staff, one that deserves recognition and celebration.

## IMPACT ON TEACHER CONFIDENCE

Survey data from teachers participating in BetterLesson coaching reveal a significant impact on teacher confidence. For instance, **80% of teachers agree/strongly agree that coaching will support them to positively impact student outcomes, and 90% of teachers indicated feeling very/extremely confident to try what they've discussed with their coach.**

As one GCSD high school teacher shared,

**“My [BetterLesson] coach was such a great support for my instruction. I grew so much throughout this year and I feel more confident being a professional in the classroom.”**

#### **NUMBER #1 ELA DATA ACROSS NEW YORK**

As it turns out, this confidence was warranted, because these teachers had an applaudable impact on student learning.

Early in GCSD's partnership with BetterLesson, there were improvements in both ELA and mathematics data. Recent data over the period of 2018-2022 reveals that GCSD is continuing to show huge academic gains, particularly in ELA data.

**During that time period, GCSD demonstrated the largest improvement in ELA proficiency throughout the entire state of New York, increasing 26% from 2019 to 2022. These gains are absolutely tremendous, and they reveal the unwavering commitment of Groton Central School District teachers and students.**

Ultimately, all of this success started with a vision, a strategic plan carried through by Superintendent Martin and executed by school leaders and teachers throughout the building, particularly early-career teachers. If the district hadn't provided early-career teachers with individualized professional support that both met them where they were at and supported them to get where they needed to be, then in the end, the students wouldn't have had access to such meaningful and impactful learning environments. Luckily, that's not the story here.

The story here is one of thoughtful leadership, dedicated teachers, and hardworking students. The story here is a call for school leaders everywhere to invest in the professional growth of all teachers, especially those newer to the profession, and to lead with student-centered values and goals at the forefront. GCSD shows us that this is the path to unparalleled student success.

**To find out how BetterLesson can help with instructional coaching in your school or district, let's talk!**