



Groton's Early Career Teachers See Gains in Student Achievement



“The benefits of BetterLesson Coaching are clear. We’ve seen new teachers who can get their kids to achieve on a level equal to or above educators who have a decade of teaching or more.”

Kent Maslin
Principal, Groton Elementary

New Teachers, New Lens: Student-Centered from the Start

Groton Central School district serves the Groton Village community of 2,400 and an additional 2,800 residents of the surrounding Finger Lakes region in upstate New York. For almost a century, the town was home to Smith Corona Typewriter Company, but in recent years it has served as a commuter town for nearby Ithaca and Cortland.

For small towns like Groton Village, developing their teacher workforce is particularly important when it comes to ensuring every student has access to a great teacher. In 2015, the district laid out a 5-year strategic plan that sought to dramatically increase student outcomes (some indicators by over 50%) and improve teacher instruction.

Challenges



30% EARLY-CAREER TEACHERS



ADDRESS LOW SCORES



AMBITIOUS VISION

In their strategic plan, district leaders decided to address low test scores by shifting a more student-centered approach to instruction. A key component of this plan was creating meaningful opportunities for each student to excel in small, collaborative, and diverse learning environments. For Groton students to succeed, educators needed to change their instructional practice and put students in the driver's seat of their learning. District leaders saw Groton's 18 "early-career" teachers—30% of the teaching population—as a key cohort that would help them achieve their ambitious goals. In order to make the leap with her early-career teachers, Superintendent Margo Martin knew she would need some help.

Solutions



1:1 COACHING



STUDENT-CENTERED APPROACH



STUDENT OWNERSHIP

Changing practice is hard, but it can be incredibly difficult for early-career teachers. A year into the new initiative, Superintendent Martin noticed newer teachers focused most of their instructional time on classroom management and not on the new student-centered initiative. **With such a large percentage of Groton teachers considered "early career," the goals of the strategic plan could not be met without their full participation.** They needed a solution that could not only help with classroom management but also support the implementation of new instructional strategies that would allow students to take ownership of their learning.

"Coming into my first year of teaching, I was very tentative and unsure about what I wanted and how to get where I wanted to be by the end of the year. With my coach's constant support and understanding, I have gained confidence in my abilities as a teacher and grown closer to the type of educator I wish to be."

Jessica Reed

Teacher, Groton Elementary School

Classroom Management and Strong Pedagogy via Coaching

Martin wanted continuous, job-embedded professional learning that reinforced the district's instructional practice. Coaching seemed like the solution, but the district did not have the manpower or resources to hire, train, and deploy an internal coaching force focused solely on the growth of new masters.

In their search for a vendor, district leaders discovered BetterLesson Coaching and found the solution they had been seeking. BetterLesson's coaching expertise, instructional resources, and ability to support both classroom management and student-centered learning were exactly the combination they needed. For the 2016-17 school year, 18 early-career teachers met with BL coaches to identify instructional challenges, implement research-based teaching strategies, and reflect on their impact on student learning.



Scaling What Works

By the end of the school year, participating teachers had made significant shifts in practice. Teachers had not only developed effective systems of classroom management, but they had also made substantive strides in personalizing the learning experience for students in their classrooms. Many teachers had implemented differentiated, small-group instructional strategies such as centers-based math activities and literacy workshops, and these changes had led to tangible results: benchmark assessments showed the coaching helped improve student outcomes in English Language Arts and Math.

“I have seen an impressive amount of student growth both personally and academically. I wanted my students to realize that they have an opportunity to work hard for whatever they want and to have a positive impact on their classroom environment. I feel that my coach really understood the direction I wanted to move our classroom in and had a seriously positive impact on its success,” said one elementary school teacher.

The impact was so profound, Superintendent Martin expanded the program to provide BetterLesson coaching for 37 teachers through the 2018-19 school year, with the hope of seeing more personalized learning in classrooms across the district.

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

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