



Bridging the Achievement Gap in 4th Grade Math

Twin Hills Elementary School, Willingboro School District, New Jersey



"I love IXL because it's not busy work. There is a purpose to everything students do. Every time they log in, they are reinforcing the things we are doing in the classroom or catching up on skills they are missing."

Nicole Gregory, 4th Grade Math Teacher

Nicole Gregory is committed to helping her 4th grade math students make the grade in the classroom and on the PARCC assessment. Implementing IXL has been the key to success, helping her boost her students' proficiency and confidence in math—and leap ahead of both state and district averages on the state test.

Helping Students Who Start from Behind

Twin Hills Elementary is a Title I school serving students in grades 1-4 in Willingboro, a central New Jersey community located midway between Trenton and Philadelphia. The school's student population is primarily African American and more than 50% of students are considered low income.

Many of Nicole's students come to her classroom with significant gaps in their math skills. "Most of our 4th graders are one to three grades below grade level in both math and English Language Arts," she says. "My co-teachers and I have struggled to find resources to help us bridge those gaps."

Nicole discovered IXL Math while researching options in the summer of 2016. After looking at the results achieved by neighboring schools using IXL, she knew she wanted to give it a try in her classroom. "It's my responsibility to prepare my students to do their best on the state test and make sure they are ready for middle school math," she explains. "IXL was exactly what I needed to help my students address skill deficiencies and close those grade-level gaps."

Targeted Instruction and Practice with a Purpose

Nicole began a free trial of IXL Math in the fall of 2016, and IXL quickly became a core component of her classroom. Students access IXL at school daily, using Chromebooks provided as part of their school's 1:1 laptop initiative. Each day, Nicole assigns IXL skills that align with the lesson she is teaching in class. For most skills, students are expected to achieve a SmartScore (IXL's proprietary scoring system that measures how well a student understands a skill) of 85 or higher. Nicole records their IXL SmartScore in her gradebook and keeps a checklist of skills students have mastered.



“IXL gives them an opportunity to practice the skills that I am teaching in whole-class or small-group instruction,” Nicole says. “If my students are struggling, they have the opportunity to go back and practice foundational skills from prior years. When they have mastered those, IXL brings them back up to 4th grade skills.”

Nicole’s students love the immediate feedback they get with IXL. “If they get a question wrong, IXL shows them what they need to do to fix their mistake,” she says. They are also highly motivated by earning awards and certificates individually and as a class. Many students go beyond the minimum goal that Nicole assigns, working on skills until they achieve a SmartScore of 100.

Students can even continue their practice at home, which has been especially useful for snow days. “I use the Live Classroom report to monitor what my students are doing both in the classroom and at home,” Nicole says. “I can see right away if a student is off track or needs additional one-on-one support.” Nicole also uses IXL Analytics for day-to-day instructional planning. “The reports show me whether instruction has been effective and where I may need to go back and reteach.”

Dramatic Gains in the Classroom—and on the PARCC

Nicole saw measurable gains in her students’ performance the first year she implemented IXL in the classroom. After using IXL in 2017, 68% of her students were proficient or above in math on the PARCC assessment—up from just 45% the year before. The state average for African American students who were proficient or above on the PARCC was 26%.

The results for 2018 were even more impressive: 73% of Nicole’s students achieved proficient or above in math on the PARCC.

Those math scores inspired Twin Hills to purchase IXL Language Arts for Nicole’s co-teacher, Christina Bookhart, in 2017. After just one year of use, Twin Hills’ 4th grade students rocketed from 56% passing to 81% passing on the ELA section of the PARCC. “We haven’t made any other significant changes in our curriculum or instructional approach,” says Nicole. “IXL has helped our students close the achievement gap and gave them the tools to do their best on the state test.”

IXL has also boosted her students’ confidence. “Math can be scary for those who don’t think they are very good at it,” she says. “IXL puts students in charge of their learning. They can work on skills on grade level, above, or below. They get a real sense of accomplishment when they master new skills and earn rewards. It has not only helped them master specific skills, but has really given them confidence in their math abilities.”

After Nicole and Christina’s successful experience, Twin Hills implemented IXL as a school-wide pilot—and teachers expressed overwhelming support for the program. “IXL was a perfect fit for our instructional needs,” says Twin Hills Principal Sonya Nock-Lemons. “The potential for teachers to differentiate the skills assigned to students based on their individual abilities provides the capability to scaffold support for struggling students. Simultaneously, it allows teachers to propel those who demonstrated higher levels of skill mastery.”

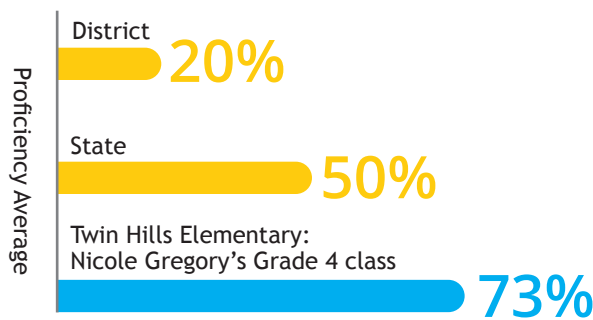


The power of IXL’s implementation has won over the whole school. “Twin Hills is committed to continuing use of IXL to equip teachers to effectively assist individual students in closing their skill gaps,” says Sonya. “We believe IXL has proven itself to be an invaluable learning resource for *all* students!”

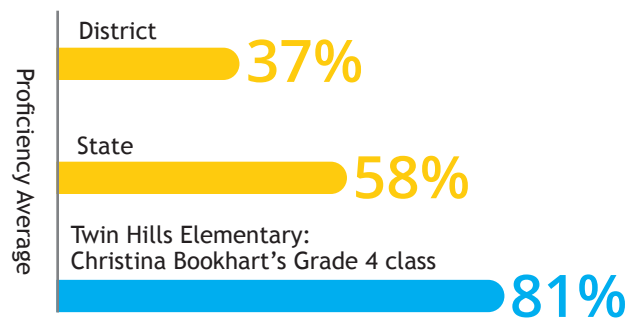
“IXL is great for districts like ours where many students are coming to the classroom with achievement gaps. It covers all the skills I teach, and helps students fill in the gaps so they can become successful on grade-level skills.”

Nicole Gregory

PARCC GRADE 4 MATH 2017-2018 RESULTS



PARCC GRADE 4 ELA 2017-2018 RESULTS



A Model for Success at Twin Hills Elementary

Here’s how Nicole Gregory is using IXL in her 4th grade math classroom:

- Students access IXL daily during class using Chromebooks.
- Nicole introduces and models new math skills during whole class instruction. Students then practice and apply the same skills individually with IXL.
- Each day, Nicole writes the IXL skills students need to practice on the board, along with a target SmartScore for each skill.
- Students work until they achieve the target SmartScore or higher. Nicole monitors their progress using the Live Classroom report and provides one-on-one support when students are struggling.
- Nicole uses IXL Analytics to track student achievement and plan daily instruction.
- Many students also use IXL at home for extra practice. Students who are struggling with grade-level skills can go back and review skills from prior grades.
- Nicole checks off skills students have mastered on a checklist. She also celebrates success by printing off class certificates and posting them on a “brag board” in the hallway.