Mc Graw Hill

Success with *StudySync*® During A Pandemic: How Frankfort Middle School Made ELA Gains Despite Remote Learning

Overview

When Frankfort Middle School (FMS) decided to pilot McGraw Hill's flexible ELA program, *StudySync,*® for the 2019/2020 school year, its leaders had no idea how complex teaching would become in the wake of Covid-19. They soon found that *StudySync*, which provides a rich ELA experience both online and off, gave them the resources and tools they needed to meet remote learning challenges. Since then, the school has fully implemented the program and has seen impressive gains.

About *StudySync*:

StudySync and McGraw Hill partner to publish award-winning educational curriculum for schools, including a comprehensive ELA curriculum for grades 6–12 and *SyncBlasts*™ for Social Studies and Science.

While leveraging technology and media to engage and inspire students in their academic pursuits, *StudySync* provides educators with an easy-to-use platform to deliver adaptable, interactive, and equitable learning solutions.

DISTRICT INFORMATION

Name:
Frankfort Middle School

Location:
Frankfort, IN

Grades:
6–8

About FMS

FMS is a Title I middle school in Frankfort, Indiana. Its student body is over 55% Hispanic, and nearly 70% of its students qualify for Free and Reduced Lunch Assistance. Many FMS students face significant socioeconomic adversities that affect their learning. FMS also educates a wide range of English language learners (EL), making differentiated approaches critical for its students' ELA success.

Prior to piloting *StudySync*, ELA educators at FMS, headed by English Department Chair, Kiersten Sanders, began designing their own curriculum, developing instruction and assessments around standards-based targets. Meanwhile, they were actively searching for a robust ELA program that could provide English learner (EL) scaffolds and differentiation by student. While they were considering products from three different publishers, Sanders said that FMS was always leaning toward *StudySync*.

"We had a 4-page checklist that included differentiation, EL support, and how relevant and easy a program is to use," said Sanders. "We chose *StudySync* because of how current and relevant its texts and Blasts are, and because it allows us to analyze student progress instantly and all along the way." Sanders added that her main goal is that her students—many of whom are multiple grades behind—see as much growth as possible, even if they can't pass a standardized test.

The Pilot

Though FMS officially began its *StudySync* pilot in 2019, Sanders said that it was not a true pilot because of the social distancing made necessary by Covid-19. At that time, FMS was not a 1:1 school and only had laptop carts, so when students were suddenly learning from home, they had to do everything by book.

> " *We chose StudySync because of how current and relevant its texts and Blasts are, and because it allows us to analyze student progress instantly and all along the way.* "

StudySync was effective despite these challenges, and Sanders and her team liked the text selections, which include passages from different cultures. "The content in *StudySync* upholds educational equity, and this was one of our main reasons for picking it. There are passages that appeal to students from all walks of life: They see themselves in the passages. That's true equity, and *StudySync* doesn't shy away from it."

Sanders added that the *StudySync*® library is huge, so teachers can set units based on the interests of students. She also appreciates engaging features like *Blasts*.

StudySync's unique *Blasts* pose a driving question to students who then participate in polls, peer review each other's tweet-length responses, and utilize live research links to learn more about the *Blast's* topic.

> " *There are passages that appeal to students from all walks of life: They see themselves in the passages. That's true equity, and StudySync doesn't shy away from it.* "

StudySync enables Sanders and FMS ELA teachers to analyze each student's data quickly and change course when needed. "It's so easy to do," said Sanders, "We can set the scaffolds and differentiation by student, and the other students have no idea, so there is no stigma. We can check the data daily and make changes quickly when we used to wait several weeks to see progress."

Support

Despite Covid restrictions, FMS educators were able to engage students with the robust ELA content and engaging tools in *StudySync*. They had the full support of *StudySync* Implementation Specialist, Billy Parker, who attended department meetings to answer questions and help customize the program for the school's needs. During these meetings, Parker heard loud and clear that FMS was hesitant to adopt the program unless it aligned with Indiana Academic Standards. He worked as a liaison between FMS teachers and *StudySync's* academic team to translate the program for Indiana Academic Standards.
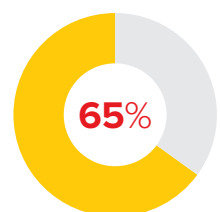
Sanders said, "We chose *StudySync* because they stuck with us, listened to our concerns, and developed the program to align with Indiana Academic Standards. There has never been an email to *StudySync* that has gone unanswered, and FMS teachers at all grade levels feel like we are the only school they work with."
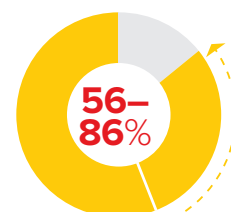
Results

During their pilot of *StudySync*, FMS teachers faced Covid restrictions with an arsenal of new content and engaging tools, but without laptops for students. At the beginning of the 2020 school year, they were 1:1 for the first time, and the curriculum was standards-based to meet the specific needs of Indiana teachers.

Each year, Indiana middle school students in grades six through eight participate in districtwide NWEA tests in early fall, winter, and spring. Teachers use the normative data and Rasch Scale (RIT) scores to zoom in on missing skills and set growth goals with students.

In the fall of 2020, FMS students took the NWEA fall assessment as a predictor test. Sanders' goal for her students was to achieve a conditional growth—student growth rate regardless of starting point—of 65% by the end of the 2020/2021 school year. When they took the mid-year winter test, Sanders' students were showing conditional growth ranging from 56 to 86%. Sanders' students, who are all using *StudySync*, are on target or have already met the end-of-year goal.

65%

Conditional growth goal by end of school year

56–86%

Actual conditional growth at winter testing

"*StudySync*® monitors spiraling standards, so it's easy to see who is falling behind," said Sanders. "We were able to scaffold by learning target and standard, and we had a clear snapshot of student growth over time."

Sanders said that one of her EL students came in at Kindergarten level, and he was unable to read or write English fluently. The student was targeted for differentiated instruction with *StudySync* and advanced three grade levels in one year. She credits much of the growth to passages that the kids want to read.

"If kids don't enjoy the passages, differentiation doesn't matter," said Sanders. "*StudySync* allows us to assign passages that speak to our students' dreams and goals. And because the *StudySync* library is huge and keeps growing, we can build a curriculum based on our students' interests. They love it, and we love it."

The Future

Frankfort now uses *StudySync* in both its middle school and high school, and Sanders can't imagine working without it. She said, "Even with the challenges of Covid-19, *StudySync* was easy to use and the McGraw Hill team fully supported us every step of the way."

She added that it is easy to edit the content for EL students while including writing prompts and different depths of knowledge for high achievers.

> " *Even with the challenges of Covid-19, StudySync was easy to use and the McGraw Hill team fully supported us every step of the way.* "

"We are now able to design our own units with supplemental texts and videos that are based on the interests of our students," she said. "*StudySync* helps us give students a foundation to achieve their goals, graduate, and make a positive contribution to the world, and because we can monitor their progress daily, we don't have to wait to the end of the year to know it's working."

studysync®

To learn more about *StudySync* or other McGraw Hill products, please visit: **mheonline.com/studysync**

McGraw Hill