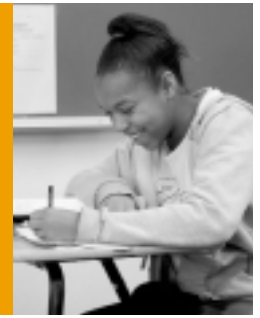


# Oregon Middle School Aims High on High Stakes

School uses PLATO Instructional Solutions courseware in its plan to achieve results on standards



Does an 80% success rate for 10th graders sound like an unachievable goal for high stakes state exams? How about when your starting point is 29% on math and 40% on reading? It seemed like a good place to start for McLoughlin Middle School in Medford, Oregon.

## Time for a strategy

A big goal loomed on the horizon for Medford School District – achieve better results on the Oregon State Assessment Test (OSAT) in grades K-10. So, they set out to devise a strategy for improvement. Looking at their starting point, they needed considerable improvement at several grade levels but decided to focus their efforts on McLoughlin Middle School. They knew that success would require real change and better than average gains by several grades each year. First, they asked themselves a key question "what pieces of the educational system can we control?" Their answer was two things, the focus of instruction and the time spent learning. From there they began developing a model to focus on standards and increased instructional time on English and Math. Doug McKenzie, Principal at McLoughlin for 3 years, explained, "We were very deliberate about choosing students for additional instruction. We developed a profile that included scores

on level tests given by the district as well as grades. With students who were behind, we doubled class time in math and reading and added time in the PLATO Learning lab as well."

## Software adds to learning

In addition to increased instructional time, PLATO Instructional Solutions software was incorporated into the new system and was key to extending learning time and providing data for teachers to use. According to Dan Zaklan, Director of Secondary Education and Personnel at Medford, "PLATO Learning software is a very cost efficient way to supplement instruction. It's so much better than traditional drill and practice and text books because it adjusts to fit each student's skill level, corrects mistakes and gives immediate feedback all while providing us with accurate and

complete data on each student's progress." Zaklan went on to add, "Our teachers want us to double our PLATO Learning labs because students come back to class with a better understanding of key concepts – making their lives easier and ensuring progress on key curriculum."

### Success

After three years of the new program that incorporates PLATO Instructional Solutions courseware, students in middle school are doubling their normal RIT gains. In addition, since the fall of 1998, the number of learners meeting or exceeding standards of the OSAT exam has increased from 43% to 60% in reading and from 40% to 58% on math. McKenzie added, "ESL/IEP students that tested below average before implementation were testing above average after additional instruction and time in the PLATO Learning lab. These populations showed larger gains than mainstream students." In addition to average score gains, McLoughlin Middle School saw growth in the percentage of students scoring at or

above grade level from the fall of 1998 to the spring of 2000. In math, as few as 38% of students entered at grade level and as many as 58% exited at or above grade level, and in reading 45% entered at grade level and 60% exited at grade level. Even with these impressive growth rates it wasn't enough to meet their goals. As a result, they are planning to implement new strategies in 9th grade at their two high schools (where Doug McKenzie is now one of the principals) and hope to start new programs in elementary school as well so students come into 7th grade with a better foundation. Sure, the road ahead is a steep one and the work will be difficult but the opportunity to ensure the success of young people on the OSAT and in life is worth it.