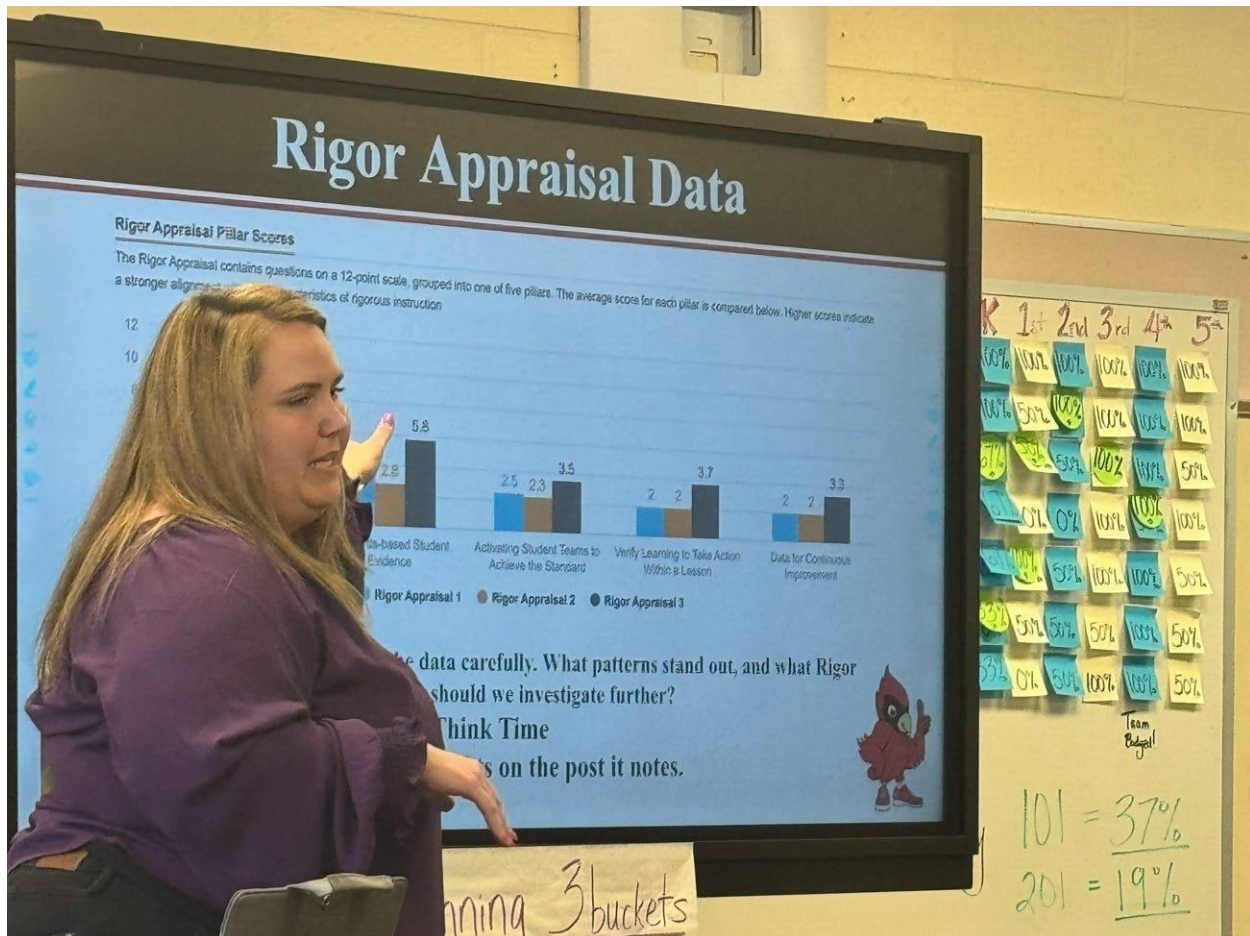


How Schools Are Increasing Student Achievement with RigorWalk, a Research-Validated Classroom Walkthrough Tool



Assistant Principal Kelley Malec of Muessel Elementary shares data gathered from the Rigor Appraisal. The school used Rigor Appraisal and its companion tool, RigorWalk, to improve student achievement.

Topics Covered

1. **Student Achievement Gains in South Bend, Indiana**
2. **A School Improvement Guide in Illinois**
3. **Leadership Growth in Morgan County, West Virginia**

What if you could predict student achievement increases—without waiting for test results? That’s exactly what schools have achieved with [RigorWalk™](#), driving measurable improvements in their schools and strengthening their own instructional leadership.

RigorWalk is trusted in thousands of classrooms nationwide, from small districts to large districts, including Chicago Public Schools. Grounded in extensive research from the [Applied Research Center](#), RigorWalk uses predictive, validated metrics to capture instructional trends and assess the quality of Tier 1 instruction in real time.

Unlike traditional walkthroughs, which are not designed to predict student outcomes, RigorWalk is validated by a [peer-reviewed research study](#) that identified scientific indicators of rigorous instruction directly correlated with higher student achievement (Basileo et al., 2024). As rigor increases, so does student achievement—making RigorWalk one of the most reliable tools for determining the effectiveness of Tier 1 instruction.

RigorWalk is more than just a tool; it is a catalyst for change. District leaders across the country are using RigorWalk to fuel measurable gains in Tier 1 instruction, strengthen leadership capacity, and drive lasting school improvement.

You can't improve what you can't measure—but with RigorWalk, three districts are proving what’s possible. Their stories show what happens when research meets action.

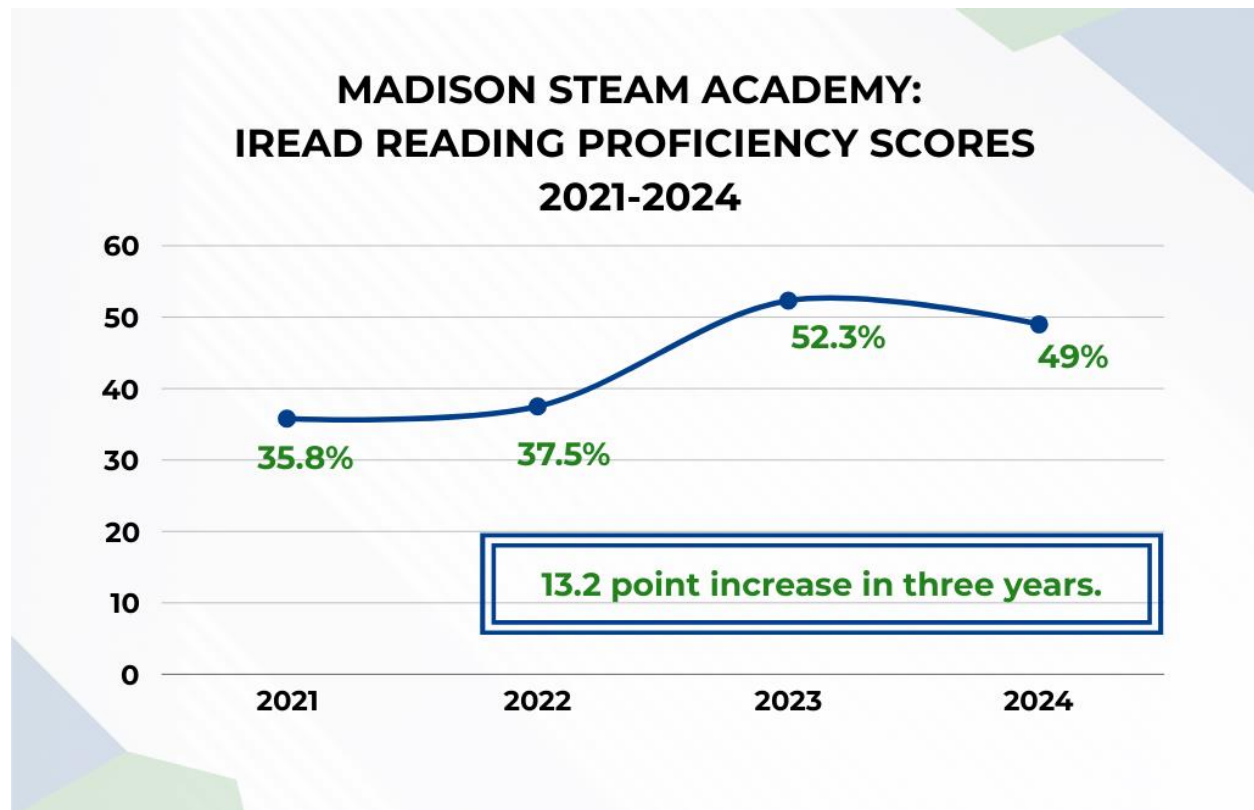
Student Achievement Gains in South Bend, Indiana

In South Bend Community School Corporation, [RigorWalk](#) has offered school leaders a new level of clarity. “I’ve had a very good lens to look through to see what is and what is not happening,” shared Howard Edwards, Director of Student Learning. These insights into instructional trends—gathered without additional testing—have been transformative for leaders focused on student outcomes. “It’s been really informative for our principals,” said Edwards.

Madison STEAM Academy Increased 3rd Grade Reading Proficiency from 35.8% to 49%

By allowing leaders to not only track progress but also identify areas for instructional improvement, RigorWalk helps leaders determine the necessary next steps that drive student success. “You can see it in the data that students are making the progress,” said Edwards.

Prior to implementing RigorWalk within South Bend Community School Corporation, 35.8% of Madison STEAM Academy third grade students demonstrated proficiency on the Indiana Reading Evaluation and Determination (IREAD) assessment (Indiana Department of Education, 2024a). In 2024, proficiency rose to 49%. Edwards shared that the school’s principal attributed this growth to “what she learned during RigorWalks.”

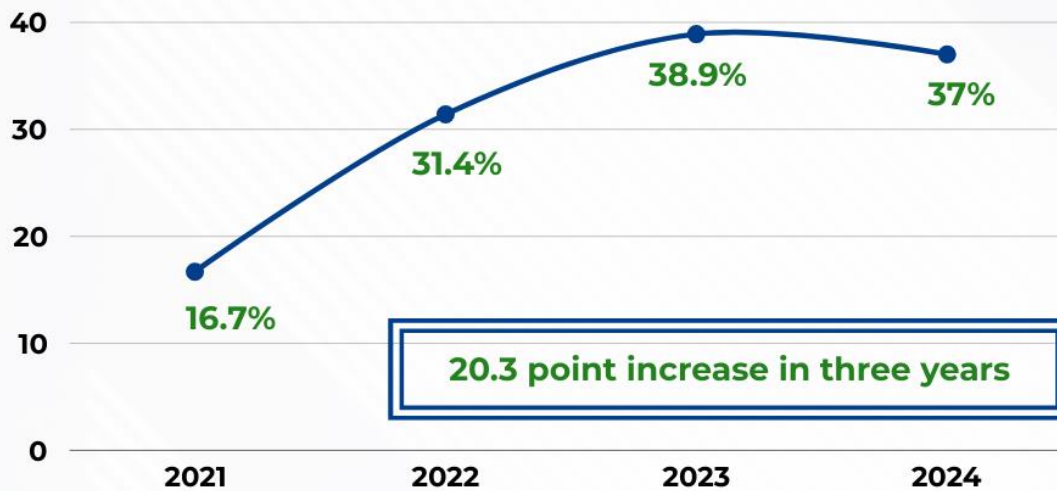


Muessel Elementary Increased 3rd Grade Reading Proficiency from 16.7% to 37%

Madison STEAM Academy isn't the only school within the district seeing growth. In 2021, only 16.7% of Muessel Elementary students met proficiency (Indiana Department of Education, 2024b). In 2024, that number more than doubled to 37%.

These findings [align with research](#) showing that the more classroom visits that school leadership teams conducted using RigorWalk, the higher the student achievement in math and ELA (Basileo et al., 2024). "The principals are getting into the classrooms more," stated Edwards. "Getting in the classroom makes a huge difference." By detecting instructional gaps, offering timely feedback, and tracking learning goals, leaders are ensuring Tier 1 instruction is improving across schools.

MUESSEL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL: IREAD READING PROFICIENCY SCORES 2021-2024



Edwards' experience implementing RigorWalk within South Bend School Corporation has turned him into a strong advocate. "I'm a big believer in what Instructional Empowerment is doing and the supports that are being offered." As a district leader, Edwards often comes back to one question: "What are you doing to monitor and make sure the quality of instruction is being carried out in your building?" With the successes he and the district are currently experiencing, Edwards shares that, "RigorWalk with Instructional Empowerment has really helped that out."

A School Improvement Guide in Illinois

At Tefft Middle School in School District U-46, Illinois, school leaders are using [RigorWalk](#) to drive schoolwide growth. “We have been doing this consistently,” shared Principal Richard Lebron. “We’ve used the strategies aligned to the different RigorWalk questions to guide our school improvement plan.”

Using RigorWalk Pillars to Align to State Standards and Increase Rigor

RigorWalk has three pillars:

1. Standards-Based Student Evidence
2. Organizing Students to Achieve the Standard
3. Monitoring to Take Action Within a Lesson

By focusing on these pillars, leaders can ensure that rigor is present and accessible to all students. “You have a frame of reference for what you’re looking for in the classroom with a very clear rubric of what it is you want to see,” explained Lebron. “We want to make sure that the tasks or work that students are doing is aligned to state standards. Usually, state standards are a higher level of taxonomy that you don’t see when students are working by themselves.”

Using RigorWalk Data to Drive School Improvement

Tefft Middle School utilizes RigorWalk data for an ongoing cycle of reflection, professional learning, and targeted action to drive schoolwide improvement.

- **Progress Monitoring:** Tefft’s data team regularly reviews instructional trends and insights to ensure the walkthrough data meaningfully supports student growth. “We meet every two weeks to look at how we’re progressing in terms of our goals related to the different RigorWalk questions,” said Lebron.
- **Targeted Professional Development:** These insights also inform the focus of targeted professional development. “Based on the data and our performance over the past two weeks, we decide how we’re going to provide

professional development during the month. That's how we're continuously modifying our plan to make sure we stay on track."

- **Data-Based Prioritization:** Lebron also includes RigorWalk metrics in the school's weekly newsletter, along with a clear message about instructional priorities. This cycle of feedback and adjustment supports professional learning and ensures everyone is aligned around [school improvement](#).

The Results: Improved Student Behavior and Engagement

Tefft's ongoing cadence of instructional observation and accountability has helped shift the school's learning culture. "There has been a fundamental change in our school," said Lebron. "We have moved from teacher-centered instruction to more student-centered instruction."

Lebron noted the impact of this shift: Improved [student behaviors](#) and engagement levels. "We've seen a decrease in student behaviors and an increase in engagement overall," Lebron shared. With RigorWalk, leaders can identify instructional issues such as low rigor and student disengagement, factors that can often lead to an increase in challenging student behaviors. "When you're engaged, you are less likely to be disruptive in the classroom."

"We've seen a decrease in student behaviors and an increase in engagement overall."

Overall, Lebron feels that the implementation of RigorWalk has been a success. "Moving toward a more student-centered approach has been great for our school," Lebron shared. "It has allowed our students to be more engaged and take more ownership of their learning." As the end of the current school year approaches, Lebron is eager to see how these changes in instruction will influence testing. "We're looking forward to seeing how this pays off as we continue growing in terms of our state assessment scores."

Leadership Growth in Morgan County, West Virginia

In Morgan County Schools, [RigorWalk](#) has strengthened leadership and instructional practices to drive meaningful change. “As a growing administrator, I’ve always been looking for ways to improve,” said Jamie Harris, principal of Warm Springs Middle School. “RigorWalk has truly helped me grow as an academic educator. It helped me provide better academic feedback to teachers.”

By focusing on student learning instead of teacher performance, educators can use data from classroom walkthroughs to ensure instructional decisions are based on student needs. “It’s improved the consistency of our classrooms from top to bottom,” Harris shared. “It’s held us accountable for what we’re doing.”

“RigorWalk has truly helped me grow as an academic educator. It helped me provide better academic feedback to teachers.”

Early Success: Exceeding Engagement Goals

The district’s efforts haven’t gone unnoticed. In February, the [Morgan Messenger](#) spotlighted Morgan County Schools’ partnership with Instructional Empowerment, noting early signs of success at both the middle and high school levels.

With the support of RigorWalk, Harris and his team at Warm Springs Middle School were able to not only achieve but exceed their 45-day goal of increasing [peer-to-peer student engagement](#), specifically within student groups.

As the district continues to scale its use of RigorWalk, leaders now have access to the predictive insights needed to track instructional progress and ensure all students receive high-quality learning—without the guesswork.

Creating a Culture of Continuous Improvement with RigorWalk

[RigorWalk](#) is proving to be an invaluable tool for district leaders seeking to improve Tier 1 instruction in real time. By offering actionable insights without adding additional testing, RigorWalk empowers school leaders to identify strengths and gaps in instruction, foster targeted professional development, and drive measurable student growth.

As demonstrated in South Bend, U-46, and Morgan County, the implementation of RigorWalk has led to increased engagement, improved academic outcomes, and strengthened leadership practices.

Through consistent classroom walkthroughs, timely data, and a focus on student-centered learning, RigorWalk is transforming instruction and cultivating a culture of continuous improvement. As these districts continue to embrace RigorWalk, their ongoing success serves as a model for how real-time insights can enhance educational practices and drive meaningful change across schools.

About RigorWalk

[RigorWalk™](#) is a research-based classroom walkthrough tool designed to measure the quality and effectiveness of Tier 1 instruction in real-time—without evaluating teachers and without additional student testing.

RigorWalk captures instructional trends using Instructional Empowerment's exclusive, research-validated predictive metrics, helping leaders track progress and pinpoint areas for instructional improvement. With easy-to-share, color-coded trend reports, leaders gain an actionable snapshot of student learning in just 5 to 10 minutes per classroom.

Subscribe for Curated Education Insights Delivered Every Two Weeks

*Get research-based approaches that will change the way you think about rigor,
engagement, and deeper learning.*



References

Basileo, L. D., Lyons, M. E., & Toth, M. D. (2024). *Leading Indicators of Academic Achievement: Investigating the Predictive Validity of an Observation Instrument in a Large District*. SAGE Open, 14(2).

<https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440241261119>

Indiana Department of Education. (2024a). *Madison S.T.E.A.M. Academy*. Indiana Graduates Prepared to Succeed.

<https://indianagps.doe.in.gov/Summary/School/4629>

Indiana Department of Education. (2024b). *Muessel Elementary School*. Indiana Graduates Prepared to Succeed.

<https://indianagps.doe.in.gov/Summary/School/4621>

[Model of Instruction for Deeper Learning](#)™ is a registered trademark of Instructional Empowerment and is research-validated.