

Student Performance Improves on Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments



400 students
Grades K to 8



James Sonju,
Principal



84% Caucasian | 21% free/reduced lunch | 7% LEP
7% African American | 6% Asian/Pacific Islander

Lincoln K-8 Choice School is part of Rochester Public Schools in southeastern Minnesota. The urban school serves 400 students in kindergarten through eighth grade. “In 2006, it looked like our school would not make AYP [Adequate Yearly Progress] in a couple areas,” said James Sonju, principal. “Fortunately, that was the year we began using [Study Island](#). [Study Island](#) changed our whole mindset about our state tests. It sharpened our focus on students’ performance on our state academic standards and gave us a tool to motivate students to achieve. We made AYP that year and have made AYP every year since.”

How They Did It

As part of a districtwide initiative at the middle school level, Lincoln first implemented [Study Island](#) in fall 2006. Today, all Lincoln students in grades 3 through 8 work on [Study Island](#) in math, reading, and science.

“[Study Island](#) is something students really enjoy,” said Sonju. “It builds their confidence and makes them feel like they’re in control of their performance in school and on the state tests.”

With real-time reporting on student achievement, [Study Island](#) helps teachers quickly identify learning gaps as they relate to state standards. “Teachers can look at the [Study Island](#) reports and see where students are doing well and where they’re coming up short,” said Sonju. “This allows teachers to adapt their instruction and spend more time on the skills students actually need to work on. As a principal, [Study Island](#) lets me know we’re providing students with exactly what they need to succeed on our state tests.”

According to Sonju, student progress monitoring is critical to the school’s improved performance. “We run a spreadsheet for every grade level that shows each standard and the percentage of children achieving mastery in [Study Island](#). Teachers review the spreadsheets in their team meetings, so they can identify areas of need and regroup students to meet those needs.”

The school also displays each class’ progress on a wall at the front of the school building. Students and teachers can see how each grade level is doing, how many questions students have answered, and how many Blue Ribbons students have earned in [Study Island](#).

To create a positive focus on the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCA), Lincoln also holds schoolwide pep assemblies. “Before I joined the school, there were negative associations with the state tests. Both teachers and



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students were stressed about the tests,” said Sonju. “So, we created the ‘Rock Town Tour’ to rally kids to do their best on the state tests. Our school band, orchestra, choir, and leadership groups present music and skits and dancing — and the kids love it. They see these students promoting academics, and they want to jump on board too.”

Students who wish to participate in the Rock Town Tour, which also tours four other schools in the district, must earn at least 44 Blue Ribbons in [Study Island](#). “It’s quite a bit of work, but the kids feel it’s worth it,” said Sonju.

To accelerate student learning, the school encourages students to use [Study Island](#) outside of the school day as well. According to Sonju, about 80 percent of the school’s [Study Island](#) usage is outside of regular school hours. “Students wouldn’t spend that much of their free time on it if it wasn’t making a difference,” he said.

[Study Island](#) is available to students in school computer labs during lunchtime and as part of a tutoring program that runs twice a week after school. “The labs are at full capacity every lunch period,” said Sonju. “Even after school, kids really enjoy it, and it’s been a great boost for their academics.”

Lincoln also uses [Study Island](#)’s parent notification system to simplify communication between teachers and parents. “All parents automatically receive notification updates about their child’s performance, which they really appreciate. It empowers parents and creates an academic partnership,” said Sonju.

Sonju and several teachers access [Study Island](#) from home as well. “Every night, I send messages to students to congratulate them on their work and the Blue Ribbons they’ve received because I can see their progress in real time. It’s a great way to provide feedback and let students know we’re paying attention.”

Thanks to the school’s efforts, students now feel confident about the MCAs. “Every year, I ask, ‘How’d the test go?’ And students say, ‘[Study Island](#) made it so easy. We feel like we’ve already seen the things that are on the test. We can’t wait until the next test tomorrow.’”



Success

Since implementing [Study Island](#) in 2006, the percentage of students meeting or exceeding standards on the MCAs has increased in math and reading, and the school has made AYP each year.

“Our results have been amazing,” said Sonju. “In 2008 and 2009, in several grades, we had the highest growth in MCA scores in the district. In 2006–07, when it was predicted that we would not make AYP, we blew our state test scores out of the water. It was awesome. With normal curve equivalent (NCE) scores, the expected gain is typically 1 or 2 points in a school year. Our school’s average NCE gain in math was 7 points. There weren’t any other changes in our curriculum or our program, so we believe [Study Island](#) was a key factor in our scores going up.”

Sonju raved, “There are a lot [of] educational software programs out there, but [Study Island](#) has been the most effective program for us. It’s worth every penny. Students are engaged, they’re having fun, and they’re achieving results. [Study Island](#) has become the fabric of our academic excellence. All schools could benefit from this amazing program.”



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Edmentum International

 www.edmentuminternational.com

 +44 (0)1572 492576

 international@edmentum.com

 8/9 Saddlers Court
Oakham
Rutland
LE15 7GH, UK

