

Evidence of Excellence



Collaboration
boosts ELA
proficiency
by **89%**



SOUTHWESTERN CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT • JAMESTOWN, NEW YORK



Solution Tree



LET'S SEE WHAT WE CAN DO TOGETHER

SOUTHWESTERN CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT



JAMESTOWN, NEW YORK

1,363 STUDENTS / 44% FREE OR REDUCED LUNCH / 1% ENGLISH LEARNERS / 16.5% SPECIAL NEEDS

85% WHITE / 7% HISPANIC OR LATINO / 6% MULTIRACIAL / 2% ASIAN OR FILIPINO / 2% NATIVE HAWAIIAN OR PACIFIC ISLANDER / 0.3% AMERICAN INDIAN OR ALASKA NATIVE / 0.3% BLACK

CHALLENGE

Southwestern Central School District (SWCSD) in New York was a well-respected district, known for achieving many accolades. They had been a sought-after school system but faced challenges in the years following the pandemic, when student proficiency in some grade levels and subjects fell below 50%. Teachers were working hard, but often felt like they were spinning their wheels because collaboration was limited and inconsistent. In fact, most of the work labeled as collaboration focused on scheduling or activities rather than improving instruction.

Specifically, the district struggled with both understanding and implementing intervention systems and recruiting and retaining teachers at the building level. Superintendent Molly Moore and Kaitlin Ring, director of instructional services, wanted a clear plan to strengthen both student learning and the culture of professional collaboration.

IMPLEMENTATION

Southwestern began its journey to strengthen collaboration and academic outcomes by joining the New York Professional Learning Communities (PLC) at Work® Cohort in the summer of 2023. The district formed a guiding coalition to help establish the vision and set a model for effective collaboration throughout each grade level.

During the 2023–2024 school year, the district launched its first book study on the fourth edition of *Learning by Doing: A Handbook for Professional Learning Communities at Work®* by Richard DuFour, Rebecca DuFour, Robert Eaker, Thomas W. Many, Mike Mattos, and Anthony Muhammad. They also began using Global PD Teams, an online team learning platform, as a resource to support teacher teams developing shared PLC at Work skills and knowledge.

Teachers participated in collaborative meetings that used structured norms and focused on the four critical questions of a PLC at Work:

1. What is it we expect our students to learn?
2. How will we know when they have learned it?
3. How will we respond when some students do not learn?
4. How will we respond when some students already know it?

The district also attended the PLC at Work Institute in Rochester, New York, providing teachers with real-world examples and strategies to improve instruction.

In the 2024–2025 school year, Southwestern CSD expanded its professional development with resources like *The 15-Day Challenge*, by Maria Nielsen; the second edition of *Common Formative Assessment*, by Kim Bailey and Chris Jakicic; and *The Big Book of Tools for Collaborative Teams in a PLC at Work®*, by William M. Ferritter. Staff attended a two-day interactive workshop on response to intervention (RTI) with associate Mike Mattos, which helped clarify how Tier 1, 2, and 3 supports could work together. Leaders then redesigned their schedules to include daily intervention blocks for all students.



Southwestern CSD uses PLC at Work[®] practices to drive student learning across subjects

By 2025–2026, the district had added *Grading from the Inside Out* by Tom Schimmer to its resources and continued to use Global PD Teams. Teachers were now consistently planning together, analyzing data, and adjusting instruction, creating a culture of collaboration and continuous improvement districtwide.

- Learning by Doing book study
- Global PD Teams
- PLC at Work[®] Institute in Rochester, New York
- The 15-Day Challenge, Common Formative Assessment, and The Big Book of Tools for Collaborative Teams in a PLC at Work[®] book studies
- RTI at Work[™] PD with Mike Mattos
- Grading from the Inside Out book study

RESULTS

Since implementing PLC at Work and RTI at Work[™], Southwestern Central School District has seen measurable improvements in student proficiency and instructional practices from the 2023–2024 school year to the 2024–2025 school year:

- ELA scores for sixth graders rose from 36% to 68%, outpacing the state average in 2024–2025 by 33%.
- Math scores for sixth graders increased 10.5%, rising from 38% to 42% in one year.
- Science scores for grades 5 and 8 boosted from 50% to 54%.

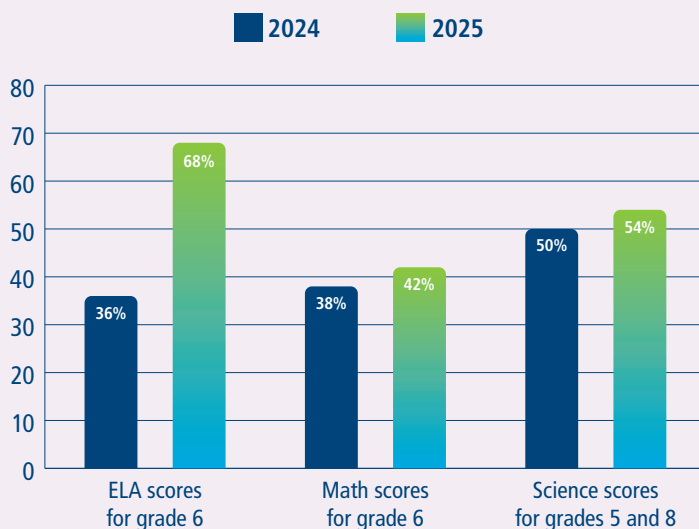
Teachers at Southwestern CSD now collaborate consistently, analyze data together, and implement tiered RTI supports. Intervention blocks and common planning time have strengthened instruction, allowing the district to focus on skill-based support for every student. This shift has built a culture of continuous improvement districtwide and set a strong foundation for future gains in math proficiency.



Teachers are collaborating in ways we've never seen before, and it's transforming instruction for every student. [Implementing PLC at Work districtwide] has given our staff the tools and support to make learning meaningful and measurable.

MOLLY MOORE / SUPERINTENDENT

SOUTHWESTERN CSD PROFICIENCY DATA



Start your success story



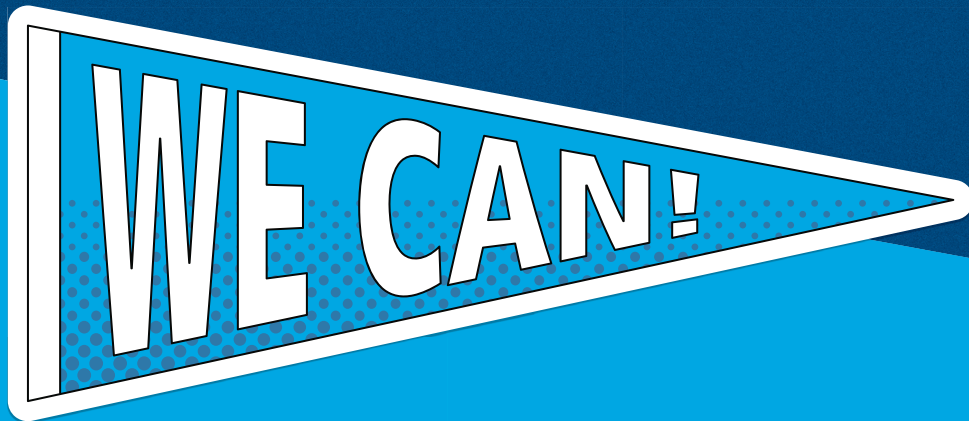
You have a vision for change and improvement in your school or district. You want to see results in the classroom for the lifelong betterment of your students.

At Solution Tree, we share your vision to transform education to ensure learning for all, and we can help you make this vision a reality.

OUR PROMISE: No other professional learning company provides our unique blend of research-based, results-driven services that improve learning outcomes for students.



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Please note that all data and people mentioned in this story represent solely the time frame in which Solution Tree actively worked with the school or district and the time frame in which the school or district committed to implementing processes and practices set forth by Solution Tree. Building and district leaders and staff featured in Evidence of Excellence stories may have changed since the stories were published.