

Newman–Crows Landing Unified School District

Newman, California

Individualized instruction supported by real-time data and an engaging adaptive learning practice tool boosts elementary classroom performance

Newman-Crows Landing Unified School District (NCLUSUD) uses the Stride Skills Arcade online supplemental program by Stride Learning Solutions in its four elementary schools to help boost learning outcomes and provide analytics to monitor students' progress and individualize instruction.

NCLUSUD is a rural district serving the Newman, Crows Landing, and Diablo communities in the heart of California's Central Valley. The district is comprised of eight schools serving about 3,200 students. Roughly seventy-five percent of the student population is Hispanic, and 36 percent are English Language Learners (ELLs).

The district is located in a major agricultural center and most of the jobs in the area revolve around the agricultural industry. But unlike many highly mobile agricultural communities, a high percentage of workers here are employed year-round and have become permanent residents of the area. Consequently, their children remain in the district throughout much or all of their K–12 school experience. This has created a stable student population resulting in strong community involvement and support for the school district. NCLUSUD has become the focus of many community events in the area.

NCLUSUD Superintendent Randy Fillpot says, "With the wide range of skill levels among our students, we needed better formative assessment tools to help identify individual learning needs and help students when and where they need it most. We selected Stride Skills Arcade because it gives us the data we need. It's fun for the kids, and they love the games they earn."

Stride Skills Arcade is a standards-based, supplemental online program that helps boost academic skills, and rewards learning with engaging digital games. Its adaptive technology helps teachers focus learning on students' skill levels on a real-time basis. All K–5 elementary students have been using the program as part of their regular weekly instructional activities for the past three years.

"Stride Skills Arcade has contributed to a growing percentage of our district's elementary students performing at or above grade level, and kids are more engaged in their learning experience overall," says Kim Bettencourt, Director of Curriculum and Instruction.

Data-driven Individualized Instruction

Stride Skills Arcade provides online supplemental instruction in math, language arts, reading, and science, and is aligned with state and national standards. Its adaptive learning design generates data that helps guide each student to practice where it is needed most, adjusting the difficulty of questions on the fly based on each student's skill level. Stride's benchmark and formative assessments help teachers track student performance and individualize learning.

Teachers make significant use of the benchmark and real-time formative assessment data to create individual and small group interventions based upon state and national standards.

DISTRICT

Type of school:
School district

Schools:

4 Elementary schools
1 Middle school
1 High school
1 Continuation high school
1 Community day school

Grades:

TK through 12

Program opened:

Fall 2014

District enrollment:

3,000

Ethnicity:

18.58% White
77.67% Hispanic
.14% Native American
.45% Filipino
.58% Asian
1.88% African American
.45% Pacific Islander
.25% Other

English Language Learners (ELLs):

36%

Free/Reduced-price lunch:

72%

Program staff:

68 Teachers
6 Administrative and support

Students served:

1,472 TK–5 Elementary students

Instructional model:

Supplemental online instruction

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

A districtwide elementary school program using the Stride Skills Arcade adaptive learning solution moves students toward mastery in math, language arts, reading, and science.

The program's benchmark and formative assessments provide the district with vital data to help identify individual student needs and assist them when and where they need it most.

NCLUSD implemented a robust individualized and small group instruction program heavily based on Stride Skills Arcade state standards-based assessment data.

Teachers make significant use of the real-time class data to help students exactly when they need it.

The district utilizes the program's adaptive technology to challenge excelling students and remediate struggling students.

"Students really get excited when they answer Stride Skills Arcade questions correctly, not just because they earn a game coin, but because they're really motivated by doing better."

— Julia Cope, third-grade teacher

Real-time statistics from the program allow teachers to provide help to students exactly when they need it, and Progress Monitoring Assessments (PMAs), administered several times a year, are extremely valuable as well. One teacher notes, "The PMAs let me know which exact standards my students understand and don't understand. PMAs were given four times last year, which I really liked. My class sets specific goals for improvement each time."

Stride Skills Arcade is used in a fairly consistent manner across grade levels in NCLUSD's four elementary schools. More noticeable usage differences, however, do exist between the upper grades (3–5) and lower grades (K–2). Upper grades use Stride Skills Arcade on average 60 minutes per week, while the lower grades tend to be more likely to devote less than 60 minutes per week; and in some cases, lower grade teachers may limit the number of academic subjects as well as the range of content complexity.

Generally, most students devote a block of time each day to the program. Students answer questions and, based on their performance, are subsequently presented with questions of higher or lower level complexity. Correct answers earn 'coins,' which are redeemed to play digital games. Teachers set aside time on Fridays for the games. "Our kids work hard to earn coins. It's immediate positive reinforcement and they love to play the games," says Kim Bettencourt, Director of Curriculum and Instruction.

Inside the Schools

Stride Skills Arcade is part of daily instruction for all NCLUSD K–5 elementary school students, roughly 1,500 students in 4 schools.

Bonita Elementary: Julia Cope's Third Grade Class

Bonita students work on Stride Skills Arcade for about 20 minutes each day, Monday through Thursday in Julia Cope's third grade class. Each day is focused only on a particular subject: math, reading/ELA, or science. On Fridays, students can play games by redeeming the 'coins' they've earned during the week. Cope says, "Students love working with Stride Skills Arcade and are very motivated to earn the coins."

Real-time feedback and individual attention is essential to Cope's teaching approach. "As I walk around while students are using the program, they'll ask me questions right then, and we can problem solve together to find the answer," she explains. "They really get excited when they answer questions correctly, not just because they earn a coin, but because they're really motivated by doing better."

One of the reasons for the program's success in Bonita's third-grade class is how it challenges students with adaptive, rigorous content. "Stride Skills Arcade helps my students become better thinkers, because it challenges them with higher grade level questions right when they need them," says Cope.

"I am a data person, and I dig into the report details to see where I need to go," she explains. "At the end of the week, I review the data to see which students need more practice in each subject and standard, and I'll have them go back and work on specific areas to bring them up to speed. For me, this program is not only an indicator of how students are doing in class, but also how they are likely to do on the SBAC (Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium achievement test)."

While Stride's supplemental instruction at NCLUSD helps move students towards grade-level performance, teachers say it's how the program supports individualized instruction with real-time data that is its overarching

Each student in Cope’s class has the use of a personal Chromebook while at school, which they use at their own desk, even though they may be part of a small group. Elementary students at NCLUSD cannot take devices home, but some teachers grant access for students to use Stride Skills Arcade at home on their personal devices. “I don’t encourage home use. I want to see what my kids are doing as they are doing it,” says Cope.

Hunt Elementary: Sherri Bedrosian’s First Grade Class

Sherri Bedrosian assigns 30 minutes of Stride Skills Arcade activities per week to her first graders. Currently, she uses the program for math only, but she plans to use other subjects later in the year. Students have the use of a personal Chromebook while at school. “My first graders work on Stride Skills Arcade independently,” says Bedrosian. “However, as I rotate through the class during the week, I pull kids back to a separate table, two at a time, one on either side of me, offering support. I first pull those students who are working below grade level. I find out why they are struggling, and I help them to succeed.”

Bedrosian scaffolds curriculum to meet the needs of individual students as well as the whole class. For instance, she has rearranged several of the program’s categories, such as Geometry, and Measurement and Data, to better coincide with her sequence of math concepts. “This has really helped,” Sherri says. “Prior to making this change, all but 4 of my 18 students were working below grade level. Within the first two weeks of making this change, over half of the class was working at grade level.”

A highly effective motivational concept is the “STRIVE FOR EXCELLENCE” bulletin board (see below), prominently displayed for all students to see. It shows each student’s progress in Stride Skills Arcade, indicating those who are BELOW, AT, and ABOVE grade level based on the previous week’s work (each student is identified by a secret student number). If students are at or above, they can play two games the following week.

Strive for Excellence Leaderboard



*Names have been changed to protect student privacy.

TEACHER-STUDENT COLLABORATION LEADS TO SUCCESS

Jimmy,* a boy in Julia Cope’s third grade class, was always discouraged when he didn’t correctly answer questions. She worked with him one-to-one, trying to slow him down and get him to think more about each question. After that, Jimmy began to get more correct answers. “That was huge for him,” Cope says. “He was not succeeding at one point, but he became successful by stopping and slowing down and working with me.”

“Stride Skills Arcade is helping students become better thinkers.”

– Julia Cope,
teacher, Bonita
Elementary
School

“Stride Skills Arcade’s analytics are particularly helpful as a scaffolding and grouping tool.”

– Lupe Robles,
Principal, Hunt
Elementary
School Principal

CUSTOM QUIZZES

At NCLUSD, teachers take advantage of Stride Skills Arcade's capability to create custom quizzes. Quizzes are constructed by selecting specific questions from the question database. Teachers particularly like this because custom quizzes can be built to match a standard or set of standards.

Susan Gonzalez, 4th-grade teacher at Barrington Elementary, regularly creates custom quizzes. She says, "It's easy to create and grade custom quizzes, so I don't have to build and grade quizzes from the ground up outside of the program. This saves me a lot of time."

Janeth Castillo, 5th-grade teacher at Von Renner Elementary, meets with other 5th grade teachers in the district three times a year to co-develop quizzes that are deployed in a consistent manner across the district. This has been helpful in comparing children, curricula, and programs across the district. It has also helped promote meaningful collaboration among teachers.

Bedrosian continually monitors the program data and she especially likes the real-time stats. "I'm able to encourage students right when they're working because I can see those who are working well and those who need to pay more attention to what they're answering," says Bedrosian. "I've taught the class how to monitor their own progress in the program. I think that's important; they're beginning to take some control of their own learning."

Hunt's Principal, Lupe Robles, is very pleased with Stride Skills Arcade's impact on the school. "The analytics are particularly helpful as a scaffolding and grouping tool. The assessments are good because they mimic our state assessments." Robles explains that the immediate feedback and incentive-based approach have had a positive effect on the school's instruction across the board.

Hurd Barrington Elementary: Susan Gonzalez's Fourth Grade Class

Fourth-grade students in Susan Gonzalez's class at Hurd Barrington Elementary use Stride Skills Arcade for 60 minutes each week. Students work individually at different times during the day, depending upon the schedule of other group and whole-class activities. All students have the use of a Chromebook and work independently at their own desks.

"A nice thing about Stride Skills Arcade is that it provides the needed data to form small groups according to the standard," says Gonzalez. "We create a lot of small groups to help struggling kids or to challenge kids that need to be challenged. I usually have five different groups operating at a time, with four to six kids each."

"I particularly like the science because I am not able to devote as much class time to science as I would like, so Stride Skills Arcade helps fill in the gaps," says Gonzalez. In math, students do a paper version of their problems so she can see students' step-by-step problem solving. Some math problems in Stride Skills Arcade are approached differently than she teaches in class, so Gonzalez cross-checks to make sure they are really understanding the concepts.

Von Renner Elementary School: Janeth Castillo's Fifth Grade Class

Von Renner is the oldest elementary school in the district. A high percentage of students remain at the school throughout their K–5 school experience. About 86 percent of Von Renner's students are native Spanish-speaking children; 50 percent of the school's students are officially English Language Learners (ELLs).

Janeth Castillo, fifth-grade teacher, delivers instruction about 50/50 in English and Spanish. All Stride Skills Arcade content, however, is presented in English. "I teach language arts instruction in Spanish," says Castillo. "One of the things I like about using this program in Spanish-taught language arts is that it gives my students a chance to practice in English. They're exposed to academic English vocabulary that they will ultimately need, and that I'm not currently teaching. This generates great questions and discussion. We have a journal where students write down the new English words they've encountered in the program."

Using Stride Skills Arcade data, Castillo creates differentiated instruction groups based on state standards. Typically, five groups run concurrently, and the groupings change weekly based on progress and standards levels. Students remain at their regular assigned seat, and are not physically separated into groups, but they do know who else is in their group.

“It makes it easy for me to see what I need to work on, and the assessment has already been done for me,” says Castillo. “It also gives me peace of mind that I know they are working independently on the right concepts, and that they will be successful.”

These fifth-graders are learning how to take responsibility for their learning. They decide on their own how to divide their time: complete their targeted weekly 60 minutes in one setting, or 20 minutes a day for three days, for example. Like the other schools in the district, Fridays are game days for those who have earned enough coins. Students access their own data to keep track of time. Castillo monitors student reports and intervenes as needed to provide individual support for struggling students and assigns higher level questions for those who are excelling.



Individualized Instruction Supported by Stride Skills Arcade Boosts Student Learning and Performance

In the four years since NCLUSD implemented Stride Skills Arcade, it has become an essential component of the district’s elementary school instructional program. Kim Bettencourt, Director of Curriculum and Instruction, says she believes the program has contributed to improvements on SBAC achievement scores.

“Stride Skills Arcade has really helped improve learning, and it gives us real-time visibility into students’ progress and the standards on which to focus,” says Superintendent Fillpot.

Success is Defined in Several Ways

GROWTH IN MATH, READING, AND LANGUAGE ARTS (FALL TO WINTER STRIDE PMA SCORES)



“At” or “Above” grade level percentages **increasing** based on both benchmark and summative assessments



More students “At” or “Above” grade level on weekly basis based on real-time stats and formative assessments

TEACHERS OBSERVED POSITIVE IMPACT ON LEARNING



Stride Skills Arcade is helping students become **better thinkers**

Students are **more engaged** and involved in learning in general, not just while using this program



Stride Skills Arcade is helping students take **more control of learning**

Adaptive technology **challenges** excelling students **and** **remediates** struggling students

TEACHERS USE STRIDE SKILLS ARCADE REPORTS TO PROMOTE LEARNING



Stride Skills Arcade’s performance data helps teachers **identify learning gaps** and facilitates individualized and small group instruction.

Real-time and periodic assessment tools provide **immediate feedback** on each student’s grasp of specific state standards.



Analytics assist teachers with **scaffolding and grouping**.

Real-time stats enable teachers to **give students immediate feedback**.