

RESEARCH SUMMARY

NEW CONFIDENCE + COLLABORATION IN THE CLASSROOM

Ni River Middle School
SPOTSYLVANIA COUNTY,
VIRGINIA

*Steelcase Education Active
Learning Grant Recipient,
Cycle 3*

At Ni River Middle school, seventh- and eighth-grade math instructors Melissa Feeley and Kristin Oswald strive to create a fully inclusive setting for students in general and special education. As recipients of an Active Learning Center (ALC) grant, they were eager to trade a traditional static classroom for a space made for group collaboration and student-led learning.

“The classroom setup is essential to teaching 21st century skills,” said Oswald of the flexible maker space the school selected. “It sparks creative communication and collaboration while fostering problem solving skills through the use of technology.”

“Every time I walk by the Steelcase Active Learning Center, I see kids excited and engaged in math! It is inspiring to see what amazing educators can do when given the right tools.”

Paul Workman, Assistant Principal

ENGAGING DEEPLY

During both years of the grant period, instructors noted increases in student engagement with the curriculum. They observed students acting with greater confidence, taking productive risks and persisting on assignments despite high levels of difficulty.

Pre- and post-occupancy survey results confirm that students felt greater motivation to learn, able to focus and confidence in their ability to succeed in the new classroom.

One parent of an ALC student said, “This year has been the BEST math experience [my child] has had to date.”

ALL TOGETHER

Teachers and administrators observed meaningful peer-to-peer collaboration, communication and teaching taking place in the ALC. They noticed students working together to solve problems rather than immediately turning to the instructor for direction and assistance – an important stride toward the school’s goal of having students take more responsibility for their learning.

Students likewise reported increased collaboration and communication with peers and teachers. In surveys, they offered an “overwhelming positive” response to being able to move within the ALC active classroom design.

“The ALC continues to help our struggling learners through the learning process. We are seeing students engaging with each other and the content, which is leading to higher level discussions and collaborations with their peers.”

Melissa Feeley, ALC Instructor

Instructors also described the environment as more inclusive, facilitating active participation among students in the special education program and their general education peers alike.

Many at the school attribute positive student experiences in the ALC with better behaviors and fewer disciplinary measures.

TEACHING NEW WAYS

Instructors said that the mobile ALC furniture has made it easier to incorporate active learning strategies, try new activities and creatively plan and deliver lessons. In particular, they voiced appreciation for flexible room setup and student grouping.

Teachers across the school participated in training on active learning strategies tailored to their respective content areas. Because some were initially reluctant to try the new classroom, administrators initiated a “professional growth challenge” for every instructor to use ALC at least once.

Since the challenge, administrators have seen active learning strategies blossom throughout the school – and are receiving requests for more active settings within additional classrooms.

340%

**INCREASE IN PEER-TO-PEER
COLLABORATION REPORTED
BY STUDENTS**