



# Wausau School District

A Wisconsin school district uses data to drive a student-centered, targeted system of supports at all levels of instruction.

## OVERVIEW

---

### District

Wausau School District

### Location

Wausau, WI

### Numbers

Number of students: 8,149

Number of staff: 1,079

Number of schools: 20

### Illuminate Education Customer Since

2016

## About Wausau School District

The mission of Wausau School District is to advance student learning, achievement, and success. The district does this by focusing on the whole child, with a strong focus on educational equity. “Our efforts are focused on creating personal and academic success for each child, because we recognize that we are creating learners and leaders who will take us forward into a time of incredible change and progress,” says Superintendent Dr. Keith Hilts.

## Using data “not as a hammer, but as a flashlight”

Like many school systems nationwide, Wausau School District provides varying types of support at different levels of intensity to meet the learning needs of every child, including both academic and social-emotional behavior (SEB) needs.

In Wausau, educators use a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) that focuses on three levels: improving universal instruction for all learners (Tier 1); delivering targeted, small-group intervention for students who need additional support (Tier 2); and providing intensive, individualized interventions for those who need further assistance (Tier 3).

To implement this model successfully, educators must gather accurate and reliable data about their students, correctly interpret and validate this information, and then use the data to make meaningful instructional changes and decisions.

Wausau leaders recognized that teachers needed help with the latter steps in this process—analyzing student information and turning data into action. “We collected a lot of data from our kids, but we weren’t doing justice to interpreting the data,” says Response to Intervention (RtI) Specialist Julie A. Oehmichen.

To help teachers use data to improve their practice, Wausau turned to Illuminate's [FastBridge](#) evidence-based screening and progress monitoring assessments. FastBridge's universal screeners include comprehensive reporting that helps teachers easily understand students' learning needs and plan their instruction accordingly. The solution also provides progress monitoring tools so that educators can learn whether interventions are working and if they're working quickly enough.

“ Wausau has undergone a ‘paradigm shift’ in how educators use data to drive improvement. ”

In addition, Wausau educators use Illuminate [eduCLIMBER](#), an MTSS collaboration and management solution providing whole child data visualizations, to gain a comprehensive, 360-degree view of each student. With these two systems working in tandem with each other, Wausau has undergone what Oehmichen calls a “paradigm shift” in how educators use data to drive improvement.

“In many districts, data is used as a hammer to punish teachers and schools,” she observes. “We think about data not as a hammer, but as a flashlight. We want it to help us shine a light on what’s working and how we can improve instruction to increase the success of our students.”

## Identifying skills gaps—and how to close them

Wausau uses Fastbridge to screen students from elementary to middle and high school, so teachers have longitudinal data with which to track student learning and growth.

All students in kindergarten through ninth grade are tested in reading and math three times per year to get a snapshot of where they are and what foundational skills they might lack. The district also tests certain groups of students in grades 10-12 according to the same schedule, such as English learners (ELs) and those who have an Individualized Education Program (IEP).

“It’s a balance,” Oehmichen says. “We don’t want to over-assess students, because we know that every time we assess them, we’re taking away from instructional time.” However, FastBridge screening tools are designed to be administered quickly, minimizing the amount of time needed to assess students while yielding accurate and actionable information, so that teachers can focus more time on instruction.

““ That [Screening to Intervention] report is so powerful, because it gives teachers instructional recommendations. ””

Teachers meet in grade-level or subject-area teams to review the data and discuss what improvements they need to make to universal (Tier 1) instruction. In addition, Rtl teams within each building meet to discuss who might need additional Tier 2 or 3 intervention and whether any adjustments to interventions are needed.

The reporting within FastBridge helps teachers understand not only what skills students are lacking but also how to close those gaps. One of the reports that teachers find particularly helpful is the Screening to Intervention (s2i) report.

“That report is so powerful,” Oehmichen says, “because it gives teachers instructional recommendations.” The s2i report prescribes specific math and reading interventions, so teachers can easily plan their next steps.

## Gaining visibility into the whole child “data story”

While FastBridge provides insights about students’ skills, eduCLIMBER has helped Wausau take data-driven instruction to the next level. eduCLIMBER combines academic, SEB, attendance, and other student data within a single platform. Using FastBridge and eduCLIMBER together is helping educators create a “data story” for their classrooms, Oehmichen says.

eduCLIMBER’s Student Profile allows educators to hone in on one particular student and has become the “go-to” report for building-level RtI teams. “They can look at it and see everything about that student,” Oehmichen says, “including which interventions the student has received in the past and how effective they were.” Importantly, FastBridge data are brought into eduCLIMBER, where they can be analyzed as an important piece of each student’s larger data picture.

“With whole child student data as their guide, Wausau educators are improving their core instruction, while also delivering targeted interventions more effectively.”

Wausau teachers also use eduCLIMBER's behavior tracking module to record any disciplinary problems they observe in class. With all of those data in a single location, educators can easily triangulate data to uncover the root cause of problems or struggles. In many cases, addressing a non-academic need can lead to increased academic success.

"We had a student in one of our elementary schools who was having major behavioral problems," Oehmichen says. "By analyzing the data within eduCLIMBER, we found that her issues always occurred around 11 o'clock. Her teacher said, 'I bet she's hungry.' That child participated in a program before school, so she ate breakfast really early. The teacher decided to give her a snack every day around 10:45 to see if that helped—and it made a huge difference in her behavior."

## Observing larger trends and patterns to target supports

With whole child student data as their guide, Wausau educators are improving their core instruction, while also delivering targeted interventions more effectively.

"We're having teachers analyze historical and current data in order to find trends or patterns that can tell a story," she explains. Teachers are using these data stories to learn more about their students' instructional needs.

“ Our end goal is to see student growth. We want to make sure the interventions we've put into place are a good use of the students' time and are making an impact. ”

For instance, one teacher discovered that many of her students were struggling with math automaticity: knowing their basic math facts. In response to this insight, she has planned a targeted, classwide intervention and built time into her math block every day for activities to help students practice and eventually master their basic multiplication and division facts.

“Our end goal is to see student growth,” Oehmichen says. “We want to make sure the interventions we’ve put into place are a good use of the students’ time and are making an impact. Using data is helping us make more meaningful decisions so we can move forward as a classroom, a school, and a district.”

Moreover, eduCLIMBER allows users to filter the data in many ways. Wausau administrators are using the platform to look at district-wide student data through the lens of equity to see how various groups of students are doing, such as special education students, ELs, or those who are economically disadvantaged.

“That has been amazing for us,” Oehmichen says. “It allows us to think about what shifts we need to make within our system to serve all students more effectively.”



To learn more about FastBridge and eduCLIMBER,  
reach out to [schedule a demo](#).

