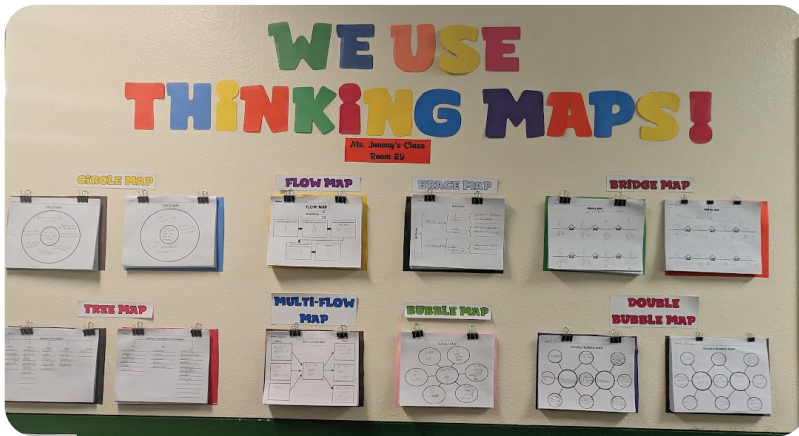




Maricopa Unified School District, Arizona



SNAPSHOT

District Snapshot

- 11 Schools (6 Elementary, 2 Middle, 2 High, 1 Virtual Academy)
- 9,200 Students Pre K-12
- 488 Teachers

At Maricopa Unified School District, Thinking Maps are embedded in everything they do, from the classroom to the district offices. A strategic district-wide approach to implementation of Thinking Maps and *Write from the Beginning...and Beyond* has created sustainable transformation at the school and district level.

A COMMITMENT TO TRANSFORMATION FROM THE TOP

Maricopa's transformation began after the COVID-19 pandemic. Several Maricopa schools were already using Thinking Maps in some form, but implementation was inconsistent. Teachers lost further momentum during the pandemic disruptions. After students returned to the classroom full time, Assistant Superintendent Sheryl Redner recognized that there was a need to rethink instruction and rally around a core set of initiatives to get everyone back on track. She and Wade Watson, the Director of Curriculum and Instruction, made the decision to recommit to Thinking Maps district wide. Recognizing that teachers needed additional support for writing instruction, they decided to reboot Thinking Maps at all schools and begin training for *Write from the Beginning...and Beyond*.

Sheryl says, "After COVID, both students and teachers really needed some kind of structure for teaching and learning. Their worlds had been disrupted." She felt that Thinking Maps—which acts as a shared visual language for learning across grade levels, content areas, and activity types—could provide the structure that students and teachers sorely needed.

"Thinking Maps are really part of our whole culture, from the classroom to meetings at the district office. Our teachers and our kids use them every day, so the thinking strategies just become natural."

-Stephanie Rhinehart, Principal,
Santa Cruz Elementary

For Wade, providing a solution for writing, not only in English Language Arts (ELA) but also in all the content areas, was a priority. As a former ELA teacher, he says, “I remember having to come up with my own process to teach writing. When I was introduced to Thinking Maps and *Write from the Beginning*, it made so much sense. I knew how much it would have helped me in the classroom as a beginning teacher. Our priority with this initiative was to make teachers’ lives better and easier, which will translate into making learning better and easier for students.”



A SHARED VISUAL LANGUAGE—FROM THE DISTRICT OFFICE TO THE CLASSROOM

The district started by shoring up the use of Thinking Maps at schools that had implemented previously and bringing the rest of their schools on board. Schools appointed (or retrained) two or more onsite leads (teachers, coaches, or administrators) to act as trainers, mentors and coaches for their peers. The Thinking Maps virtual “training of trainers” gave them the in-depth knowledge, materials and support they needed to provide consistent, high-quality training and coaching at the school sites. Wade also rehearsed and planned training with the school trainers, who went on to retrain all school staff. “You have to monitor what’s going on and model it from the top,” says Sheryl. “We realized we needed to be on top of it to make sure the training offered by our trainers was the quality we expect.”

The *Write from the Beginning...and Beyond* (WFBB) implementation began with a district-wide training of trainers organized over several Friday nights and Saturdays. Over the last two years, the district has rolled out the first two modules of WFBB, *Setting the Stage*, and *Narrative*, and will roll out the remaining modules over the next three years. At Santa Cruz Elementary, where Stephanie Rhinehart is Principal, they have a total of eight on-site trainers for Thinking Maps, *Setting the Stage*, and *Narrative*, with the goal of building capacity across the school and sharing responsibility for coaching and training. Teachers share ideas for Thinking Maps and WFBB in their professional learning communities (PLCs). Stephanie says, “We’ve been very targeted in our focus on writing, because that’s been a challenge across content areas. *Write from the Beginning...and Beyond* is great for making the writing process visible, so you can really see the writing that is going on when you walk through the school.”

“Thinking Maps is making learning equitable for all our scholars and building confidence in our teachers, especially for teaching writing. I have conversations with teachers who say they can’t imagine teaching without them.”

-Jen Robinson, Principal,
Maricopa Elementary

Maricopa also invested in *Language for Leadership* training for all school and district leaders—all the way up to the Superintendent, who was an active participant throughout the process. Wade says, “The leadership training puts Thinking Maps in their world, with examples of how they can use the Maps for their day-to-day jobs.” As a result, Thinking Maps is now embedded at all levels of the district and used for everything from facilitating staff meetings to parent communication.

SUSTAINING THE CHANGE

The school and district leadership teams at Maricopa are committed to creating a sustainable Thinking Maps and WFBB implementation for the long haul. The district provides day-one training each year for all new hires, and the schools assign new onsite trainers as needed. At Maricopa Elementary, the trainers lead the eight-week rollout at the beginning of the year and facilitate PLC meetings throughout the year focused on Thinking Maps and WFBB. Principal Jen Robinson also uses instructional rounds as a way to observe how Thinking Maps and WFBB are used in the classroom, gather ideas and feedback, and identify areas of improvement or training needs. “We visit every classroom and look for the evidence of how they are being used and the level of engagement,” she says. “Then we come back as a staff and discuss the findings together—using Thinking Maps to organize our ideas, of course. It really has become a natural entry point for conversations between teachers and sharing instructional strategies. We’re constantly reflecting on our progress and growing.”

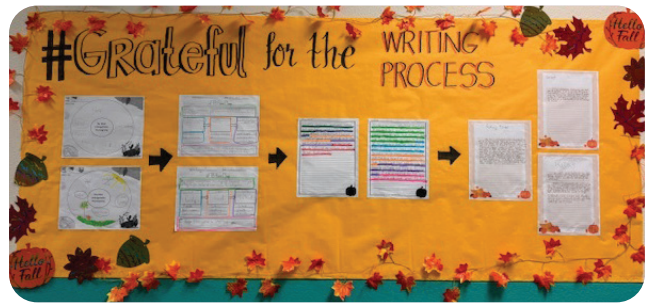
This intentional and focused approach has paid off. Sheryl and Wade report that they see Thinking Maps everywhere they go, from classrooms to hallways to staff meetings. Back office staff, including HR, also use Thinking Maps for planning and communication.

The most visible results have been in writing—not just in ELA, but in every content area. “When we go into our elementary sites, there is evidence of writing everywhere,” Wade says. “You can see the whole writing process in the Maps that students are creating. We see first and second graders who are already creating multi-paragraph essays with transitions, an opener and closer, because now they have a structure that lets them see that. I can’t wait to see what these kids will be doing by the time they get to high school.”

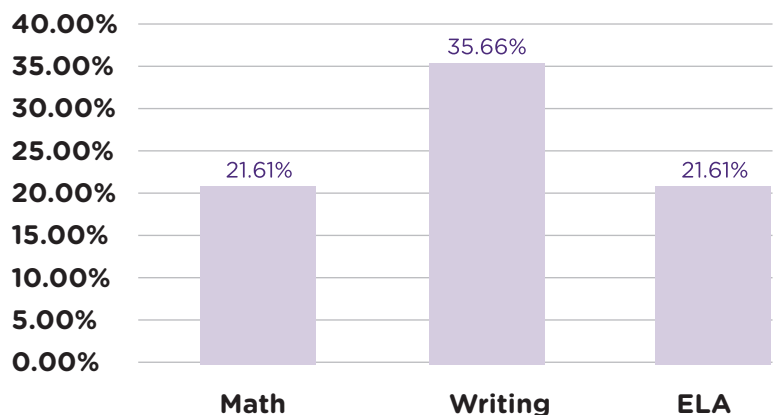
Sheryl is excited to see the commitment and confidence from teachers. In her school visits, she sees teachers integrating and applying Thinking Maps in a variety of ways to support their curricula. “It can’t just be top down. It has to be a groundswell as well,” she says. “Many of these teachers are going to outlast us. What will keep the implementation going is the value that teachers see at the classroom level.”

“We have systemic gains across the board at every grade level and every school in elementary. Students improved in writing from the fall benchmark to the winter benchmark. We can’t wait to see the gain after state testing.”

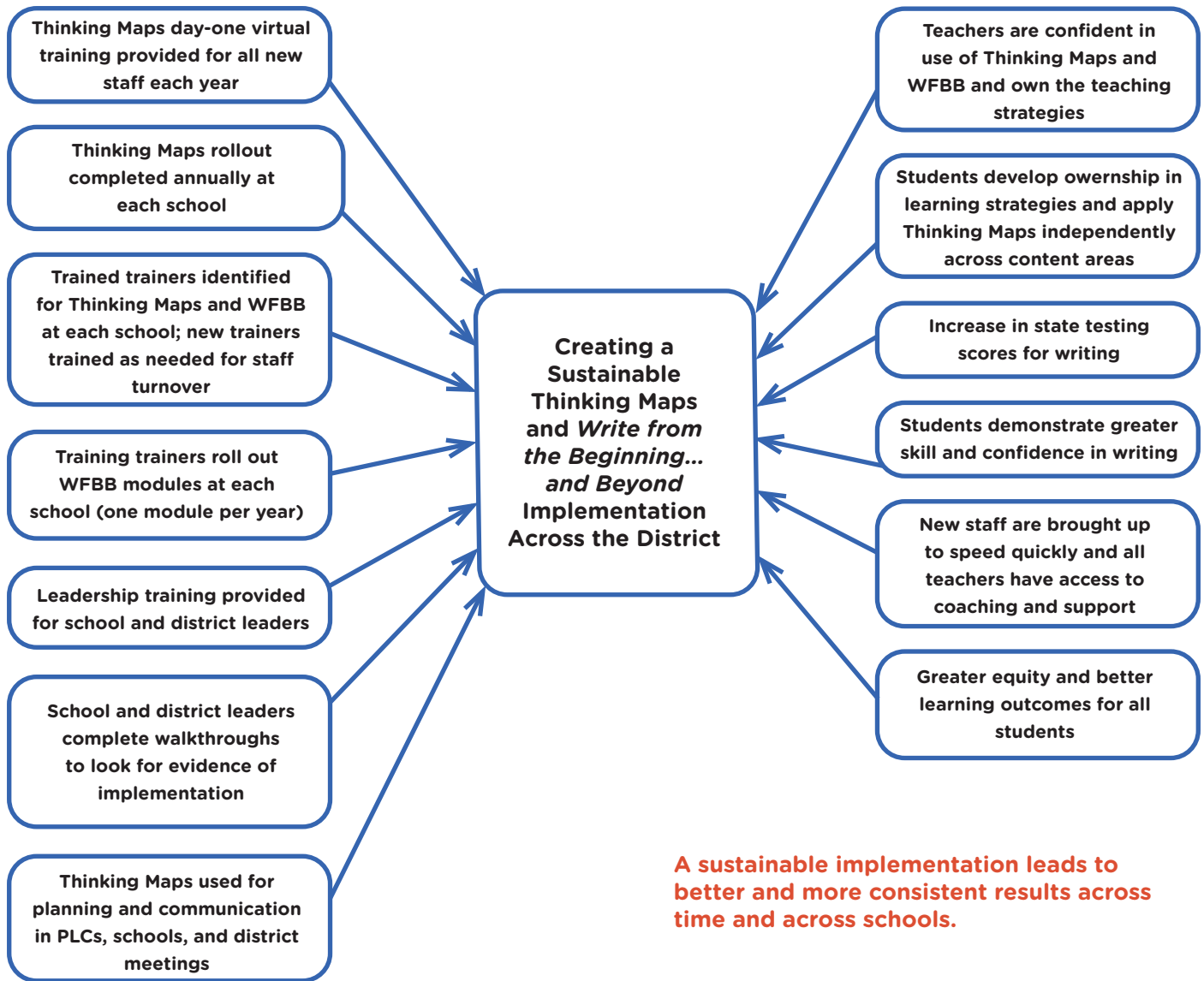
-Loraine Conley, Ed.D.,
Director of Data & Assessment



**% of Students Increasing at Least One Proficiency Level
Fall 2023-Winter 2024 Benchmarks**



Being committed to a systematic and intentional approach to training and rollout has resulted in Thinking Maps having a significant impact on instruction and student outcomes.



A sustainable implementation leads to better and more consistent results across time and across schools.