

Minnesota Data and Assessment Literacy (MnDAL) Implementation for Success: Lessons Learned from the Field

Learning Journey Journal

October 2024

The Minnesota Data and Assessment Literacy (MnDAL) course is a series of on-demand learning modules aimed at supporting educators and leaders to use data and assessment to transform teaching and learning. The modules are designed to support professional learning of both individuals and groups of learners, and may be used to support professional learning tailored for an organization's needs.

The MnDAL course is differentiated through two paths: one for teachers, and one for building/district leaders. The modules within the course are grouped into strands by topic: Systems Thinking, Assessment Literacy, Formative Assessment, and Data Use. The modules within the course were developed in partnership with WestEd and made available to educators and school and district leaders across Minnesota in the fall of 2023. They can be accessed through MDE's [Testing 1 2 3](#) website.

The intent of the Collaborative Minnesota Partnerships to Advance Student Success (COMPASS) at the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) is to support Minnesota leaders and educators as they work toward more balanced and equitable assessment systems that lead to continuous improvement. COMPASS is designed to meet schools and districts where they are in their work to accelerate student learning and match the state's response to those needs through professional learning and coaching, along with coordinated support from experts.

The MnDAL course was developed based on survey results that indicated a need for improving assessment and assessment system practices across the state. Based on these survey data, leaders and teachers:

- Recognize the importance and need to increase their own data and assessment literacy
- Reported a lack of confidence in their ability to interpret and use state assessment data to improve instruction
- Expressed a need for a culturally responsive approach to data and assessment use

This learning journey journal will explore different implementation efforts for MnDAL that may be useful at your school or district given your specific context.

Elements for Implementation

As districts across Minnesota begin to implement and utilize MnDAL to enact change in their data and assessment literacy systems, best practices for successful implementation have begun to emerge. This section provides insights on the major considerations Minnesota schools and district have addressed to ensure successful implementation of the MnDAL module content into their systems.

While there are many ways to bring data and assessment literacy learning to your school or district, the following considerations should be addressed and tailored to your local context, assets, and needs to ensure a more successful MnDAL implementation.

Identify your local needs around data and assessment literacy.

Collect and review district evidence about the current status of data and assessment literacy knowledge and practices at all levels of your organization. Evidence collection might come in several forms – some of which are informal (e.g., conversations with colleagues, observing classroom practice, observing teacher professional learning time, attending and noticing the qualities of conversations at data meetings) and other more formal (e.g., surveys, focus groups, interviews, group discussions at team meetings). The data and evidence collected should help you better understand the existing assets and knowledge, professional learning opportunities, and improvement needs related to data and assessment literacy use and help you identify a clear purpose for engaging with MnDAL. If your data indicate a low or varied understanding of data and assessment literacy, consider starting by building a common, shared understanding of what data and assessment literacy are and why they are important.

Identify and engage your learners.

Identify your first learner or group of learners who will explore MnDAL modules together. Ideally, two or more individuals can engage in shared learning first with a goal of becoming leaders who can facilitate learning with a larger group. These individuals can be at the same site or at different sites (e.g., schools or districts), but they should have dedicated time for both individual learning and group learning throughout the learning process.

Consider: Who will engage in learning? How will the professional learning be structured? Are there multiple individuals at the same or across sites who can work together, or are there small teams at a given site? Will it be district or school leaders or teacher-leaders?

If you choose to start with leaders, gather school and district leaders who can explore the MnDAL Leader Course, as well as the Educator Course, modules together. This may be individuals from different sites who can collaborate, or a small group within a site.

If you choose to start with teachers, provide sufficient detail about their role and clear expectations for their responsibilities related to completing the MnDAL course modules and enacting change in classrooms.

Organize and honor professional learning structures for your learners.

Ensure that leaders and teachers alike have dedicated professional learning structures and time to complete the modules themselves, try out some things they have learned, and reflect with colleagues about implications for future practice. Consider allocating some Professional Learning Community (PLC) or other shared collaboration time that may already be built into the school schedule. The MnDAL Community of Practice (CoP) facilitation guides for educators are available to support dialogue and reflection during these type of shared collaboration times.

Consider professional learning culture at your school site(s).

What is the current culture around professional learning like at your site? Is it a continuous learning/continuous improvement culture or a compliance culture? Will professional learning work best when it can be continuous and focused around a topic year-long (e.g., continual bite-sized learning) or does it work best to provide longer, in-depth trainings less often throughout the year? How successful have pre-meeting work assignments (e.g., articles, activities, try it out) been at your site? Do participants come to meetings fully prepared to engage or do norms need to be established around expectations and learning culture?

Utilize MnDAL Roadmaps to determine targeted learning pathways.

Utilize the MnDAL Roadmaps on [Testing 1 2 3](#) to support more customized learning pathways. The MnDAL Roadmaps identify specific topics of learning and provide a sequence or pathway of suggested modules. Use the data you gathered from determining your local needs around data and assessment literacy to help inform the best starting points or learning pathways.

Make learning relevant and the right grain size.

There are many competing priorities for schools and districts, and these priorities can shift every few years. But, there are some topics that are relevant to nearly all new or shifting priorities, including building strong data and assessment literacy. Understanding correct and incorrect ways of gathering and using information is necessary to measure the impact educational decisions, programs, curriculum, etc. have on student outcomes. Discuss why learning is important and how it is relevant to other topics of focus or priorities. What topics around data and assessment literacy are most important to educators and leaders in your organization? Where are they in their learning (beginning, middle, or continual growth towards expertise)?

Involve students.

Find ways to engage students on their perspectives as to how data, evidence, and assessment are used to support their learning (and their peers' learning) in the classroom. Consider using surveys, focus groups, empathy interviews, or student advisory convenings.

Avoid these Pitfalls

As you consider the most effective approach to bringing MnDAL content and learning to your school or district, we encourage you to plan for systems and intentional professional learning that will lead to high quality implementation of data and assessment literacy use practices. The MnDAL modules are designed for flexible use to fit the learning needs and contexts at your site. Regardless of whether you engage with the modules on your own, with a partner within your school site, or with a group outside of your site, there are some pitfalls to consider that will help maximize their use.

Only doing learning individually on your own.

There is power in exploring content and reflecting with colleagues on learning. Discussions will introduce new ways of thinking or application of learning to try, and debriefs can help identify

where misinterpretations or missteps may have been made. Minnesota schools and districts that were most successful in implementation engaged in group learning.

For guidance and support in getting started, reach out to the Minnesota Department of Education's [COMPASS team](#) or the [Minnesota Service Cooperative](#) in your region.

Relying only on individuals who are motivated to go through the module content.

Teachers are busy and have many competing demands on their time. Relying on the personal motivation of individual teachers to engage with the MnDAL modules on their own will likely not yield the results you envision. Provide professional learning structures to support their learning and reflection time. Make connections that demonstrate why this learning is important.

Waiting for the “right time” to introduce MnDAL module content.

Data and assessment literacy may never be identified as a priority topic. Yet, being data and assessment literate is necessary to determine effects of policies, programs, or other decisions on student learning in a more accurate, reliable, and consistent manner. MnDAL learning can be made into integrated learning experiences that can help target challenges or improvements that districts, schools, and teachers want to make in their classrooms.

Engaging with the MnDAL course content the same way for all learners.

MnDAL is designed to be used flexibly, allowing for both sequential and à la carte uses in order to meet learners where they are and support them in their individual needs. For à la carte options, utilize the [MnDAL Course Roadmaps](#) for Leaders and Educators, which provide recommended learning sequences in the MnDAL course modules around specific topics of learning.

Conclusion

There are many ways to introduce MnDAL module content in order to deepen and expand data and assessment literacy practices across Minnesota. The ideas explored in this resource outline early lessons learned by Minnesota schools and districts who seek to build and deepen their data and assessment literacy practices.

For more information about MnDAL and supports for learning, please contact MDE at compass.mde@state.mn.us.