

EAA's "Buzz"

TOOL: Buzz, a platform for personalized learning

GOAL: Technology that facilitates rigorous, student-directed learning paths and provides teachers with real-time data to inform instruction

BREAK THROUGH

MODEL: Education Achievement Authority (EAA) of Michigan

Why was this tool developed?

In 2012, EAA was tasked with turning around 15 of Detroit's poorest performing schools. Established as a public school agency through an agreement between the Michigan Department of Education, Detroit Public Schools, and Eastern Michigan University, EAA developed a blended, student-centered learning strategy to help empower students to advance their own learning. **EAA's mastery-based strategy relies on Buzz, a personalized learning platform that facilitates the delivery of core content and assessments to students, allows students to advance at an individualized pace, and provides data to inform teachers' instructional strategies.** EAA developed Buzz in partnership with Agilix and School Improvement Network.

How is it different?

Buzz supports EAA's **blended learning school design** by organizing a variety of digital curricular resources and assessments for daily access by students, tracking student progress, and exchanging feedback between students and teachers. Students log into Buzz each day to access core content resources that teachers have

organized in instructional units mapped to state standards. The resources might include:

1. Courses available through license with curriculum providers
2. EAA-created hybrid courses that leverage open and licensed resources
3. Digital libraries of open and licensed digital assets and applied projects

The content is presented through a variety of media including online texts, videos, and applied projects. Students progress through units at their own pace by demonstrating mastery—producing project-based “evidence” for each learning target within the unit—and by taking assessments that are integrated in Buzz.

Buzz enables EAA teachers to group students by instructional level rather than grade. Teachers can use the various data provided by Buzz to track each student's pace and progress to better enable real-time intervention. The system is also interactive; students can message teachers to ask for help or message other students who have been approved to be “peer coaches” for a specific learning target. Through Buzz, students complete daily self-assessments measuring their well-being, engagement, and effort.

What is the advantage for students?

Buzz enables students to direct their own learning. Students progress at



their own pace, completing work required by the teacher as well as by using Buzz's “picker” to choose from an array of curricular resources sorted in subject “decks.” Students choose the projects that best suit their learning style to provide evidence of mastery. In accumulating evidence to demonstrate mastery, students are learning how to put their best foot forward—a life skill that is applicable to many situations, from building a résumé to asking for a raise to finding a life partner.

Buzz also allows students to establish goals, manage tasks, and assess their own progress. The platform tracks each student's daily activity completion; students can compare this against their course-level objectives to help measure their progress. Students also receive tangible evidence of achievement in the form of “badges,” which helps build confidence. Many of the students in EAA's schools were performing below grade level and may have been used to noticing their failures; badges represent students' accomplishments, helping them recognize that they can succeed in school and life.

“I fully integrated the Buzz platform into my classroom curriculum design. I used the format that was provided in the Buzz courses as an outline to guide my progression and pace for the year. I then added/deleted content in order to fit the needs of my students.”

Kristie Ford, EAA science and social studies teacher

Monitor Student Progress

The screenshot shows a 'UNIT SUMMARY' dashboard for Thomas Webster. It features a table of student progress and an 'INTERVENTION' panel on the right.

Student Name	Overall	Course Introducti	Marine Life	The Physical Ocean	Marine Ecosystem	Marine Conservat	Self-Assessment	Completed Today
Charles Aceves	<div style="width: 20%;"></div>	<div style="width: 10%;"></div>	<div style="width: 15%;"></div>	<div style="width: 5%;"></div>	<div style="width: 0%;"></div>	<div style="width: 0%;"></div>		0
Aron Davis	<div style="width: 25%;"></div>	<div style="width: 15%;"></div>	<div style="width: 20%;"></div>	<div style="width: 10%;"></div>	<div style="width: 0%;"></div>	<div style="width: 0%;"></div>		0
Michael Dugan	<div style="width: 30%;"></div>	<div style="width: 20%;"></div>	<div style="width: 25%;"></div>	<div style="width: 15%;"></div>	<div style="width: 0%;"></div>	<div style="width: 0%;"></div>		0
James Green	<div style="width: 10%;"></div>	<div style="width: 5%;"></div>	<div style="width: 0%;"></div>	<div style="width: 0%;"></div>	<div style="width: 0%;"></div>	<div style="width: 0%;"></div>		1
Sharon Hall	<div style="width: 20%;"></div>	<div style="width: 15%;"></div>	<div style="width: 15%;"></div>	<div style="width: 10%;"></div>	<div style="width: 0%;"></div>	<div style="width: 0%;"></div>		0
Elsie Hoffmann	<div style="width: 10%;"></div>	<div style="width: 10%;"></div>	<div style="width: 10%;"></div>	<div style="width: 0%;"></div>	<div style="width: 0%;"></div>	<div style="width: 0%;"></div>		0

The 'INTERVENTION' panel on the right shows a list of students (Michael, James, Cassandra) and options to assign resources, award badges, send notes, or assign learning activities.

How does it improve learning?

The goal is that the type of individualized learning enabled by the EAA personalized learning platform will allow students to flourish where they are comfortable, and yet continually be challenged as they demonstrate mastery and make progress. Students are placed at appropriate instructional levels based on assessments, and they can be at different levels in different subjects. Buzz allows students a degree of choice among activities required in their learning paths; this requires a level of self-assessment that can help contribute to success in school and life.

What is the advantage for instructors and administrators?

Buzz helps teachers track the personal learning path of every student on a daily basis. Every click and assessment in Buzz is collected, stored, and displayed real-time in a dashboard. This helps teachers see, at-a-glance, how their students are progressing, where they may need additional help, what types of resources they are most often choosing, and how the class is performing as a whole. Teachers do not deliver one-size-fits-all lectures to students at varying instructional levels in their classes; they use the data collected in Buzz to strategically group students

for deeper learning opportunities that might include direct large-group instruction, peer-to-peer assistance through small-group projects, or one-on-one instruction with a student who is stalled. Buzz enables teachers to direct students to specific digital curricula for help.

“I fully integrated the Buzz platform into my classroom curriculum design,” said EAA science and social studies teacher Kristie Ford. “I used the format that was provided in the Buzz courses as an outline to guide my progression and pace for the year. I then added/ deleted content in order to fit the needs of my students. My students also had the choice of using outside resources to supplement their learning—textbooks, resource books, peer-to-peer discussion, and small group instruction that matched the content in Buzz.”

The flexibility of Buzz allows teachers to organize and plan with content that most closely serves the needs of their students. And the platform offers a virtual community for teachers. They can share resources and learning strategies, air their challenges, and exchange solutions.

What are the challenges?

Technology was a necessity for student-centered instruction in EAA’s model, said Mary Esselman, Deputy Chancellor of EAA. Yet many of the teachers in

EAA’s schools were not trained to work in blended learning schools or to use digital learning platforms. Therefore, a significant amount of [professional development](#) continues to be offered to make the personalized learning platform an integral and successful part of EAA’s school improvement plan.

In addition, as with any online tool, there were technical difficulties; Buzz would crash occasionally, and schools’ internet connections required upgrading and maintenance. It has also been a challenge to purchase enough devices for all students.

What’s next?

After one year of using Buzz in classrooms, EAA held focus groups with teachers and students to define additional functionality and integration that teachers and students needed. EAA plans to continue improvements that make it easier for students to access content and to take ownership of their learning, for teachers to more easily curate digital resources, and for students and their parents to track progress. The data will continue to be expanded, as instructors and administrators learn what type of information is useful in improving the learning environment. In addition, Buzz will feature more resources—and ways to access those resources—for students with special needs.



NEXT GEN TOOLS

Strategies and Innovations for Implementing Breakthrough Models

ARTIFACT:

"The Student Side of Buzz:" a student-led video tour of the platform

The screenshot displays the 'ALL ABOUT ME' platform interface. The main dashboard shows a grid of learning targets (LT 1-5) and a 'Student Toolbox' with a green checkmark. A large red play button is overlaid on the dashboard. To the right, a 'SCORES' table lists activities and their scores:

Activity Title	Score
All About Me	
Student Toolbox	
Big Picture	✓
Essential Questions	✓
Vocabulary	✓
LT 1: I can relate characters in fiction stories to me.	
Learn	
Fluency: Modeling	
High Frequency Words: use, their, these	
Spelling Practice List 1	✓

Below the dashboard, a detailed view of a learning target is shown:

Language Arts Grade 2 - All About Me

LT 1: I can relate characters in fiction stories to me.

- Learn
 - I am a Bunny
 - All About Me Lesson
 - All About Me!
 - Fluency: Modeling
 - High Frequency Words: use, their, these
 - Spelling Practice List 1
 - Choice Activities
- Practice
 - Apply
- Assess
 - All About Me Quiz

LT 2: I can use adjectives in every day life.

UNIT DETAIL

STANDARDS

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.2.1e Use adjectives and adverbs, and choose between them depending on what is to be modified.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.2.2f Generalize learned spelling patterns when writing words (e.g., cage → badge; boy → boil).
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RF.2.3a Distinguish long and short vowels when reading regularly spelled one-syllable words.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RF.2.4a Read on-level text with purpose and understanding.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.2.5 Describe the overall structure of a story, including describing how the beginning introduces the story and the ending concludes the action.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.2.5 With guidance and support from adults and peers, focus on a topic and strengthen writing as needed by revising and editing.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.2.6 With guidance and support from adults, use a variety of digital tools to produce and publish writing, including in collaboration with peers.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

ENDURING KNOWLEDGE

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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