Building Real Assets: Scaffolding 134 Sixth Graders Toward Grade-Level Math by the New Year

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Executive summary

Asset-based instruction only works when students actually hold the assets it builds on. This paper describes how I restructured daily math instruction for 134 Grade 6 students at Chandler Park Academy so that every student is working on grade 6 i-Ready content by Christmas 2026.

The approach is a ladder, not a label, built from each student's weakest i-Ready scores up. Students who placed at grade 3 or below on i-Ready are assigned progressive lessons starting at grade 4, climbing on a set schedule toward grade 6. Students already at or above grade level are differentiated upward toward grade 7 work using NWEA MAP scores.

Around that ladder sit classroom routines that turn skills into visible, usable assets: whiteboard rows, the stated-ratio project routine, structured test practice, and a proposed extended-hours L.A.P. Program. The result is a strengths-based classroom where the strengths are earned, measured, and real.

The problem: assets in name only

Asset-based instruction asks teachers to build on what students bring rather than what they lack. The intent is right. But in a sixth grade math room where many students place several grades below level, praising strengths does not close a three-year skill gap.

A student who cannot yet work with fractions cannot draw on that "asset" when ratio and rate units arrive. Without a plan to build the underlying skills, asset-based language risks becoming a kinder way of describing the same gap.

My position: the most asset-based thing a teacher can do is give students new assets — concrete, grade-level skills they own and can use. The scaffold below is designed to do exactly that, on a deadline.

Context

Item	Detail
School	Chandler Park Academy, Detroit area, Room 112
Grade and subject	Grade 6 mathematics
Sections	5 classes across the full school day, Standard and Honors
Students	134
Core program	i-Ready Classroom Mathematics (Student Worktext) and i-Ready My Path, used daily
Diagnostics	i-Ready Diagnostic; NWEA MAP Growth
Homework	Google Classroom (not required)
Device management	Chromebooks via Clever; Blocksi Teacher Dashboard

Standard and Honors sections each follow their own weekly lesson plan. Every student, regardless of section, uses i-Ready every day.

The scaffold

The scaffold has one engine and four supports. The engine moves students up in grade level; the supports make each new skill stick and show.

The engine: the i-Ready acceleration ladder

1. **Diagnose.** Every student takes the i-Ready Diagnostic. I read each student's results down to the domain level (Number and Operations, Algebra and Algebraic Thinking, Measurement and Data, Geometry) and find their weakest scores. That weakest point, not the overall placement, sets the starting rung.
2. **Assign the first rung.** Any student who placed at grade 3 or below receives teacher-assigned, progressive lessons starting at grade 4, beginning in their weakest domain and building up from there. I do not wait for My Path to move them on its own.
3. **Climb on a schedule.** Lessons step from grade 4 to grade 5 to grade 6, with the target of grade 6 My Path work for every student by Christmas 2026.

4. **Lift placement.** I have asked the school's i-Ready administrator to help raise My Path placement in math as students show mastery, so the software keeps pace with the student.
5. **Remove language barriers.** English learners receive i-Ready lessons in their home language, so the climb tests math, not English.

Support 1: whiteboard rows

Students work i-Ready problems standing in rows at a giant whiteboard. Every student's thinking is visible at once. I can correct a misconception in seconds, and students learn from the work beside them.

Support 2: the stated-ratio project routine

Students build projects, such as designing a skyscraper, from i-Ready problems. They follow a fixed routine: state the ratio in words, find the ratio sum, divide the change by the ratio sum, then multiply each part. Naming "the change" separately keeps students from wrongly placing the scaled-out number inside the ratio.

Support 3: structured pre-test practice

Before each test, students complete a three-day practice session. Tests run in Google Forms locked mode, pushed to every Chromebook through Blocksi, so results reflect what students know.

Support 4: the proposed L.A.P. Program

L.A.P. (Learning, Assessment and Practice) is a proposed extended-hours model for below-grade students, run in two rooms:

- **LA room** — led by a certified teacher; collegiate feel; driven by data monitoring and teacher-built summative assessments in Google Forms.
- **P room** — led by a paraprofessional; homey, study-at-home feel; focused on the strongest edtech practice, anchored in i-Ready for rigor and Zearn for scaffolding.

Differentiating upward

The ladder does not stop at grade 6. Students who already work at grade level need new assets too, or the scaffold only serves half the room.

I am setting a minimum NWEA MAP math score that qualifies a sixth grader for grade 7 work. Students above that cut move into grade 7 i-Ready lessons and take on leadership roles at the whiteboard rows, where explaining a problem deepens their own mastery.

Open question: the exact MAP cut score is still being set and will be finalized against fall MAP results.

Measuring the assets

An asset counts only if it shows up in the data. Success by the new year is defined in measurable terms.

Checkpoint	Measure	Target
Fall baseline	i-Ready Diagnostic placement and weakest domain per student	Every student has a starting rung
Weekly	i-Ready lessons passed and time on task, by student	Steady climb up the rungs
Each unit test	Locked Google Forms test scores	Growth over the prior unit
Winter Diagnostic	i-Ready placement, overall and by domain	Weakest-domain scores rise
Christmas 2026	My Path grade level	All 134 students on grade 6 work or above
Winter MAP	NWEA MAP math score	Qualifying students on grade 7 work

Results will be added to this paper after the winter Diagnostic.

Standards alignment

The scaffold aligns to the Common Core State Standards for Mathematics, which Michigan adopted as the Michigan K-12 Standards for Mathematics, and to Common Core literacy standards for read-aloud and discussion.

Component	Common Core / Michigan math	Literacy and read-aloud
Acceleration ladder	Grade 4–5 foundations in the weakest domain leading to 6.NS, 6.EE, 6.G	RST.6-8.4 domain vocabulary
Whiteboard rows	MP3 construct arguments and critique reasoning; MP6 precision	SL.6.1 collaborative discussion
Stated-ratio projects	6.RP.A.1, 6.RP.A.3; MP4 model with mathematics	RST.6-8.3 follow a multistep procedure; SL.6.4 present findings aloud
Pre-test practice and locked tests	Unit standards in each i-Ready lesson	RI.6.4 word meaning in word problems
Grade 7 differentiation	7.RP, 7.NS, 7.EE	SL.6.1 leading peer explanation

Recommendations

For teachers:

- Start from each student's weakest i-Ready domain, not the overall placement.
- Assign lessons yourself; do not wait for adaptive software to catch up.
- Make thinking visible daily, at the board, in rows.
- Teach one fixed routine for each problem type and keep its vocabulary consistent.
- Push strong students upward with a clear, data-based cut score.

For administrators:

- Give teachers the access needed to adjust My Path placement as students show mastery.
- Fund extended-hours models such as L.A.P. for students furthest below grade level.
- Judge asset-based instruction by growth data, not by the language used to describe it.

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