

## *Cheltenham Township School District Uses Value-Added Information to Help ALL Students: From Gifted to At-Risk Students*

### **Cheltenham Township School District — Elkins Park, Pennsylvania**

With large numbers of National Merit Scholars and Ivy League college-bound students each year, the School District of Cheltenham Township has earned a reputation of being a high-achieving district that makes significant strides with all of its students, particularly its high-achieving and gifted students. From the surface, it appears that the district is meeting the needs of its students. After becoming one of the first school districts to join Pennsylvania's value-added pilot program (PVAAS) in 2002, Cheltenham administrators were shocked to find out that they were not making as much progress with their high-achieving students as they thought.

After reviewing the data, "We noticed that our top quintile students were not gaining as much as our other students," says Dr. Susan Beerman, assistant superintendent. "Value-added data helped to shed new light on an issue that we didn't even know existed."

Armed with this new information, district administrators were determined to make improvements to help the top quintile of students and decided to host a Gifted Summit. This Summit was designed to bring parents, students, teachers and community members together to create a strategic plan to improve the gifted program. With input from a variety of people, the district was able to create a new plan that focuses on assessing gifted students more frequently and providing additional enrichment resources that supplement the existing curriculum for these students. "The parents of our gifted students have been very receptive and are thrilled with the changes," Beerman says. Over the next few years, district leaders will continue to examine this quintile of students to monitor whether the changes are having a positive impact on student achievement.

### **Helping Teachers Help Their Students**

Just as Cheltenham administrators used value-added information to make adjustments to help their high-achieving and gifted students, they also used their value-added information to look at student projections to find out which students were at risk for not passing the PSSA, Pennsylvania's statewide assessment.

"Once we were able to identify students who were at risk for not being proficient on the PSSA, we gave the teachers their students' reports with the predicted scores," Beerman explains. From there, "we provided professional development to the teachers on using assessment anchors to better prepare students for the test. The teachers were able to focus on the at-risk students, because they knew who they were and how low they were predicted to score," Beerman continues. In addition to assisting the teachers, "we also provided our at-risk students with interventions to help them better prepare for the PSSA."

Cheltenham administrators recognize the importance of professional development in order to help educators understand how to use value-added information to improve teaching and learning. Educators need to have the knowledge, skills and training on how to use the information, and ongoing, interactive and hands-on professional development is a key component of the learning process.

"We are using the information to modify our curriculum and to provide ongoing feedback to teachers regarding how much value they have added to their students," says Dr. Beerman.

# STORY

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Value-added information and professional development have been so well received by the teachers in the district that “many teachers have expressed interest in knowing how their students scored on this year’s PSSA, compared to how they were predicted to score. We have a number of teachers who are anxiously awaiting the results,” indicates Beerman.

### **Value-Added Information is Making a Difference**

It’s a fact. Students enter the classroom at different levels — some below grade level, some at grade level and others above grade level. One of the challenges facing district administrators and educators is how to meet the needs of all students to ensure that each child is making appropriate annual progress. With value-added information, educators now have a more accurate and precise way to look at their students’ progress — whether they are low, average or high performing. The Cheltenham Township School District is serving as a leader in Pennsylvania in the implementation of value-added and is using its value-added information to look at the progress of all of its students. They are using the information to make data-informed decisions about where to make improvements.

“With value-added, we are able to identify the strengths and weaknesses of our academic programs by reviewing the longitudinal data,” Beerman explains. “If a particular group of students is not meeting projected expectations, we can focus our attention on the curriculum and instruction those students are receiving.”

“I think value-added is the best way to assess the quality of education in any district,” Beerman says. “With value-added, you measure the same groups of students each year, which becomes a valuable tool for assessing individual student growth and among subgroups of students. Over time, we will be able to determine if we need to modify curriculum or provide additional staff development for our teachers to help all students achieve annual academic growth.”

### **Want to Learn More?**

For additional information on PVAAS and value-added professional development opportunities and resources, visit the Pennsylvania Department of Education’s Web site at [www.pde.state.pa.us](http://www.pde.state.pa.us), email at [pdepvaas@iu13.org](mailto:pdepvaas@iu13.org) or call (717) 560-4611.

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