

*Derry Township School District Embraces the Use of **Value-Added** Information to Look Deeper at Student Performance*

Derry Township School District — Hershey, Pennsylvania

Known for its chocolate manufacturer and its progressive medical community and facilities, Hershey, Pennsylvania is a thriving community. This suburban town boasts one of the highest-achieving school districts in the state, with nearly 95 percent of its high school graduates going on to post-secondary educational institutions. Hershey High School also was recently ranked by *Newsweek* magazine as one of the top high schools in the country.

Despite Derry Township's high performance ratings, district leaders take the opportunity to look deeper at student performance and challenge staff to provide strong programs and instruction to students.

"We continually remind our staff that you don't have to be sick to get better," explains Timothy Quinn, Ed.D., assistant to the superintendent. "We may have high-achieving students, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't challenge them to their fullest potential."

For more than two years, Derry Township has utilized PVAAS reports to reinforce the existing data culture, as well as to re-evaluate how the district uses all data sources to inform instructional and curricular practices. PVAAS has served as an over-arching umbrella that has motivated the district to use data to inform instruction and to determine what is working and what is not.

"Data alone is useless," says Quinn. "Teachers want to know that their students are growing and achieving. When we can present them with data that shows that their students are making progress, they are reminded of the impact they have on students. They become believers in what the data is telling them."

Using PVAAS reports, in combination with other data and information, the district has guided staff to analyze various programs and their results. Recently, the district's PVAAS reports served as the impetus for a thorough examination of the literacy program.

"Our state assessment data confirmed that we were doing well in reading and even better in writing; however, the data weren't showing any achievement gaps," says Quinn. "Some of our students were reading at a high level, but were not learning to read for comprehension or learning to write for technical competence. PVAAS reports made us look at why we didn't have more students at the advanced level and dig deeper into our curriculum and instructional practices."

After a closer look into the literacy program, the district made several curriculum changes and created assessments to help show teachers whether their instruction was making a difference.

"When you're a high-achieving district and most of your students on average do well, it is easy to become complacent," Quinn explains. "High achievement does not always provide an accurate picture of what is happening with every student. With PVAAS, we are able to look at individual students and better determine what programs and instructional practices are most effective or need adjusted."

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Use of PVAAS data also has created an intense staff development initiative in the district. Nearly half the teachers in the district have less than five years of teaching experience. The district is committed to cultivating teacher leaders, and is conducting leadership workshops to review a compilation of district data.

“We know parents want to know how their children are doing, and we need to provide our teachers with the necessary tools and training to make them feel confident about sharing data and information with parents,” says Quinn. “If we can provide our teachers with quality instructional strategies and tools, they will be better able to teach the standards in a way that meets the needs of every child.”

Want to Learn More?

For additional information about PVAAS and value-added professional development opportunities and resources, visit the Pennsylvania Department of Education’s Web site at www.pde.state.pa.us, email at pdepvaas@iu13.org or call (717) 606-1911.

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