

## Using *Value-Added Analysis* as a Diagnostic School Improvement Tool

### DuBois Area School District — DuBois, Pennsylvania

As a rural district serving nearly 4,500 students, including a high population of economically-disadvantaged students, the DuBois Area School District has made tremendous progress improving student achievement. For four consecutive years, the district has been recognized by Standard & Poor's (S&P) as one of 29 districts in Pennsylvania to outperform similar districts. Additionally, one of the district's elementary schools, Sykesville Elementary, recently was recognized as a Blue Ribbon School because of its improved achievement status. In January 2007, the district also was notified by the National Middle School Association that DuBois Area Middle School was designated as a *School to Watch*.

"Our work with value-added assessment was instrumental in receiving our Blue Ribbon Award," says Sharon Kirk, superintendent. "Because we now have more information on our students' progress, we have a greater ability to individualize instruction. In DuBois, we believe that student achievement is directly related to the quality of instruction and any data that provides insight into our instructional practices is valuable."

Teachers at Sykesville Elementary agree.

"Value-added data has provided us with information on our students' yearly progress," explains Heather Dzikiy, a teacher at Sykesville. "It allows us to use standardized testing results to examine students' individual strengths and weaknesses, as well as student subgroups. This helps us focus our instructional efforts to better serve our students."

### Creating a Data-Driven Focus

To foster a data-driven culture within the district, Kirk meets with her administrative team each year to discuss and share the district's data plans and to establish goals for the coming school year. PVAAS data, along with other data, such as PSSA and 4Sight, are key components of the district's plan.

"Our district operates under the philosophy that all students can learn," says Kirk. "As educators, it is our job to determine how that happens. I am a strong believer that data provide critical information with which to make informed decisions. Data can create a crisis or open your eyes. If you are going to be successful, you need to be open-minded to make changes, get better and improve instruction."

Once plans are established and communicated to building leadership, principals are required to look at their student data and share it with their teachers. By engaging teachers in data discussions, they are able to look at the data, ask questions and discuss how to replicate strengths and talk about changes that need to be made. Using a non-threatening, collaborative approach has helped teachers embrace the idea of using data to inform their professional practices.

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# STORY

## *Using **Value-Added Analysis** as a Diagnostic School Improvement Tool — **continued***

“With value-added data, there is no excuse for not improving yourself as a teacher,” explains one educator. “It is simple to look back at student achievement and see our own strengths and areas of concern. In our school, we work together to supplement our skills in specific areas and also offer support to other teachers in areas where one of us may be stronger.”

Building leaders also view students’ projected proficiency levels to gauge the percentage of students projected to exceed or not reach proficiency on the PSSA. By presenting teachers with information on students’ projected proficiency levels, they are able to know what students need additional support or remediation prior to testing.

In addition to engaging principals and teachers, Kirk also presents data to her school board members, and explains how using PVAAS and other data have informed instructional and curricular practices to make the district more effective.

“Our school board is very supportive of our efforts and they believe PVAAS data offers incredible promise to help all of our students,” she says.

### **Providing Professional Development Support**

“Having access to data is important, but if educators don’t know how to use and effectively interpret data, it is useless,” explains Kirk. “We have taken a multi-faceted approach to professional development around data use at the elementary, middle and high school levels.”

In addition to providing principal and teacher data trainings, the district also encourages educators to study and collaborate with other states and districts using value-added data to obtain ideas and hear stories about effective application practices. Kirk believes PVAAS has motivated DuBois teachers to look at their instructional strategies and help increase professional dialogue about successful practices. As a result of these efforts, student achievement has increased.

“PVAAS helps reinforce that good things are happening,” says Kirk. “We use this information to replicate good practice among our teachers, particularly new teachers, because it helps validate teacher success. Value-added has provided our district with a valuable school improvement tool to improve teaching and learning practices.”

### **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](http://www.pde.state.pa.us), email at [pdepvaas@iu13.org](mailto:pdepvaas@iu13.org) or call (717) 606-1911.

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