

Northeast Intermediate Uses Value-Added Information to Help Create a Data-Driven School Culture

Northeast Intermediate School Scranton City School District — Scranton, Pennsylvania

Recognized by Standard & Poor's (S&P) as a model school district among its peers, the Scranton City School District, located in urban, northeast Pennsylvania, serves nearly 10,000 students. S&P also recognized Scranton as one of 47 "outperforming" districts in the Commonwealth. Although all schools in the district did not meet adequate yearly progress (AYP), Scranton still outperforms many other urban districts.

Over the past few years, Northeast Intermediate, one of the largest schools in the district, has made significant improvements and increased overall student achievement. However, the school faced many challenges when Barbara Ann Dixon became principal in 2002. At that time, Northeast Intermediate experienced a physical relocation and boundary change, which added 300 new students. The building also served a large population of economically-disadvantaged students and experienced discipline issues, low student attendance rates and a young staff.

"We needed to define a school culture and make Northeast Intermediate a place where teachers and students would learn and grow together," says Dixon.

Dixon and other building staff took immediate action to create a comprehensive school improvement plan to establish new discipline and attendance policies, reconstruct special education programs to set high standards for all students and analyze existing curriculum and instructional practices. At the center of these changes was a clear focus on analyzing data to identify strengths and weaknesses.

Using PSSA and Terra Nova assessment results, building staff began to focus on specific student subgroups and identify whether the instructional strategies were meeting particular students' needs. While the staff had been analyzing and using data for several years, they were thrilled to receive their first PVAAS reports in 2005.

"Our eyes were opened when we saw that all of the work we did by hand was right before us," says Dixon. "Hours of gathering PSSA and Terra Nova data would be a thing of the past, and we now have a statistically reliable measure for how each student should perform."

PVAAS reports revealed that Northeast Intermediate's IEP subgroup students were excelling, but their high-achieving students were not making a year's worth of growth.

"We know that every group of students is different and we can't use the data from one group of students to best shape the programming for another group of students," explains Dixon. "By having the data serve as the bus that drives instruction, adjustments can be made quickly to keep learning moving forward."

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*Northeast Intermediate Uses
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Seeing Results

Strong leadership, communication and a commitment to being data-driven are among the key factors in Northeast Intermediate’s turnaround process.

“The ever opening lines of communication have caused educators, parents and students to own both problems and successes, which has resulted in tremendous academic and personal growth for everyone,” says Dixon.

Over the past three years, Northeast Intermediate has seen significant improvements in achievement on their PSSA reading and math scores. Significant growth is evidenced by the increasing achievement.

School Year	PSSA Reading	PSSA Math
2003	57.3%	41.7%
2004	64.1%	44%
2005	79.7%	78.6%

Dixon attributes the building’s academic accomplishments to the building-wide use of data to identify strengths and areas of improvement. Over the next few years, building staff intend to use PVAAS information, in combination with alternative assessments, to dig deeper and learn more about the capabilities of what PVAAS can provide.

“As the leader of this building I want my teachers to feel like they are growing every year, and I want to make sure they have the tools they need to be successful. I believe PVAAS is one of those tools to help my staff learn and grow.”

Parents and students also are noticing the improvements and have been pleased with the cultural changes and academic successes. Parents appreciate the approach to open communication between their child’s teachers to better understand how their child is progressing. Students also are asked to take part in their success by setting individual goals at the beginning of the year, and tracking their own results.

Dixon says, “Involving students in this process allows them not only to challenge themselves, but also to see the important investment they are making in their future.”

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.

