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## Williamsport Area School District Uses District-Wide Professional Development Approach to Roll Out Value-Added Analysis

### Williamsport Area School District — Williamsport, Pennsylvania

Over the past few years, the Williamsport Area School District has experienced a decline in student enrollment, while experiencing an increase in serving high-needs students. With nearly 6,000 students, the district serves a diverse mix of urban, suburban, rural and high- to middle-achieving school buildings.

"Achievement measures alone, like PSSA, do not give teachers the necessary information they need to impact learning," says Jodi Harris, director of educational data analysis. "Value-added and PVAAS offer a unique method of analyzing student achievement data that helps teachers, schools and districts determine whether students are growing at appropriate rates based on their own individual growth pattern."

After becoming part of Pennsylvania's value-added pilot program (PVAAS) in 2004 and reviewing initial value-added reports, district leaders knew that a comprehensive value-added professional development plan was critical to successfully implement value-added analysis in the district.

"Holding administrators accountable for using data to inform the learning and instruction process is crucial to the development of a data-driven culture within a district," said Dr. Patricia Lowery, former superintendent.

### **Creating a Comprehensive Professional Development Plan**

With a commitment to build a data-driven culture, Lowery and several district administrators created a comprehensive professional development plan for the 2005-06 school year. The plan called for the creation of a district data team that includes teacher representatives, curriculum supervisors, district administrators, and building-based data teams designed to cultivate teacher leaders to share ideas and strategies and use data to inform instruction.

During the school year, the teams met to analyze their PVAAS results and identify strengths and weaknesses. The building-based data teams participated in additional training to review results, manipulate data files and review 4Sight results. Concluding the training, each building team developed goals about how to use data in their building. The team's goals focused on:

- · Informing teachers about the data and resources available.
- Using data to identify students who need intervention and remediation.
- Using data to differentiate instruction.
- Educating parents about PVAAS.

"The data team generated and shared a presentation on data use, which resulted in teachers being more receptive to PVAAS. Our teachers then became eager to proceed with using real-time data, such as 4Sight, as a tool to reflect on their own instructional practices," says Bruce Elliot, principal.

### **Using Value-Added Information for School Improvement**

As a result of the district data team training, two PVAAS themes emerged. First, students in the district were making a year's worth of growth. In fact, one school that serves a large population of high-needs, IEP and economically-disadvantaged students and struggled with AYP results in the past realized that its students, on average, were making more than a year's worth of growth.

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### Williamsport Area School District Uses District-Wide Professional Development Approach to Roll Out Value-Added Analysis — continued

"The value-added results validated what we already suspected to be true," explains Harris. "Despite the AYP status of the building, teachers and administrators celebrated their success in providing an opportunity for all students to make their own year's worth of growth."

Second, district and building leaders need to take a closer look at high-achieving students' growth to ensure these students continue to be challenged. PVAAS results indicated that some of the district's proficient and advanced students might not have made a year's worth of growth. While this was a surprise to teachers, the information made them reassess their instructional strategies to provide high-achieving students with opportunities to grow.

One urban principal, Kirk Felix, notes, "As the year progressed, we were more attentive to our population's needs. We used PSSA and 4Sight data to focus on our strengths and weaknesses compared to the standards and then gathered resources to improve our instruction." He continues, "We are anxiously waiting to see our scores this year and hope our efforts are validated by exceeding the AYP cut scores and having ALL students achieve growth."

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

The district's comprehensive approach to professional development has helped lay the foundation for a data-driven culture within the district. District and building leaders have embraced the use of PVAAS because the information provides them with information about what is working and what is not working. Some principals also have noticed that PVAAS information is bolstering their teachers' spirits and providing them with hope and encouragement.

During the next school year, building-based data teams will focus on sharing individual PVAAS results with parents. The Williamsport school district is committed to cultivating a relationship with parents to share PVAAS information.

"Educational research shows that data can help solidify a mutually supportive relationship between school personnel and parents through the development of individualized student goals," said Dr. Lowery. "And, we plan to include parent and community outreach as an important piece of our district's professional development efforts to share information about our students' performances."

### 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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