## South Fayette Township School District Finds "Value" in New Progress Metric

### South Fayette Township School District — McDonald, Pennsylvania

In a rapidly-growing district located just outside the city of Pittsburgh, the South Fayette Township School District is known for its high achievement status in the surrounding area and across the state. Recently ranked by Standard and Poor's as 8th out of 501 school districts in the state according to performance, district and building administrators are always striving to make improvements to ensure that all of their students are making progress and experiencing growth.

"A very important component of value-added is that it prevents any high-achieving district from assuming they are doing well just because achievement scores are high," says Dr. Linda Hippert, district superintendent. "Value-added permits us to look at growth of student achievement so that we can assess whether or not the students who are proficient and advanced are also experiencing continuous growth. With high expectations for student achievement, we realize the importance that each student, every year makes at least a year of progress. And when they do not, we need to find ways to keep them from falling behind."

#### **Using Value-Added Information to See the "Big Picture"**

South Fayette Township administrators recognize the importance of training teachers to use this information and are working hard to raise awareness around this valuable tool. "It is important for teachers to be able to access the information quickly and easily and to show teachers the bigger picture. Once they understand what they are reading and can see the big picture, they are forced to look deeper to see where we are making great strides," explains Hippert.

"One of the ways we have started our training is with a dialogue and professional development session," notes Dr. Mary Ravita, assistant superintendent. "I like to call these sessions the 'give one, take one' sessions because we give teachers data from the previous school year and then at the next session, we give them data for next year's students," continues Ravita. "Because we have these sessions at the beginning and end of the school year, we talk about what is the big picture of what we are doing well and where we need to improve to raise student achievement. Once teachers get into a reflective dialogue with all of the other data, they can begin looking at things from a different perspective and look for patterns and trends."

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

Recently, a group of educators in the district examined their value-added data and began to notice a pattern with a particular group of students in one building — the students were not proficient in fifth-grade reading. Once those students were identified, district administrators devised a plan to put those students into a single class with a teacher who was trained in targeted reading strategies the following school year.

"The teacher was able to hone in on and use specific strategies that were working well for other students," explains Ravita. "At the end of the school year, we were able to look at those students' achievement and progress data and see that they did, in fact, make gains. Although the students were still not at the proficient level, they made improvements. With the help of our value-added reports, we were able to see that these students were progressing in reading."

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## South Fayette Township School District Finds "Value" in New Progress Metric — continued

Another encouraging sign district administrators have seen with using value-added, "is that we are able to see that although a student or group of students may not have achieved proficiency, they truly are, through the efforts of committed teachers, administrators and parents, making more than a year's growth in one school year. Value-added will benefit our students in that teachers and administrators will have access to data in a different form that portrays more than achievement — it portrays growth," says Dr. Hippert.

"Once people understand value-added, they begin to realize that it provides very important assessment information that fairly looks at what schools are really doing to advance student achievement. It is not the score that is important, but the progress that is made each year to reach the levels of proficiency that we desire."

#### 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, email at pdepvaas@iu13.org or call (717) 560-4611.