



CASE STUDY | MEASURES OF ACADEMIC PROGRESS

Pewaukee School District, Wisconsin

A district reaps rewards when it opts in for personalized assessment

For more than a decade, Pewaukee School District Superintendent JoAnn Sternke has watched her district get better and better at its mission: opening the door to each student's future. The Wisconsin district began using Measures of Academic Progress® (MAP®) computer adaptive interim assessments from Northwest Evaluation Association™ (NWEA™) in 2004 as a tool to improve student growth. After years of effort by educators, staff, and students to advance academic achievement, Pewaukee School District (PSD) now boasts one of the highest graduation rates in the state. And in 2013, they received another tangible marker of success: the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award, the highest presidential honor given to American organizations for performance excellence.

School leadership credits educators' increasingly sophisticated use of high-quality assessment data with improvements in classroom learning and programmatic effectiveness. While educators and policymakers across the nation debate the appropriate amount of time to spend on testing students' knowledge, PSD feels strongly that assessing their K – 12 students at key points throughout the year enables them to better prepare each student for college and career. It's a belief supported by outstanding 2014 graduation rates, national recognition for student success, and an impressive 22.1% increase in the number of students planning to attend a two- or four-year college—from 68.8% (2006-2007) to 90.9% (2013-2014).

Taking a stand on the value of personalized assessments helped the district stay focused on student growth. Recalls Superintendent Sternke, "At one point we were at a crossroads with the opt-out movement. While parents can opt out of state testing, we made a decision to include all students in our locally driven assessments, including MAP, because they're more of a dynamic tool for us. While the end-of-year state assessments are a static programmatic tool and accountability measure, we use the results from MAP and certain other tests for learning, grouping students, and determining interventions."

District Snapshot

Student population: Serves ~2,800 K – 12 students

School district location: Waukesha County, outside of Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Graduation and college-bound rates: 97% of students graduate (2014); 90.9% planning to attend a two- or four-year college (2014) following graduation

Economic markers: 12% free or reduced lunch

Recognition: Winner, Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award (2013); Pewaukee High School ranked #5 in Wisconsin and #213 in nation in Newsweek magazine's The Daily Beast Top High Schools 2014 feature

MAP use: Implemented MAP in 2004, but created new role for assessment leadership in 2012; implemented MAP for Primary Grades in 2013

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— JoAnn Sternke, Superintendent, Pewaukee (WI) School District



She notes that the district uses MAP data to:

- measure student growth
- engage students in their own progress and learning
- establish goals with educators and students
- evaluate the accuracy of other assessments' data
- predict students' performance on state assessments and the ACT®

They also rely on MAP as a universal screener for their response to intervention (RTI) efforts.

Assessing MAP assessments leads to a thumbs-up

Knowing that MAP provides valid, reliable, predictive results that reflect what teachers observe in the classroom increases Pewaukee School District's confidence in its decision to support MAP. "In terms of performance on our state assessments and ACT, MAP is predictive as claimed. We've seen it be valid year after year, and we've been with it long enough that we have cohorts," states Sterneke.

As data and assessment specialist for PSD, Candice Bentley knows the issue of over-testing looms large in the minds of educators and parents alike. She's pleased that district educators see MAP as a practical use of time due to the actionable information it provides.

"MAP isn't just a test we take and then we're done with it. We work to make sure that everyone is looking at and doing something with the resulting data: the superintendent, the principals, the teachers, and the coaches. My team might see information that leads them to say, 'Hey, we think there might be a problem,' or, 'Good job. This is going really well. You might not want to spend so much time on this because your students are already hitting this bar.' We use MAP data to course-correct."

Mike Cady, the district's chief academic officer, agrees, adding, "The information we get from MAP is really kind of a go-to measure for teachers in their goal setting. They set team goals and they share the data."

Educators aren't the only ones who see the value of MAP, however; as students and parents gain experience with the test, they understand it's about each individual student's growth and growth targets.

By using MAP data to inform instruction and involve students in their learning goals, the district empowers students to see MAP performance as concrete evidence of their hard work. This broadens student-teacher and parent-teacher discussions around learning, says Cady. "When teachers want to talk about a student's performance they can reference more than just classroom grades; they can reference growth."

Incorporating MAP data into district-wide initiatives

The district's past achievements fuel their desire for continued excellence. To help their students reach new heights, PSD school leaders and teachers have several initiatives underway, including:

- standards-based grading
- personalized learning
- program evaluation
- disciplinary literacy (teaching literacy across all content areas)
- full inclusion for students with special needs

Whenever possible, educators use information from MAP to support their initiatives. "It's been really good to see our district being able to take a student's readiness, motivation, and interest as a way to personalize instruction," notes Sterneke. "When it comes to the readiness piece, MAP data really help us meet students' needs during the year. We see where students are in their learning and we can respond quickly, which is pivotal."

Cady explains that the district's insistence on growth for all students changes the dynamic of goal setting; if they have a high- or low-performing class, they don't look to what a class with average performance should achieve when setting goals. "Creating unique targets complements the kind of personalized learning approaches that we're trying to advance," he states.



He goes on to share that including MAP data in another key initiative, program evaluation, has sometimes led to surprising results. “MAP gives us such rich data, such evidence of student learning and challenges, that it lets us analyze program effectiveness in ways we couldn’t previously.”

The district’s emphasis on continuous improvement has paid off with gains in student performance. PSD’s 2014-2015 ACT composite scores of 24.5 exceeded averages for both Wisconsin (22.2) and the nation (21.0). Advanced Placement exam participation and scores are moving steadily upward, too; in 2013, students wrote 291 AP exams and 69% passed. Just two years later, 75% of the 433 exams submitted passed. Additionally, economically disadvantaged PSD third grade students performed extremely well on the 2014 Wisconsin Knowledge and Concept Examinations (WKCE) reading proficiency tests when compared to similar students; they achieved 38.1 % proficiency, while rates of similar students in the county, state, and nearby high-performing schools were below 33%.

Opening up a world of possibility with real-time MAP data

In the past, PSD looked at end-of-year assessment data annually. Now, it has Bentley in a linchpin role, formalized data teams, and content specialists in literacy and math. And when leaders report to the school board every 90 days, they consistently demonstrate how MAP data can be a strategic part of a district’s improvement plans.

“When I see the journey that we’ve had with MAP since 2004 I’m struck by how our district has evolved,” Sterneke reflects. “Initially, the number of people that looked at the data wasn’t more than you could count on two hands. But now thousands of people see it and understand that it’s measuring growth. And that to me is the biggest message that we talk about with students: that with persistence and tenacity come growth.”

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