

Dodge City Public Schools Dodge City, Kansas

Pearson Benchmark Successes

Profile

Dodge City Public Schools, Unified School District 443, is located in the southwest corner of Kansas. The system enrolls approximately 6,200 students in 12 buildings—seven K-4, two 5-6, one middle school, one high school and one pre-school. It has a rural location with an urban profile. Nearly 70 percent of the student population receives free lunches, and another 15 percent receive reduced-fee lunches. The ethnic population of Dodge City schools is comprised of over 80 percent Hispanic students with Caucasian students making up the remaining nearly 20 percent of the populace.

“In this new NCLB era, validation and assessment are at the heart of many school and school system improvement projects. We decided it was critical to add the Pearson Benchmark assessment series to our schools so we could dramatically improve our ability to decisively measure, manage and maximize student achievement.”

- Alan Cunningham, Director of Assessment and Curriculum Development

Challenge

To achieve the goals of No Child Left Behind and close the student achievement gap, many school districts are taking a fresh look at the way they assess student progress. In so doing, Dodge City Public Schools' district leaders saw that the need for accurate, frequent, cost-effective assessment capabilities was growing exponentially with each passing school year.

Dodge City Public Schools employs a variety of manual assessments to measure student performance. In addition to formal and informal teacher-prepared reviews, the district uses a series of secure student achievement assessments to provide independent, objective information throughout the school district. These include the national norm-referenced assessments TerraNova (CTBS/5) and Supera from CTB/McGraw-Hill, state assessments that are a part of Kansas Assessment Program, and local criterion-referenced assessments such as the Rigby Reading Assessment.

On the surface it would appear that Dodge City had a well-rounded assessment program that would provide all the information needed to help the district achievement Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) objectives and close the student achievement gap. But as most educators know, the story doesn't end there.

The problem Dodge City Public Schools faced was in organizing and synthesizing the enormous amount of data that was available to them—and then making it accessible to both district administrators and teachers in a manner conducive to affecting student progress.

“We needed a solution that would allow us to do several things: get our arms around this growing body of assessment data, monitor student progress on a regular ongoing basis, address deficiencies as they occurred, and then recheck progress after a course-correction had been implemented,” said Alan Cunningham, director of assessment and curriculum development of Dodge City Public Schools, Unified School District 443.

Additionally, district leaders wanted a system that would help them validate student performance against state and national standards anytime throughout the school year.

After researching and reviewing the latest educational assessment technology solutions available, Cunningham and his staff selected Pearson School System's Pearson Benchmark.

"Originally, we selected a competitor's product, but that relationship was cut short when we realized the greater potential afforded us with Pearson Benchmark. This system will clearly help us to meet and exceed our instructional objectives and move our assessment strategy to the next level," said Cunningham.

Implementation

Cunningham stated there were three specific reasons he and his team selected Pearson Benchmark. First, it will provide them with a comprehensive, in-district management system that can create, deliver, score and report on standards-based district tests using any of their current methods—paper/pencil, bubble sheet or computer testing.

Second, it will give them the ability to provide online assessments for reading, mathematics, science and social studies at all grade levels—just as the state is doing.

Third, Pearson Benchmark allows them to customize their assessments by class, course, grade level, school or demographic characteristic—and Dodge City was determined to make sure that both district and building administrators were testing the right information at the right time—continuously.

"We can't afford to be inefficient with our instructional time," said Cunningham. "We need to be able to quickly render accurate assessments so that our teachers can drill down and narrow the focus of teaching to each student's strengths and weaknesses."

Results

Dodge City administrators have noted a significant impact on their use of data since implementing Pearson Benchmark.

"At any time on any given day we can not only envision but implement enhanced, targeted instruction, shorter assessment cycles, more enlightened teaching and superior student results," said Cunningham.

To date, Dodge City Public Schools is on target with district requirements to eliminate pencil and paper and bubble sheet assessment tests within 24 months—and to go live with online testing. In the meantime, their next step is to complete assessment-on-demand by teachers after each unit of instruction—assessments that are aligned to state and district standards.

"We are beginning to see an incredible change in our assessment strategy and our student achievement results," said Cunningham. "Our teachers are talking about the results instead of spending an inordinate amount of time compiling the results, which means more effective teaching delivery and better student outcomes."

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