

**Marion County Public Schools**  
**Ocala, Florida**  
**Benchmark and Inform case study**

**Large Florida District Improves Student Achievement With Assessment and Data Analysis Tools From Pearson**

**Marion County Public Schools Ranked Among Top in Florida for Growth in State Assessment Scores**

At Lake Weir High School in Ocala, Fla., it's no longer a game of guesswork in determining how the 1,700 students are achieving and where they need remediation or enrichment. Since Lake Weir—part of Marion County Public Schools in central Florida—brought aboard Pearson Benchmark™ and Pearson Inform™, teachers and administrators have been able to pinpoint exactly which students, classes and subject areas need attention.

The adoption of Pearson Benchmark and Inform began at Marion County Public Schools more than three years ago, and today these tools help teachers and administrators meet the instructional needs of the district's 43,000 students in 50 schools.

Pearson Benchmark, a comprehensive, customizable, Web-based district-level formative assessment testing system and reporting tool, enables schools to measure, manage and maximize student achievement through testing, reporting and analytics. Pearson Inform, a data analysis and decision support tool, provides one-click access to clear, intuitive reports on student and school performance. Powerful graphs and charts—predefined or customized—make it easy to target assistance, measure progress and inform decisions.

"Running a school is objective, rather than subjective, now," said Lake Weir principal Cynthia Saunders. "We have a clear picture of our school."

So far, Marion County is using Pearson Benchmark for students in grades three through 10 in reading, language arts and math. Next year, science will be added across the district.

Every three weeks, students take district-wide "focus calendar assessments" (FCA), which are scanned into Pearson Benchmark and reveal how they are progressing toward state standards. The day following the assessment, teachers and administrators receive results and come together to look at the data by subject area. "We disaggregate the data, look for weaknesses and set up in-service workshops or whatever is necessary before students take the state assessment," said Saunders. "Benchmark is a great tool to help teachers guide instruction."

Saunders rolls the data—from both the FCAs and state assessments—into Pearson Inform for a "school picture," which is often eye-opening, she explained. She can see where she needs to make adjustments school-wide, grade-wide or in a particular classroom. "I've learned that just because someone is a veteran teacher doesn't mean the students in that person's class are mastering the skills. And, just because someone is a new teacher doesn't mean her kids aren't."

In the past, Saunders only had the state assessment in the spring to evaluate the learning in the classroom, "and then it was way too late," she said.

Teachers have been quite receptive to seeing the data, said Saunders. "It's an informational learning situation, not a punitive situation," she said. "When teachers perform very well in specific skills, I have them share what they did, and the best practices they've shared have been amazing. It's so wonderful, especially for the new teachers because they haven't yet developed a box of tricks."

Sometimes the data point out surprising discrepancies, she said. For example, when examining the data during a “big push for writing,” she discovered that the school’s reading remediation teachers had never been taught writing strategies. And the science teachers needed help in this area, too. “We brought in writing training to address the problem—something we wouldn’t have seen without the data.”

Without Pearson Benchmark and Inform, Lake Weir “wouldn’t have an objective way to look at student performance, to make sure our students have mastered the skills,” said Saunders. “As a principal, I’ve used them at two schools as principal and I can’t imagine this job without these tools.”

Saunders said that transfers within the district are common, but, with the help of Pearson Inform, the data follow the student. This means that teachers and administrators can see from the start, for example, whether a new student is proficient in writing. “We’re able to see all the assessments in one collective place, whether or not they’ve been at our school the whole time, so we can determine where they are,” she said.

She also finds Pearson Inform helpful in parent meetings, as it shows a snapshot of an entire academic history. For example, when she and her colleagues recommend holding back a student, they can show that the decision does not rest on a feeling or an isolated test. “We can show that this student has not been proficient at these skills since the third grade,” said Saunders.

Reaching this point of accessibility to data has been an evolution for Marion County Public Schools, said deputy superintendent Diana Greene, Ph.D. “Four years ago, we needed data, but we had no way to warehouse it,” she said. “Today, we are able to analyze information that will affect children’s lives. Teaching in our district has become more of a science.”

Greene appreciates the features of Pearson Inform that allow her to see school-wide data across a period of time, she said. “It gives a birds-eye view, which is very valuable to us.” Pearson Inform helps her see gaps in the curriculum, she said, that she can address. “When I see trends—when students are not understanding what they are being taught—that provides me with information. I look at what we can do differently with training, district policies, grading or whatever needs to be addressed to assist our teachers and students.”

Pearson Benchmark, she said, “is more valuable yet, because it goes to the teacher level and shows how well students are performing individually and as a class. They can see that these five students do not understand this concept, and then they can address that either with remediation or alternative instructional resources.”

Teachers find great value in being able to access data on their own through Pearson Benchmark and seeing what their students are accomplishing throughout the year, Greene explained. “The tools have made our teachers practitioners of this art of teaching. They can be more descriptive and prescriptive of students’ strengths and weaknesses.”

She finds that Pearson Benchmark is helping teachers to think about their instruction and how it’s aligned with standards—so they can reflect on what they’re doing in the classroom. “It’s all about the teachers having the information,” she said.

Chris Sandy, the district’s executive director of elementary education, said the value of Pearson Benchmark and Inform is in the conversation they provoke. “That conversation is what is moving the district forward,” she said. “They give us the vehicles to have that human dialogue.”

Pearson Inform has become “the cornerstone of what I do,” she said. “I continually use Inform to pull data at the district level and then share it in email, meetings

and conversations. What a powerful tool. You don't have to wonder—you just go and look. I can't imagine being in a district without it."

Sandy noted that she is able to look ahead as well as behind with Pearson Inform. "It helps us forecast—it's not all stuck in the past," she said.

By using the data to shape teaching and learning, Marion County is meeting its goals and the district's overall Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) results are showing strong improvement. In fact, in the 2006-2007 school year, the district had the second highest growth in FCAT scores in the state of Florida. "The data point out that our kids are growing because we're focusing on what's important," said Sandy.

Five years ago, "we didn't even know," she said. "But today we can see it. When you know, how can you *not* do something to make a difference with students? The students are benefiting because we've gotten smarter."

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