



Fox Chapel Area School District Implements Data-Driven Decision Making

Fox Chapel Area School District is committed to individualized instruction. Since 2003, the district of 4600 students has used data for planning. Data analysis tools and the addition of a data analyst to the administration team helped to put new instructional priorities and strategies in the hands of teachers.

Located 8.5 miles from downtown Pittsburgh, Fox Chapel Area School District is very diverse. Coming together from urban and suburban areas as well as rural farms and coal-mining towns, students attend four elementary, one middle school, and one high school. The district's commitment to helping all students succeed requires a more data-based approach to curriculum planning and instruction.

"We continue to hone in on the students who need help in an area and finding targeted ways of addressing them," said Matt Harris, Principal of Dorseyville Middle School.

Data-Driven Decision Making: An Ongoing Journey

It all began in 2003 when the district created data teams and launched data planning at every school site. Like many districts, they built a data warehouse to collect and store assessment and other types of information. But leaders soon realized that only a few made use of the information. Accessing and analyzing the data was too complicated and time consuming.

"A University of Pittsburgh study on teachers' attitudes toward data showed that they want to use data and understand the importance," said Norton Gusky, Coordinator of Educational Technology, "but the problem is getting appropriate data for individual instruction." To effectively use data for differentiated instruction required that data collection and analysis made it easy for teachers to focus on improving instruction for each student.

Fox Chapel teachers have been examining assessment data on a continual basis since the implementation of a data-driven system. They monitor and adjust their instruction based on this valuable information and use it to evaluate the success of interventions. Programs such as EdInsight provide easy and instant access to student assessment data by class roster for each teacher, making it easy for teachers to use the data to inform instruction. Teams of teachers by grade levels, instructional teams, and/or departments examine student data as it relates to attainment of the Pennsylvania Academic Standards and Assessment Anchors. For example, the 4Sight Benchmark Assessments are administered three times per year in grades 3 through 11. Using this assessment data, teachers set goals for specific grade levels, teams, departments, groups, or individual students, plan for intervention/instructions and determine what evidence will be collected to monitor student progress. Goals are revisited during follow-up data meetings, with outcomes driving their individualized curriculum.

Each year, FCASD provides data-driven decision making in-service for elementary, middle and high school teachers. Teachers develop learning plans, and administer assessments

online giving immediate results to teachers, parents and students. In 2009, the district introduced item analysis by teacher, class and student. The district data information system, EdInsight, provides real-time information through the district portal where students look at their own data and set learning goals. Alicia Hutchings, Data Analyst for the school district, and Norton Gusky, Coordinator of Educational Technology both agree that they have seen tremendous growth in the use of technology for data-driven decision making over the past five to six years. Hutchings continues to work with teachers and principals at the beginning of the year in the use of data. When school opens, teachers and principals are given broad-brush data; they identify strengths and weaknesses; finally, they set goals and determine what data they need to track student growth and progress. Within a six week cycle, formative and benchmark assessment results are analyzed. If there is evidence of student growth, new learning goals are set. If there is not sufficient evidence of growth, plans for remediation and support are put in place. As Hutchings says, "we are growing students by levels, proficient to advanced, and we are seeing growth in percentages of kids scoring advanced and beyond. Today, technology gets us deeper growth".

Data-Driven Decision Making: Experience the Change

"Data-driven decision making has changed the whole culture and perspective on how the district uses data," said Gusky. Teacher cohorts in the middle school use data analysis of the 4Sight benchmarks to identify students who have a weakness in 'anchors', core standards required for development. Through item analysis, they identify the skills required to achieve the anchors and then build lessons for small groups of students or individuals.

The culture of the school has changed from a focus on classes to small groups and individualized instruction with deep conversations among educators. At a typical middle school planning meeting teachers review the results of students who performed poorly on an anchor to find the root cause. Principal Harris facilitates the conversation and helps with reporting and analysis. He said: "That rich conversation is really rewarding. The team collaboratively comes up with an approach. That's magic."

Data-Driven Decision Making: Impacting Individual Students

High school teachers meet with their "Quality Resource Time" (homeroom) students at the beginning of the year to look at individual levels and where the students need to focus to demonstrate proficiency on state standards. The students and teachers look at the state assessment data, PSSA, and identify areas of relative weakness.

Throughout the year the teacher and student together revisit the results of benchmark assessments, 4Sight, and determine whether there has been progress. With the teacher's guidance, the student adjusts their unique and individualized plan.

Jill Tabis, a high school business education teacher follows this procedure with her QRT students. "At the end of the nine weeks I pull up their report card and we go over what they are most proud of and what they think is going well. Next, we go over what they could improve on and how they might go about achieving it. We also review the 4site test scores at this time.

At the end of the semester, we look at their overall grades and conference about what went well and why, and what they can improve on. I ask them to write down the area they are proud of and what they can work on. We also discuss any classes that might be challenging to them."

Tabis continues monitoring students in a classroom setting. "If I notice a struggling student,

I'll invite them to my room during QRT. I retrieve their grades for 3-4 years back and talk to them about their strengths and weaknesses over the past few years, and see how it may relate to their current achievements and relevant struggles. If attendance is an issue, we'll pull up attendance records and address the importance of being present in class. I ask them the same questions that I ask my QRT students: what are they proud of, what can they improve on, and how I can help them. Sometimes we work on study skills, test taking strategies, or simply work on self confidence issues."

"I've found that I can definitely make a direct impact if they are willing to allow me 'into their world' and are willing to accept a few suggestions. I use EdInsight data system to guide discussion around grades, strengths, weaknesses, test scores and overall performance for each student," says Tabis. "It's a gift for teachers to be able to pinpoint areas where we can really make an impact".