

Left to right:
Jim Hirsch,
 Associate Superintendent
 Academic and Technology Services
Doug Otto,
 Superintendent



PLANO SCHOOLS MEASURE SUCCESS WITH SAS®

The No Child Left Behind Act requires schools to show that every student is making yearly progress. In Texas, the Plano Independent School District wanted a better way to measure progress to avoid surprises at end-of-year test time. The district turned to the SAS® Enterprise Intelligence Platform, which allows Plano's teachers to access student data quickly, predict outcomes and intervene to help students reach their potential.

Industry

Education

Business Issue

The Plano Independent School District wanted data tools to help measure and improve student performance.

Solution

SAS® Enterprise Intelligence Platform pulls data from disparate sources and makes it easy for anyone all the way down to the classroom level to gain useful knowledge and draw insightful conclusions.

Benefits

Plano's teachers and staff better understand how students are doing during the year and can intervene more quickly for more successful student performance.

The Plano Independent School District is one of Texas' highest-performing school districts. In 2007, every school met adequate yearly progress goals on all indicators of the federal No Child Left Behind Act. Twenty-two schools have been named National Blue Ribbon Schools of Excellence. But even in outstanding school systems there is room for improvement, and with the district's increased enrollment of economically disadvantaged students as well as a growing number of students who don't speak English at home, there are additional challenges.

The district set out to find a solution that let it measure how students were doing during the school year – not afterwards – and to measure the quality of teaching and program costs against test outcomes. It wanted a solution that not only provided data at the district level but also provided on-demand information to every teacher at its 68 sites. The district chose SAS Enterprise Intelligence Platform.

"We used to do things intuitively," explains Jim Hirsch, Associate Superintendent of Academic and Technology Services. "Now to truly maximize each student's academic achievement, we need to identify the cognitive ability of each student, in addition to their individual achievement from pre-K through 12th grade, and match that with the curriculum and instructional strategies to help them achieve at their highest level. Without a new level of analytic capability within our performance management system, that task would be impossible."

"We wanted to be able to put the right resources in the right place to affect the student's outcome when it's needed and not after the fact," says Doug Otto, Plano's Superintendent.

Many of Plano's students come from homes where the parents work in high-tech professions, and they expect the district to take an analytical approach to educating their children. The district also has a growing number of students who don't speak English at home. Both groups need to make educational gains each year without fail. And if a school does fall short, there are federal penalties. A school can be deemed "failing" if one subgroup isn't performing, and a failing school must allow transfers or eventually offer expensive tutoring services.

Teamwork for Excellence



P L A N O
 Independent School District

With SAS, Plano uses the same business intelligence (BI) tools available to corporations so that it can relate student performance to a number of variables, including traditional ones such as finance and quality of staff. The solution also involves figuring out how to differentiate instruction to improve test results. Plano's hard work and know-how, combined with the district's

“Our district is making better decisions because teachers and principals have predictive capability that lets them redirect learning for students at risk.”

Doug Otto
Superintendent
Plano Independent School District

use of SAS, resulted in the school district being honored as a finalist in Computerworld's Best Practices in Business Intelligence awards program.

The initial phase of the BI implementation brought together historical and operational data from a variety of local, state and national stores into an open technology SAS data mart. From there, the data was cleansed to create a consolidated, accurate picture of district information.

Records for more than 53,000 students and 4,000 teachers quickly provided a basis for building initial reports. The data includes everything from national test results to classroom test scores that are scanned into the system. The system recognizes the person logging in and provides access to the appropriate data. Teachers don't waste time scrolling through numerous files to get to data for their students. Likewise, matching the data to the individual logging on ensures the security of sensitive data.

With SAS' modeling capability, Plano now has the ability to predict likely student test results early in the year and take steps to improve student success on an individual basis. The data can be presented visually, which helps when teachers need to communicate with parents. “We can show parents trend data to help them better understand how their children are progressing,” says Mike Collinsworth, Principal of Renner Middle School in the Plano district.

The district can also better assess the quality of its teaching. “As our teachers begin another unit of study, they look at the data for student strengths and weaknesses and plan accordingly,” Collinsworth says. Instead of looking at the percent of students who pass or fail in a given year, the district looks at how much each child progressed and can then tell which teachers are succeeding and which need more instructional help. The district can also measure program effectiveness, be it reading curriculum or techniques for helping at-risk learners, much more objectively. It can

also more objectively identify students ready for a more challenging curriculum, such as honors or Advanced Placement courses.

“With SAS, we treat students as individuals. We aren't looking at school achievement or class achievement – we are looking at where an individual is and where you want them to go,” Collinsworth says.

The district has been so happy with the initial SAS implementation that it is expanding its use into human resources and finance. In addition to striving for individual student success, the district is also challenged with getting the job done with the limited resources available to it. “We want the same capability in HR and finance to provide real-time data with relational databases and even use the predictive capabilities that the SAS solution brings to us,” Otto says. “SAS has proved to be an actively involved, committed and loyal partner. “



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TO KNOW.**

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