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## In the Real World: Analyzing Data to Improve Instruction

### One principal shares how she uses data to determine proficiency

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by Sharon Weber

Testing season is almost upon us. For principals, analyzing data to improve instructional practices is commonplace and necessary. Do you know which students are proficient and which are not? Are there areas in the curriculum that must be supplemented so that students who are struggling understand the various assessment anchors? Are gifted students performing to their capacity? Do you have a teacher who has outstanding knowledge of measurement concepts (or some other testable skill), and can offer suggestions to other teachers? And if so, is there time for that activity? How will you allocate your resources to give additional assistance and time to those students who are not yet proficient?

In my fall 2006 column, I discussed the Response to Intervention model that our district is using. This issue's column will describe a method I use to identify and aid students who are not proficient.

This is the first year in the Punxsutawney Area School District that we are testing students in grades 3-5, as well as all middle school students, using 4Sight assessments. In this assessment program students take an initial math and reading test during the first week of school, and are tested again in November, January, and May. These assessments parallel the state test in its use of math anchors, reading passages, and answering techniques. After the tests are scored, the results are immediately available to the teachers and administrators. A myriad of reports are available, including proficiency levels and subscale results.

At our monthly faculty meetings, we discuss data from these reports, and ask questions like:

- How did the kids do on last year's state assessment?
- Are there any areas in which students' scores are low across the board?
- Does a teacher have a specific effective activity in an area of concern?
- What resources should teachers use to cover the various testable anchors?
- Which students are struggling, in what areas, and by how much?
- Have the struggling students' parents been contacted?

In addition to the faculty meetings, I meet with the third- through fifth-grade teachers and Title I faculty to again review the data, give a number rating to those students not proficient, and reassign personnel and resources to try to "bump" those students into the proficient range by mid-March.

I feel that teachers welcome the ongoing data discussion because they need training on how to access and interpret the various reports, and more importantly, they need advice about what to do with the information they receive. As a result of this training, their classroom instruction now incorporates differentiation, class assessments that mirror the state tests, and meaningful student-led activities. Training teachers to use data to improve instructional practices is an important part of being an instructional leader, and will make the difference in our schools achieving adequate yearly progress.

I'm anxious to learn about the strategies you use in your schools on the topic of data analysis and student proficiency. Please e-mail me so I can include your responses in the next column.

Signing off from the educational "real world,"

Sharon Weber

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