

Recognizing the importance of data-driven decision-making, educators in Arizona's Pendergast Elementary School District developed a districtwide assessment program that delivered periodic performance summaries to administrators. By adding the Scantron® Achievement SeriesSM assessment platform, they were able to improve the program's usefulness for instruction while retaining its unique advantages.

Make the Assessment Program Useful at the Classroom Level

"If you're teaching without assessment, you're just shooting in the dark," says Rick Baker, Academic Services consultant for this 11,000-student K-8 district near Phoenix. To supplement the state tests, the district created its own assessment program to measure students' performance in reading and math. According to Baker, data collection worked well, but the district had trouble disaggregating the data quickly enough to have an impact on instruction. "Teachers gave quarterly assessment tests, scored them, and used a spreadsheet to transmit classroom data to the principal," he says. "Principals created schoolwide summaries that were further distilled at the district level." As a result, administrators had a good high-level picture of student progress. Unfortunately, teachers did not get comparable feedback. "The teachers were putting a lot of work into gathering the data, but we couldn't turn it around fast enough for them to use in instructional decision-making," Baker says. "We needed to lessen the teachers' pain and also give them more useful information."

Achievement Series

In fall 2004, the district started using Achievement Series, a web-based assessment platform with a content-neutral structure and multiple delivery capabilities. According to Rosanne Inserra, assistant superintendent for Academic Services, Achievement Series has enabled the district to improve the assessment process without losing any of its unique advantages. "We're still using our own teacher-created test items and a familiar, paper-and-pencil format," she says. "But we count on Achievement Series to do the rest—manage the bank of test items, print classroom-specific tests, print student ID information on scanner-ready response sheets, score the tests, and report the results."

Provide Teachers with Easy Access to Practical Data

Once students' response sheets are scanned, detailed performance reports are automatically available—to teachers as well as administrators. "Achievement Series gives us the opportunity to do an item-by-item analysis of the test results and create online reports for each class," says Baker. "Teachers are very excited about this capability because they can now see how individual students performed on any item—or examine class performance across a range of items. In the past, the information they received was more general—and of course, it wasn't available instantly, the way this is." According to Inserra, the new reports are a great improvement. "Our test items have always been aligned to the state standards," she says, "but the old reports were not easy to understand. With Achievement Series, the reports not only show connections to the standards, but also provide data that teachers





can easily grasp and use right away—to help them adjust instruction, for example, or to design flexible skill groupings. We're also starting to identify various subgroups, such as English Language Learners and Special Education, to provide additional information." Just as Achievement Series supports the district's mission to use student performance data to drive instruction, the district supports teachers in making use of the data. "Assessment drives teaching," says Inserra, "and making use of all of this information has long been a district thrust. We give teachers time to examine the data, and provide common prep time so

grade-level teachers can work together in a more diagnostic-prescriptive manner. We're giving teachers time to use the data to improve instruction." What's next? The district is already looking for ways to create a richer collection of performance data to guide instruction. "We're going to put students' writing scores in the system," says Inserra. "It will be extremely useful for teachers to have reading, writing, and math data in one place—and to be able to examine it by individual, by item, and by group."

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Rosanne Inserra,
Assistant Superintendent,
Pendergast Elementary School District



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