

LINK DATA

TO LEARNING GOALS

**COMMON DISTRICT ASSESSMENTS
CONNECT TEACHING EFFECTIVENESS
TO STUDENT PERFORMANCE**

By Kay Psencik and Rhonda Baldwin

In 2010, district leaders of Douglas County Public Schools, Douglasville, Ga., launched an ambitious initiative to ensure that teachers set goals that focus on increasing their effectiveness and show student growth. To achieve this goal, the district leadership team focused on common district assessments to establish common learning experiences for all students regardless of the school they attend and to ensure teachers across the district have a level playing field when setting their goals for the year and measuring student growth as a part of CLASS Keys, the Georgia teacher evaluation system.

To improve student academic achievement, the leadership team believed that the district needed more than

talented people, a clearly stated set of standards, high expectations, and hope. Tying student performance data and levels of effectiveness on the CLASS Keys standards to a teacher's and/or teaching team's annual goals has created a system that focuses and facilitates teacher learning. CLASS Keys and LEADER Keys (the leader evaluation system) call for a clear connection between teacher behaviors and student growth and performance. The rubric from the CLASS Keys system on pp. 34-35 shows details from the curriculum and planning strand. The rubric outlines the teacher actions and evidence that demonstrate an educator's level of performance in that strand. The district's leadership team developed several assumptions about its work to guide this process:

- When teachers and administrators appraise teacher effectiveness on CLASS Keys indicators and set au-

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thentic, challenging goals for teacher growth, teacher effectiveness improves in ways that positively impact student learning.

- Teacher-developed common district assessments driven by the Georgia Performance Standards for all units are central to teaching teams' efforts to offer results-oriented instruction that meets students' needs.
- When teachers analyze student achievement trends in a variety of data and reflect on their own practice, they are better informed to set relevant professional learning goals for strengthening their performance.

COMMON DISTRICT ASSESSMENTS

One of the district's most ambitious goals was to start the 2011-12 school year with common district assessments for each grade level and all content areas for at least three units of study. The district assembled an assessment leadership team that included teachers, instructional facilitators, coaches, members of the professional learning department, principals and assistant principals, and district cabinet members. This team established clear specifications for all assessment designs and a rubric to judge quality. Four teachers from every grade level and every content area became a team of assessment writers. Each team met with facilitators and wrote assessments over the course of four days in June. The leadership team would guide, facilitate, review, and give feedback about assessments to all teams. After all assessments were developed, all staff reviewed every assessment and gave feedback for recommended changes before the first assessment. Furthermore,

the assessment leadership team reviewed every assessment developed using the rubric they had created. With this feedback, the assessment writing teams made corrections to their work.

ONE TEAM'S EXPERIENCE

The experience of one 4th-grade team illustrates how using the CLASS Keys to inform professional learning can impact teacher practice and student results. The three team members met during the summer to review end-of-year data and regularly throughout the year for common planning time. Their work together informed lesson planning, student interventions, and their own growth and goal setting.

The team was enthusiastic about recently developed districtwide common assessments in all content areas for all grade levels. Though only one team member had been on an assessment writing team, all had reviewed and given feedback on the assessments before the start of the school year. The team believed the assessments were clearly aligned with the Georgia Performance Standards and reflected their rigorous expectations for students.

At its first meeting, the team had two agenda items: establishing CLASS Keys goals for the year and preparing the first unit of study. Team members shared what they had learned about themselves as individual teachers and as a team through their self-assessments in CLASS Keys. They set goals using a process and guidebook from the district. They analyzed student performance data and set a team goal. They debated possible causes and remedies in what they observed in the data. They shared ideas for their

own professional learning and began to craft goal statements.

As part of this process, they completed individual self-assessments in CLASS Keys. One team member noted his growth in classroom management, which had been a challenge for him when he first started teaching. Another noted her increased effectiveness in ensuring that each lesson was clearly aligned with student standards. She realized how much she had grown in intentional teaching. Both team members also noted areas that still challenged them.

At the team's next common planning time, members shared their strengths and challenges. They reviewed the previous year's student achievement data on state and district assessments and on student grades. They identified where students had shown growth and the challenges they continued to face.

Team members discussed their self-assessments, recognizing that the strengths they held in common made a predictable contribution to student growth. Then they uncovered the challenges facing them. They discussed the connections: *"Students did not show as much growth in the area of mathematics problem solving. Though we taught problem solving all year, we did not really focus on it. We might have even considered it an add-on."*

Through discussion, they realized that student math results wouldn't improve unless the team changed its approach toward problem solving. During the discussion, their principal and coach walked in and, after review, both principal and coach agreed with the team's analysis.

ESTABLISH GOALS

The team's next step was to establish goals. First, team members set their target SMART goal for student achievement in mathematics problem solving. Then they thought about how to set their own professional learning goal. They agreed to research the best strategies to teach problem solving before their next common planning meeting and then set their goal.

The team was accountable for two goals — one focused on using the common district assessments to demonstrate student learning and growth and a second on their own professional learning.

The team combined the two expectations into one statement: *Students in 4th-grade math will increase their achievement on the state standards from 45% to 53% by the end of the year through implementation of effective mathematics problem-solving strategies.*

Team members re-examined their common district assessments to determine which reports would be essential and how to use data from those assessments to determine student growth in their classes.

They narrowed their selection to data that focused on problem solving. They reviewed the common district assessments to analyze whether data from these assessments would be sufficient to show growth. They also used their own common assessments for learning, classroom observations, students' daily reflections

LESSONS LEARNED ALONG THE WAY

- **Leadership matters.** District-level teacher leaders, teacher leaders at their building, teacher assessment writing teams, and the principal leadership team have all been integral to the district making significant movement toward achieving its goal. When leadership is shared throughout the district and teams of teacher leaders and administrators work collaboratively to achieve common goals, those leaders become a strong, powerful voice in building understanding and shared vision in the district.
- **Listening to all voices**, challenging the status quo, not losing sight of the vision, and encouraging the learners along the way are essential to progress.
- **Growth in student learning** is not always clearly discernable from a single assessment strategy, even if that strategy is clearly aligned to the state standards.
- **Connecting professional learning goals** to student data builds ownership in student outcomes and changes in practice. This practice is aligned with the cycle of continuous improvement as illustrated with the 4th-grade team in this article: analyze data, establish learning goals for students and staff, develop effective instructional strategies, engage in professional learning and coaching, and assess the impact of those adult learning experiences on student performance.

on learning, and one-on-one conferences with students to chart student growth in math problem solving. They brought their data charts and samples of student work to every other common planning session so that they could not only examine the data but also analyze student work.

Because the team's goal would be part of its initial goal-setting meeting with the principal, team members used the district goal-setting guide to establish a rationale, a theory of change, and a logical process that would lead them to adopt new instructional strategies.

Once they had done their research and study, team members discussed what high-quality mathematics instruction that incorporates problem solving looked like. They described what students would do well, what new approaches to learning that they would use well, and how teachers would know that they are changing their practice. They developed model lessons using new strategies, observed each other teaching those strategies,

and then made shifts in their lessons as they learned. While they would be using assessment strategies to measure student growth, they would also host regular focus groups with students to learn about their attitudes toward mathematics.

STUDY EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES

As the team began to plan the first unit of study, team members discussed different ways to approach mathematics problem-solving instruction. Realizing they needed to study effective strategies, they decided to explore new strategies individually and bring ideas to their next meeting. They also planned to visit the 3rd-grade team, which was more skilled in this area.

During the next week, team members worked individually on the goals they had set for themselves. They observed the 3rd-grade team together and debriefed that experience. They recognized several strategies that would help students and discussed them at their next meeting. They also reviewed the upcoming first common district assessment.

Though the 4th-grade team only met formally once a week, they continuously planned together. Sometimes they reviewed lessons; sometimes they discussed students who were not meeting with success and determined differentiated strategies to help. They were determined to meet their goal, so they monitored student progress regularly.

As they dug into their sources of data — including a data management tool the district had purchased — they discovered several promising reporting options: They could identify groups of students who missed each question; they could see individual student areas of strengths and growth for the entire assessment; or they could group students by standard, ethnicity, and performance based on a number of criteria. Excited about the possibilities, they used these reports at their next formal collaboration session. To know whether students are making progress, the team must continuously chart student growth student by student, skill by skill, assessment by assessment. Though this work is time-consuming, the results show student progress and clarify the connection between their work and student outcomes.

As the time came to give the first common district assessment, the team was pleased with its efforts. Team members had planned units based on the standards that they knew were tested, they had applied new strategies for differentiation, and the new strategies had made a difference for many students. They discussed the data summary reports to prepare for their conversation with the principal about student growth and their own learning.

Team members noted with satisfaction that students were developing greater skill in problem solving. They could see the connection between student growth and the team's efforts to increase teacher effectiveness in this area. While they knew they were on the right track, they also knew they still had much to learn.

THE CHALLENGES

Not all experiences have been as promising as the one shared by this 4th-grade math team. Starting many initiatives at one time has challenged the staff and inspired resistance. The leadership teams have stayed the course and are making adjustments to the system of designing common assessments and setting goals based on what they are learning.

Common district assessments were developed from district curriculum maps that are aligned with the Georgia Performance Standards. However, the coherence of assessments from unit to unit may not have been sufficiently articulated to ensure that the assessments written provide adequate information for teams to determine student growth. Even the fact that some standards are not taught in each unit of study based on the district curriculum maps or throughout multiple units all year long makes analyzing student growth based on the common district assessments difficult.

NEXT STEPS

Now that a substantial amount of work has been done to write and use the district common assessments, principals and teachers are beginning to focus on using the data from these assessments to set meaningful, challenging adult learning goals.

The common district assessment writing teams met again in June to revise their work, write new assessments for units of study they did not address last year, and develop assessments for units of study with single common district assessments.

The way to ensure the success of all students is to ensure the success of all teachers and principals who are responsible for their learning. Douglas County is committed to coaching and facilitating school teams and school leaders to instill professional learning into the daily life of all so that everyone can be successful.

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Douglas County Public Schools Douglasville, Ga.

Number of schools: **33**
(**20** elementary, **8** middle,
5 high schools)

Enrollment: **24,250**

Staff: **2,400**

Racial/ethnic mix:

White:	35%
Black:	48%
Hispanic:	11%
Asian/Pacific Islander:	1%
Native American:	0%
Other:	4%

Limited English proficient: **5%**

Languages spoken: **English, Spanish, Russian, Japanese**

Free/reduced lunch: **58%**

Special education: **10%**

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SAMPLE CURRICULUM AND PLANNING RUBRIC

This example of a rubric from the Georgia CLASS Keys system for the curriculum and planning strand highlights at the top the overall areas that a teacher addresses for a strand. The details below show the evidence and actions that demonstrate a teacher’s performance along a continuum for just one aspect of that strand.

CURRICULUM: A system for managing and facilitating student achievement and learning based on consensus-driven content and performance standards.

CP 1.1: *The teacher plans instruction that demonstrates strong knowledge of content and effective instructional delivery.*

	NOT EVIDENT	EMERGING
CONTINUUM OF IMPROVEMENT	The teacher does not plan instruction that demonstrates adequate knowledge of assigned content area(s) or the teacher is unable to teach content using effective instructional methodology.	The teacher plans instruction based on knowledge of the assigned content area; however, the teacher lacks depth in content knowledge or cannot organize or present content effectively so that students can learn.
EXAMPLES OF EVIDENCE	<p>Teacher evidence</p> <p><i>Lesson plans/curriculum units</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Covers content superficially in lesson plans. Identifies material to be covered, but rarely thinks about how students will learn the material. Provides students with no opportunities to use content creatively in a peer group or individually. <p>Observations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Asks students primarily for facts rather than in-depth concepts. Overlooks incorrect or confused student responses by moving on to another student or changing topics. Controls class discussions and limits student interactions with one another. <p>Conferences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cannot explain how students or groups learn content differently. Blames students for their lack of content knowledge or interest in the subject area. 	<p>Teacher evidence</p> <p><i>Lesson plans/curriculum units</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Designs plans to help students grasp factual knowledge and use content knowledge. Creates strategies to engage students in content, but strategies are isolated and/or may lack coherence or depth across lessons. <p>Observations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uses current and accurate content knowledge in teaching. Explains content in more than one way. Relies on teacher-student-teacher response pattern that keeps students dependent on teacher for approval/disapproval of their ideas. Asks simple questions of fact or interpretation, but rarely higher-level questions that enable students to grasp deeper concepts. <p>Conferences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrates enthusiasm and interest in teaching and learning more about field of study. Believes that all students learn content the same way rather than acknowledging learning differences.
EXAMPLES OF EVIDENCE	<p>Student evidence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students frequently produce misinterpretations of content in assessments or discussions. Students report that the teacher does not understand the content area(s). 	<p>Student evidence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students learn accurate information, but also are interested in different ideas people have about content. Students report benefits from learning in the content area(s).

Plans with deep knowledge of content and delivery.	Demonstrates a clear understanding of the curriculum.	Plans interdisciplinary instruction with real-world connections.
Curriculum and planning		
Uses the curriculum to plan instruction and assessment.	Uses an organizing framework to plan instruction.	Plans assessment to measure mastery of the curriculum.

CURRICULUM: A system for managing and facilitating student achievement and learning based on consensus-driven content and performance standards.

CP 1.1: *The teacher plans instruction that demonstrates strong knowledge of content and effective instructional delivery.*

PROFICIENT	EXEMPLARY
<p>The teacher plans instruction that consistently demonstrates knowledge of major concepts in the assigned content area. The teacher also organizes and presents content effectively so that students learn.</p>	<p>The teacher plans instruction that demonstrates a depth of knowledge of major concepts, assumptions, debates, processes of inquiry, and ways of knowing that is central to the assigned content area and presents content effectively so that students learn.</p>
<p>Teacher evidence <i>Lesson plans/curriculum units</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides a strong content base in all plans, including major concepts and assumptions as well as facts. Designs opportunities for students to learn content in appropriate ways for the content type. Designs extended practices that apply acceleration/remediation according to learning needs. <p><i>Observations</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uses students' prior knowledge and/or misconceptions to guide instruction. Expects and encourages students to learn and reason about problems in the content area(s). Arranges opportunities for students to explore content knowledge in complex ways and report discoveries to others. <p><i>Conferences</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Articulates in-depth, complex knowledge of content and teaches it appropriately for most learners' needs. Demonstrates awareness that content knowledge in any field is complex and constantly evolving. Recognizes there are multiple perspectives on any topic. Articulates, questions, and reflects on conceptual issues in the field. 	<p>Teacher evidence <i>Lesson plans/curriculum units</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourages students to debate issues in the content area(s). Engages students in active learning through exploration and hands-on learning through projects, inquiry processes, and the use of technology. Anticipates common misconceptions and makes modifications to address student needs. Plans interventions when students do not understand. <p><i>Observations</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Asks questions that demonstrate the teacher thinks like someone in the field and helps students to see the world in that way. Provides subject-specific scaffolding, coaching, and modeling to support students as they learn new concepts. <p><i>Conferences</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Forms a broad understanding of how diverse learners acquire specific content knowledge. Adapts instruction during the lesson to meet specific student needs.
<p>Student evidence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students observe (in surveys, etc.) that teachers help them understand rather than judge them for misconceptions. Students grasp the meaning as well as the facts of the content they are learning. Students recognize and discuss issues related to the content area. 	<p>Student evidence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students demonstrate understanding of content through explanation, interpretation, empathy, perspective, application, and self-knowledge. Students listen, learn, generate data, and use evidence in ways acknowledged by those in the content area(s).

Source: Georgia Department of Education.