

School District of Philadelphia

Improving the Urban Educational Landscape: A Four-Year Retrospective

In September 2003, the School District of Philadelphia began reform efforts rooted in the development and implementation of core curricula in the four major content areas--literacy, mathematics, science, and social studies--for grades K-12 to help improve student achievement through the inclusion of formative assessments, textbooks, and program materials. The curriculum was intentionally designed to align to the state standards and to provide for changes based on local, state, and national trends. It was also created to level the playing field for all students since all students would receive a challenging and rigorous curriculum preparing them for the NCLB required state assessments (PSSA) and for career and college. The ability to revise the curriculum has provided our district with a dynamic and data-driven process whereby each year the curriculum is reviewed, revised, and redesigned. Knowing how important it is for teachers to understand how their students are learning, we also developed a benchmark assessment system to help teachers review, remediate, and enrich their teaching based on the data from the assessment. An additional week of instruction was set aside for teachers to provide this level of data-driven instruction for students.

The use of data to drive instruction was enhanced through the parallel development of the Instructional Management System (IMS), in which the benchmark data could be accessed by teachers, principals, and other administrators. These key elements have helped our district focus on student achievement in a systemic manner, resulting in five years of increased scores on the PSSA. This presentation is intended to provide educators with an overview of the key strategies implemented by the School District of Philadelphia to help improve student achievement with a particular focus on curricular reform.

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