

Data Informed Decision Making and Value Added Assessment: Our Professional Development Future

by Jim Lloyd



The theme for this edition of the *Navigator* relates to how professional development adds value to student achievement. In this article, I will relay to the reader how Ohio House Bill 3 has impacted our accountability model, which in turn will have a profound effect on the future of professional development in

Ohio. I will argue that the main focus of future professional development should be aimed at helping educators become more adept at using student formative and summative assessments in order to make instructional adjustments. Finally, I will provide an example of an Ohio initiative that will seek to provide the kind of professional development needed by Ohio's educators in order to leverage student achievement.

When HB 3 passed, it significantly pushed Ohio's accountability system into a new frontier. While all states are responsible for answering the call for adequate yearly progress, Ohio's educational and legislative leaders saw an opportunity for our state to enter into a more progressive age of growth toward standards. Our mission has been redefined. While we work to continuously improve our systems to ensure all students achieve high standards, our second goal focuses on student growth at specific quintiles.

Prior to HB 3, we focused our energies and resources at "moving" our struggling achievers up. Post HB 3, our intervention efforts will continue with those that struggle to reach proficiency and at the same time we will look to ensure the growth of our middle and high achievers as well. It is not too far fetched to imagine building-level intervention assistance teams continuing to discuss those students struggling to reach grade-level standards, and at the same time working to determine how to extend the learning of higher achieving students who are not demonstrating growth. What is clear is the goal of growth toward standards will require a fearless dedication to increasing the capacity of teachers and administrators to engage in data informed decision making for academic achievement and growth through professional development. The word *informed* is chosen over the word *driven* because data may not pinpoint how we should handle the situation, but it does provide us with insight regarding what factors we need to consider (Knapp, Swinnerton, Copland & Monpas-Huber, 2006).

Some states that have gone to a growth model have struggled considerably. Ohio can learn from these states. In 1992, Tennessee approved a piece of legislation that reorga-

nized school funding, set new standards, and established a new accountability system for school districts, individual schools, and individual teachers that centered on value added assessment (HB 752). This piece of legislation created a significant amount of backlash between those in the field of education and those in the field of politics. A dissertation by Thomas Young (1996) investigated the perceptions of Tennessee's value added assessment system (TVAAS) and found different perceptions between those who approved the accountability model (politicians) and those who were subject to it (educators). The later group reported that they perceived that TVAAS does not improve achievement, instruction, and curriculum. The most telling finding most likely seeks to explain the different perceptions between the groups. In the study, all groups agreed that TVAAS causes teacher stress and does not have a positive effect on teacher morale.

While these results most likely do not surprise the reader, it should be noted that Tennessee did not invest in a proactive, professional development initiative to support the implementation of their growth model. Further evidence from Tennessee supports this point. In a study and report that was submitted to the Tennessee Congress (Morgan, 2002), one important finding indicated that few schools and districts utilize test data to improve student learning. **The reported reason:** lack of professional development for teachers and administrators was commonly reported reasons test data was not used to enhance classroom learning. As other states begin to look at instituting a growth model of student learning, the lessons learned in Tennessee should resonate. **The point:** engage in a capacity-building campaign to increase educators' skills in engaging in data informed decision making for academic achievement and growth. Such a campaign extends well beyond the use of state achievement data and EVAAS. The future is in learning how to analyze and use all types of data by leveraging a data culture.

While our state has been criticized for its tardiness to the standards-based education age, we have demonstrated considerable strategic insight and strategy in preparing educators for our Educational Value Added Assessment System (EVAAS). With help from Battelle for Kids, a professional development infrastructure has been created to assist Ohio's educators with the roll out of EVAAS. As Regional Value Added Specialists (RVAS) finish training District Value Added Specialists (DVAS), approximately 1,500 educators will be in place to support EVAAS. This organized investment in human resources represents a start at creating an infrastructure of individuals who should be able to train others within their school districts. While this effort should be commended, it


should also be expanded. Certainly learning about EVAAS and how to use student growth data is important; however, my hypothesis is that the creation of a second accountability prong (student growth) will make it even more important for districts to extend professional development offerings to teachers and administrators beyond EVAAS. Indeed, in order for us to truly come of age, we will need to develop teachers' capacities to engage in data informed decision making within summative and formative data systems. While this will include the provision of training regarding EVAAS, it extends well beyond that.

Educators must become more adept at understanding the state accountability system and how it has a direct impact on their classroom practices. Further, districts will need to help educators make meaning of the formative and summative assessment; help them begin to learn how to analyze data and make inferences; and finally, assist staff members in learning how to use data to make instructional decisions. Every public school district will face these same challenges. As a result, the only way in which we are going to increase our probability of ensuring the continued viability of public education as the primary educational choice, the work must be shared both within school districts and outside of them. As Margaret Wheatley put it, "We do need to be sharing what we find, but not as models. From each other, we need to learn what's possible. Another's success encourages us to continue our own search for treasure." (Wheatley, 1999, p. 174) Our professional learning community needs to extend beyond individual district boarders.

The future of public school is at a crossroads. Our mission is to help all students achieve at high levels and ensure that each demonstrates annual growth. In our profession, we've often known what to do, but we've lacked the will to act. We must close what has been defined as the knowing-doing gap. (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2000) We must guarantee and commit to a viable, common curriculum and have the courage to monitor it; albeit collaboratively. (Schmoker, 2006) We've begun to build our foundation for data informed decision making through District Value Added Specialists. This should be expanded into each district through the creation of data teams. By doing so, we can build a support team and begin to establish a culture of data use and continuous improvement. Our dialog regarding data use will need to be honest, fair and most important, safe for teachers.

In Ohio, we have come closer to the creation of a statewide information management system through the Data Driven Decision Making for Academic Achievement (D3A2) project. Through this effort (D3A2), not only will a data

analysis tool be developed that will include summative assessment results, but also it promises the inclusion of district's formative assessment results as well. Content resources that include both assessment items and instructional materials are already available. Focused professional development is being created by the D3A2 Professional Development Subcommittee that will show educators how to use the system and, more importantly, how to begin to change district culture by leveraging data informed decision making. Professional development regarding data informed decision making should come from the top down, from the bottom up, and from side to side.

Finally, as we move into the future, may we have the wisdom to learn from others who have shifted to a growth model. More importantly, while EVAAS will greatly assist our efforts to help all students, it will fall short if we fail to recognize that it is a piece to the accountability puzzle. Without an investment in a well-planned professional development initiative aimed at increasing the capacity of educators to collaboratively engage in data informed decision making, we are doomed to failure. We know what we need to do... we always have. It is the responsibility of each of us to demonstrate the will to act for it is the only way our culture will professionally develop. 

References

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