

Case Study: Pearson Assessment Training Institute (ATI)

Coherent Instructional Language Leads to Continuous Academic Improvement

Olmsted Falls City Schools, Olmsted Falls, Ohio

Demographics

- › Suburban district in greater Cleveland area
- › 3,638 students
- › 225 teachers
- › 92% White
- › 2% African American
- › 2% Hispanic
- › 4% Other
- › 18% free and reduced lunch
- › 13% special education
- › 10% Title I

Challenge

Olmsted Falls City Schools has a history of high student achievement, with about 90% of students scoring proficient or above on the Ohio state achievement test each year. But Assistant Superintendent Dr. Jim Lloyd wanted to help teachers take their work to the next level, and he was concerned about the growing number of students qualifying for free-and-reduced lunch as a result of the economic downturn. “We were asking ourselves how we could create a sense of urgency for change,” he says.

Jim felt that the ATI instructional language, which clarifies learning targets based on “balanced assessment” and “five keys to quality assessment practice,” would help Olmsted Falls take the next steps. “And I knew we would need district-wide 90% fidelity of implementation to see if it was working,” he says.

Implementation

In fall 2007, Jim met with school-level administrators to lay out the balanced assessment vision, using the ATI textbook, *Classroom Assessment for Student Learning (CASL)*. The district then began to build capacity, with ATI professional development for principals and assistant principals. Jim and two principals—Don Svec, Principal of Olmsted Falls Intermediate, and Neil Roseberry, Principal of Falls-Lenox Primary School—attended a training session in Portland, Oregon.

Don was inspired to divide the 25 teachers in his school into five learning teams and purchase CASL for each team, and Neil, excited about ATI learning targets, asked Jim to conduct a training session at his school. “The training helped teachers identify learning targets, unwrap the standards, and ask key questions about what I’m assessing and why I’m assessing. Teachers started to understand that the instructional vision should be grounded in balanced assessment practices,” says Jim.

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— Dr. Jim Lloyd, Assistant Superintendent, Olmsted Falls City Schools

In 2008, the district was charged with developing a new vision for improvement using the Ohio leadership framework. The leadership team decided to focus on two goals and do them well. “We wanted to be the best in the world at making learning targets clear for students and at providing them with high quality feedback,” says Jim. “These two goals resonated across the system, with PE teachers, music teachers, math teachers—everyone—because they were about pedagogy, not content.”

When Jim created a balanced assessment course that staff could take for credit, 15 principals and teachers signed up, met weekly for a semester, and then continued on for a second semester, studying the ATI textbook *Seven Strategies of Assessment for Learning*. Olmsted Falls sent five people, including two classroom teachers, to an ATI formative assessment course offered locally through a partnership with Cleveland State University and the Greater Cleveland Educational Development Center (GCEDC). The two classroom teachers then trained others, and, with the help of ARRA funding, became academic coaches and led two formative assessment cohorts within the district.

The district continues to send approximately 30 people a year to the GCEDC training. Videotaped models of good assessment practices, showing the academic coaches and other teachers in action, are posted online. Teachers visit each other's classrooms and take a lesson-planning unit together, to promote collaborative teaming. Rubrics that apply across grade levels are used in classroom walkthroughs, and over 100 units of instruction have been re-worked according to ATI assessment-related recommendations. The district is building capacity both locally and through the university program and is positioned well for the upcoming Common Core standards, according to Jim.

Impact

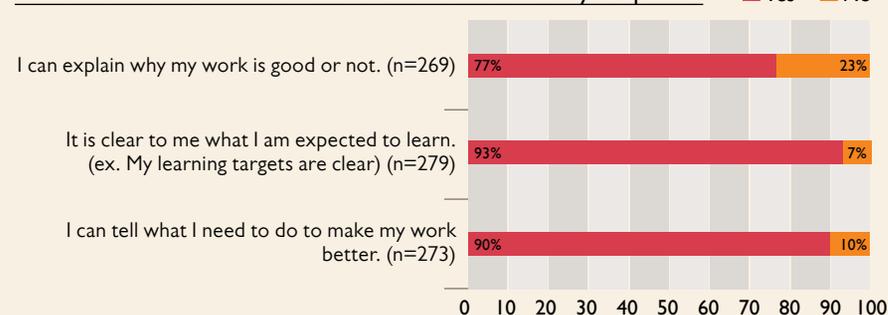
Unlike high achieving students, who can often clarify their own learning targets and provide internal feedback, struggling students need structured support to learn these skills, says Jim. “ATI lets us balance our assessment practices and eliminate the system of winners and losers. So student understanding and student work have improved across the board. In a survey conducted in 2011, students showed a very positive response,” he says.

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Test scores are not the only key to student and school improvement at Olmsted Falls. “Our focus has shifted to measuring adult implementation and improving our practices,” says Jim. “We measure implementation in classroom walkthroughs, through self-reporting, and by teachers anonymously rating themselves. Once teachers have had the right professional development in assessment, they never want to return to their earlier practices.”

Olmsted Falls Intermediate School: 2011 Student Survey Responses



Teacher Implementation (From District Wide Classroom Walkthroughs)

