Data **Drives District to** New Heights

Chilton Public School District wins national award for technology use

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The Chilton Public School District built an impressive new high school and district offices six years ago but the highlight of the district may be something that can't be so easily seen.

For the past 11 years, the Chilton Public School District has been compiling a data warehouse. Dozens of pieces of data are collected and stored on the district's server. Students' test scores, attendance records, grades, courses taken and demographic data are just a few of the pieces of data that are collected.

Data on the district's staff is also recorded. Educators' professional development activities, education and experience are all part of the data pool. Chilton was one of the first public school districts in the state to use this technology to track the progress of its students and staff in such a detailed way.

Test results from the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Exam, ACT, and the computer adaptive test, Measure of Academic Progress (MAP), are collected. Becky Blink, Chilton Public Schools director of curriculum says the data is so nimble that student progress can easily be tracked. With the click of a mouse, Blink can find out what a student's, a class's or a school's reading scores were at in the beginning of the school year compared to the end of the year.

Any data collected in the warehouse can also be compared side by side with scores from other students, classes or schools within the district.

"You can really drill down and find out where our improvements have taken place and where we can improve," Blink says.

This kind of detailed data allows school board members and administrators to track certain programs or curriculum changes and see how it affects the district's students' test scores. From that data, the school board can make informed decisions.

"We pride ourselves on being a data-driven decision-making board," Chilton school board President Paul Meier says. "It takes the emotion out of the decisions."

The data warehouse has also helped solve disputes in the district and it can be used to guide teachers and identify students that need attention. All of this, Chilton Superintendent Claire Martin says, works in favor of the district's 1,215 students.

Warehouse at Work

The connection between data and student achievement is evident in how the district uses the data warehouse.

In 2000, after reviewing this data, administrators and school board members decided to revamp the middle school math curriculum. Blink says Chilton has traditionally tested well in math but noticed a lull in the district's scores. The district wanted to continue to challenge its students so it reassessed its middle school mathematics classes using data the district had collected.

"We realigned our entire math curriculum," says Blink.

Before the realignment, the district provided one section of algebra to its eighth-grade students. Now, in addition to algebra, eighth-grade students can enroll in geometry and pre-algebra. Since students are expected to take more challenging classes in eighth-grade, the math curriculum in the other grades have been strengthened as well. This trickled all the way down to the elementary school where struggling students are now enrolled in a remedial math program to prepare them for the challenging math classes in middle school and high school.

In another instance, the data warehouse helped put an issue to rest. When the district switched to block scheduling in 2002, some parents and staff members worried the format would hinder student learning. However, based on data collected, there has been no noticeable change in student's test scores.

"Having 11 years of data to go back on kind of put that to rest," says Martin.

However, using a system like a data warehouse, education leaders may wonder if students are reduced to numbers in a computer. However, Meier says the data actually helps the district identify individual students that need help.

"Maybe most kids in a class are getting it but there is one that student has a different learning style," Meier says. "This helps us identify that student."

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Claire Martin (left), Chilton Public Schools superintendent, Becky Blink, director of curriculum, and the Chilton School Board use technology to accurately measure and improve student achievement.

Award-Winning District

After 11 years of using technology at the district level to boost student success, the Chilton Public School District received some deserved recognition for its work. Last November, the Center for Digital Education, along with the National School Boards Association and *Converge Online*, awarded Chilton sixth in the small school division of the fifth annual Digital School Districts Survey.

The award recognizes districts that use technology to "govern the district, communicate with students, parents and the community to improve district operations." Chilton was the only school district in the state to make the final list.

The award is nice, but Martin says, the focus remains on student success.

"Ultimately, we did it [data warehouse] to make a difference for the kids," she says.

In addition to the data warehouse, the district has revamped its Web site. The front page is updated with district news and announcements. Links to the district's schools are easily accessed, the mission statement is visible in the upper right hand corner of the Web page and district events and activities are at the viewer's fingertips.

The district has also fitted six classrooms with MIMIOs, which are interactive white boards that can be used in the classroom to promote student participation and aid teacher's lessons. The district hopes to purchase more MIMIOs in the future. In addition, almost every classroom in the middle and high school has a computer hooked up to a projector, allowing educators and students to bring the latest technology into the classroom.

The community has gotten involved in the district's technology

action plan as well. Heartland Business Systems has sponsored a 21st century learning classroom that is fitted with the latest classroom technology including one of the district's MIMIOs.

The Chilton school board has been a part of the technology push in the district as well. The board is considering switching over to a paperless board format.

"It's a big step for some board members," Meier says. "Some want it tomorrow, others want to keep paper. It's important to look at because it ties in with technology and also going green."

Overall, Meier says technology has been a big part of student learning in Chilton.

"Part of our overall mission is that we want our students to be 21st century learners," Meier says. "We want them to learn how to learn … not necessarily just absorb facts."

A New Vision

Chilton's ability to closely monitor its students' progress through its data warehouse has allowed the district to really challenge itself. At the beginning of this school year, the Chilton school board passed a lofty new achievement goal: "All students, K-12, in the Chilton Public School District will achieve reading proficiency."

The district has identified proficient as scoring in the 80th percentile on the MAP reading assessment for students in grades 2-10. An assessment system has yet to be identified for students in grades K-1 and 11-12.

"This is a very ambitious goal," Martin says. "One board member asked, 'Can we afford this?' And I said, 'I don't know if we can afford not to.'"

Both Martin and Meier make it clear that this goal isn't just going to gather dust in the district's office.

"We're willing to support this," Meier says. "We don't want to just set that goal out there and see what happens. We want to be active in it."

At three different board meetings this school year, committees from the district's various schools will present what progress they have made and what can be done to improve student reading levels.

This high level of accountability in each school has helped make this goal a priority in the district from everyone from the school board to the students, Martin says. However, district leaders understand the goal may never be reached but Meier says as long as students continue to improve, the district will be doing its job.

"We expect this to be an evolving goal," Meier says. "Any progress we make on that goal will help our ultimate number one goal, which is to turn out the best students we can." ■