



THE WEST SPRINGFIELD STORY

When educators work together to improve teaching practices and share their insights, students flourish.

Take a look at how Measured Progress's professional development team helped a district create its own unified, sustainable classroom assessment program.

“Teaching the standards isn’t stifling creativity; it opens the door for creativity.”

Elayne Gumlaw,
Director of Curriculum,
West Springfield
School District

Clarifying the Vision

West Springfield School District educators had a clear vision: to create a balanced assessment system and improve student achievement at the summative and formative levels. They knew they needed a unifying initiative to get teachers and administrators at all grade levels on board.

In 2006, Dr. Suzanne Marotta, superintendent of West Springfield schools, and Elayne Gumlaw, director of curriculum, approached Catherine “Kate” Garrison, manager of the Measured Progress professional development team, to help the district achieve its goals.

The district had undertaken several professional development initiatives in years past—including curriculum mapping, backwards design, and differentiated instruction—only to find that not all teachers were teaching based on a common understanding of the standards. To create a strong, unified learning community based on the same effective assessment practices, the district committed to a three-year professional development program with Garrison.

“Kate was here for a purpose, to reflect upon and validate what we do and move us in a positive direction,” Gumlaw says. “Measured Progress customized this [program] for us in a planned way and that is how the professional development program emerged.”

Marotta says that West Springfield is unique in the way it approaches professional development: what the district picks, it sticks with.

At a Glance

District	Web Site
West Springfield, MA	http://www.wsps.org
Superintendent	Total Number of Teachers
Suzanne Marotta	303
Grades Offered	District Type
PK–12	Local School
District Title I Status	Inter-District School Choice
Title I District	Offers Choice

Establishing the Goal

During the first year, 40 teachers received a stipend or salary advance to participate in the September-through-January training; in years two and three, teachers volunteered to participate, while some former cadre members stayed on as teacher leaders. To date, more than 155 teachers have gone through Measured Progress cadre training. By year three, administrators decided that the 2008-2009 school year should be the “tipping point,” whereby most of the district’s teachers would be trained in:

- ◆ understanding the components of a balanced classroom assessment system—summative and formative,
- ◆ determining when to use specific assessment formats for varying purposes,
- ◆ using assessment to determine how well students understand a skill or concept,
- ◆ aligning assessment to targeted standards, and
- ◆ unpacking the standards into student-friendly language.

In addition, teachers would be expected to apply their understanding of these concepts tangibly in the classroom through:

- ◆ creating student learning targets,
- ◆ providing descriptive feedback to students,
- ◆ revising paper-and-pencil tests to better capture student comprehension,
- ◆ providing students multiple opportunities to achieve mastery of a standard, and
- ◆ using portfolios and performance assessment to explore student understanding and track growth.

For some teachers and administrators, the training validated their current teaching methods and assessment practices; for others, it opened up a whole new way to engage students, find out what they know, and expand upon their learning. Gumlaw says the professional development training has given teachers an outlet for creativity and better dialogue, while still focusing on core content.

“Teaching the standards isn’t stifling creativity; it opens the door for creativity,” she says.

High School: Changing Conversations

Peter Dufresne, principal at West Springfield High School, says Gumlaw gave him his first exposure to Measured Progress. He calls the Measured Progress cadre training the “most impactful piece around assessment training” that he’s ever experienced, noting that it has changed conversations about teaching and assessment in his school. He says that this professional development initiative was one that could have never succeeded without the right outside consultation.

School	Student Population
John Ashley	320
Philip G. Coburn	386
John R. Fausey	421
Memorial	212
Mittineague	135
Tatham	250
West Springfield Middle	955
West Springfield High	1,304
District	3,983

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Tom McNulty,
Principal,
West Springfield
Middle School

“We brought in Measured Progress as the ‘guide on the side,’ as opposed to the ‘sage on the stage,’” Dufresne explains. “I know my faculty felt it’s been a collaborative effort.”

Maria Silvestri, vice principal, says that the professional development program validates the school’s ninth-grade, team-based approach to teaching, called “Terrier House.” In Terrier House, ninth graders work with groups of core teachers who create individual success plans for each student and confer regularly to ensure students aren’t falling into any gaps. Ninth grade is a “temperamental year,” Silvestri explains, and success during this year is critical to keeping students engaged and successful throughout the rest of their school careers.

“What Measured Progress did was validate what we do; they are another source that says, this thing that we are doing is good for kids,” Silvestri says.

John Danaher, a first-year physics teacher in Terrier House, says the Measured Progress training equipped him with specific tools that he now uses in the classroom: he no longer grades formative assessment activities or uses a system that allows students to just “collect points.” Students in Danaher’s classroom are not allowed to be “in the dark” about what they are learning.

“I put learning targets on all handouts as well as an ‘I Can’ statement—even if they don’t quite understand the topic, they at least understand what it is they need to learn,” he says.

Veteran Terrier House social studies teacher Shaun Tharaldson calls the marriage between Terrier House and Measured Progress “a match made in heaven.” He uses a formative assessment technique that includes giving students a menu of choices that allows them to take control of their own learning. For example, Tharaldson designs a basic assignment whereby every student

Students	% of District	% of State
First Language not English	21.6	15.4
Limited English Proficient	6.8	5.9
Low-income	40.5	30.7
Special Education	18.2	17.1
Free Lunch	35.1	25.2
Reduced Lunch	5.4	5.5

starts with a “C” grade. In order to move from a “C” to a “B,” students need to include more advanced information; an “A” includes even more requirements.

Third-year English teacher Damien Johnson makes his writing curriculum a formative experience throughout the school year. A recent cadre graduate, Johnson says the training supported his practice of conversing with students during the writing process. Classmates give feedback on one another’s writing assignments. Students keep a record of their poetry, journals, essays, and other writing assignments on an online word processing program.

Dufresne says Measured Progress’s professional development program underscores teamwork and getting to know students as well as possible.

“The days of teaching when you shut your door have to be over,” he says. “You can’t prepare globally. And there has to be an application—we now have common planning time that has improved things by leaps and bounds.”

What’s even better is that students have bought into the model, says Silvestri. They are beginning to understand learning for learning’s sake, rather than learning to get a grade.

Middle School: Re-purposing Portfolios

Tom McNulty has served as West Springfield Middle School’s principal for eight years and has taught in the district for 16 years. He says that people teach the way they’ve been taught. But now there’s a transition. Teachers spend more time planning how they instruct and determining what information they need to gather about students.

“We’re asking well-crafted, higher-level questions that require children to think about the subject matter,” McNulty says. “The feedback is more task-specific: where are they now and how can they get better?”

Despite being in his 37th year of teaching, geography teacher Peter Kwiat credits Measured Progress for suggesting a “commonsensical approach” to collecting and showing evidence of growth in student writing. In fact, the title of the student writing portfolio he’s developed is called “Measuring Progress.”

“In most portfolios I’ve seen, there is nothing leading to a goal. Now I use a graphing system with rubric numbers. I grade portfolios with the [student] name facing down and apply my critique [based on the rubric] before I grade. As a teacher, it makes sense for me to have a portfolio that is working toward an end,” Kwiat says.

Middle school math colleague Steve Paterwic, a 34-year teaching veteran, echoes Kwiat’s enthusiasm about learning new teaching techniques. Teaching is changing, he says, and formative assessment techniques cause him to question the regurgitation of information teachers pose by administering traditional unit tests. Observing how students are learning every day and teaching to a curriculum rather than to a textbook proves to be far more informative, he says.

“If students know how to do five examples, why do we need to give them 30?” Paterwic says.

“We knew we were light years ahead in terms of this kind of thinking.”

Dr. Suzanne Marotta,
Superintendent,
West Springfield School
District

Elementary Schools: Sharing Successes

Gathering student work, keeping journals, and encouraging peer evaluation are formative practices that elementary teachers used prior to undergoing Measured Progress professional development training, says Martha Tighe, Fausey Elementary School principal. What was different about this program is that it was mandated and supported by West Springfield’s district administration to ensure teachers could carry out the new techniques they learned. In fact, Tighe says when she does walk-throughs in the classrooms, it’s rare for her *not* to see teachers taking notes on what their students are doing.

Tighe says she sees a lot more focus on the students now, more planning, and solid plans targeting each student. She says that professional development participation was “easy to sell” to teachers and credits the program for training trainers who can serve as “in-house gurus” to other teachers.

Karen Desilets, a second-grade teacher and three-year cadre participant, takes on a leadership role at Fausey School, teaching others how they can create lessons to assess student understanding at the early grade levels. She says the professional development program made her more aware of how she teaches in general—and how she teaches each individual child.

“It’s a misconception that if one child struggles, he or she struggles all across the board. That’s not true,” Desilets says.

Amy D’Angelo, a first-grade teacher and 14-year teaching veteran, created a rubric for work students perform in their “centers.” She also begins student writing assignments by asking students to draw out the beginning, middle, and end of their stories before putting their pencils to paper. Both ideas were inspired by the training.

Susan Mulvaney, Tatham Elementary School principal, is pleased to see her teachers using multiple forms of assessment in instruction—including activities that call for increased student participation, the development of rubrics, “I Can” statements, and improved analysis of data, particularly math data.

“The analysis of data has really changed; we’re now paying attention to the big picture: what is involved in learning a new skill, what is the reason why students might not understand?” she explains.

Collecting student work and tracking daily progress also helps teachers work better with parents to boost student performance right away.

Measured Progress’s Kate Garrison lauds the district for its commitment to a unified vision, although teachers were apprehensive at first. But Mulvaney says staff knew to take it seriously.

“It was expected that the superintendent, principals, and teachers would attend the professional development, understand it, and talk to other teachers,” she says. “It’s been sustained; it’s not been a fly-by-night initiative. The PD’s been really embedded.”

Mittineague Elementary School’s small size lends itself perfectly to differentiated instruction. Kim Lyons, a 17-year veteran and Title I math teacher, enrolled in the first training cadre and watched improved assessment practices grow over time.

“Everybody is looking at everything they do, putting lots of thought into ‘how do we reach every student?’” Lyons says.

Paul Heath, Mittineague principal, says past experience that he and reading specialist Nicole LaBonte share teaching at a low-performing, urban school focused them on the standards and gelled with the concepts Garrison presented throughout the training.

“It was about knowing the standards, not putting the [textbook] at the forefront, so we were ahead of the curve,” he says.

What began as what some teachers found potentially “threatening” is now welcome.

“It will be great one day when math is broken up into standards and not recorded as one grade,” Lyons says.

Elayne Gumlaw says teachers’ careful monitoring of student work allows Mittineague students to move forward. “What gets monitored gets done,” she says.

Looking Ahead

“In ten years, students will think about getting better at what they do, rather than what grade they receive,” Suzanne Marotta says. “When you see students satisfied, it raises the bar for everybody.

“Teaching is more than liking kids; you have to be savvy in so many ways. You have to look at the data, analyze the data, get more data, and address the whole piece,” she says.

Implementation takes time, effort, and work; but the outcome is a community of leaders and practice that may change education, Gumlaw says. Marotta continues to be surprised by the level of knowledge of the staff and their commitment to new assessment practice.

“We knew we were light years ahead in terms of this kind of thinking. The fruit was hanging on the tree, far from ripe. We could see this fruit and Kate Garrison was here to ripen it. Now we are picking the fruit and reaping the benefits,” Marotta says.

Measured Progress's research-based approach to professional development calls for educators to embed proven practices and tools in their classrooms to increase student learning.

Educators can apply strategies and skills across content areas and grade levels to improve student, school, and district performance. Our professional development experts will work in partnership with your team to focus on one or more of these core competencies:

- **Assessment literacy:** Gain fluency in the understanding and use of assessment.
- **Comprehensive assessment:** Build a holistic assessment system using all the right tools and practices.
- **Examining student work:** Use a process to establish and maintain consistent criteria for quality student work across grade levels.
- **Formative assessment:** Translate assessment theory into great instructional practice by using proven techniques to adjust ongoing teaching and learning.
- **Standards-based assessment:** Create a learning environment that aligns instruction to standards and assessment.
- **Using data:** Draw from multiple data sources to guide instructional improvement.



It's all about student learning. Period.

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