Analysis of assessment data creates a bridge between a school’s shared vision and the reality of current school performance. Data analysis guides problem-solving and decision-making to address concerns about instructional practice. The process can be threatening to teachers if it is not a common practice within the school. To alleviate staff apprehension about exploring data and understanding its implications, a “staff must collaboratively participate in the collection and analysis of data so that the resulting information is trusted to be an accurate picture of current performance” (Zmuda, Kuklis, & Kline, 2004, p. 88). Data analysis as a collaborative practice creates an atmosphere of inquiry and collective responsibility that results in a shared understanding of the need to change teaching and learning practices to increase student achievement (Price & Koretz, 2005).

To support administrators and teachers in effective data analysis and productive data conversations, consider the following frequently asked question and proposed answers.

**How do we channel the student-focused conversation into a conversation focused on instruction and related tasks?**

Undoubtedly, student learning is influenced by factors such as home life and socioeconomics as well as previous school experiences. However, teachers often engage in conversations that center on these topics as reasons for poor student achievement—factors over which teachers have little or no influence (City, Kagle, & Teoh, 2005; Gravois & Gickling, 2003). Student learning is based on tasks and instruction, in other words, effective teaching practices, which are within teacher control (Gravois & Gickling, 2003). Moving the conversation from the student to the task and instruction requires four primary tasks outlined by City, Kagle, and Teoh (2005).
• **Connect student learning with instruction:** When considering learning problems, how does instruction impact student learning?

• **Develop a shared understanding of instructional practice:** What professional development resources can teachers access to develop a shared understanding of effective instructional practice?

• **Develop the skill of examining instructional practice:** How do teachers learn about effective instructional practices (e.g., videos, observations, interviews)? How do they develop a shared language that allows them to communicate what they see?

• **Analyze current instructional practice in the classroom:** What is truly happening in the classroom to address learning problems and is it aligned with our understanding of effective instructional practice?

How are assessment results analyzed to gain a realistic shared understanding of current school performance that includes authentic discussion about student learning?

• Choose one assessment source for analysis to initiate discussion focused on instructional practice.

• Analyze the assessment data to better understand how groups of students think and approach learning tasks. Questions such as *What do students know? What can they do? How do they think? How do they approach tasks they are unsure of?* will prompt administrators and teachers to raise questions about learning patterns and strengths as well as learning concerns (Gravois & Gickling, 2003).

• Explore a variety of data sources to look for similar patterns across content areas (Mintz, Fiarmann, & Buffett, 2005).

• Use graphic data displays to direct attention to patterns and trends when exploring assessment results. Strategically crafted graphs can “paint” a picture for school staffs. Graphic displays should include complete titles (assessment name and date, number of students tested, grade level, subject) and graphically clear designs (labels, appropriate graph choice, use of color and font style for clarity) (Hodge & Willett, 2005).

To engage in such analysis is it necessary for teachers to be statisticians? No. However, teachers should develop a sound working knowledge of the basic principles of assessment in order to better interpret student test scores graphically (Price & Koretz, 2005). Requesting guidance and professional development from division assessment coordinators and school-based administrators as well as referencing resources such as *Datawise: A Step-by-Step Guide to Using Assessment Results to Improve Teaching and Learning* (Boudett, City, & Murnane, 2005) are means to brush up on the essential understandings necessary for interpreting data accurately.

Also, ensure focused productive discussions by using a facilitated discussion process or protocol, which enables teachers to talk about significant patterns or themes in the data, develop “educational questions,” and establish a common language around teaching and learning that clarifies misunderstandings. Structured discussions create a safe environment for having conversations about a given concern (Mintz et al., 2005).
Engaging in data conversations that focus on effective instructional practice requires meaningful professional development and opportunities for collaborative involvement of school staff. The net effect is a shared understanding of the school’s current performance, which empower teachers to strategically change their instructional practice closing the achievement gap for all students.

References


VGLA and VSEP At-A-Glance Inserts

For quick information about the Virginia Grade Level Alternative Assessment (VGLA) and the Virginia Substitute Evaluation Program (VSEP), please see the enclosed At-A-Glance inserts. These inserts provide a brief overview of each assessment, including a description of the assessment, participation criteria, student evidence, and diploma type. For more in-depth information, visit http://www.pen.k12.va.us/VDOE/Assessment/home.shtml.

Pearson Educational Measurement and the DOE Division of Assessment and Reporting will conduct four two-day regional Train-the-Trainer workshops for VGLA scoring. Please see Testing Memo No. 602 or access http://www.customconference.com/PEM07/vglamar07/ for workshop dates and registration information. Participants must pre-register by February 15, 2007.
Collaborative Leadership
Data Conversations for Student Success
By Lee Anne Sulzberger, M.Ed.

A collegial school culture is a prerequisite for school improvement (Barth, 2006). A school culture characterized by encouraging relationships among the adults and meaningful conversations about instruction and student achievement provides the infrastructure that supports educators as they work to ensure that all students achieve to high levels.

Instructional decision-making based on data is a cornerstone of collegial discussions about student achievement. The following step-by-step process, adapted from Boudett, City, and Murnane (2005), outlines one method for engaging staff in collegial conversations about data and student achievement.

Preparing for Data Discussions
Boudett and Moody (2005) identify three schoolwide activities for educators to engage in as they prepare for meaningful conversations about data:

Activity I: Creating and Guiding a Data Team—Data teams organize and prepare the data so that teachers can focus on discussing the data and implications for instruction. School leadership teams (e.g., school improvement teams) can serve as the data team. School leaders should guide the data team in three key tasks: (a) creation of a data inventory to show all available data sources; (b) examination of data organization to determine the best way to manage data so they are used frequently and appropriately; and (c) identification and evaluation of all programs designed to meet student instructional needs.

Activity II: Enabling Collaborative Work Among Faculty—All teachers must be involved in ongoing discussions about the data. School leaders should decide if existing collaborative structures (e.g., grade-level or content area meetings) can be infused with data discussions, or if new structures need to be created. School leaders also must ensure that master schedules include time for collaborative work to take place.

Activity III: Planning Productive Meetings—The data team is responsible for ensuring that meetings to discuss data are effective and efficient. For example, establishing group norms to ensure a positive and safe atmosphere and using protocols to structure conversations will ensure that meetings are conducted with care and achieve the desired outcomes.

Exploring Assessment Results
After preparing for data discussions, the team will lead teachers in exploring the data. Please see the article on page 1 of this newsletter for essential information on analyzing assessment data.

Linking Data to Action
Once the data have been studied to determine areas for improvement, it is time for action. Many have noted the importance of action planning for school improvement (e.g., Danielson, 2002; Schmoker, 2001). Action planning typically consists of four tasks: (a) identifying an instructional strategy to address the needs revealed in the data analysis; (b) reaching consensus on what implementation of the strategy will look like in the school; (c) establishing roles, responsibilities, and concrete steps needed to implement the change; and (d) assessing the plan’s progress (Buffett, Teoh, & Martinez, 2005).

School leaders can promote student success by using a structured process to engage staff in meaningful conversations about student achievement and the effectiveness of instructional practices.

References
Check It Out!

The following materials are available on loan from the T/TAC William and Mary lending library. To request materials, please call 1-800-323-4489 and leave a message. The materials will be sent to you along with a postage-paid return mailer. A complete listing of professional resources available through the T/TAC William and Mary lending library may be viewed at http://www.wm.edu/ttac. Simply click on the “Library” link to view holdings, complete an online search, or order materials.

**Interactions: Collaboration Skills for School Professionals, 5th Ed.**

By Marilyn Friend and Lynne Cook

This book serves as a guide for general and special education personnel in building effective collaborative relationships. The authors have reviewed and evaluated extensive research and translated the results into practical learning. For each topic addressed, they provide numerous examples and questions for further study. The book is designed to build skills in addition to providing theory on collaboration.  *(CC3.3)*

**Making Meetings Work: Achieving High Quality Group Decisions**

By John E. Tropman

This book covers everything you need to know about organizing productive meetings. Information includes preparing agendas, controlling what happens behind the scenes prior to and after meetings, and managing conflicting values and personalities. Through the Meeting Masters Research Project at the University of Michigan, Tropman observed and interviewed the nation’s most successful meeting experts to find out how to make meetings both stimulating and productive. Based upon his findings, Tropman developed 7 principles and 14 commandments for implementing dynamic meetings. *(CC59)*

The following information packets provide a brief overview of current topics and best practices for serving students with mild/moderate disabilities. These packets may be downloaded or ordered from the T/TAC web site at http://www.wm.edu/ttac.

**Considerations: Geometry Strategies for Middle School**

This Considerations Packet describes strategies that middle school mathematics teachers may incorporate into their teaching of geometry. An overview of the van Hiele Model is followed by a description of how to assess students’ levels. Strategies for teaching plane figures, perimeter, area, geometric solids, and transformations are included.

**Considerations: Algebra Strategies for Middle School**

This Considerations Packet addresses strategies that middle school teachers can implement in teaching algebraic thinking. The strategies address the topics of exploring patterns, graphs, symbolic manipulation, technology as an aid for understanding algebraic concepts, discourse in the algebra classroom, and writing about algebraic thinking. Additional references and resources are provided at the end of the packet.
Educating students is the responsibility of both parents and teachers. As the second semester begins, many parents are struggling with the realization that their children are not meeting goals outlined on the individual educational program (IEP) or other student improvement plan. Parents are willing to do their part in helping students meet goals addressed in the IEP, but often find themselves at a loss as to where to begin.

Throughout the school year, parents follow the suggestions given to them by school officials and classroom teachers. They provide their child with a distraction-free area at home to complete school assignments. They check over papers for accuracy before assignments are returned to teachers. Yet midway through the school year, many parents find their children struggling to meet the goals set at the IEP meeting. Often, progress reports and report cards reflect poor grades in content areas.

No later than the beginning of second semester, parents must take the initiative to contact the school if their child is not making adequate progress. They should ask for a conference to discuss plans of action that would help get their child back on track for success. Parents need to inform school officials and teachers about schedules and routines that have been in place since the beginning of the school year. They may remind teachers that these schedules, routines, or other strategies implemented at home were the direct result of proposals made at the initial IEP meeting. Parents should share information with teachers regarding their child’s strengths and special needs. The knowledge and experience that parents have is invaluable. When parents notice that their child is becoming overwhelmed by assignments, they should ask educators for possible solutions to help with this situation. Parents must also ensure that their child is given the necessary accommodations specified in the IEP. If necessary, parents may ask for some type of planning tool for their child, such as an agenda book to write down assignments and due dates. Many of these planning tools have a comments session that teachers and parents can use to correspond with each other regularly.

The following is a list of free resources intended especially for parents and other family members of students with disabilities. These resources offer an abundance of learning strategies, homework tips, and study skills designed to improve the overall progress of students with special needs.

- Learning Disabilities Online
  [www.LDonline.org](http://www.LDonline.org)
- Schwab Learning
  [www.Schwablearning.org](http://www.Schwablearning.org)
- Virginia Department of Education
  [www.pen.k12.va.us/VDOE/sess](http://www.pen.k12.va.us/VDOE/sess)
- Parent’s Guide to Special Education
  (English and Spanish versions)
  [www.pen.k12.va.us/VDOE/Instruction/Sped/parent_guide.pdf](http://www.pen.k12.va.us/VDOE/Instruction/Sped/parent_guide.pdf)
  [www.pen.k12.va.us/VDOE/Instruction/Sped/parent_guide_spanish.pdf](http://www.pen.k12.va.us/VDOE/Instruction/Sped/parent_guide_spanish.pdf)
- Parent Ombudsman
  [www.pen.k12.va.us/VDOE/sess/ombudsman/index.html](http://www.pen.k12.va.us/VDOE/sess/ombudsman/index.html)
- Parent’s Resource Centers (located in school divisions across the state)
  [www.pen.k12.va.us/VDOE/Instruction/Sped/prc_list.pdf](http://www.pen.k12.va.us/VDOE/Instruction/Sped/prc_list.pdf)

Other Resources
Math Instruction: Increasing Student and Staff Performance Through Assessment and Intervention
By Judy Martin, M.Ed.

Expectations for student performance and achievement in mathematics have increased dramatically, fueled, not only by state (Standards of Learning) and national (No Child Left Behind) standards, but by the increasingly technological society in which we live. Students’ competency in mathematics is critical for their future success in our high-tech world (Furner & Berman, 2004). According to *The Nation’s Report Card: Mathematics 2005* (Perie, Grigg, & Dion, 2005), although improvements have been noted, only a third of our fourth- and eighth-grade students are performing at proficiency level or above.

An unfortunate by-product of increased math demands placed on students is math anxiety (Tobias, 1993), which is found from the elementary school years through college to the workplace. Further, research shows a correlation between math anxiety and student performance (Furner & Berman, 2004). One way to reduce stress, is to conduct an assessment to determine the best instructional match for the student.

Specifically, an instructional assessment helps to establish a match between the student’s prior knowledge, readiness to learn and what is to be learned (curriculum demands). When this match is determined, effective instructional practices can be implemented and optimum learning can take place (Gravois & Gickling, 2003). With success comes improvement in student attitudes, confidence, and achievement in mathematics.

Strategies should revolve around the dimensions of math. Gravois and Gickling (2003) identify the broad math domains as:

- **Reasoning**  Understanding and knowing how to solve math problems
- **Connecting**  Using clues to unlock rules, steps, and strategies for solving problems
- **Communicating**  Explaining solutions to math problems in logical order
- **Problem-Solving**  Discovering solutions to math problems using reasoning, connecting, and communicating

The *Instructional Strategies That Support Authentic Assessment Within the Dimensions of Math* insert in this newsletter provides more specific information about the dimensions of math, essential questions, and instructional strategies.

**References**
Instruct-A-View: An Alternative to Suspension
By C. Elaine M. Smith, Teacher Specialist
Norfolk Public Schools
Department of Special Education Services

The Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Act 2004 (IDEA) emphasizes increased access to the general curriculum for students with disabilities. Students with disabilities who display behavioral challenges are often able to maintain behavior in a general education setting but periodically exhibit poor social skills resulting in classroom disruptions. IDEA supports providing positive behavioral supports (PBS) for these students. Without consistent behavioral intervention, they continue to disrupt instruction and, ultimately, may be removed from the least restrictive setting into self-contained classes or may be suspended. Rather than addressing the root problem, placement in self-contained classrooms results in limited opportunities for generalization of social skills training across settings and limited access to the general curriculum. Further, to obtain an advanced or standard diploma, students with disabilities must be instructed by teachers who are certified in the core subjects. Because few special educators are content certified, removal of these students from general education interferes with the successful completion of diploma requirements.

An analysis of Norfolk Public Schools’ (NPS) disaggregated discipline data on students with disabilities compared to the discipline data of their nondisabled peers at the same grade levels revealed numerous infractions resulting in out-of-school suspensions, showing that discipline is a districtwide concern.

In an effort to adhere to provisions of IDEA and provide effective programming options for students with disabilities that encourage positive behavioral outcomes, NPS’ Department of Special Education offers programming in various ways for students with disabilities who present challenging behaviors. At the secondary level, social skills instruction is provided as a positive behavior support intervention. In co-taught classes, positive behavioral supports are provided to students receiving instruction within the general setting through weekly identification and review of individualized target behaviors, goal-setting and development of a plan of action to address those behavioral goals. Some students with disabilities, many of whom are working toward an advanced or standard diploma, periodically require more intensive positive behavioral supports than can be provided in the general education setting. Instruct-A-View evolved to meet this need.

NPS’ Department of Special Education, in conjunction with the NPS’ Network Services, embarked upon an innovative intervention to assure students with disabilities access to the general education curriculum while providing an alternative to suspension. In a pilot program at Granby High School, selected general and special educators who co-teach at the ninth-grade level in each of the four content areas (English, science, social studies and math) agreed to have their sessions recorded and broadcasted live while teaching Virginia Standards of Learning (SOLs) units of study.

Under the supervision of a special educator, students with disabilities who exhibited behavioral challenges that required removal from the general education setting have the opportunity to receive their instruction via web-cast viewed in a designated location, the Instruct-A-View lab. In addition, these 20-minute direct instruction sessions are archived on a web-based server to be accessed at a later time by students as needed. This strategy is anticipated to assist with remediation of SOL skill acquisition while providing students with a temporary alternative to suspension without compromising their diploma options.

Instruct-A-View is a positive behavior support intervention that began as an effort to provide students with disabilities a temporary alternative to suspension while continuing their access to the general curriculum. From its embryonic stage, it has evolved into much more—a world-class intervention with the potential to benefit all students. In Norfolk helping “all students” succeed really does mean ALL students!

For more information, contact Elaine Smith at esmith1@nps.k12.va.us.
Please join colleagues from around the state!

MARCH 23 – 24, 2007

Virginia Council for Learning Disabilities
Spring Symposium
The Inn at Virginia Tech and Skelton Conference Center
Blacksburg, Virginia

UNLOCKING CREATIVE DIFFERENTIATION:
THE KEY TO LEARNING

For additional information go to:
The Virginia Council for Learning Disabilities
website at: www.vcld.org
or contact Carol Ann Cox at cacox07@yahoo.com
or any VCLD Board Member
Transition Time
Connecting with Internet Resources That Support Transition Planning
By Dale Pennell, C.A.S.

The world wide web provides a variety of resources designed to facilitate transition planning for secondary students with disabilities. The sites listed below offer information, assessments, and materials that support transition planning for these students from high school to adult life.

This 192-page manual published by the Heath Resource Center at George Washington University is intended to help school counselors assist high school students with disabilities in transitioning into postsecondary education and employment.

The Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment (ACLSA) [http://caseylifeskills.org]
The ACLSA is an evaluation of students’ independent living skills. The instrument consists of statements about life skills to which the youth and his or her caregivers respond. Life skill areas assessed include:

- Career Planning
- Communication
- Daily Living
- Home Life
- Housing & Money Management
- Self Care
- Social Relationships
- Work Life
- Work and Study Skills

This assessment, developed by the Pennsylvania Department of Health, guides professionals through a checklist of skills necessary for youth with disabilities to transition successfully to adult health care services. The following areas of skills students need for independence are assessed:

- Communication
- Vision/Hearing
- Equipment/Treatments
- Activities of Daily Living and Safety
- Managing Medical Information
- Self-Advocacy
- Job Search
- Educational Considerations
- Managing Appointments
- Pharmacy
- Transportation
- Nutrition
- Fitness
- Self-Awareness
- Medications
Areas of assessment of students’ knowledge of benefits and services include:

- Locating Adult Service Providers
- Understanding Insurance Plans Have Approved Providers
- Knowing How Each Benefit Is Identified
- Considering All Options/Limitations
- Exploring Benefits and Services

**Hands on Banking** [http://www.handsonbanking.org/]
This financial education program presents the basics of smart money management in an easy-to-use format. Topics include budgeting, the importance of saving, bank accounts and services, borrowing money, establishing credit, and investing. The curriculum is customized for four age groups from fourth grade through adults.

**The P.R.O. Filer Personal Portfolio and Filing System** [http://ici.umn.edu/all/helptool.html]
The P.R.O. Filer is a personal portfolio and filing system designed to help students learn how to organize important documents, keep records of school and community learning opportunities, and create a personal portfolio to showcase their accomplishments. The P.R.O. Filer includes a manual and 11 file dividers with the following headings:

- Accomplishments
- Education
- Financial
- Medical
- Personal
- Recreation/Leisure
- Residence
- Support Services
- Transportation
- Vocational
- Other

**Register Now!!!**

**Virginia Transition Forum**
*Working Together to Achieve Results*

March 12-14, 2007
Norfolk Marriott Waterside
Norfolk, VA

Register online at [www.virginiatransitionforum.org](http://www.virginiatransitionforum.org)
Please share this newsletter with others. It may be copied.
Call 1-800-323-4489 to be added to our mailing list or visit our website.