

DATA INSIGHTS

Pennsylvania Edition • Winter/Spring 2024

"Education has needed an MTSS solution like LinkIt's Intervention Manager for decades. It makes the intervention process more efficient by allowing our teachers to focus on the students and what is needed for learning rather than analyzing data for hours in spreadsheets. The data is available quickly and provides an electronic file for each student to track progress. We love this system."

Heather Collins, Ed.D.

Director of Teaching and Learning
Kennett Consolidated School District



"The faster the data review process, the faster the school or district can consider specific options to address the identified issues. LinkIt! makes it easy to disaggregate data. Now that two-thirds of our districts in Bucks County are using LinkIt, we are all able to speak the same language and suggest specific reports that help them move forward with planning."

Rachel Holler, Ed.D.

Assistant Executive Director
Bucks County Intermediate Unit



Articles Inside:

- How a small rural district realized the largest PSSA growth in its history
- A high school turns adversity into advantage
- A milestone year for an elementary school
- IUs can boost data IQs
- ...and more stories from across the Commonwealth!

LinkIt!
Collect. Analyze. Grow.

Proud partner. Simply stated, LinkIt! loves to collaborate with Pennsylvania educators. In this first edition of Pennsylvania *Data Insights*, we are excited to bring you stories of amazing leaders, teachers, and teams using data to positively impact their students and cultures. In speaking with our customers, the most effective educators continue to raise the bar and build on their previous successes and lessons learned. Whether your assessment, data, and MTSS initiatives are in their infancy or highly refined, we hope the articles inspire you as much as they do us.

It was nearly a decade ago that LinkIt! entered a partnership with the Bucks County Intermediate Unit to provide data, assessment, and MTSS services to our first three customers in the state. All three are still customers today, and one of them, Palisades School District, is featured on page 27. While not every partner district is featured in this magazine, our team has learned something from each implementation and we thank you for helping to shape Pennsylvania's assessment, data, and MTSS culture.

LinkIt's Pennsylvania focus and expanding customer footprint is due to:

1. Our **local expertise**, with 100+ districts in Pennsylvania and three former Pennsylvania educators on our staff
2. Our **commitment to product innovation** and listening to customer feedback
3. Our **unparalleled customer service and support**, which led to a 98% renewal rate in the state
4. Our **partnership and collaboration** with school districts, Intermediate Units, conferences and events, and educators across the state

We would like to thank our team as their efforts have helped to make these success stories a reality. For those who are newer to LinkIt, we invite you to flip through the following pages to see how LinkIt can help achieve your district's goals. Lastly, we would like to thank the many districts who participated in this magazine for being so open and honest about the challenges they have experienced. Thank you for sharing the strategies your team implemented to improve student outcomes and the data culture in each of your schools. We know your stories will help inspire the next round of data-driven celebrations throughout the state.



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WELCOME TO DATA INSIGHTS By Mike Zwanch & Ryan Winter	ii
HOW A SMALL RURAL DISTRICT REALIZED THE LARGEST PSSA GROWTH IN ITS HISTORY Forest Hills School District	2
ANATOMY OF A MILESTONE YEAR Upper Perkiomen School District	5
A HIGH SCHOOL TURNS ADVERSITY INTO ADVANTAGE Dallas School District	8
KENNETT RUNS ON DATA Kennett Consolidated School District	11
FEATURED PROFILE: EXECUTING ON A DISTRICT'S VISION, ONE SCHOOL AT A TIME Kennett Consolidated School District	16
CREATING A FRAMEWORK FOR SUCCESS: AN MTSS CONSULTING CASE STUDY Kennett Consolidated School District	17
EXPLORING THE DATA NEEDS OF CYBER SCHOOLS PA Distance Learning Charter School	21
PORTRAIT OF DATA SUCCESS Colonial School District	24
DATA DRIVES BEHAVIORAL/EMOTIONAL HEALTH INTERVENTIONS Palisades School District	27
INDIVIDUALIZATION AND INNOVATION IN IASD Indiana Area School District	30
FEATURED PROFILE: A DATA REBOOT IN QUAKERTOWN Quakertown Community School District	33
ARE YOU HAVING DATA CONVERSATIONS WITH YOUR STUDENTS? By Tracey Severns, Ed.D.	37
IUS CAN BOOST DATA IQS BLaST IU, Bucks IU, and Montgomery County IU	41
SECRETS TO FUN AND MEMORABLE DATA WORKSHOPS BLast IU 17	44
BRINGING RESEARCH TO LIFE: TALKING DATA AND MTSS WITH BECKY MILLSPAUGH, ED.D Montgomery County IU	47
ABOUT LINKIT!	50
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	54

Special thanks to Michael Cravotta of Flight 19 Media for his contributions to this magazine.
Michael is an award-winning writer who has worked with K-12 districts on communications and messaging.

Actionable insight and the time to use it



How a small rural district realized the largest PSSA growth in its history



Rob Dill, Ed.D, then assistant principal of Forest Hills Elementary School, asked his principal and central office in 2018 for approval to initiate a LinkIt! pilot program. At the time, he couldn't imagine that the move would set in motion a data revolution in the district. It would take a span of five years – and a global pandemic – for all the components of the transformative nexus to be enacted:

1. The user-friendly **LinkIt!** platform used in all grades.
2. **Ongoing training** to empower educators to maximize LinkIt's usage.
3. **Time** for regular in-depth data analysis to identify student strengths and weaknesses.
4. Dedicated **time** for targeted instructional support and enrichment.

Once the final pieces of the puzzle were in place, the new framework led to the largest overall increase in PSSA scores in district history. Scores on 10 of the 12 PSSAs hit post-Covid highs. In fact, the average score on the exams was higher in 2023 than in 2019 (the final administration year before the pandemic-caused hiatus of state assessments). That achievement exemplifies the potency of evidence-informed instruction when a comprehensive data platform, collaborative analysis, and scheduled intervention time work in synergy with a talented group of educators. In many ways, it's the golden data paradigm.

The genesis of the journey

In 2018, Forest Hills Elementary School had a problem. The school had a wealth of data but was without a system that could help manage it all. Working with data was arduous and cumbersome. "We were data rich, but information poor," said Dill, knowing that untapped insights were hidden away in spreadsheets and isolated on individual assessment platforms.

While PSSA scores were respectable, they revealed a concerning trend: Student cohorts were not showing growth from year to year. Having spent 19 years in Forest Hills classrooms, Dill had unwavering confidence in the

quality of the district's faculty. He knew "They were teaching their hearts out," yet the effort didn't match the outcomes. A shift toward a more structured use of instructional data was imperative for the school to climb out of its holding pattern.

Dill also suspected the possibility of alignment issues and had lost confidence in the reliability of the benchmarks being used at the time. LinkIt! emerged as the solution, offering benchmarks, the capacity to store state and third-party assessments, and much more. Following LinkIt! training, the school embarked on its journey in the fall of 2018, armed with benchmarks and years of historical data archived by LinkIt. For most teachers, the buy-in to more data-driven instruction was swift.



"We have to adapt," said **Dawn McCall**, a fourth-grade math teacher who's been a part of many educational initiatives over her 33-year career. "We can't do things the same way we've always done them. We have to roll with the changes and how we drive our instruction."

That same school year, Forest Hills Elementary also introduced enrichment time. These 20 minutes at the end of the day are primarily focused on math intervention but really serve as a flexible instructional window. Students can work with their teachers one-on-one if necessary, obtain help with homework, and catch up on any missed assignments. Students who've mastered their work can take advantage of various activities to enhance their skills. These might include personal reading or game-structured learning applications.

While PSSA scores remained relatively stable in the spring of 2019, instruction became more personalized than ever before. Educators saw the growth potential and understood that meaningful change doesn't happen overnight. Hopes were high that Forest Hills Elementary would see notable progress the following school year. However, the Covid-19 pandemic abruptly halted in-person instruction and led to the cancellation of state testing.



In need of a tool to diagnose post-shutdown learning gaps, Forest Hills introduced LinkIt! to the secondary campus in the fall of 2020 when in-person instruction returned. Superintendent **David Lehman**, Ed.D, a long-time district resident who had just come aboard in 2019, tapped Dill to lead the 7-12 implementation.

Data initiatives at the secondary level, particularly at the high school level, are sometimes slow to catch steam. That wasn't the case in Forest Hills. In fact, if you were to look for a silver lining to the pandemic shutdown, it would be the fast adoption of more data-informed instruction and the strengthening of MTSS processes in districts nationwide. Teachers and administrators recognized the urgency and necessity for change. Covid compelled school systems to rethink their educational systems (e.g. accelerated plans for 1:1 computer access and tech upgrades, widespread adoption of Google Classroom and associated educational apps). Buoyed by an infusion of federal aid, the shrewdest districts seized the opportunity to reinvent themselves in some way.

The game-changers – Time to analyze and remediate

The 2022 PSSA scores were better than 2021, but there was still work to be done. Students continued to grapple with learning deficits from virtual instruction and subsequent modalities. The district took bold, decisive action.

Time is in no one's corner. For teachers, 180 days can zoom by at warp speed – so much to do, and so many balls in the air. Carving out time for collaborative data analysis can pose a formidable challenge; however, for Forest Hills, overcoming the scheduling hurdle proved to be a game-changer, the glue that pulled together the pieces of the intervention/MTSS process.

In 2022-23, the district introduced PLCs. At Forest Hills Elementary teachers meet biweekly in grade level groups; at Forest Hills Junior-Senior High School, grades 7 and 8 subject area teachers meet daily (in addition to their prep period), not only for data review but to co-plan lessons and joint activities that emphasize student engagement. At the high school level, traditionally the most difficult to schedule, PLCs are held monthly.

While the primary goal of providing PLC time was to provide forums to collaboratively analyze data, discuss student progress, and talk about targeted instructional strategies, the sessions are so much more. PLCs are crucibles for innovation – dynamic forums where educators come together to exchange new ideas, experiences, and best practices. When executed effectively, they foster a culture of continuous professional improvement.

"We want to promote collaboration and collaborative learning because teachers can't work in silos," said Dill, who served as the elementary school principal from 2021-23 and

is now assistant superintendent. "We're trying to tear down those silos and say, 'Look, we need to work together.'"

LinkIt! played a pivotal role by providing extensive training to support the data-focused nature of PLCs, as well as another district data initiative: data days. Three times per year, a dedicated day is set aside to examine the results of the most recent LinkIt! Benchmark and then develop plans to meet the specific needs of individual students. Without analysis, data is just a set of numbers devoid of actionable insight.

The PLCs and data days helped drive enrichment time at the elementary school and, new in 2022-23, WIN time in grades 7 and 8.

The icing on the cake

- ✓ PLCs to analyze data.
- ✓ Intervention/WIN time in grades K–8.
- ✓ Data days to examine benchmark results.
- ✓ More LinkIt! training.

The essential components were in place to individually reach students like never before. Then, the district asked itself a question: What if?

What if Benchmark C was administered before the PSSAs, rather than after? What if Benchmark C was considered a diagnostic and the results were used to provide individual support before the PSSA?

There was much to consider. With an earlier spring benchmark, the results from the fall administration of Benchmark A compared to Benchmark C would not provide a true statistical portrait of a student's year-long learning. While everyone appreciates the clarity of bookends to mark beginnings and conclusions, were these growth markers as important as the state exams? Were students being done a disservice if the PSSA scores failed to reflect what they were fully capable of?



To educators such as **Scott Lashinsky**, who has been in front of a Forest Hills fifth grade chalkboard for 21 years, the answer seemed clear-cut.

"We thought that if LinkIt's purpose was to provide us with actionable data, then we should take action," the seasoned teacher said. "We should take the final benchmark before the PSSA itself and give us a window so we could go back, hit those weaker areas."

Forest Hills students completed Benchmark C in mid-March. For those intervening six weeks before the PSSAs, teachers used the data insight to differentiate instruction in their own ways. There were no test-prep boot camps or intense afterschool cram sessions, just teachers engaging with students on a more individual level to address specific areas of need.

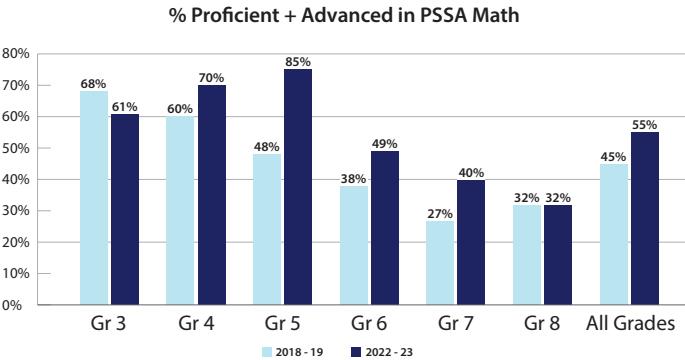
"Each day after our main lesson, I would work with kids in groups," said math teacher McCall. "We might've been working on maybe five different topics. So the five lowest topics that I could see on LinkIt! then are the five topics we worked on. It was probably 20 minutes worth of group work [per day], and that little bit of extra helped push them over. LinkIt! really helped us to drive our instruction."



"We didn't reinvent the wheel," said **Courtney Zaramba**, fifth-grade ELA teacher. "We had that data to look at and it reinforced what we needed to hit. Maybe let's hit it a different way and deliver it a different way than we did the first time, and maybe just be able to reach a couple more kids that way."

Benchmark C pinpointed the weakest areas for students and classes as a whole. Fifth-grade ELA teachers, for example, reinforced topics such as main idea and theme in both fiction and literature. Fourth-grade math teachers hit measurement, using data, and the bane of so many students everywhere: multi-step problems.

Lashinsky, McCall, and Zaramba have reason to stand tall. Fifth-grade ELA and fourth-grade math showed some of the most notable scores in 2023. The average PSSA score in fifth grade ELA surged by nine percentage points to 71%. That's the highest average score since 2013. (Fifth-grade math grew even more, by a whopping 25 percentage points to an average test score of 76%, the highest in **district history**.) In fourth-grade math, the average score leaped by 14 percentage points to 70%, topping every year since 2013.



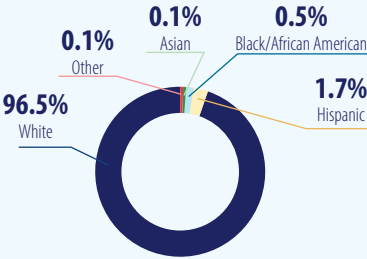
The combination of LinkIt, comprehensive LinkIt! training, data analysis time, and intervention time was a formula that had proven its worth. The process made quality teaching more purposeful and targeted.

"I truly can't say enough about LinkIt," said Dill. "It's more than a data benchmarking and warehousing system. If you approach it in the right way, it can be transformative to a district."

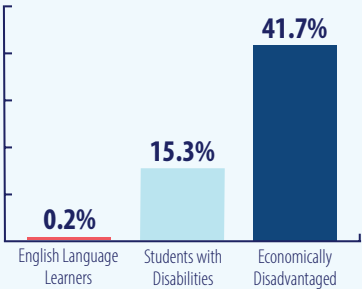
Forest Hills began using LinkIt's Intervention Manager this school year to schedule and track students in tiered interventions. LinkIt! Benchmarks are used, in part, to assess progress.

FOREST HILLS AT A GLANCE

State: Pennsylvania
County: Cambria County
District Enrollment: 1,700
Grade Configuration: K-12
Number of Schools: 2
Race:

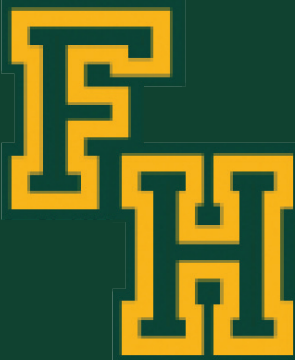


Programs:



Data Source: Future Ready PA Index

LinkIt Partner Since: 2019
SIS: PowerSchool
Assessment Strategy: LinkIt! Benchmarks, Acadience
Third-Party Data Sets: ACT, AP, ASVAB, Attendance, Keystone, PSAT, SAT, PSSA
Solutions Implemented: Data Warehouse, Navigator Analytics, Assessment Solutions, Intervention Manager

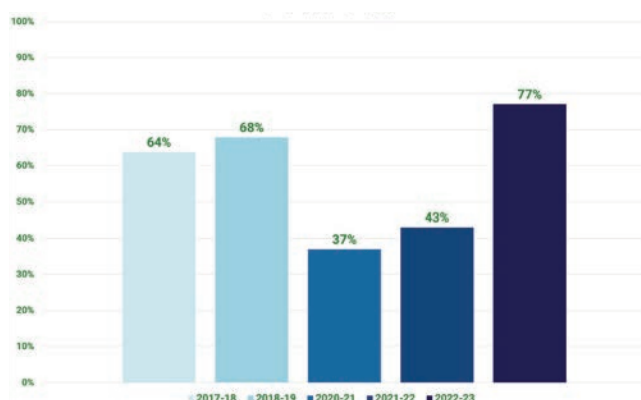


Anatomy of a milestone year



A 79% increase in G3 PSSA Math Proficiency

The school increased the % of students Proficient + Advanced from 43% to 77%, an increase of 79% and 9% above where the school was prior to the pandemic.



A 32% increase in G3 PSSA ELA Proficiency

The school increased the % of students Proficient + Advanced from 56% to 74%, an increase of 32% and only 2% below where the school was prior to the pandemic.



Early one June Saturday morning while she was still in bed, **Allison Stephens** used her cell to open the email with the 2023 PSSA results. The principal of Marlborough Elementary School in the Upper Perkiomen School District threw off the covers and jumped up.

"We did it, we did it!" she exclaimed, more to herself than to her husband. A flurry of text messages to core team members immediately followed, testing the axiom that it's never too early in the morning for positive news.

A triumph of the magnitude seen at Marlborough does not arrive by chance. The school's educators made it their mission to boost student achievement at every level, grades K-3.

"This is not something that I did," Stephens is quick to note. "This is something that the teachers did. They worked their tails off to really differentiate instruction and to get to know kids at a really granular level. Their efforts paid off in dividends in our performance. I'm proud of them, I'm proud of our students."

If Stephens had a recipe for double-digit academic growth, she'd bottle it and get rich. There is no secret sauce, no magic tricks behind the feat. Marlborough excelled through

a combination of needs assessment, timely intervention, constant progress monitoring, curriculum alignment, and a whole lot of hard work.

The beginning of a new way of thinking

Stephens had big plans for Marlborough when she took the reins, transitioning from her district office role as a curriculum, technology, and innovation specialist. And she had big plans for the use of data. When LinkIt! was introduced to the district in the 2017-18 school year, Stephens saw its potential.

In her very first year as principal in 2019-20, Stephens asked LinkIt! for a custom report forecasting how each student would fare on the PSSA - not just third graders but first- and second-graders too. LinkIt! accomplished this by creating district-specific cut scores correlating historical first- and second-grade students' NWEA MAP scores with their third-grade outcomes. Once cut scores were established, LinkIt! color-coded every first- and second-grade student with the four achievement levels of PSSA. This was run after Fall, Winter, and Spring MAP administrations to determine at-risk measures for each student. Stephens then shared the information with teachers to guide their instruction.

Before insight from the PSSA projection could be translated to action, however, Stephens' plans were scuttled. Just seven

months into her tenure, Covid-19 arrived and in-person instruction ended. But the foray sent a message and set the stage for an instructional transformation.

"That was the beginning of the change for all teachers and staff," she said. "We're going to be a data school. We're going to use it to our advantage and make instructional decisions around the data we see."

Data and the establishment of data centrism would soon become one of the hallmarks of her principalship.

A renewed focus

Third-grade PSSA results serve as touchstones for K-3 schools like Marlborough. As the only state-administered tests for early elementary students, they're often viewed as barometers of a K-3 building's entire educational program – a culmination of the first four years in students' educational careers.

Whether that perception is justified or not, the reality is that PSSA results are the only third-grade scores distributed by the state, published by the media, and talked about by the public. This makes them a focal point for discussions about school performance and student achievement.

Among Marlborough educators, the PSSA stats have been points of pride, proof that the school is providing kids with a strong foundation and preparing them for their continued educational journeys at Upper Perkiomen 4th & 5th Grade Center. Like almost every school everywhere, however, Marlborough's test scores dipped post-pandemic. Stephens knew her teachers and support staff were exceptional at their jobs, so together they set out to improve student achievement by intensive differentiation and personalization – not just in third grade but in all grades.

The makings of a blockbuster year built on data-informed instruction had been in the cards for Marlborough. So many

data pieces were already in place. PSSAs and benchmarks are housed in LinkIt. At-risk reports are generated three times per year. Fingertip Profiles, one-page data portraits of each student, are given to teachers before the school year begins, allowing differentiation to begin on day one. Unit assessments in all grades had moved to LinkIt, and teachers and instructional specialists associated questions to exact state standards. (Since the students are young, the teachers enter the results into the platform manually or via LinkIt's Data Locker module.) The results are tabulated immediately and show with precision the areas in which students need assistance at that exact moment in time.

The list goes on. The data initiatives stood like dominos, waiting for the push that would unleash their cumulative potential. That nudge began two years ago and turned into an overwhelming force last year.

In 2021-22, Upper Perkiomen put into action a comprehensive and cohesive MTSS framework. The systemic MTSS initiative was designed to help students rebound and make up for any learning lags caused by pandemic-fueled disruptions in instruction. A strong emphasis was placed on ensuring that students receive quality tiered support. District administrators developed and provided the MTSS protocols and decision-making flowcharts, and conducted extensive data analysis PD.

To encourage the use of that data PD and underscore its commitment to MTSS, the district set aside three entire days per year for educators in each building to examine their benchmark results, and other data in LinkIt. At Marlborough, sister school Hereford Elementary, and the 4th & 5th Grade Center, the data days are strategically set for the end of every trimester. They're led by the principals, instructional coaches, math specialists, and reading specialists of each school, and generally feature broader looks at data and trends.

PLCs, on the other hand, go into more detailed examinations of data. PLCs have been used for data analysis for several



Stephens (center) with Marlborough teachers Stephanie Ruane, Greta Salmons, Tessa Kiesel, and Jared Krupp

years. However, with the new MTSS vigilance, the weekly PLCs for each grade were used last year to finely track individual student progress. The performance of students receiving Tier 2 and Tier 3 intervention, who were assessed every two weeks in 2022-23, received a particularly close watch, as well as in Stephens' weekly data meetings with the school's instructional coach, reading specialist, and math specialist. The amount of tracking, data mining, and follow-up with targeted differentiation was extraordinary.

"We did a tremendous amount of root cause analysis and used our benchmarks to really analyze where kids were falling," said Stephens. "We got down to the nitty-gritty, then used more diagnostic assessments along the way. We dug deeper into what fundamentals kids were really struggling with."

A great deal of PLC discussion last year was devoted to intervention strategies and pedagogy, too. "We spent a lot of time with our teachers on best practices and the science of reading and math, and looking across the board to see if 80% of our kids are hitting our benchmarks," Stephens said. "If not, then what can we do to get them there?"

Each grade also deconstructed their math and ELA learning standards, often tracing them back to standards in prior grades to better understand the skill progression. Sometimes, a student's weakness can be caused by a failure to master a prerequisite concept or skill.

Setting high bars

Marlborough Elementary School has transcended a data culture; it possesses an achievement culture that helped provide the catalyst for the impressive PSSA growth. There's an important difference between the two mindsets. To go from one to the other requires three key ingredients: clear evidence-based objectives, a timetable, and motivation.

As an extension of its overhauled MTSS framework, the district tasked each school with establishing academic goals. In 2022-23, Marlborough placed those objectives front and center. Stephens worked with teachers and instructional specialists to establish individual student goals, grade-level goals, and even building goals. In all cases, the goals were based on certain topics, skills, and standards that the educators targeted for strengthening.

Combined with the intensive intervention and support efforts, the measurable learning objectives imparted each school day with a sense of purpose beyond teaching and learning the curriculum. Teachers and students focused on growth.

Goals were discussed with kids in age-appropriate terms. It could be something as simple as explaining, Today you recognized 10 sight words, on Friday let's try for 12.

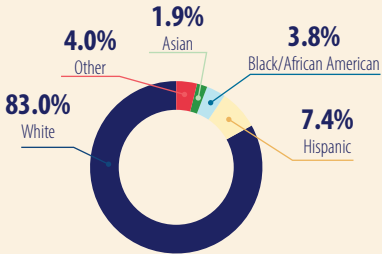
"A goal gives them that ownership of their education and has them feel that pride, that responsibility of 'I can do this,'" said Tessa Kiesel, a first-grade teacher. The process helps students understand the expectations that teachers have for them and

can be a driving source of motivation. "Having kids be a part of their own education like that helps you move them farther along. And seeing their excitement when they reach their goal, that's just great."

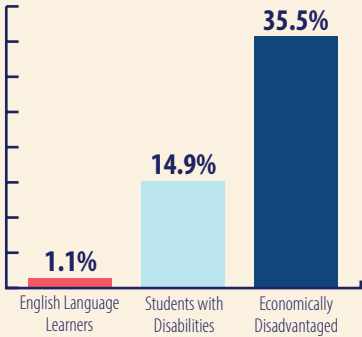
The third-grade PSSA goals were shattered in 2022-23, but the scores were really the product of two years of diligent needs analysis, targeted interventions, and high-caliber, individualized instruction. While PSSA scores steal the spotlight, all grade levels at Marlborough exceeded their year-end objectives, a clear indicator of the school's holistic success.

UPPER PERKIOMEN AT A GLANCE

State: Pennsylvania
County: Montgomery County
Enrollment: 3,198
Grade Configuration: K-12
Number of Schools: 5
Race:



Programs:



Data Source: Future Ready PA Index

LinkIt Partner Since: 2017
SIS: Skyward
Assessment Strategy: LinkIt! Benchmarks, NWEA MAP, DIBELS
Third-Party Data Sets: PSSA, Keystone, AP, ACCESS for ELLs, PSAT, SAT, Attendance, Grades, Behavior
Solutions Implemented: Data Warehouse, Intervention Manager, Navigator Analytics, Assessment Solutions

A high school turns adversity into advantage



In July 2019, just three months into his tenure as high school principal in the Dallas School District, **Greg Riley** received an envelope from the Pennsylvania Department of Education. Correspondence from the PDE is always greeted with trepidation, and Dallas

High School had been designated as a school in need of support. And now as the guy in the big chair, Riley owned the problem.

DHS was specifically classified as a school requiring Additional Targeted Support and Improvement (A-TSI), a term defined as underperformance by “one or more student groups.” At DHS, a low percentage of special education students passed the Literature Keystone exam; in addition, the entire school had low attendance in a recent year, largely due to a teacher strike. The latter had already righted itself; the former, however, would require effort and coordination.

“I wasn’t shocked because of the attendance piece,” said Riley. “We had some thoughts from our regular reporting that we would have an issue. But the special education part, that did surprise me.”

The A-TSI designation was a blemish on the sterling reputation of one of the top high schools in the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton area, located in one of the region’s best districts. However, the sky most certainly was not falling.

Riley doesn’t rattle easily. He served as assistant principal at DHS for nearly four years before taking the helm; over that time, he developed a reputation as a confident, driven, and progressive instructional leader. Prior to finding his way into administration, Riley taught music for 15 years. On the weekends, you can still find him

on keyboards or sax with a Journey tribute band, or playing popular events such as Oktoberfest at Mohegan Pennsylvania and the Pittston Tomato Festival. More than anyone, he understands that hitting a wrong note is not the end of the world; what matters is how you recover and move forward.

With his enthusiasm for fresh ideas, Riley turned out to be the right leader at the right time. He and his administrative team spun the A-TSI designation into an advantage. Within two short years, the team marked DHS with an indelible stamp, transforming the school through data-informed instruction, curriculum improvement, targeted intervention and support, and continuous professional development.

The first step

The PDE provides detailed frameworks that designated schools must use to develop improvement plans. At DHS, the process included coordination with the local intermediate unit, gathering input from stakeholders, and conducting an exhaustive data review and needs assessment. Fortuitously, DHS had slated a rollout of LinkIt! to the entire faculty the following month, with LinkIt! Benchmark exams planned soon thereafter.

Drowning in a sea of test data two years prior, in 2017, then-Assistant Principal Riley learned about LinkIt! at a conference and was impressed at the platform’s extensive warehousing capabilities. He was instrumental in the high school administration’s adoption of LinkIt! to disaggregate Keystone and PSSA results. The following year, 2018, the testing of the LinkIt! waters expanded to a cadre of talented teachers in the Keystone-tested subjects. They evaluated the platform’s ability to identify the strengths and weaknesses of students, and guide

instruction. A plan was developed to introduce LinkIt! to the entire starting with the beginning of school in fall 2019. The stars had aligned and LinkIt! was ready to roll out on the heels of the A-TSI classification, just when the school needed it most.

Secondary school educators often approach data utilization with a degree of skepticism. They might view the concept as intrusive, somehow tainting the sanctity of the subjects they fell in love with. Some may question its necessity, while others may view data analysis as an arduous task that cuts into precious instructional and planning time. Riley, with a keen understanding of these challenges, positioned the A-TSI designation as a catalyst for major change by delivering a simple message: Data is needed, and it will be thoughtfully used as a powerful tool to enhance instruction across all subjects.

"It got us faculty buy-in [of LinkIt!] earlier than we'd expected," said Riley about the state's classification. "I said basically 'Okay, we're in A-TSI, we're one of the highest performing school districts in the county, here's our plan.' And that really jump-started the whole LinkIt! adoption."

DHS administered LinkIt's fall and winter benchmarks. Educators dissected the results and compared the scores looking for trends and monitoring student progress. This marked an important moment in the school's journey toward data-driven decision-making, according to Matt Samuel, English department chair.

"Meaningful conversations were born from those data points," he said. "We were able to say here's what's working, here's where we're struggling. 'These students [for example] don't understand author's purpose.' And those kinds of conversations guided curriculum decisions, intervention, class creation, and assessment design."

Not only did the benchmark analyses show teachers the targeted insight that could be gleaned from LinkIt! data, they offered a hands-on opportunity for teachers to familiarize themselves with the platform's features.

Everything was progressing according to plan – until it suddenly wasn't.

A window of opportunity

With the Covid-19 pandemic, the nationwide suspension of in-person classes and the transition to remote instruction threw schools into chaos; computers had to be distributed, passwords issued, and students and staff trained to conduct video conferences.

All was calm, however, at DHS. The school segued smoothly, barely missing a beat. Students were already adept at using Google Classroom and Google's suite of educational tools. "While other people were scrambling to provide online instruction, we were good, we were ready to go," said Riley.

As the physical shutdown lengthened to the remainder of the academic year, Riley and his team made preparations for the inevitable re-opening. Teachers and administrators rewrote the curriculum for every single high school course. The extraordinary effort updated curricula that hadn't seen a major revision in nearly a decade. Sequence and pacing were improved, and content was more closely aligned to state standards.

Attention then shifted to intervention. Although the bulk of the 2019-20 curriculum was taught prior to the pandemic, the shift to remote learning undoubtedly resulted in learning gaps. Engagement levels varied, and the effectiveness of virtual instruction differed from student to student. Uncertainty also loomed over when schools would open their doors for 2020-21 and the modality to be used. Even more instructional ground might need to be made up.

Two things were clear, though: Students would require more remediation and support than ever before, and teachers would need more instructional time and resources. Riley and the administrative team seized this post-pandemic opportunity to fully embrace data-informed instruction.



Riley (second from left) with the Dallas School District administrative team

For the 2020-21 school year, a flexible time block was carved out from the master schedule for Mountaineer Minutes, a multi-use period at the end of the day named after the school's mountaineer mascot. This enabled DHS teachers to have weekly PLC sessions designed to enhance their professional skills and focus on the improvement of student performance. The PLCs are often geared toward collaboratively analyzing data, conducting root cause analysis, and tailoring instructional practices to address specific topics, skills, and standards.

The PLC work often guides targeted data-driven intervention which occurs during this time window twice per week. Teachers typically work with students in small groups organized by need, providing extended instructional time that can help kids master core content.

In addition, LinkIt's use in the school was expanded; along with the continued use of benchmarks, DHS utilized the company's Prime digitization service to prepare 80 assessments for online testing that year (and 328 additional assessments the following year). The digitized assessments included unit tests for the Keystone subjects, which offered immediate feedback and progress tracking since they were administered through the platform. Remediation could begin the next day rather than weeks after the content was covered in class.

The introduction of PLCs, weekly intervention periods, updated curriculum, and more testing via LinkIt were game changers that transformed the educational landscape of the school. In the face of adversity, DHS emerged revitalized and stronger than ever.

And then they followed

In the following years, unit tests in all subjects have made their way into LinkIt. DHS has also opened LinkIt's student and parent portals, helping to spark academic conversations at home and encouraging students to take a more active role in monitoring their own progress.

The marked success DHS had with LinkIt! spurred the entire district to become part of the LinkIt! family later that year. Riley takes pride in being the first kid on the block to use the platform and see its value. He takes even more pride in the faculty's fast embrace and effective use of data.

Data-informed instruction and frequent progress monitoring became cornerstones of the school's improvement plan to better prepare special education students in ELA; the restructuring of the special education department was also a significant component. Moving away from a generalist model, educators began to specialize in specific subject areas, bringing more targeted expertise and support to students.

Over a span of three years, this strategic shift yielded impressive results. **The percentage of special education students that passed the Literature Keystone exam nearly tripled.** DHS distinguished itself as one of the few schools in the state to successfully navigate its way out of the A-TSI designation, showcasing the profound impact of data-informed practices and specialized teaching on student achievement.

DALLAS AT A GLANCE

State: Pennsylvania
 County: Luzerne County
 District Enrollment: 2,467
 Grade Configuration: K-12
 Number of Schools: 4
 Race:

Race	Percentage
White	88.9%
Hispanic	4.9%
Other	2.9%
Asian	2.0%
Black/African American	1.3%

Programs:

Program	Percentage
English Language Learners	0.8%
Students with Disabilities	16.5%
Economically Disadvantaged	27.8%

Data Source: Future Ready PA Index

 LinkIt Partner Since: 2019
 SIS: eSchool Data
 Assessment Strategy: LinkIt! Benchmarks, Acadience

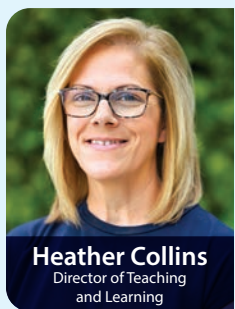
 Third-Party
 Data Sets: PSSA, Keystone, PSAT, SAT, AP, Attendance, Grades
 Solutions Implemented: Data Warehouse, Navigator Analytics, Assessment Solutions





Kennett runs on data

The world seems so far removed from the COVID-19 pandemic and the effects it wrought. Distant are the memories of health concerns and the paralyzing halt to society that disrupted the lives of everyone on the planet. The mind compresses time and dulls painful moments.



Heather Collins
Director of Teaching
and Learning

For Heather Collins, Ed.D., director of teaching and learning at Kennett Consolidated School District, memories of the time are vivid, not only for the hurdles that were leaped but for the successes she helped lead. One of the most impactful was the district-wide implementation of LinkIt.

Collins joined Kennett as the director of special education and student services in April 2020, a month into remote instruction following the pandemic shuttering of all Pennsylvania schools.

Beginning any new job requires time devoted to meeting colleagues and forging new relationships. For Collins, the pandemic meant there would be no welcome handshakes; her introductions to staff members were done in her

living room via Zoom. While she held essentially the same position in a larger school system in Delaware, which she left to join Kennett, every district has its own unique processes and procedures. She had to learn Kennett's on the run and develop new ones as she helped address the emergency pandemic needs of the district and some of its most vulnerable students.

"It was like building the plane as you were flying it, but with a lot of turbulence," Collins recalled.

Pupil personnel services encompasses the instruction of students with special needs and the delivery of support for all students. This includes the work of school nurses, guidance counselors, psychologists, speech and language therapists, and social workers – services that don't translate well to phone and video communication necessitated by the highest level of COVID-19 protocols. Monitoring the progress of students during this unprecedented time in history was more important than ever.

Collins found a decentralized system of data collection and distribution. Everyone seemed to be doing something different. Data was locked up in the platforms of individual assessments. Accessing it was time-

consuming, but also difficult to disaggregate and parse. Spreadsheets were compiled by hand.

"There were Google Sheets upon Google Sheets, and Google Drives," said Collins. "At one of my first cabinet meetings with the superintendent, we were sitting there trying to examine data, and every five minutes someone would get on the phone to the tech department and say 'We need this data,' 'We need that data.'"

On the receiving end of those phone calls was Kevin Bridges, the district's supervisor of information systems and data reporting. The labor-intensive process of compiling top-level assessment data fell on his shoulders more often than not.

"Whenever we needed to look at data at a district or school level, and taking all these different data pieces and putting them together, it would usually come to me," said Bridges, a tech and numbers wizard who spent his early career working in finance. "I would do a little something in Excel and put it together, a very static document. It was nothing dynamic, nothing that was accessible to all, nothing that was living and breathing. And it had to be constantly updated. During the pandemic, when everything is virtual and we're trying to measure what's going on with our kids, finding a data solution was more important than ever."

Charting a course

The COVID closure in March 2020 struck not even two months into the tenure of D. Dusty Blakey, Ed.D., Kennett's new superintendent. The well-respected educator had ended his superintendency in Delaware and packed his bags for Kennett's rolling hills. Blakey made it known early on that an important short-term priority was to develop a unified data system, one that could store information from multiple assessments and be easily accessible to everyone – something like the system he was accustomed to in his former state. Data was an essential part of his larger vision of Kennett. And while he was new to Kennett, his near decade of experience helming a system of 15 schools gave him the foundation and expertise to manage anything that came along.

When Collins joined the district, Blakey found a data compadre in his fellow former Delawarean. Still in her role as special ed and student services director, Collins was desperate for data. "I needed to see how we were progressing and our special education students are learning. And [even in the pandemic] we still were tied to state and federal law and reporting."

The administrative team began the search for a data platform to meet Kennett's needs, with Collins assigned

to a leading role. Collins is calming, gracious, unflappable, and precise, an expert at channeling resources to meet a goal. The data initiative and its inevitable rollout perfectly suited her talents.

At a meeting early in the search process, central office administrators and members of the technology department discussed their data needs and vision. Bridges quietly slipped out to his office. He returned minutes later and proclaimed "I have this catalog."

In his hand was a publication he'd recently received: the LinkIt! Software Compendium. Published annually and mailed to clients and non-clients alike, the compendium describes the primary features and services of LinkIt. Numerous screenshots show how the capabilities work together to form a tight-knit, cohesive data ecosystem that is interactive, allows for cross-comparison of multiple measures including state and third-party assessments, and integrates with student management systems.

"This is actually everything we need," Bridges recalls saying. "If this company could actually do what is in this booklet, this would be exactly what we need."

LinkIt! CEO Ryan Winter virtually presented an overview of LinkIt! for the administrative team. The guided tour demonstrated LinkIt's capabilities with actual anonymized data. It focused on warehousing features and the interactive disaggregation of scores on various assessments. Winter also showed the ability to compile and sort SEL and behavioral data, track student growth, examine student performance by skill and standard, and even create and administer assessments in LinkIt's testing module.

After examining other possible data solutions, the team decided in the spring of 2021 to pilot the platform in the upcoming school year. A well-planned rollout was imperative; administrators were cognizant of the risks of implementing such a major game-changing initiative too quickly. While, at the time, the pandemic seemed to be winding down, anxiety was still on high with questions about the future. Adding a new data platform to an all-ready full plate, central office feared, would derail the initiative before it even began.



"We were all so taxed," said Kelly Figueroa, an instructional technology coach who taught fourth grade during the early months of the shutdown. "I would say, You can't ask teachers to do one more new thing or they will just cry. We need to go slowly at the beginning."

With the anticipation of a smooth introduction, a three-year phase-in was developed. The first year was intended to be a transitional period with building-level administrators and teachers growing accustomed to the new data management system and, just as important, the new paradigm. Educators on the instructional frontlines would directly access and analyze data for their own students, not have it handed to them by the tech department or administer their own assessments at the start of the school year for insight into what could already be gleaned.

Then the extraordinary happened: The confluence of pandemic need and individual empowerment drove the embrace of this new way of doing business. "By the end of Year 1, we were on Year 3.5 of our implementation plan," said Dan Maguire, the district's director of technology.

Excitement and possibilities

Resistance to change can come in all shapes and forms, from unwillingness to take on different responsibilities and a failure to see a purpose, to concern about a lack of support and resources. Kennett's implementation accelerated at warp speed because of its purposeful design which naturally addressed these potential road bumps.

Kennett set specific goals for its test drive of LinkIt!. During this time, Kennett schools, like every school in the nation, grappled with addressing post-pandemic learning gaps and helping students catch up with their social and emotional development. The district did not throw LinkIt! into the air as another ball to be juggled by teachers and building administrators. The introduction and subsequent steps unfolded logically and with purpose, and served as the catalysts for the accelerated LinkIt! adoption.

"This is the most thoughtful evaluation I've ever seen," said Winter. "It's why their first year was such a home run."

The 2021-22 pilot year was designed with four overarching goals:

- Solicit input from a variety of stakeholders on the ways LinkIt! could be used
- See the identification of actionable goals
- See a change in practices and student outcomes
- Secure staff acceptance of LinkIt! and an active willingness to utilize it

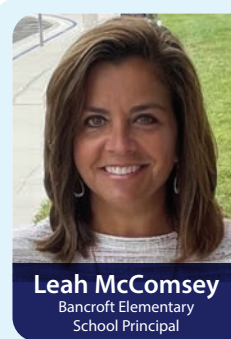
Early training sessions in the spring of 2021 for central and building administrators set the table for success.

Held before the roll-out to all staff, the hands-on workshops provided practical instruction on key features of the LinkIt! platform. LinkIt! had imported five years of Kennett's historical data including PSSA and Keystone scores, ACCESS for ELLs scores (for English learners), DIBELS, NWEA MAP, and PSATs. Discipline and attendance data were brought in, too. For the first time, administrators had one place for all data; at their fingertips were statistical portraits of every student in the district. Suddenly, growth could be easily tracked by skill and standard, scores on multiple assessments could be compared, and so much more.

Also examined were LinkIt! Navigator Analytics reports which disaggregated Kennett's Keystone and PSSA results. Data was separated by demographic, school, grade, and teacher which encouraged a granular examination. In many ways, these custom reports serve as principal compasses that chart the course for improvement.

The introduction to LinkIt! opened minds to the possibilities. "The principals realized in that room how easy this data was to get at now," Maguire said. "You are now empowered," was the message. There was excitement. 'Can it do that?' 'Can it do this?' They were excited to have this control and learn how to do it themselves, then transfer it to their teaching staff. It was organic. We planted the seed."

During another session, this time for principals and teacher leaders in their buildings, the training focuses on accessing various reports. Principals and their teachers were given time to discuss how this information could be used at the building and classroom levels.



This interaction with staff proved to be seminal for Leah McComsey, Bancroft Elementary School principal of 13 years who logged more than a few hours creating color-coded spreadsheets. "Hearing their input was really powerful," she said. "It opened my eyes into different ways that the teaching staff might be able to utilize this tool." (see page 16)

Just as important as learning to use LinkIt! and sort data was the heightened level of anticipation the development session created. A buzz was soon in the air in advance of the official introduction to the entire faculty.

"This really helped get the word out there," said McComsey. "Wow, there's this cool new thing!" Teachers [from that training session] were talking about it with their teams and getting people excited. When it came



From left to right: Kelly Figueroa, Kevin Bridges, and Dan Maguire

time to formally roll it out to everyone, a little bit of information had leaked out. They were hearing ‘We’re going to be able to do with this.’ ‘We’re going to be able to make [differentiated] groups’ ‘We’re going to be able to put tests online.’ ‘We’re going to have instantaneous grading and reporting.’ The excitement was contagious.”

LinkIt! training was conducted during grade level and subject area meetings, as well as during professional development days. And both the tech department and LinkIt! educational consultants were available to answer questions. The periodic training and constant support sent the message that this new platform would play a pivotal role in moving the district forward.

In a way, the fast adoption of LinkIt! by Kennett teachers was aided by the pandemic. Because of the limitations of remote instruction, teachers had anticipated learning gaps in their students. Now, here was a method to easily identify them and group them together for differentiation. Teachers viewed LinkIt! as a helpful tool rather than another responsibility they were saddled with.

Quickly too, for most teachers, came the realization that LinkIt! saves time, and its value in identifying student needs with pinpoint accuracy would be a game-changer. PSSA and Keystone scores were easily sorted and analyzed to identify strengths and weaknesses. Scores on thrice-yearly benchmarks were assessed almost immediately, helping accelerate the remediation and enrichment process. For teachers, particularly special education teachers, the time savings was substantial.

“Special education teachers and specialists would spend most of the month of September giving assessments and then a month analyzing the data from individual students, before they could even start intervention with

kids,” said Collins. “Intervention was starting mid-October. And I think this was one of the biggest realizations early on, that they were losing weeks of instructional time when they could have been working with kids. Now all of a sudden they can pull up what they need for everyone in an hour.”

Almost immediately, says Collins, the “floodgates opened.” When you’re given the keys to a new car, you want to try out and use every feature. It’s natural. Unfortunately, not every LinkIt! module had been activated for Kennett, including the testing component. Within months, a push had snowballed.

“Everyone looked at the historical data and said ‘Okay, this is all great, but I need data on yesterday’s math test so that I can make instructional decisions for tomorrow,’” said Figueroa.

The wave of formatives began. The Test Authoring module was activated, and teachers were soon adding their own common unit assessments into LinkIt, assessments that students completed right in the LinkIt! platform. Results were instantaneous. Then came the activation of the Mastery Item Bank, a massive set of questions from Instructure that are mapped to individual skills and standards and can be imported directly into LinkIt! assessments natively in that same Test Authoring module.

Just like that, within a year, Kennett had moved beyond Year 3 of its implementation plan. The momentum was entirely teacher-driven. Supported by the technology department and central and building administration, the faculty learned how to disaggregate data in LinkIt, felt comfortable with their capabilities, and wanted to move beyond. They saw the possibilities.

A district transformed

Fast forward just over two years. Kennett runs on data and LinkIt! is ubiquitous, a language spoken by everyone.

The easy accessibility of data has changed conversations at every level across the district. At subject team meetings and grade-level PLC meetings, data is now a focal point. Every school, including the high school, has a scheduled block of time for intervention/enrichment. Data serves as the catalyst for discussions about the efficacy of pedagogies, books, and support materials, and the distribution of resources. At cabinet meetings, the phone that buzzed with data requests to the tech department now sits quiet.

“It’s transformative, the way that teachers are able to pinpoint their instruction, the way that they can differentiate or accelerate learning for the students based on instant data that is at their fingertips,” said McComsey. “We’re using data constantly, not just three or four times a year or once every week. It’s ongoing and it’s transformed the teaching and the learning in my building.”

The district also worked with LinkIt! consultants to create a rigorous and cohesive MTSS manual and protocol that is consistent across the district (see page 17). Targeted supports and intervention plans are built and monitored using LinkIt! data. The process integrates seamlessly with Intervention Manager, the company’s popular intervention dashboard that allows easy progress tracking and setting of tier cut scores.

Data has also spread beyond the purview of just educators, too. It’s shared with parents at parent-teacher conferences. And students use it to set goals for themselves, a powerful technique to enhance executive function and boost performance.

Kennett’s teachers and administrators exuberantly speak about data. In a group, they talk over each other and in rapid fire. Numbers themselves don’t elicit emotion; underlying the sentiment is how LinkIt’s analytics and easy access to data have changed not just instruction, but everything. Kennett has come so far in such a short time – during one of the most serious crises to face the nation and its schools. It’s a testament to everyone in the district.

“The superintendent’s message was always clear,” said Collins. “He envisioned a district with a true student-centered focus that tailors learning for each child. The only way to create that personalized learning environment was to have data readily available and accessible immediately to meet the needs of the students on a day-to-day basis. Access to data is empowering

and it helps our principals lead their buildings. His vision started us down this path.”

In many ways, Kennett is a model for the introduction and implementation of LinkIt. The project reinforced the strong connection between its responsive technology department and its instructional staff. There’s more work to be done, there always is. And new challenges constantly arise. However, 2021 will be remembered in the district not for COVID-fueled instructional challenges but for the huge leap forward in Kennett’s evolution.

KENNETT AT A GLANCE

State: Pennsylvania
County: Chester County
District Enrollment: 3,906
Grade Configuration: K-12
Number of Schools: 6
Race:

Race	Percentage
White	48.4%
Hispanic	44.6%
Black/African American	1.8%
Asian	1.7%
Other	3.5%

Programs:

Program	Percentage
English Language Learners	16.5%
Students with Disabilities	11.8%
Economically Disadvantaged	45.9%

Data Source: Future Ready PA Index

LinkIt Partner Since: 2021
SIS: Skyward
Assessment Strategy: NWEA MAP, Acadience
Third-Party
Data Sets: PSSA, Keystone, AP, PSAT, SAT, Grades, Attendance, Behavior, ACCESS for ELLs
Solutions Implemented: Data Warehouse, Intervention Manager, Navigator Analytics, Assessment Solutions



Leah McComsey, Principal



Executing on a district's vision, one school at a time

Some teachers in the Kennett Consolidated School District share data at parent-teacher conferences and also with students to set realistic academic goals. Research repeatedly shows that student goal setting is a helpful methodology. The process and follow-up engages students and boosts academic performance.

Bancroft Elementary School exemplifies this practice. For several years, fourth- and fifth-graders have been encouraged to set targets for each major assessment. Now, in the 2023-24, the approach has been encouraged for grades 1-3.

Bancroft Principal Leah McComsey stressed the importance of asking students to consider their work and note both the achievements and areas that need improvement.

"After the assessments, there's a feedback loop," McComsey said. "The teachers will have a mini-conference with each student and talk about their performance. They'll talk about whether they hit their goal, if they did or if they didn't, the whys and the why nots. It gives time for kids to self-reflect and consider strengths and weaknesses.

Self-reflection – the critical contemplation of what they know and don't know – has been shown in studies to be an invaluable strategy when practiced consistently

According to McComsey, the self-reflection process at Bancroft is always framed in a positive, motivating context. The message is one of empowerment and is designed to help students feel that they're participating more in their own education.

"The goal setting and conversations are all age appropriate," McComsey said. "We most definitely can have those conversations without stressing out students. We certainly don't want to do that. But there's a lot of power in students knowing what their goals and expectations are."

Setting learning goals also cultivates student agency – the capacity to act independently and make their own choices. They feel more in-control over their learning and take greater responsibility for their levels of achievement. They monitor their progress towards meeting their goals, which contributes to sustained engagement and enthusiasm.

Tech coach Kelly Figueroa, who has two children in the district, has personally seen the impact of sharing data and establishing goals, and the growth mindset the process inspired. "Right now, my son will tell you that he grew exponentially and made 99 percentile growth in ELA," she said of her sixth-grader. "That's motivating for him. Seeing something he's not proud of and then kicking it into high gear for the year, and come home

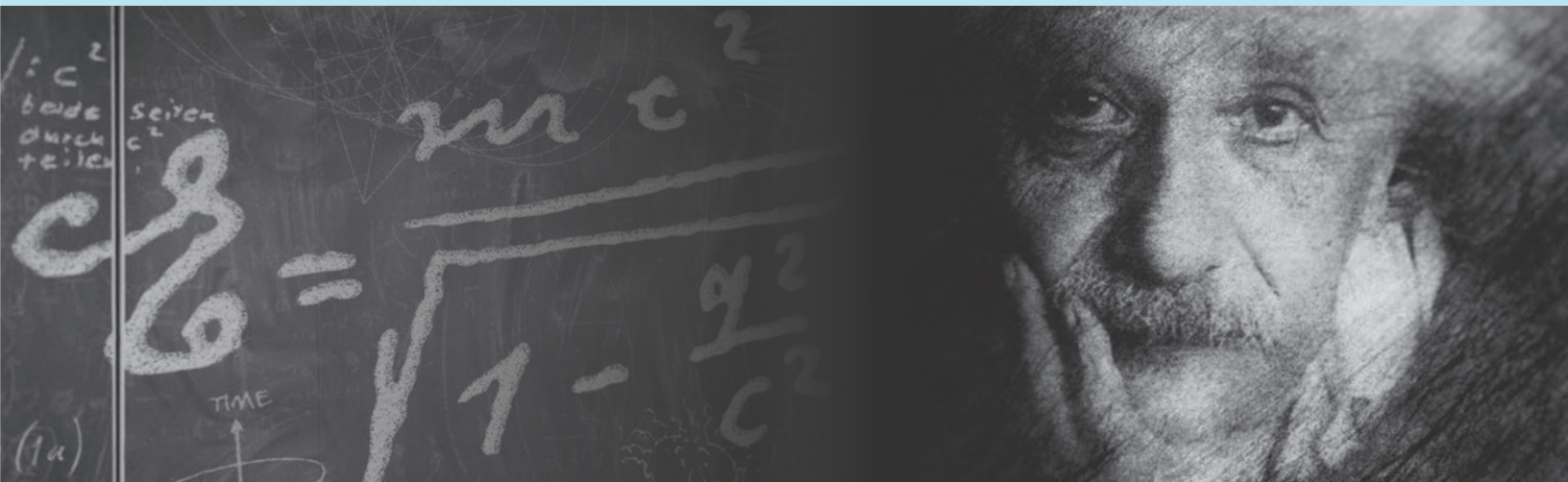
and say 'Mom, guess what? I grew,' is so exciting for me as a mother and an educator."

Jaclyn Musser, special education teacher at Kennett Middle School, has championed data-driven dialogue for several years. It's an effective strategy, she said, for fostering a culture of collective growth and a sense of shared purpose.

"We'll do one-on-one [data conferences], sometimes we'll do small groups if they're kind of in the same wavelength," she said. "It depends on the class, but I'm huge on building a culture where students are comfortable talking about their scores with each other. The kids don't see it as a competition and say 'I did better than you.' It's more like 'We're going to work together to grow.' And any time you can motivate middle schoolers to work harder and smarter, you take it."

Goal setting, however, transcends the four walls of the classroom, says Heather Collins, Ed.D, director of teaching and learning. "It's really more a life lesson than about school. Setting goals then working to achieve them teaches perseverance and responsibility. That's what we're trying to instill in our students."

Creating a framework for success: an MTSS consulting case study



In his relentless quest for understanding, Albert Einstein dedicated the last three decades of his life to the search for an overarching cohesive framework for the universe. He envisioned an elegant, singular model that would harmonize the fundamental forces of physics, neatly explaining how all the formulas and moving parts of the universe work in tandem.

A multi-tiered system of supports brings to education what Einstein attempted to do for the cosmos. An effective MTSS model is a framework with the overarching goal being student achievement, but requires the examination of all areas of a student's needs — from academic, to behavior, to SEL, to executive functioning, and mental health. It is designed to address each student's unique needs and help them grow. It's an elegant, singular model where all the formulas and moving parts of the educational mechanism — curriculum, pedagogy, and student services — work in tandem, ensuring each student is holistically propelled forward in all facets.

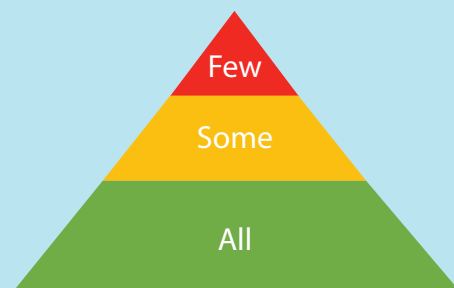
MTSS answers the questions, who is this student now, what is needed for each of them to become better, what data/progress criteria will be used as barometers, and how will educators collaborate to ensure growth? While Response to Intervention centers on one facet of education, academic achievement, MTSS includes two others: SEL and behavior.

MTSS begins with a simple premise: Most students can be divided into three groups based on the different levels of support needed to move them forward.

- **Tier 1:** This is the foundation for the entire system and represents high quality instruction with universal interventions, usually within the general classroom. These interventions might include differentiated instruction and behavior management strategies.
- **Tier 2:** Some students need a little extra assistance in meeting academic and behavioral goals. Tier 2 provides these targeted interventions, which typically involve small-group sessions or more specialized interventions.

- **Tier 3:** A small subset of students with significant challenges that do not respond to the supports in Tier 1 or Tier 2. Intensive individualized interventions are provided which may involve one-on-one sessions that are highly tailored to a student's specific needs.

The visual diagram for MTSS is a three-layered triangle, which also serves to indicate the relative numbers of students in each group. Tier 1 is the largest slice of the triangle at which 80–90% of students should be, Tier 2 is the middle slice and should represent 10–15% of students; Tier 3 is the smallest of all with 3–5% of students.



LinkIt! offers an extensive selection of MTSS professional development

and consultation services including needs assessment, development of MTSS district handbook, sustained support, and introductory and advanced PD for administrators, classroom teachers, interventionists, and special education teachers. Since LinkIt! offers a data-driven intervention management system, the emergence of LinkIt's MTSS services was a natural evolution; while Intervention Manager and LinkIt's MTSS consulting seamlessly unite to form a powerful metasystem for improvement, one is not essential for the other.

Two veterans with extensive education technology, special education, RTI, and MTSS credentials coordinate LinkIt's delivery of these services:



Frankie Jones, senior VP of professional services & special programs, brings an extraordinary array of diverse expertise and experiences to LinkIt. A results-driven collaborator and energetic leader, Jones has worked with more than 1,500 school districts over the course of nearly three decades, helping to improve and implement educational technology, MTSS/RTI, special education, 504 development, ELL offerings, and gifted education programs.



Christie Schutz Vincelli, Ed.D., senior director of professional services, is an award-winning teacher, presenter, published researcher, and school administrator. Her skills and broad range of expertise includes educational leadership, MTSS/RTI, special education, staff development, educational technology, research, and program and curriculum development. She holds a doctorate of education from Seton Hall University in South Orange, New Jersey.

The dynamic and dauntless Jones/Schutz Vincelli duo lead the work of a team of professionals that includes certified reading and math specialists, instructional coaches, experts in 504s, attorneys specializing in special education, equity consultants, behaviorists, and gifted & talented experts.

A case study: Kennett Consolidated School District



Something needed to be done about intervention.

That much was clear to central office, particularly to new Superintendent D. Dusty Blakely, Ed.D., and Heather Collins, Ed.D., then director of special education and student services (now director of teaching and learning). Blakely had recently joined Kennett from a larger school system in Delaware, and Collins followed two months later from another Delaware district.

Over the years, the schools had been extended substantial autonomy and had devised their own intervention processes. Different schools and even different grades within a building were using different methods of assessment, remediation, and enrichment. Seen from afar, it was a patchwork of RTI and remnants of No Child Left Behind. Rather than a collective effort from a school's entire teaching and support staff using standard

measures and interventions, these silos stood relatively untethered to each other. That landscape is contrary to the educational equity that should be deeply embedded in a stalwart MTSS model; students across the district should receive the same high-quality support from classroom educators, counselors, and administrators no matter what school or classroom they are in.

"There was really no systemization," said Collins. "That was something we knew we needed coming out of the pandemic. We needed to get a handle on which groups are making it, which groups weren't, and how we were going to intervene. We knew coming out of the pandemic it would be an entirely different level of intervention than we had ever experienced."

More so than ever before, the district needed a helping hand. Time and personnel were at a premium, and creating a well-planned and well-executed system requires resources that just weren't there. LinkIt! CEO Ryan Winter, always attuned to the needs of clients, arranged a meeting that would alter Kennett's DNA.

"When Ryan introduced me to Frankie Jones, I said, 'Yes! She understands exactly what we're doing here,'" said Collins. "I explained to her the system we wanted and she said 'We'll build it. We'll write the manual, we'll do the training. You will get all these things.' And she and the LinkIt! team literally took the ideas that we had and built Kennett's system the way we wanted it."

Kennett's MTSS framework was constructed through a systematic methodology and included: a multiyear strategic plan, an extensive, written manual (with communication structures and flowcharts) describing processes

and educator responsibilities, ongoing professional development and support, a data solution and intervention management platform (in this case, LinkIt's Intervention Manager), and the opportunity for regular feedback and continuous system revisions to meet changing district and student needs.

Research guides development

Successful development of an MTSS framework hinges on understanding the unique dynamics of a school system. It's crucial to make the first step a research and needs assessment process. At its most fundamental level, the process helps establish a vision. More specifically, it's a tool for listening. Providing all stakeholders with a voice solidifies the framework's foundation by accurately representing the unique perspectives, strengths, and challenges (e.g., achievement gaps, budget constraints, influx of English Language Learners) of the school district. Research also helps understand the personnel and positions currently in place.

In Kennett, LinkIt! used instruments including staff surveys and personal interviews with administrators, counselors, and interventionists. The research focused on the six core elements of MTSS:

- ✓ Leadership and guidance
- ✓ Communication and collaboration
- ✓ Professional development and coaching
- ✓ Data evaluation
- ✓ Student screening and progress monitoring
- ✓ Levels of differentiated support

Obtaining the viewpoints of the ultimate users of any system fosters ownership and commitment.

"You have to be empathetic, you have to be listening to concerns and opinions," Jones said. "When that input is factored in, it creates buy-in. Then you have to do professional development so everyone feels like they can become champions."

According to Schutz Vincelli, presenting the research around the efficacy of MTSS also helps with the acceptance of the new system. "If you don't show them that MTSS is foundational, a key part of instruction, everyone is going to see this as taking on another thing and that won't go over well. MTSS is a framework that promotes best practice and one of the most effective strategies proven to help kids grow. That's the bottom line. It's good for kids."

After the general MTSS research, LinkIt! followed up with specific research to assess the existing process of working with ELLs and writing 504s.

Manual and professional development

At the heart of any effective MTSS model is a well-structured manual that outlines the crucial elements of the system. While the model can bend and is continuously revised as curriculum, personnel, schedules, and protocols change, there is little room for subjectivity or interpretation.

The Kennett standard operation manual was created to assist the district manage their internal processes for MTSS, and forms the playbook that all school personnel follow to help each student grow academically, socially, emotionally, and if necessary, behaviorally. With diagrams and flowcharts, the manual describes in detail the intervention process. Key components are defined, including intervention duration for the three

tiers, setting of cut scores and data points, establishment of SMART goals, frequency of data reviews, roles and responsibilities, and the significance of data teams at the grade, school, and district levels.

Once the MTSS model was created in partnership with central administration, staff members were trained to implement it. LinkIt! has delivered MTSS consultation and Intervention Manager software training to all stakeholders within the district; this training took place over a three-year window and the LinkIt! staff continues to provide support where needed. Much was done in small groups school by school. Hours of consulting – sometimes one-on-one – were also conducted to examine specific assessment data and intervention pedagogy. These training sessions were in addition to the PD on using the LinkIt! platform for test score analysis and unit assessment authoring.

The significant professional investment represented a resounding vote of confidence for LinkIt's consulting division. Through a constant presence and personal support, plus valued experience and insight from districts across the nation, Jones and LinkIt! staff members became trusted members of the Kennett family.

Data and Intervention Manager

MTSS is evidence-based. By using data as a guide to determine strengths and weaknesses, as well as movements between tiers, remediation, and enrichment are grounded in actual student need, not just educator perception.

"One of the reasons why MTSS is so incredibly powerful is that it's an equitable process that starts with data," said Schutz Vincelli. "Frankie and I talk about this all the time, that

some districts are using the ‘thinkies’ and the ‘feelies’ as opposed to what the actual objective information is telling them. That means kids are getting missed because people are thinking and feeling rather than using and analyzing assessments. While many teachers do know their students, using concrete evidence helps get a precise baseline and rightsize the magnitude of the issue. The combination of qualitative feedback and insight with objective-based assessment data yields is what will lead to the best outcomes.

“At the end of the day, what it comes down to is knowing how to read what your data’s telling you, making sure that you have a defined intervention system in place, and then by following good, solid instructional practice.”

Given the data-centric nature of MTSS, educators can find themselves inundated with assessment results, intervention logs, and progress monitoring reports. LinkIt’s Intervention Manager solves that problem by organizing and streamlining the MTSS process, allowing for easy

input and analysis. It’s a one-place student overview that seamlessly integrates with a district’s student information system.

Intervention Manager and its rich suite of resources help educators make actionable all types of data, including academic, behavioral, social and emotional, attendance, and executive functioning data. The platform also standardizes language and procedures for everyone within a district, ensuring consistency in how interventions are documented and monitored.

Intervention Manager is separated into two modules that can be used with or without LinkIt’s data warehousing and assessment software:

- **The Dashboard** provides customizable options for goal setting, progress monitoring, managing meetings and files, and creating teams. It also includes an extensive research-based content library of best-practice intervention plans, forms, document templates, goal/strategy banks, service

logs, and parent communication templates. These resources are provided for MTSS, gifted and talented programs, ELL support, and writing 504 plans. They save time, foster consistency, enhance collaboration, and help ensure equitable support for all learners.

- **The Grouping Module** allows users to utilize any combination of multiple measures and define custom performance criteria rules and auto-grouping methodologies to tier students, determine program eligibility, generate early warning dashboards, and create rosters that balance academic performance and demographic equity.

“Education has needed an MTSS solution like LinkIt’s Intervention Manager for decades,” said Collins. “It makes the intervention process more efficient by allowing our teachers to focus on the students and what is needed for learning rather than analyzing data for hours in spreadsheets. The data is available quickly and provides an electronic file for each student to track progress. We love this system.”



Dr. Schutz Vincelli conversing with educators at a recent professional development workshop



Exploring the data needs of cyber schools

The differences between online schools and brick-and-mortar schools go far beyond... well, the absence or presence of bricks and mortar. Because of those differences, cyber schools have different and more intensive data needs than traditional schools. The staff at PA Distance Learning Charter School make up the veins and arteries, and since joining the LinkIt! family in 2018-19, they have carried the lifeblood of critical data to every corner of the school.

A laser focus on learning

In many ways, cyber instruction is freeing. Teachers aren't encumbered with hall duty or cafeteria duty, walking students to specials, managing student conflicts, or modulating behavior. Principals don't face the daily triage that comes as school building manager or fixer. Gone are the heavy operational weights of transportation problems, lack of substitute teachers and classroom coverage, and facilities breakdowns. The dispensation of student discipline is largely removed as well.



Michael Leitera,
Chief Executive Officer

Without these operational and institutional duties, there are fewer detours to the mission of providing quality instruction and shepherding students along in their educational journeys. When **Michael Leitera**, Ed.D., joined PA Distance in 2023 as CEO after spending all of his career in the traditional education system, he found this laser attentiveness invigorating. "Here we're able to spend a great deal of time discussing academics," said Leitera, a former superintendent in two Pennsylvania districts. "We have a greater focus on learning and the management of learning as opposed to the management of a logistical organization. When you introduce busing and athletics and food and all

those different services, it can detract from your discussions about student learning and achievement."

Undivided attention on teaching and learning inevitably means a deeper and broader data scrutiny than in brick-and-mortar schools. Academic statistics have always been integral to PA Distance. Like many schools and school systems, the data had been painstakingly compiled by administrators in spreadsheets or sequestered away in the reporting section of the individual assessments. Since the introduction and expansion of LinkIt, PA Distance has experienced a crucial democratization of data. All student data is available to all educators all the time through LinkIt's warehousing. That means results from CDTs, PSSAs, Keystones, DIBELS, STAR, IXL – you name the acronym or initialism, it's there for review and cross-comparison. Even grades and attendance information are available, updated multiple times throughout the year from the Infinite Campus student information system.

Time for review

Collaborative data analysis has become a cornerstone. It takes place at regular data meetings and grade level and departmental PLCs. At the elementary and middle school level, that time helps inform and program WIN time for each K-8 student. In fact, PA Distance now has such a granular data focus that administrators often meet with teachers one-on-one to discuss the progress and needs of each child. The school recently reshuffled staff and schedules to provide the time for those individual reviews. It's also an opportunity, says Leitera, to identify trends and explore how teachers are performing with certain standards and skills.

"It really gets down to such a detailed level that we can start to see the holes in our curriculum in terms of scope and sequence,

but also we can start to look at the strengths and weaknesses of teachers,” Leitera said. “This helps us make better scheduling decisions and make better decisions about what professional development we need.”

In one-to-one meetings especially, but in all data reviews, a key to success is perspective. Data must be considered “something that’s joyful, even when it’s not a beautiful thing to look at,” says Leitera, because it answers questions or spurs further thought and action. Truth is a gift, never a gotcha. Cultivating a positive teacher-data relationship means shedding any perceptions of judgement and embracing the notion that student achievement is an ongoing collective effort.



“We’ve worked hard over these past years with LinkIt! to build a data community and a data culture,” said **Kelly Crooks**, chief academic officer and 16-year PA Distance veteran. “We want everyone to be part of the data conversation for each student. We want everyone to own the data, not just data specialists or data analysts. We want everyone to see different trends around the school. LinkIt! has enabled us to do that.”

In the 2022-23 school year, PA Distance adopted LinkIt’s Intervention Manager. The popular progress monitoring and tiering intervention organization tool was “literally a life changer for us,” said Crooks. Gone for good were Google Sheets and Google Docs. They were replaced with Intervention Manager’s easy-to-use system for documenting intervention plans, establishing goals, grouping students for shared intervention, and setting cut scores on assessments. IM also made it a breeze for teachers, instructional specialists, and other members of the MTSS team to communicate and collaborate with each other – and with parents.

Redefining success

The universal access to data, combined with LinkIt’s nimble disaggregation and universal color-coding system, has sparked a subtle but significant shift at PA Distance. With the ease of identifying the abilities of each student down to the specific standard, topic, and skill, instruction has become more individualized than ever. And with that emphasis, individual student growth has become a primary measure of success.

With a highly transient student population, a characteristic inherent in most online K-12 schooling, optimizing the time you have with a student is the priority. While it’s improbable that you can move a student from below basic to proficient, for example, over the course of a year or less, you can still significantly move the needle. For cyber schools, making that incremental growth is imperative.

“It’s hard to show proficiency when you don’t have students year after year,” said Crooks. Within a year’s time, as many as one-third of PA Distance students leave for a traditional

public or private school, or are home-schooled; a wave of new faces takes their place. Churn is par for the course. “We have to rely on growth. Our scores recently came out for some standardized testing and we weren’t all that excited. But we analyzed our growth, we felt better. LinkIt’s Navigator reports allow us to look at cohort groups and the online reporting platform allows us to analyze growth by time in school. So focusing on growth does help us to view the data through a different lens because you can see that the hard work is paying off. We’re growing these students. And that’s happening faster than seeing the successes by looking at proficiency.”

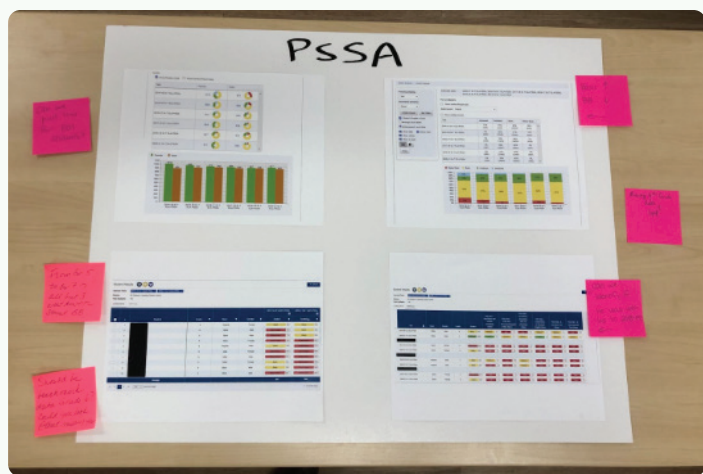
The high transience also makes assessing the efficacy of curriculum difficult. The school is in the rudimentary stages of working with LinkIt on a process to examine student achievement data based on length of enrollment. For systemic analysis and improvement, the results could be invaluable.

Measuring more than achievement

In the spring of 2020 every brick-and-mortar teacher became an online teacher, courtesy of Covid-19. The abrupt plunge was an eye-opening experience for many. Their past envy for their online colleagues’ ability to work from home quickly disappeared. In its place emerged a blurred work-life balance and a newfound appreciation of the challenges of online teaching and learning.



A data carousel with LinkIt! and PA Distance staff



Pedagogy that worked well in a physical classroom wasn't always effective for online instruction. Hands-on activities required effort in order to get supplies to kids, or couldn't be done at all. The development of teacher-student relationships and the nurturing of a sense of community necessitated a constant effort. But perhaps most significant of all was the difficulty in keeping students engaged and participating. Sometimes it's hard enough to keep kids engaged when they're seated right in front of you, much less on a computer screen.

"That's the challenge," said Leitera. "The challenge is to always try to better engage students, not just from an academic standpoint, but from a social standpoint as well."

PA Distance recently modified its attendance system to include a third category in addition to absent and present: present, but not engaged. It's the initial step in the school's intention to develop a more comprehensive dataset on student engagement.

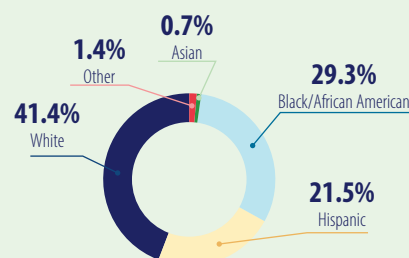
"What is engagement and how can we say that a student is an engaged learner in our school, that's what it comes down to," said Leitera. "Are they participating in live classes? Are they accessing online curriculum products? Are they using online intervention tools? Are they attending field trips? I think that engagement is such an important predictor of academic success and indicator of student belongingness."

The next step is to measure engagement systematically. Data indicating low engagement could serve as an early warning sign that a student is struggling. According to a 2018 Gallup poll, engaged students are 2.5 times more likely to say that they perform well in school and are 4.5 times more inclined to feel optimistic about their futures compared to their less engaged peers. The research also revealed that schools in the highest quartile of engagement had a notably higher percentage of students who met proficiency standards compared to schools in the lowest quartile. PA Distance will begin to send LinkIt! usage data from Zearn and Savaas to triangulate usage data on curriculum products and compare performance to both benchmark and state test scores.

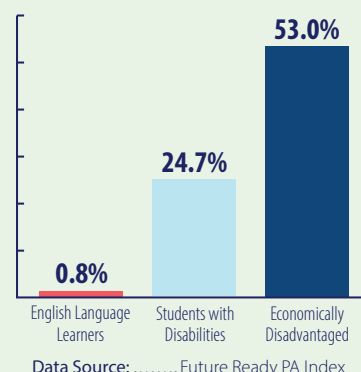
Every year, PA Distance's community engagement team hosts dozens of learning activities throughout the state. They're important real-world opportunities for students to interact. LinkIt! has also held engagement sessions with the PA Distance staff, including data carousels, an interactive exercise that allows educators to share their "notices" and "wonderings" based on different data tables and charts. As the 2020 quarantine has taught us: While technology has the power to bridge distances, it can't wholly replace the feelings of closeness and shared experience that are engendered when being together in the flesh.

PA DISTANCE AT A GLANCE

State: Pennsylvania
 Enrollment: 1,350
 Grade Configuration: K-12
 Race:



Programs:



Data Source: Future Ready PA Index

LinkIt Partner Since: 2018
 SIS: Infinite Campus
 Assessment Strategy: Acadience, STAR, CDT
 Third-Party
 Data Sets: Attendance, CDT, Grades, IXL, Keystone, PSSA, PVAAS, SAT, STAR
 Solutions Implemented: Data Warehouse, Intervention Manager, Navigator Analytics, Assessment Solutions



Portrait of data success

The corridors of Colonial Middle School were quiet and dim, but a glow emanated from room 104. Inside, a whiteboard was lit with graphs and banded charts of green, yellow, and red. Desks aligned in makeshift tables. Laid out were data reports, student writing and work samples, unit assessments, and three laptops open to LinkIt.

It was June 2022. A trio of ELA teachers sat immersed in the scores from the most recent PSSAs – Amanda Thornton (grade 6), Katie Kennedy (grade 7), and Josh Rothstein (grade 8). From the stacks of documents, you could tell this was no cursory glance. The aggregate figures looked good with few surprises; however, the practiced educators were here on a mission to examine the curriculum for a low-scoring ELA topic that stretched across all three middle school grade levels.

Compared to other areas, scores in Craft and Structure/Integration of Knowledge and Ideas raised eyebrows. This broad umbrella comprises state standards that reflect a student's ability to think critically about fiction and non-fiction texts, analyze an author's point of view or purpose, evaluate arguments, comprehend figurative language, and form connections between texts and ideas. The three data investigators scrutinized what was taught and how it related to questions on the PSSA itself.

"We took a look at what the standards were really asking," said Rothstein, a 15-year teaching veteran. "We then wrote a series of learning intentions and success criteria that we could share with our colleagues. So that way we all had the same definition of what it meant to be successful in each standard."

After that preliminary review, ELA teachers from each grade then met to decide how to better address the underlying standards, and they mapped out a plan of attack for the school year. The teachers reflected on and revised their lessons and activities concerning the ways authors craft stories and structure informational articles. More focus was placed on the examination of paragraph design and word choice to discern how the authors' choices affected readers. Different texts were chosen to be read and analyzed. Students completed more assignments and projects that focused on finding and identifying elements of craft and structure in short stories, poems, and informational and opinion pieces.

"We essentially sharpened their lenses as critical readers and directed them to pay attention to how authors use words effectively," Rothstein said.

The PSSA results announced in the summer of 2023 were decisive. (The proof, as the idiom goes, is in the cohort analysis.) Seventh-graders of 2022-23 correctly answered

30% more questions in Craft and Structure than they did in 2021-2022 as sixth-graders. The eighth-grade scores showed a more dramatic jump. Eighth-graders of 2022-2023 correctly answered 63% more questions than they did the prior year as seventh-graders.

The anecdote exemplifies Colonial School District's sophisticated data-driven approach, but it doesn't stand in isolation. Whether its Principal Kyrene Philips, Ed.D., rallying the troops at Plymouth Elementary School to boost student achievement in targeted standards or Math Curriculum Supervisor Edward Merk working across the district to raise math outcomes, data is interwoven into the district's very essence, from top to bottom. Data propels reflection and action on curriculum alignment, teaching methods, instructional materials, pacing, and allocation of resources and supports.

A long history of data use

Just half a dozen years ago, the work done by the middle school ELA teachers would have been unthinkable. Pre-LinkIt!, Colonial used Performance

Tracker, once a leading tool but since being acquired, investment in the tool and support did not keep up with the times. Teachers didn't access the former platform; data was so difficult to work with, it was mostly the domain of instructional coaches, supervisors, principals, and reading specialists who would then dish out reports to teachers.

"One of the limitations was its inability to run quick, efficient reports," said Maria Wileczek, science curriculum supervisor and senior member of the district office team. "Valuable, focused reports would take several hours of time to generate and share. LinkIt!, on the other hand, allows users to run targeted reports quickly, so teacher teams can see the exact data they need and immediately start having conversations."

The old data platform, however, introduced data-driven academic decision-making and served as the initial step toward the development of Colonial's data culture. It generated a desire for a more robust system that could empower teachers and inform daily instruction.

After the switch to LinkIt! was initiated, the differences became even more apparent. Extensive training, often at individual buildings, and data insight to aid school improvement planning showed LinkIt!'s focus on personal service and the user experience.

"LinkIt! does work in a very collaborative capacity with us," said Rosemarie Gregitis, director of curriculum, instruction and assessment. "If we have questions or specific requests for data reports, they're able to do it. They're a partner with us. And many products and service providers just don't do that. Sincerely, I've worked with many they don't have the integrated, collaborative approach that LinkIt! does."

The district first began using LinkIt! for local assessments, and the relationship took off. In every way, from the data-focus of the strong, complementary central administration to the teachers across the district who understand data's power to spotlight student strengths and areas of focus, Colonial is the portrait of advanced LinkIt! usage.

Flexible time powered by data

For decades, Colonial has championed the importance of differentiated instruction and the personalization of learning. The pedagogical approach is a testament to



Rosemarie Gregitis, Director of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment

the district's unwavering commitment to addressing the unique needs of each student. Perhaps no example is more emblematic of that than the data-informed, flexible instructional periods at each school. Made possible through building-level scheduling wizardry, the daily time blocks are in the true spirit of tiered instruction and are used for both remediation and enrichment. This concept resonates closely with the popular educational strategy often termed as "What I Need Time."

At the elementary level, the flexible time is known as GAIN and was begun in 2015; at the middle school, the block of time is referred to as Extended Learning Time; at the high school, it's Bonus Block. While structured a bit differently at the various levels, the period serves the same general purposes. It's a two-fold approach. First, the time provides a safety net for those students who need extra time or a change in instructional strategy to fully grasp key skills and knowledge. Second, it offers learners an opportunity to spread their wings and pursue more advanced content and subjects that pique their interest.

Covid-19 posed unprecedented challenges for educational institutions worldwide. Yet, Colonial deftly navigated the stormy seas of the pandemic. Dedicated teachers and hardworking students kept the educational momentum high and the district hardly missed a beat.

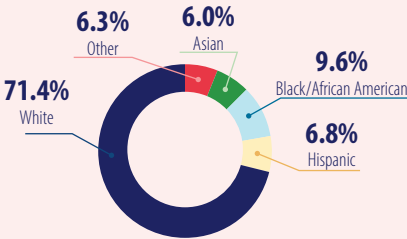
Interestingly, some students found themselves thriving in the remote learning environment. When schools reopened their doors in the fall of 2020, the flexible time, particularly at the elementary school, became instrumental. It offered precious academic minutes to bridge the minor learning gaps indicated by the district's formative and summative data.

"GAIN really helped fill in those gaps in knowledge," said Gregitis. The experienced educator moved from Plymouth school principal to curriculum director during this critical time, helping to steer through the crests and troughs of Covid instruction, and charting an instructional plan forward into the post-pandemic future.

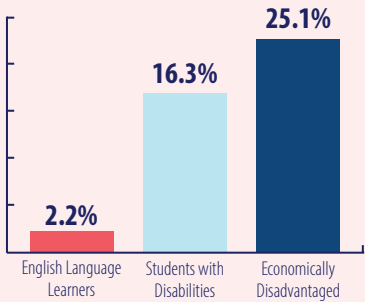
Colonial is now exploring the use of LinkIt's Intervention Manager as a solution to organizing tiered interventions, as well as the warehousing of Act 158 college and career readiness documentation. "The biggest benefit we've had with LinkIt! is being able to support student growth each year by refining our existing practices and exploring new opportunities," she concluded.

COLONIAL AT A GLANCE

State: Pennsylvania
 County: Montgomery County
 District Enrollment: 5,417
 Grade Configuration: K-12
 Number of Schools: 7
 Race:



Programs:



Data Source: Future Ready PA Index

LinkIt Partner Since: 2017
 SIS: PowerSchool
 Assessment Strategy: LinkIt! Benchmarks, DIBELS
 Third-Party Data Sets: PSSA, Keystone, AP, ACCESS for ELLs, PSAT, SAT, Attendance, Grades, DIBELS 8
 Solutions Implemented: Data Warehouse, Navigator Analytics, Assessment Solutions

Colonial

SCHOOL DISTRICT



Data drives behavioral/emotional health interventions

When hallway chatter, lunchroom banter, and clanging school bells gave way to the stillness of virtual classrooms and remote learning, the world prepared itself for pandemic learning gaps. But the repercussions didn't end there. Isolation and the loss of face-to-face interaction profoundly impacted the behavioral, social, and emotional development of students.

While many districts scrambled to enact programs and procedures that would help students in their personal development, one small district on the banks of the Delaware River was prepared. For years, Palisades School District has prided itself on a comprehensive strategy, particularly at the elementary level, to foster a positive school climate and nurture social and emotional growth. The core component uses information housed in LinkIt! for all data-based decisions.



"Children are sponges and they are emotionally aware, despite the fact they may not necessarily know how to express what they're thinking or feeling," said **Michael Donnelly**, Tincum Elementary School principal

and assistant to the superintendent for educational services. "So I think that's just as important as it is for us to review academic data, it's important to see kiddos through a different lens and look at social-emotional data in order to offer both interventions and enrichment."

At the elementary level, Palisades utilizes the principles of Pennsylvania's School-Wide Positive Behavior Support (SWPBS) framework, which is known for its proactive, positive approach. More a collection of school-level best practices than a start-to-finish prescription model, SWPBIS serves as the behavioral/social and emotional facet of the district's multi-tiered system of supports. Just as with academic MTSS data, students are tiered based on the level of assistance each one needs to move forward. The process isn't just a way to shape character; it works to remove any personal barriers that may get in the way of academic success.

Observational data is at the heart of SWPBIS. Three times per year (fall, winter, and spring), teachers use SRSS-IE, a common universal screener to assay each student based on the frequency of specific conduct and emotions, entering the scores directly into LinkIt's Data Locker. The process is fast and easy — LinkIt's reporting auto-compiles the results and categorizes them with the same green-yellow-red color scheme used for academic data, making interpretation simple and familiar. The results can also be broken down by behavior and emotion, letting teachers and support staff organize students into groups tailored for specific interventions.

Palisades warehouses all data with LinkIt! including NWEA MAP benchmarks, Acadience, state

assessments, and all unit tests. Elementary building principals meet monthly with each grade's teachers to discuss academic data as well as SEL/behavioral data and anecdotal behavioral evidence. The school's reading specialists, speech and language pathologists, counseling staff members, and special education teachers may also attend, if necessary. After years of using LinkIt! and a multitude of LinkIt! PD, data summits, and attendance at the company's annual summer institutes, ***Palisades educators are experts at spotting patterns and making correlations in all educational data. Practice and experience have honed their skills in finding meaning beneath the data and taking action.***

After each administration of the behavioral screener, a meeting is held at each building with the principal and school counselors. The purpose is to "think about Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions to help all those kiddos who need extra support," said Donnelly.

Possible interventions include group meetings with the school counselor to discuss topics such as communication skills, for example, and participation in a mentor-type program called "Check in, Check out." In CICO, as it is commonly referred to, students are each paired with an adult in the school who

provides regular, positive attention and reinforces good conduct with, at minimum, quick and casual meetings in the morning and near dismissal.

"It's super fast," said Donnelly, who in addition to his principal duties supervises curriculum, professional development, and assessment for the entire district. "Hello, greetings, how are you doing? We're going to set up our day for success. I'm looking forward to seeing how you do on that math test. I'm really proud of you today. Is there some part of your day that you feel was super important or that stands out to you?" And then if they share something, we mark that down. Each student [in CICO] has a chart that teachers fill out based on certain skills. The focus is to let students know that an adult in the building is looking out for them as an individual."

A host of other strategies too extensive to list are also employed to improve social and emotional skills and underscore the expectations for positive behavior for all students. Perhaps most notable are the positive bookmarks that start and conclude each learning day. The elementary buildings all begin their mornings with a student recitation of pledges to behave responsibly and respectfully. Just before dismissal, a school-wide announcement acknowledges the students whom staff members have recognized throughout the day for behaving politely, safely, or demonstrating another positive attribute.

Using LinkIt! to crunch the numbers and sort the data provides another invaluable feature: the ability to quickly compare results from one screener administration to another. This lets educators both monitor student progress and evaluate the effectiveness of any intervention strategies used. Rather than an immediate process like flipping a switch, the expectation is continued growth from the enacted supports and regular nurturing of positive character traits, says Donnelly. "By the end of the year, the hope is having if not all, then most of our students in the 'green' category, with kids having maintained their status or improved based on the interventions that have been implemented. We as schools do not intend to replace or serve as parents, that's quite not the case. We're a partner."

Parents are indeed considered valuable partners who are encouraged to be active, informed participants in the education of their children. For years, the district's elementary schools have used standards-based



Dr. Bridget O'Connell, Superintendent with Dr. Michael Donnelly



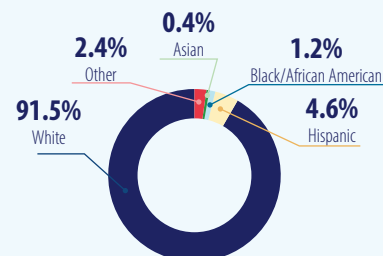
report cards. Along with each emailed quarterly report card, parents also receive a two-page, color-coded LinkIt! summary. This document provides detailed unit assessment scores, enabling parents to effortlessly track their child's progress on specific standards. Beyond just a grade on a report card, the LinkIt! summary offers a comprehensive view of a student's learning journey and growth.

"At the end of the day our job is to work with students as unique individuals and to provide an environment in which they feel successful," said Donnelly, "to give each and every one what he or she needs to be able to navigate school, society, and the global community as they get older. That's the bottom line."

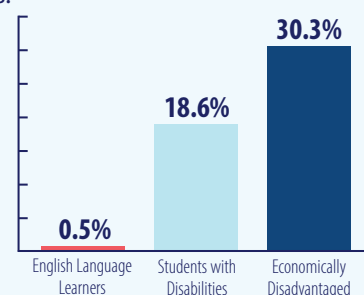
Over the past several years, Palisades Middle School adopted some of the components of the SWPBIS framework. The goal this year is to continue that evolution and duplicate the success that's been seen at the elementary level.

PALISADES AT A GLANCE

State: Pennsylvania
 County: Bucks County
 District Enrollment: 1,353
 Grade Configuration: K-12
 Number of Schools: 5
 Race:



Programs:



Data Source: Future Ready PA Index
 LinkIt Partner Since: 2015
 SIS: PowerSchool
 Assessment Strategy: NWEA MAP,
 Acadience, Unit Assessments

Third-Party
 Data Sets: PSSA, Keystone, PSAT,
 SAT, Attendance,
 ACCESS for ELLs
 Solutions Implemented: Data Warehouse,
 Navigator Analytics,
 Assessment Solutions



Individualization and innovation in IASD



LinkIt's five-year PSSA/Keystone comparative analysis, personalized and shared annually at no charge to every Pennsylvania school district, raised eyebrows when received in Indiana Area School District's central office. Administrators bubbled at the potential benefits that easily-accessed, actionable data could bring to teaching and learning.

Unhappy with the service, support, and product innovation from Pittsburgh-based OnHand (now edInsight), Indiana joined the LinkIt! family in the 2021-22 school year and never looked back. The choice was transformative. LinkIt! data warehousing, analysis tools, and benchmark assessments have become integral to the district, helping make the "I" in Indiana truly stand for individualization and innovation.

Flexing and WINning at Indiana Junior High School

Crafting a secondary school schedule requires finesse and precision. It's an intricate task to slot core courses and electives without overwhelming students or teachers, or exceeding class size guidelines.

At Indiana Junior High School, a proud 2019 National Blue Ribbon award recipient, scheduling has risen to an art form. In 2023-24, administrators carved out a second period of the day in which students can receive essential support and data-directed intervention, in addition to the existing WIN.

What I Need time, which has been in place at IJHS since 2021-22, is the formal MTSS intervention and enrichment period (also run at the elementary level and high school level). Staggered throughout the IJHS day, WIN provides students with personalized, evidence-based tiered intervention. Using PSSA scores and insights from LinkIt's

benchmark assessments, educators pinpoint students' specific needs and tailor instructional strategies for effective remediation.

Before the use of LinkIt! Benchmarks, teachers would use grades or self-created assessments to make academic support determinations for WIN. Individualization was limited, and usually in the form of homework help or the reteaching of a lesson. With LinkIt, intervention has become more targeted and specific.

After the thrice-yearly LinkIt! Benchmarks, the district provides professional development time for teachers to meet and strategize.



"This time is critical for digging deeper and helping teachers digest the data," said **Angela McMasters**, Ed.D., IJHS's MTSS coordinator and school psychologist – and Pennsylvania's 2023 school psychologist of the year. "You have to have teachers understand data at a classroom level and use it to make instructional decisions. 'What's your instructional plan from this point to the next? How will you informatively assess as you're going so that by the next benchmarking period students can demonstrate growth?'"

These collaborative analysis sessions go beyond planning interventions for specific students or groups of students. They help educators learn the sophisticated nuances of the LinkIt! platform and encourage dialogues about effective instructional methods.

Administrators and MTSS team members review data monthly or sometimes every other week to monitor student progress. The comprehensive assessment includes both academic

indicators, such as grade distributions and MAZE assessments, as well as non-academic metrics like attendance and behavioral referrals. Because the data is efficiently warehoused in LinkIt!, swift access and streamlined analysis are assured. Similarly, the district's MTSS team uses LinkIt! tools to track districtwide performance and analyze trends.



Superintendent **Robert J. Heinrich Jr.** appreciates the efficiency that LinkIt! has brought to Indiana's data analysis. Heinrich spent four years as Director of Education in the district before being tapped for the big chair.

"Before we had LinkIt, we had to go to five different places to get the data we needed, maybe more than that. It took so long to get the data, you didn't have any time left to analyze or actionize the data. Now, through LinkIt, I can see for any student their attendance, how many days they were tardy, how many days absent, what their grades are, and what their LinkIt! Benchmark results were by standard and by topic. I can see all of this data instantly. When we have a data meeting, we have all the information at our fingertips to make really well-informed decisions. So LinkIt! does a lot of the heavy lifting and enables us to really focus on using the data rather than collecting it."

For students needing even more intensive intervention, there is also Flex, the newest addition to the IJHS schedule. Flex is a multipurpose time at day's end designed to be flexible and individualized.



"We initially created the Flex period so that students could connect with their teachers for review, remediation, and intervention in addition to regular class time," said **Michael Minnick**, Ed.D., IJHS school principal.

"However, Flex is also the time when kids participate in clubs and musical ensembles. It's really become a pivotal piece to our programming."

Flex is exactly that. In addition to instructional support, students can make up a quiz, for example, wrap up a science project or meet with a guidance counselor. By allocating a dedicated schoolwide period for academic support and instructional odds and ends, students can make up educational ground without being pulled from other core classes.

In addition, Flex serves as a platform for PBIS (Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports). The weekly lesson, developed by the school's PBIS core team, hones social and emotional skills and fosters positive student behavior and a harmonious school climate.

The same teacher that a student sees for morning homeroom teaches PBIS. Bookending the day with the same teacher, one who also delivers important lessons on interpersonal skills and emotional growth, has significant benefits. The continuity strengthens student-teacher bonds and provides each child with a trusted adult within the school community.

Just as the middle school years serve as a transition from elementary school to the rigorous demands of high school, they are also a transition from childhood to young adulthood. Middle school students undergo profound social, physical, emotional, and personal developments; having a supportive adult to turn to in school can help students navigate this important and impressionable phase in their lives.

LinkIt! data helps assess educator effectiveness

In 2021-22, a revised educator evaluation formula took effect in the state. Colloquially referred to as Act 13 after the legislation that prescribed it, the comprehensive overhaul eliminated standardized tests as a determining factor and placed a greater emphasis on observation and pedagogy.

While empirical data still plays an important role in evaluations, school systems can now select the achievement



From left to right: Cori Anderson (Counselor), Erica Aiken (Counselor), Krista Templeton (Junior HS Principal), Dr. Angela McMasters (School Psychologist), Justin Zahorchak (Director of Education), Dr. Michael Minnick (Junior HS Principal), and Robert Heinrich (Superintendent)

measures to use in their formulas. Indiana chose LinkIt! Benchmarks in the state-tested areas (grades 4-12) because of their tight alignment with the PSSAs and Keystones. Under this system, a teacher carefully selects a cohort of at least 11 students, designates a specific academic standard to focus on, sets a benchmark goal, and then formulates tailored instructional strategies to guide these students toward achieving that goal.

“This is not a gotcha mentality, this is a true focus on student growth,” said Heinrich. “The nice thing about the changes in Act 13 is that there’s a reflective piece. Okay, why didn’t we hit the number? What happened? And LinkIt! gives us the tools so that we can drill down to each individual student and see individual growth across the benchmarks.”

Reflection is also a central pillar in Indiana’s unique PLC methodology, which often complements Act 13 evaluations and instructional planning. PLCs essentially function as teacher self-study groups, with a research and evidence component. District educators and outside consultants developed more than a dozen courses that teachers can select to join as part of their ongoing professional development. Five PLC meetings are held over the year, with homework conducted between sessions to take the theory to practice. A book, topic, or instructional strategy is studied, teachers construct a plan and put what they have gleaned into practice, use data to gauge the impact, and reflect on the outcomes. A PLC could, for example, focus on using more formative assessments, more explicit instruction, or more center work.

Teachers may also establish their own PLCs centered on topics of personal interest. The same structured approach applies: planning, evidence-based practice, and reflection. Administrators do not participate in PLCs to encourage free discussions without the perception of “judgement.”

“We wanted a collegial experience and a PLC to be a support system when needed,” said Heinrich. “We wanted a teacher to feel comfortable saying ‘Look, my kids just didn’t do well. What can I do better?’ And they could go back and forth on what might be working, what might not be working.”

Up next for Indiana

In 2023-24, Indiana plans to encourage the digitization and administration of common assessments (i.e. unit/chapter tests) through LinkIt. It’s just a toe dip to show teachers the powerful benefits of this approach. Each assessment question is linked to the applicable state standard or standards within the test authoring module, ensuring alignment and clarity. Test entry takes a little more work than photocopying a quiz, but the payoff is substantial. Grading is automatic and instantaneous, with results neatly broken down by standard and banded using LinkIt’s universal color-coding schema.

“The process will give you even more frequent data points by which you can measure student growth,” said Heinrich. “And that will help teachers provide more timely and targeted intervention.”

The district is also currently using LinkIt’s IEP Writer integration and Intervention Manager Grouping Module to enhance their MTSS processes.

INDIANA AT A GLANCE

State: Pennsylvania
County: Indiana County
District Enrollment: 2,800
Grade Configuration: K-12
Number of Schools: 6

Race:

Race	Percentage
White	86.1%
Black/African American	4.7%
Hispanic	2.0%
Asian	1.9%
Other	0.3%

Programs:

Program	Percentage
Economically Disadvantaged	50.1%
Students with Disabilities	15.5%
English Language Learners	1.9%

Data Source: Future Ready PA Index

LinkIt Partner Since: 2021
SIS: PowerSchool
Assessment Strategy: LinkIt! Benchmarks, Acadience

Third-Party Data Sets: ACT, AP, ASVAB, Behavior, Grades, Keystone, PSAT, PSSA, SAT, SRSS

Solutions Implemented: Data Warehouse, Intervention Manager, Navigator Analytics, Assessment Solutions





A data reboot in Quakertown

Each afternoon when teenager Matthew Friedman picked up copies of *The Pittsburgh Press* for his newspaper route, he would eagerly thumb through the broadsheet to the sports section. With the scent of ink and newsprint in the air, the future Ed.D. and superintendent of the Quakertown Community School District immersed himself in the game scores and individual stats of his favorite athletes. The sport hardly mattered; Friedman loved them all, and he bled the black and gold of the local teams. This was the era of a young Barry Bonds and Jay Bell, Bubby Brister, Rod Woodson, and Mario Lemieux – a time not so long ago when yesterday's events were still today's headlines.

Friedman did more than glance at the data during his daily newspaper ritual, he interacted with it. He calculated the number of victories a team would need to win the division, for example, and the total hits a player had to accrue to reach .300. While playing baseball in high school and college, adult league ball, and fantasy football, data developed into an even more important part of his life.

Working with numbers became second nature to Friedman. Over his 24-year educational career, he cultivated his analytical skills, realizing the transformative potential of data to shape educational

outcomes. Sworn in as Quakertown superintendent on July 3, Friedman quickly began planning to reboot the district's use of data. His two years as chief academic officer of Downingtown, a high-achieving district of 13,000 kids and 17 buildings, taught Friedman the importance of systems thinking and uniform procedures across all schools – elements he planned to bring to his new district.

Quakertown prides itself on being a very good school district. Niche.com, a popular website that ranks schools and school systems across the nation, most recently awarded Quakertown a B+, with an A- in academics. Programs are firing on all cylinders, and teachers and support personnel are at the top of their game. It would be easy for the district to rest on its laurels.

Friedman, though, recognizes that the quest to maximize student learning and provide more opportunities to kids should never end. One of his first steps to move the district forward is to ensure that all schools use the same operational frameworks – many of which involve data. This lays the foundation for all future improvements.

"You have to step back and take a 30,000-foot view," he said. "We need to use a district lens versus a building lens."



Matthew Friedman, Quakertown Community School District Superintendent

Discussion, reflection, and action

Quakertown has been a member of the LinkIt! family since the 2019-20 school year. The district makes impressive use of the online platform and custom Navigator Analytics reports to gain insights into student learning, trends, and areas of concern. Utilized are in-depth reports on LinkIt! Benchmarks, 5-year PSSA & Keystone results (to identify trends and cohort performance), Fingertips (which are used at the start of a school year to familiarize teachers with their new students), DIBELS, and ACCESS for ELLs.

Keeping his strategic perspective and “district lens,” Friedman has initiated districtwide data review meetings, a page taken from the playbook he used in multiple other districts. Building principals meet with the central office team quarterly during the academic year to examine state, benchmarking, and other local data to seek to understand the underlying messages behind the data. These sessions are a deep dive into the why’s and how’s of student achievement. Areas that require attention

are pinpointed, and discussions then turn toward creating action plans.

To ensure focused discussions, the meetings are segmented: elementary school principals gather on one day, while their secondary school counterparts meet on a separate day. Discussions about instructional materials and resources often arise. The meetings also serve as platforms for principals to share insights into effective teaching methodologies and learn from each other. For secondary school leaders, this time is an invaluable opportunity to discuss curriculum and help ensure seamless progression and consistency from middle school to high school.

“It’s not a data inquisition,” Friedman said of these sessions. “These are conversations where we’re sharing highlights and openly discussing strengths, areas of concern, collaboratively looking at where the peaks and valleys are. As everyone rises, everyone helps each other. And collectively you move in the same direction.”

The first data session, held in the fall, was dedicated to analyzing state test scores through LinkIt! PSSA and Keystone Navigator Reports. These show student achievement in ELA and Math broken down by school, grade, teacher, and demographic, and compared to state averages. Attendance and behavior/discipline stats were also examined. The subsequent meetings will revolve around scores from LinkIt! Benchmarks carried out during the year, along with other local assessments.

The specific improvement tactics developed in these meetings, says Friedman, can serve as important messages for stakeholders. Discussing them fosters trust and builds awareness of school goals.

“When we share reports with the school board or the community or the parents in the district, really any stakeholder, we can easily say ‘Here’s what the buildings are doing. Here’s how they’re doing it. Here’s when they’re doing it. Here’s what we’re looking at. Here’s the questions that we’re asking.’ We’re able to consistently tell the story of how the district is moving forward.”

Thursdays are for Data

Quakertown's dedication to professional growth is virtually unrivaled. Short PD sessions of approximately 20 minutes are conducted every morning before student arrival. These concentrated chunks of time put the focus on a single, easily digestible topic or process.

Recognizing the immense potential of these sessions, Friedman created the position of district supervisor of professional development which is charged with programming this critical time. The PD is self-directed three times a week; teachers usually select a subject or activity from choice boards. Twice per week, principals and school leadership teams organize and develop PD to meet their own staff's needs.

A specific theme/subject has been assigned to each day. Mondays focus on collaboration, for example, and Tuesdays focus on instructional technology tools. Every Thursday morning is reserved for data. This time is spent analyzing data, presenting tips on using the LinkIt! ecosystem, and running reports, and discussing teaching strategies and supports. Over the course of the school year, this provides up to a dozen hours of data PD.

The rethinking of professional learning again shows Friedman's holistic approach. But it also does something more: It underscores the importance he places on developing teacher capacity and introducing new instructional strategies that will inspire creativity in the classroom. As the son of two teachers with more than 70 years of combined experience, it's no surprise he places a high value on allowing talented teachers to spread their wings.

"I've always believed if you focus on best practices and quality instructional practices, quality curriculum, quality resources, you'll always see strong student achievement," said Friedman, a former high school social studies teacher like his father. "I've always tried to push the envelope as a teacher and administrator, and paint outside the lines, but I've always tried to keep organized. I've learned from some amazing people over the years to be forward-thinking. I believe the antiquated industrial model of schools where you sit in rows of desks and an adult talks at you is something of the past. We've got to think outside the box on how we can do innovative things for kids that are in our classes every day."

At each school, teachers from individual grade levels and teams/departments also meet, often with the building principals, to examine data and chart the progress of students. The meetings use the same step-by-step administrator-developed procedures for data review and decision-making. This ensures that the same analysis processes are used across the district, providing an important continuity, particularly for MTSS.

Next steps

Looking into the near future, further integration of data into Quakertown's educational culture and instructional planning seems to be in the cards.

One objective is to further unify the multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) across the district, establishing common performance indicators and cut scores. Instructionally, Quakertown is reinforcing Tier 1 supports this year while also enhancing and broadening Tier 2 interventions.

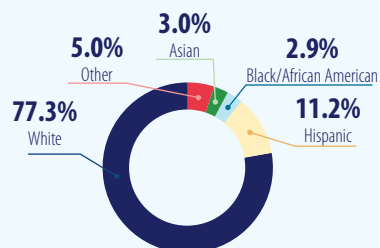
Further down the line, Friedman envisions a classroom environment in which teachers actively engage students in discussions about their own performance data. This reinforces expectations and helps students understand who they are as learners. More importantly, it encourages students to set academic milestones and gives teachers the chance to explain how they will support each child in reaching those goals.

The sharing of data with parents may also be in the future. This expands the transparency of school decision-making and establishes data as a common language. Using data at parent-teacher conferences is one possibility; another is opening LinkIt's parent portal so parents can directly access information and better understand their child's academic trajectory. No matter how it happens, sharing data cultivates parental involvement and fosters collaboration between educators, students, and families.

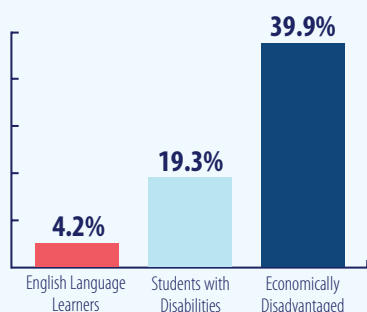
Said Friedman, "It's next-level data usage, where everyone knows what needs to be done and is working together to get there. That's how you move the needle forward."

QUAKERTOWN AT A GLANCE

State: Pennsylvania
 County: Bucks County
 District Enrollment: 4,688
 Grade Configuration: K-12
 Number of Schools: 8
 Race:



Programs:



Data Source: Future Ready PA Index
 LinkIt Partner Since: 2019
 SIS: PowerSchool
 Assessment Strategy: LinkIt! Benchmarks, DIBELS, IXL

Third-Party

Data Sets: PSSA, Keystone, AP, PSAT, SAT, ACT, Grades, Attendance, Behavior, ACCESS for ELLs, Acadience

Solutions Implemented: Data Warehouse, Intervention Manager, Navigator Analytics, Assessment Solutions



Hear more from other LinkIt! customers

"The two big reasons we came to LinkIt! were service and solutions. I was frustrated one day with this other company – I was trying to get a hold of someone to set up a training and then I had this beautiful LinkIt! report sitting on my desk that came in the mail. I wasn't even a customer. **They had five years of data on beautiful colored graphs and I said, "Why can't I get this?"** We made a phone call and the rest of history. LinkIt's been responsive to our service needs above all the things and **we now have all of our data in just a few clicks.**"

Rob Heinrich

Superintendent

Indiana Area School District

"Our biggest pain point was each building was collecting data in their own different way and we couldn't compare apples to apples. **Our desire was to find something that could house everything and make us more efficient.** We wanted everyone to be more data-driven in their role. I think we've certainly **met and exceeded those goals** with LinkIt's help."

Laurie Smith

Former Assistant Superintendent

Perkiomen Valley School District

"If I had to describe LinkIt! with one term, it would be customer service. **The team has always responded, making our requests a reality.** We feel like it's a true partnership with the team at LinkIt. I laugh at times because their responses are so quick, I sometimes wonder if they ever sleep..."

Stacy Dabbs

Director of Curriculum & Instruction/Student Information
 Conemaugh Township Area School District



Are You Having Data Conversations with Your Students?

BY TRACEY SEVERNS, ED.D.

TRUTH IS A GIFT

It provides clarity and focus, the impetus for reflection and the motivation to change.

When it comes to truth, educators have sold students short. We've been reluctant to have the tough conversations with kids about where they are and where they need to be. We've been uncomfortable doing so for a variety of reasons. Some don't think kids have the cognitive skills. Others worry about hurting their feelings. A few are afraid they'll "get in trouble" with parents or administrators. Most, however, just don't know how.

The solution is simple. Use data. Data provides the content for focused and meaningful conversations. When we're honest with students and talk with them about what they're learning and why it matters, and we help them see where they stand in relation to mastery, they are more likely to join us as partners in the learning process.

Data makes these discussions easier, more substantive, and much more likely to result in increased effort and improved achievement.

And when teachers conduct these conversations in a way that communicates that they are on the student's side, that the data reflects their combined effort and they too have "skin in the game," the data becomes a powerful motivator and a shared call to action.

DATA CONVERSATIONS ARE IMPROVEMENT CONVERSATIONS

For many, the word "data" is off-putting, engendering images of emotionless workers sitting at banks of computer monitors in a windowless office. It's a vision far removed from the dynamism of the classroom. Perhaps this misconception is why so many educators have been slow to see the benefit of data.

Instructional data is a set of quantitative indicators of student knowledge and ability. That's it – student achievement in numerical form. Information. So when we talk about student data discussions, we are not referring to torturous conversations about pages of statistics; they're discussions with students about their progress and performance, and they are designed to guide improvement. Maybe if we thought of them as "truth talks" instead of "data discussions" we would be better able to see them for what they are – caring conversations about learning and opportunities to grow.

For as long as teachers have taught, they have shown students the paths to improvement. In the 21st century, data allows teachers to be specific when discussing strengths and weaknesses. Data can also measure progress. Or reveal the lack of it. Regardless of the outcome, students deserve to know.

I've seen great teachers use data every day to differentiate instruction but then show reluctance to share data with students. Can you imagine a track coach who regularly times the runners on her team but never tells them how they did? Never shares how each performance stacks up against their past performances, their peers' performances, or the time necessary to win the race?

Just like runners, students need feedback, *honest* feedback in order to improve. Without it, they lack the information necessary to reflect on their performances (how did I do?), refine their approaches (what could I do better or differently?), and alter their outcomes.

Just like a coach, a teacher needs to share the data, provide actionable feedback, and guide goal-setting.

In their 2018 book, "Developing Assessment-Capable Visible Learners," Douglas Fisher, Nancy Frey, and John Hattie identify self-assessment against mastery measures, student expectations of themselves, feedback, and goal-setting as "high-yield performance influences." Data conversations engender and support each of these factors for students of all ages.

What does a data-based improvement conversation look like?

Here are a few tips for data conversations, followed by some examples:

ESTABLISH A POSITIVE, NON-JUDGMENTAL "COACHING" TONE. Communicate the mutual goal of forging a path to improvement by using "we" at least as often as "you."

MAKE DATA FRIENDLY AND AGE-APPROPRIATE. Be sure the student understands what the data means and how it compares to past performance and the passing benchmark.

ENGAGE EACH STUDENT IN A GOAL-SETTING ACTIVITY. Provide time for reflection and ask students to write down their next goals as well as the strategies they will use to realize them. This is a great time to share your plans for helping them improve, too. Parents can also be brought into the process by having students share their data and goals at student-led parent/teacher conferences.

MAKE PROGRESS VISIBLE. Consider using data walls to mark both individual and class progress toward learning outcomes and goals. If you choose to chart individual progress, ensure anonymity by having students use unique emojis or symbols to represent their places on the board.

CELEBRATE DATA SUCCESSES. Reward progress by recognizing each achievement and acknowledging the effort that went into the accomplishment. Extrinsic rewards such as prizes, privileges, parties, notifying parents, or postings on social media can also serve as motivators and tangible celebrations of progress. Remember, it's not really a data success, it's an achievement success revealed by data!

SO HOW DO YOU PUT IT INTO PRACTICE?

Let's say **fifth-graders** are working to raise their independent reading levels. The teacher can create a bulletin board with a road or steps that begin with the lowest reading level on the left (or bottom step) and the target reading level on the right (or top step). Each student selects or designs a unique emoji or symbol that is used to represent where they are now. Each time they advance in reading, they advance on the board.

To encourage **third-graders** to master their multiplication facts, the teacher can have students draw a square in the upper right-hand corner of their "mad minute" sheets and enter their predictions for the number of math facts they will answer correctly. Students who exceed their predictions can be asked to share with their classmates what they did to help surpass expectations. Each student can then set a target for the next assessment and write at least one strategy that will be used to meet or exceed the goal.

Your **kindergarteners** are working on letter recognition. Create a graph template that goes from 0 to 26 on the Y (vertical) axis and has assessment dates across the X (horizontal) axis. Explain that each time students show how many letters they know, they will draw bars that go up to the number of letters they correctly identified. Then each week, ask students to reflect on their progress, evaluate the effectiveness of past strategies, set new goals, and establish new strategies. The same process, this "touching" of data, can be used to graph how high students can count, how many numbers they can place in the proper sequence, or any other quantifiable outcome.

For older kids, post the range (lowest and highest score), mean (arithmetic average) and mode (most common score), and ask students to reflect on how they did in relation to their peers and the passing score (e.g. 70%). Then, ask them to "suit up" for a deeper dive.

For benchmarks, LinkIt's Item Analysis report can be used to have students examine their performance on specific skills or standards.

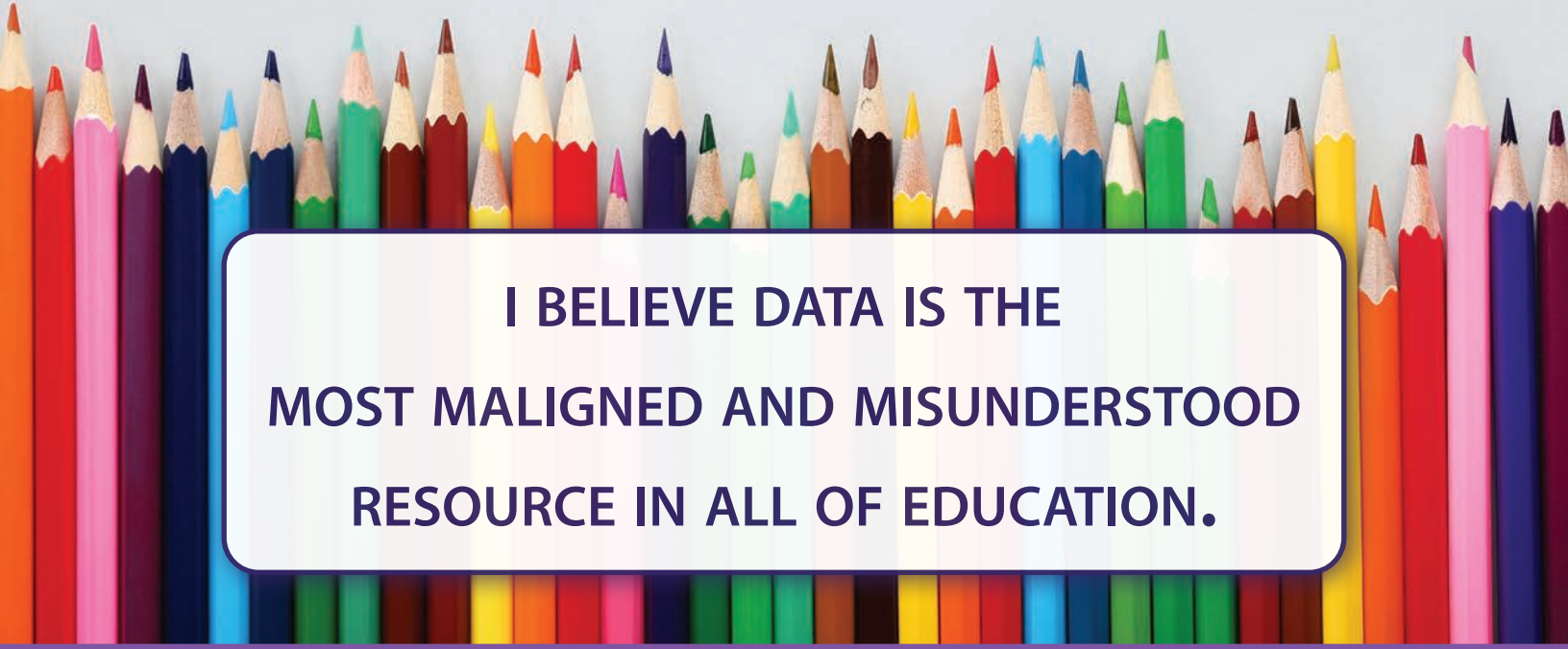
To turn this information into action, students can be asked to conduct their own root cause analyses by answering questions such as, "On which skills/standards did I do well? Why might that be?" and "On which skills/standards did I do poorly? Why might that be?"

Students can even drill down and apply the same process to the questions. For this analysis, ask them to code each incorrect answer with a symbol that indicates the reason they got the question or problem wrong.

For example, put a question mark next to the item if you didn't understand the question. Put a star next to the item if you understood the question but didn't know how to answer it. Put a dollar sign next to the item if you understood the question and knew how to answer it, but you made a "careless error" that you could correct next time by slowing down or checking your work.

Think about how much could be learned through these analyses. Teachers would gain access to information that goes beyond *how much* and *what* students are learning to reveal how and why students are (or aren't) learning. With these insights, teachers can provide feedback that goes **beyond task analysis** (what the students got right or wrong) to include **process feedback** (how students are learning) and self-regulation (who students are as learners). Imagine how this kind of feedback could influence the learning environment and improve instructional outcomes.

Now consider this exercise from the students' perspective. Students could use objective data to consider the connection between effort and outcomes, and strategies and success. In addition to working on content-specific skills and standards, they could work on developing themselves as learners. Using the data, students can set SMARTER goals – specific, measurable, achievable, results-oriented, timebound, evidence-based, revised through reflection – and develop their own plans to improve.



I BELIEVE DATA IS THE MOST MALIGNED AND MISUNDERSTOOD RESOURCE IN ALL OF EDUCATION.

A LAND CALLED 'AND'

Too many teachers are working way too hard in trying to single-handedly drag 30 kids through a curriculum that could choke a horse. The idea of spending 10 months striving to get a room full of disaffected and reluctant learners to achieve even modest goals would seem an exercise in futility and a reason for early retirement.

Students must be encouraged to self-regulate and take ownership of their own learning. Data can easily be leveraged as a motivational tool by making it the substance of forthright conversations with kids. Ask them to reflect, teach them to see data and feedback as markers on their journey toward mastery, and encourage them to set goals.

We all want to improve, to be the next best version of ourselves; no one prefers struggle over success. While students may balk initially at reflection and goal-setting, once they see their scores rise and feel their frustrations diminish, they will become willing participants in the process.

People think that it's cold or boring or that it takes the heart out of what we do. Others think it's a distraction or it's too complex or that it takes the joy out of learning.

"Or" is a rigid, confining word. In the business best-seller "Built to Last," James Collins and Jerry Porras coined the term "tyranny of the 'or'" to describe

decision-making that is restricted to just one of seemingly contradictory strategies. It's either this or it's that. It's either keep the instructional process enjoyable for kids or use data to make students responsible for their learning. Too many educators live in this space.

I believe there's a beautiful land called "*and*" that teachers can create in their classrooms. Meet me there *and* we can talk truth *and* we can do data *and* we can make learning fun *and* interesting *and* alive.

AUTHOR BIO:

Dr. Tracey Severns has served as a classroom aide, special education teacher, vice principal, principal, director of student performance, superintendent, adjunct professor, and Chief Academic Officer for the New Jersey Department of Education.

A frequent presenter at state and national conferences, she has spoken about a variety of topics including data and educational leadership. You can find her on the web at teach4results.com and follow her on X (formerly Twitter) at @docseverns.



IUs can

boost data IQs

Ever wonder how educators learn to collect and analyze data to help teachers and students improve learning outcomes? From curriculum planning to professional learning, Intermediate Units across the commonwealth play a pivotal role in training and assisting schools to collect and interpret data.

IUs hold a multifaceted role and employ a diverse team of experts in various fields. Flexible and entrepreneurial by design, IUs serve their local component districts by offering services such as collaborative purchasing, technology support, and programs for students with special needs. IUs are also positioned as an important link between the Pennsylvania Department of Education and local school systems, often providing essential guidance on implementing new state laws and policies.

Helping schools that need support

One of the most important duties of an IU is leveraging its resources and expertise to aid constituent schools that have been formally identified by the PDE as requiring support. IUs work with educators and other stakeholders to facilitate and support the development of school improvement plans, which begins with extensive data analysis and root cause assessment.

Depending on a school's needs, the data analysis process can be comprehensive and encompass the review of a multitude of data sets. These might include data from the Future Ready index, PSSAs and Keystones, local assessments, state-required self-assessments, benchmarks, and other diagnostic exams, as well as subgroup performance within those assessments. The purpose is not only to identify gaps or inequities but to help schools determine the why – the underlying factors behind the numbers.



"We engage in those deep questions," said **Donna Gaffney**, Ed.D., Montgomery County IU's director of the office of organizational and professional learning – the branch that supports curriculum, instruction, assessment, and training. "We dig, to identify where opportunities for improvement lie. We peel away the layers of the onion. 'What's getting in the way of student success? Is this a systemic problem across the district? Is it a curriculum issue? Maybe it's a pedagogy issue?' The data helps you understand."

All districts can engage their IUs for assistance with curriculum development and strategic planning. The IUs tailor their solutions to the component district's exact needs – typically beginning with data analysis.



LinkIt! expedites data analysis, says **Rachel Holler**, Ed.D., assistant executive director of Bucks IU. “The faster the data review process, the faster the school or district can consider specific options to address the identified issues. LinkIt! makes it easy to disaggregate data. Now that two-thirds of our districts in Bucks County are using LinkIt, we are all able to speak the same language and suggest specific reports that help them move forward with planning.”



Chad Evans, supervisor of educational planning at Bucks IU, reached out to one of the districts engaged with school improvement planning work and offered to look at their data in LinkIt. “LinkIt! responds to inquiries quickly and makes it easy for Intermediate Unit professionals to support our districts,” said Evans, who also serves as a School Improvement Plan facilitator. “Within a day, I had a username and password and have been able to better support our schools with their needs assessment and planning,” he recalled.

Professional learning

Indirectly, providing school improvement plan assistance and curriculum support builds teacher and administrator data skills. IUs, however, offer more formal training. Product User Groups, IU-hosted LinkIt! data summits, and data workshops for several school districts are common.

Most recently, Bucks IU hosted a data summit geared specifically to math. More than 50 math educators from most of the 13 Bucks County districts in a host of different roles came together to discuss and share best practices for instructional and curricular challenges facing their districts. In addition to examining state and county math trends in PSSA, Keystone, AP, PSAT, and SAT, participants engaged in various round-table topics including best practices in response to data, accounting for student feedback in the classroom, and a best practices showcase led by LinkIt! partners in the county who shared success stories from their districts. The summit concluded with breakout sessions for elementary, middle, and high school staff geared toward discussion of essential questions, followed by action planning in teams to determine tangible next steps that germinated within the summit.

Helping educators in its component districts develop practical data skills is particularly important for BLaST IU, which spans four counties across a swath of nearly 4,000 square miles in Central Pennsylvania. Many of the districts are small, some without a dedicated curriculum director. The IU's curriculum experts are frequently relied upon for support.

BLaST's Division of Educational Planning is a team of data gurus; they conduct extensive data PD, including on-site LinkIt! training at component schools. The focus in a recent training session was on comparing multiple reading and literacy measures, and then translating numbers into targeted remediation and curriculum improvement.

At an intermediate school that had recently had all its data warehoused in LinkIt, the team reviewed scores in i-Ready, DIBELS, and other screeners that, for the first time, were together under one data umbrella. Scores on one fundamental skill stood out, so the team discussed including a stronger vocabulary piece in the next curriculum update.



Educator breakout session at LinkIt's Data Forward Summer Institute at Bucks IU



Connecting the Dots planning activity at LinkIt's Data Forward Summer Institute

Honest data conversations



Beyond the ability to identify the needs of each student and shed light on curriculum, sequence and pacing, and efficacy of interventions, the capacity to dissect data and the empowerment that comes with it means teachers must confront their own truths about who they are as educators. According to **Rebecca Gibboney**, BLaST's director of educational planning, data analysis pushes educators "out of their comfort zone" to critically evaluate their methodologies and identify ways in which they can improve.

When done in a group setting, that also means sharing with others. This type of professional self-disclosure can often be more daunting than sharing personal experiences. "One of the hardest things is getting over being vulnerable in those conversations," said Gibboney.

Through data workshops and their own consultation with districts, Gibboney and BLaST model data discussions to help administrators learn to cultivate their own culture of mutual support, respect, and togetherness. In such an affirming atmosphere, teachers find it easier to cast aside any apprehensions of judgment from superiors and colleagues; administrators find it easier to coach and point out areas of concern.

"As the intermediate unit, we can go in and have these conversations because we have no bias. We're not judging, we're not in there teaching the students. So we can be the facilitator and help administrators or even department heads with those conversations. Sometimes it's tough for them to be able to say 'This is an area that needs improvement' just as it is for teachers to hear. We can help them navigate some difficult conversations."

Those candid, constructive discussions have an important bottom line: They can lead to changes that ultimately benefit kids.

"That's the fruit of all conversation," said Evans. "All improvement starts with talking about what works and what doesn't work, and how we know what those look like. And when we do that together, when we're on the same page, exciting things start to happen. Quality teaching and deep learning occur when everyone is talking about teaching and learning."

INTERMEDIATE UNITS AT A GLANCE

	BLaST IU 17	Bucks IU 22	Montgomery IU 23
State:	Pennsylvania	Pennsylvania	Pennsylvania
County:	Bradford, Lycoming, Sullivan, Tioga	Bucks	Montgomery
Square Miles:	3,923	620	455
Number of Districts:	19	13	21
Number of LinkIt! Customers:	5	9	17
Number of Students:	29,282	80,720	107,799
Average Students per District:	1,541	6,209	5,133
Website:	iu17.org	bucksiu.org	mciu.org

Data Source: Future Ready PA Index

SECRETS TO FUN AND MEMORABLE DATA WORKSHOPS

You squirm in your seat as the PowerPoint barrage continues.

Not wanting to appear rude or disinterested in the professional development session, you've resisted as long as you could. It's time: you hazard a casual glance at your watch...

How is that possible? Somehow after an hour of sitting and watching slides, only five minutes have passed. The presenter has literally broken time.

We've all been there. We've all felt our consciousnesses leave our bodies and roam freely as our physical selves stared on.

The "sit and get" model for professional development is as engaging and effective for adults as it is for children; that is to say, not very. Even the most fascinating raconteur would be hard pressed to keep audience members rapt when they're expected to sit still and passively absorb information like a human sponge. Somehow the concept of active and enjoyable professional development has been equated to mean unprofessional development.

Rebecca Gibboney, the director of educational planning at BLaST Intermediate Unit 17, rejects that concept. Gibboney wrote the book on fun PD. Literally. In 2020, EduMatch Publishing released her book, **"The Tiebreaker: A Scouting Report on Building a Culture for Gamification in Professional Learning."**

The athletic theme and structure were inspired by Gibboney's extensive time on the hardwood; she played basketball from fourth grade through the end of her undergraduate college career. She currently serves as a coach of the women's team at Lycoming College in Williamsport.

"Tiebreaker" is as much a look into her creativity and boundless optimism as it is a playbook that flips the traditional PD model on its head.

Rebecca Gibboney
Director of Educational Planning
BLaST IU



"When you sign up to be an educator, you're committing to being a lifelong learner," Gibboney said in an interview. "The profession is exhausting. You're going to be exhausted, that's fine, but you also need to make sure you're having fun. If you don't have fun, you're going to burn out, you're going to forget your 'why' [the reason you're in education]."

In the post-pandemic age, injecting a giggle or two into the profession may be just what the doctor ordered. While not a prolonged nationwide trend, over the last several years many more educators have fled the field than is typical, causing regional teacher and administrator shortages. Those still in the trenches, data shows, are experiencing high stress levels – though lower than in 2021. According to a recent Merrimack College survey, half of teachers indicated they were very or fairly likely to leave the profession for a different occupation within two years.

Educator climate was among the considerations for Gibboney in the fall of 2022 when she designed a data workshop for BLaST IU's component districts. The IU spans a huge geographical area, 4,000 square miles, and participants would be logging significant driving time to attend. This day of learning couldn't feel just like more work, an addition to already full plates.

"We're seeing turnaround and burnout, and struggling with teacher retention, I didn't want this to be a boring sit and get," Gibboney said. **"Data pushes people out of their comfort zones already. So how do we spice it up and make it engaging? How do we make people comfortable and ready to share and collaborate? By having some fun. 'Yes, today we're going to have fun with data.'"**

The major tenets of her book, "Tiebreaker," as well as presentation best practices were on display in the

workshop, facilitated with LinkIt! CEO Ryan Winter. Here are some takeaways that you can use when thinking about developing the data skills of your own team:

Choose a theme

A theme immediately creates opportunities to be creative and let the inner child in all of us come out. It's fodder for developing hands-on activities and games, putting a clever spin on learning. Workshops organized around a central theme also allow participants to easily relate new knowledge to their existing mental frameworks, increasing retention and recall.

Seasonal events and holidays (e.g., Super Bowl, Valentine's Day) lend themselves well. Halloween was the theme of BLaST's "Pumpkin Patch" data analysis workshop.

Share the objectives

Educators know that sharing lesson goals with students helps reduce anxiety about what they are expected to know and do. It also helps them better focus on key concepts and avoid distractions.

The same benefits apply to personal development sessions. Along with the agenda, the goals serve as a guiding light that focuses the learning experience and shows the relevance of the content.

Get participants moving, observing, and talking

If sit and get is to be avoided, then what is the opposite? It's go and find. That means facilitate learning, not disseminate information.

Data carousels were at the workshop's heart. Participants circled the conference room analyzing posted data, engaging in discussions, and sharing insights. They labeled notable observations with sticky notes which Gibboney and her administrative assistant had customized with iconic Halloween images.

Stickies with pumpkins, bats, ghosts, and cats were used to highlight surprises ("Oh my gourd!"), concerns ("This drives me batty!"), patterns, and successes that can be celebrated. The incorporation of the theme may sound silly, but adding humor helps retention and sets a friendly tone that's conducive to sharing.

"Becky set up the day to be fun-themed, and this helped make the conversation flow," said Joel Spinney, principal of academic affairs at Towanda Area School District. "She



Data Pumpkin Patch

Finding the Pick of the Patch

November 3, 2022

Agenda

- Welcome & Introductions
- Understanding the Patch - Data Overview
- Exploring the Patch - Data Carousel (Regional Data)
- The Pick of the Patch - District Data
- Lunch (email check & phone calls)
- The Best Pick of the Patch - Students, Groupings, and Data Walls!
- Sharing Your Best Pick - Next Steps

Success Criteria

- I can compare and contrast my data to regional and state trends.
- I can facilitate a data carousel for my teachers.
- I can identify growth and areas of improvement.
- I can understand student results and how to group students to increase student achievement.
- I focus on the whole child by building student data walls.

Norms

- Students are at the center of our work.
- We are all learners.
- This is a marathon, not a sprint.
- We will go further working together.

Resources

Feedback - BLaST IU 17 Feedback Form



Transforming lives and communities through educational services

BLaST IU 17 built an engaging workshop agenda

also scheduled a good amount of collaboration and discussion, which was important as we looked at data. I've attended several of Becky's trainings, and she does a great job of making the information memorable."

Make the data relevant

LinkIt! supplied three data sets used in the workshop. During the initial round, the educators examined Pennsylvania and regional PSSA and Keystone results to identify trends. In the second carousel, attendees looked at LinkIt! custom Navigator Analytics reports of district and building-level data specific to the school systems of the participants. A deep dive into anonymized student data from the participating districts was last. Led by Winter, the analyses examined data by skill and standard, and demonstrated LinkIt's nimble grouping features that aid teachers in selecting students for differentiation.

Because the administrators in attendance were using their own regional and local data, the analyses had

meaning; that personal connection heightened engagement and made the learning powerful. If randomized data had been utilized, participants would not have been as emotionally invested or as interested.

Make it stick

You’ve done all your presenting and facilitation, so now what? Before you say goodbye, ask participants to write down their next steps. How will they use the information and new skills? The process harnesses the motivation you’ve engendered and transforms it into something concrete.

At the workshop’s conclusion, Gibboney asked participants to reflect on the day’s discussions (reflection is a major influencer of learning). She then asked them to use black markers to write their next data steps on small pumpkins – items that can sit on desks and inspire the further blueprinting of action. Since every district has unique needs and the workshop participants had differing roles (e.g. supervisors, superintendents), these subsequent plans were all different, reflecting a different plateau in a data journey.

According to Spinney, the workshop fueled a re-evaluation of Towanda’s remediation and enrichment practices. “We came back to the district with the goal of looking at our interventions and making sure we are providing what each student needs,” he said. “Part of this entailed looking at our resources and processes, but it also involved using data in a more tangible way. *I like to think that I can analyze data, but I was really impressed with the data and reports that LinkIt! generates. Shortly after the data summit, I reached out to LinkIt! to set up a pilot and ultimately to bring LinkIt!*

onboard. Through last spring and into this summer, we have worked as a team to hone our processes for intervention. We’re excited to see how everything works together this school year.”

To be continued

In discussions, Gibboney is quick to delineate the differences between professional development (those short sessions of information and skill development) with professional learning (an ongoing process that nurtures further growth).

In her book, she quotes a 2007 study that found that professional learning of 14 hours or more had the largest effects on student learning. The message: Eliminate those data analysis one-shots and follow through with subsequent training. This reviews and reinforces prior learning, develops further skills, and underscores the importance of data analysis to help guide instruction.

IU FOOTPRINT AT A GLANCE

State:	Pennsylvania
Counties:	Bradford, Lycoming, Sullivan, Tioga
Square Miles:	3,923
Number of Districts:	19
Number of LinkIt! Customers: ...	5
Number of Students:	29,282
Average Students per District: ..	1,541
Data Source:	Future Ready PA Index



Bringing research to life

Talking data and MTSS with Becky Millspaugh, Ed.D

Becky Millspaugh, Ed.D, Project Consultant at Montgomery County IU, works with schools, districts, organizations, and occasionally state-level organizations to support various aspects of Multi-Tiered Systems of Support. She has more than 30 years of experience in a wide variety of educational roles, including 14 years in the classroom in Maryland, Virginia, and Pennsylvania.

Since 2007, Becky has worked with the MTSS framework for both academics and behavior/social-emotional learning, also known as positive behavior interventions and supports. The veteran educator recently sat down for a conversation with one of our writers.



L! How would you describe your role as a project consultant in the Office of Organizational & Professional Learning at Montgomery IU?

Becky: I am one of many at MCIU who focuses on bringing research to life. We are so fortunate to live in a time when implementation science and neurological studies are part of our educational landscape. It used to take such a long time to get research to the users who interfaced with students every day; however, now we not only receive this information more efficiently, but we can also use these opportunities to help shape instruction at all levels through the process of MTSS.

L! I've heard you talk about the importance of context in examining data. What do you mean by that?

Becky: We often use data to see what's happening in terms of growth and trends. And I think that's one of the things that people miss. Districts and schools often get caught in the weeds of looking at individual students, but oftentimes the things that they can easily change are overlooked, such as curriculum, environment, the extent to which assessment is used to meet the needs of the group, and the learner's interaction with the school setting.

L! What's an example?

Becky: One of my schools saw that scores were low in phonemic awareness. And as they looked at their scheduling and their instructional routine, the reason that was happening was that they did not have enough time dedicated in their instructional schedule towards teaching that skill. So it wasn't so much a deficit of the students as it was actually how they used the curriculum and how they scheduled time for instruction. You have to understand the context to come up with that root cause. So really, while you're looking at your data, you're not only analyzing it, but you're also examining the "why" so that when you decide on a strategy to fix a problem, you're selecting the right one. Root cause comes from understanding the context.

L! What are three data suggestions for districts?

Becky: One of the most common mistakes we see is a rush to put data into the hands of leaders and teachers without first training them in data-based decision-making. The rush to change practices without taking this initial step often results in frustration or even panic among the very teachers who are the change-makers.

So before you start working collaboratively around data you should, first, make sure you are creating teams that have clearly defined purposes. Align the purpose of the meeting with the goals of your organization, district, or school. There should be

a clear throughline between why you are bringing these professionals together and your broader mission and vision.

The second suggestion would be to consider organizing your data to answer prioritized questions instead of asking questions about your data. Avoid the tendency to chase your data. We collect so much data but have very little time to interpret it. To bring value to your data, organize it based on questions that get to the heart of why you're meeting. If, for example, the purpose of the meeting is to identify support and the need for differentiation in the general education classroom, then a broad question of "How are students responding to our current instruction?" would help to organize formative data sources such as classroom-based assessments, common assessments, or observational rubrics. By deciding ahead of time how to organize and report data, you'll become more efficient and effective with your data-based decision-making.

Lastly, define any issue or problem you're pondering with precision, making sure to consider why a certain result or outcome persists. When identifying a persistent issue, consider the who, what, where, when, and why before moving forward with a goal or action plan. Creating a statement of the problem with precision helps lead to efficient problem-solving. It also helps reduce bias in your decision-making by considering multiple perspectives.

 **You've helped many schools and school systems develop MTSS protocols. If a district is taking it on themselves, how would they start?**

Becky: One of the first things I'd say is get yourself a really good MTSS readiness checklist; there are many out there, and they will show you what you're getting into, and they'll keep you on track. The other thing is to make sure that you get multiple perspectives on what the needs actually are. Because if you're going to go through a system-level checklist like that, you need to make sure that everyone agrees on how well you're currently operating, and then everyone agrees to prioritize areas where you want to improve. That's when you bring your data in and ask the tough questions. Take the time to explore while you are planning and organizing.

 **You've trained districts in Team Initiated Problem Solving. What is it and why is it important in MTSS?**

Becky: Team Initiated Problem Solving (TIPS) is an evidence-based data protocol for academic and behavioral problem-solving and planning that was first introduced into the field in 2009 by Newcomer and colleagues at the University of Oregon. Every intermediate unit in Pennsylvania trains using this model and it is part of the Pennsylvania Positive Behavior Support Network curriculum.

One of the most important aspects of TIPS is how teams are organized and the use of precision statements to define problems prior to setting goals or putting action plans into place. Root cause analysis is part of precision statement creation and this data protocol places this practice front-and-center.

We tend in education to do root cause analysis when there are large, complex problems. What sets TIPS apart from other data protocols we have used in the past is the idea of keeping the "why" front and center, to consider the context alongside the "what" of the problem.

TIPS encourages the thinking and analysis of data through the lens of the interaction between the learner and the curriculum, instruction, environment, and interpersonal relationships. When implemented with fidelity, it's become a transformative way to create positive outcomes for students.

 **You provided a great deal of feedback to LinkIt! during the company's development of its Intervention Manager modules.**

Becky: What's really great about Ryan [Winter, LinkIt! CEO] is he actually shares out his products while they're in development because it allows him to hear feedback from the educational community. And his team is very receptive to comments because they are 100% focused on the end user.

How Intervention Manager came to life is interesting. While the LinkIt! team was building some of the database features, the whole team, including developers, were also getting trained in multi-tiered systems of support the way Pennsylvania describes it. And that was impressive. I've never seen that happen before.

Intervention Manager was built not just thinking about what schools do right now, but thinking about what best practices are and how the system could be flexible enough to allow for changes that happen as we learn more and more from MTSS research.



LinkIt's Data Forward Summer Institute event at Montgomery County IU

L! What first struck you when you saw Intervention Manager?

Becky: One of the things that schools struggle with is being able to assign a goal not only to one student, but to a group of students. And I'm telling you that feature right there made Intervention Manager a game changer. It's not just about collecting all of the skill deficits, but it gives you the ability to set goals and track them. You can really develop your interventions more robustly.

L! It seems almost impossible to collect data and track progress by hand.

Becky: It's possible, but it's inefficient. One of the things I actually shared with the LinkIt! team was my litany of Excel spreadsheets. Every size and shape. And they would say, 'Help me understand why you put this kind of a sheet together.' And I would see my answers reflected in the changes to the system. They will often say during our data summits, 'You don't need to have Excel spreadsheets all over the place. We're able to bring that all together for you.' That's a comfort to many of us, myself included, who would create spreadsheets for just about every data source or grouping prior to using Intervention Manager.

L! How does Intervention Manager help with communication to parents?

Becky: Oh my goodness, that's one of the biggest questions we have from schools. 'What information do we share with families and how do we get that information family-friendly?' LinkIt! has a ton of form templates to use, they really thought that through. You never have to be at a loss for words and can easily communicate student progress to the parents.

This interview has been lightly edited for length and clarity.

IU FOOTPRINT AT A GLANCE

State: Pennsylvania
 County: Montgomery County
 Square Miles: 455
 Number of Districts: 21

Number of LinkIt! Customers: 17
 Number of Students: 107,799
 Average Students per District: ... 5,133
 Data Source: Future Ready PA Index

LinkIt's Dedicated Pennsylvania Team

While LinkIt! has over 100 employees, here are eight faces who work directly with our Pennsylvania customers.

Pennsylvania Leadership Team



Ryan Winter

CEO & President

- Been with LinkIt! since 2008
- Began working directly with Pennsylvania districts in 2013
- Enjoys working with districts and IUs in PA on how best to utilize data



Mike Zwanch

Pennsylvania Account Director

- Been with LinkIt! since December 2021
- Previously spent almost 20 years in Pennsylvania public education as a teacher, administrator, and IU consultant
- Prior to LinkIt, served as Partnership Manager at Edmentum, working closely with administrators and teachers to connect their key data sets with existing district initiatives



Kevin Fahy

Chief Client Officer

- Been with LinkIt! since January 2018
- Manages all customer implementations throughout the state
- Prior to LinkIt, successfully implemented the LinkIt! solution as an

administrator, instructional coach, and teacher in two districts as part of a 20-year career in education



Carrie Button

Chief of Content Strategy

- Leads the research, design, and development of LinkIt's assessment and content products, including upcoming PA STEELS science assessments
- Has nearly 30 years of experience in education and assessment, beginning her career as a mathematics teacher
- Prior to LinkIt, directed the design and development of state summative assessments for the Maryland State Department of Education, and previously worked at New Meridian, Edmentum, NWEA, and other assessment organizations

Pennsylvania Customer Success Team



Kelly Klinger

Senior Educational Consultant

- Been with LinkIt! since June 2019
- Works with LinkIt! customers in Philadelphia and Northeastern Pennsylvania
- Prior to LinkIt, was a 3-year customer as an administrator in a K-8 Pennsylvania school, where she led extensive training sessions after tri-annual benchmark testing using the LinkIt! platform
- Spent 14 years as a math teacher and instructional coach in districts in Pennsylvania and Maryland



Amber Ammon

Educational Consultant

- Been with LinkIt! since August 2021
- Works with LinkIt! customers in Bucks, Chester, and Montgomery counties
- Prior to LinkIt, was an educator for 15 years in Pennsylvania and Maryland
- Her last five years were spent as both a teacher and a curriculum supervisor leading her district's K-8 implementation of the platform



Will Lentz

Educational Consultant

- Been with LinkIt! since July 2019
- Primarily works with LinkIt! customers in Western Pennsylvania
- Started his LinkIt! career as a Technical Account Manager, responsible for customer support and training for Pennsylvania customers
- Prior to LinkIt, was a varsity soccer player while studying at Princeton University



Wilson Burdier

Senior Technical Account Manager

- Been with LinkIt! since September 2014
- Has worked with Pennsylvania customers for the last five years
- Prior to LinkIt, earned a B.A. in Computer Science from Queens College

Navigator Analytics 10 YEARS

Navigator Analytics is an advanced custom reporting and consulting service that identifies patterns and trends to improve decision making and data fluency. These longitudinal reports can compare school results, measure growth, quantify achievement gaps, predict future performance, and more.

- 1 State Data
- 2 Benchmarks and Screeners
- 3 College and Career Readiness (CCR)
- 4 ACCESS for ELLs
- 5 Grades, Attendance, and Behavior



Work With Experts

Consultation and professional development conducted by educators, data analysts, and researchers



Identify Trends

Receive comprehensive district, school, and classroom reports throughout the year highlighting key patterns and trends in your data



Data Literacy

Build capacity with all stakeholders on data interpretation and application



Report Variety

Longitudinal trends, correlations, predictive analytics, equity, and subgroup analysis



Principal Playbook

Empower building level administrators to become data-driven leaders



Story Telling

Develop a narrative with your data to better communicate your messaging to various stakeholders



"I appreciate the Navigator reports very much. We distribute them to our leadership teams and beyond, and share as much as we can. They're voluminous and **we study them deeply for our school improvement planning. The level of detail is extraordinary.** We can examine our demographics in every possible way and concentrate on what we can do to reach those respective groups. **There are so many layers to them and sometimes they are really eye-opening.**"

Dr. Katy Giovanisci

Director of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment
Agora Cyber Charter School

Contact us to request your district's no-cost 5-Year PSSA and Keystone Peer Comparison Report:



User Groups



Regional Events



Data Forward Summer Institute





Data Warehousing

Collect, store, and analyze all your data sets with easy-to-use reporting and data visualization capabilities for a more holistic view of student learning



Assessment Solutions

Full support for online and paper-based test administration, advanced test authoring tools, and an extensive content library of benchmark assessments, item banks, and progress monitoring tools



Navigator Analytics

Advanced custom reporting and consulting service that identifies patterns and trends to improve decision making and data fluency

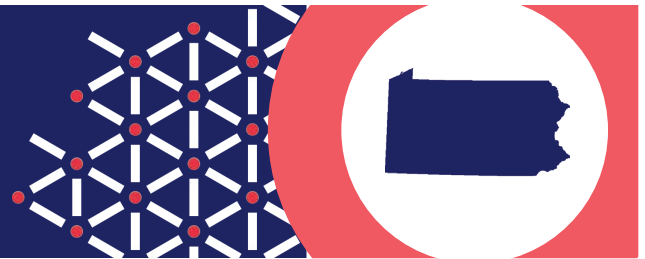


Intervention Manager

An online management suite to support and enhance your processes for MTSS/RTI, Gifted, ELLs, and 504

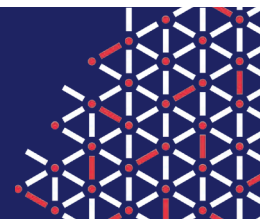


No-cost, no-risk pilots available



Intervention Manager

An online management suite to support and enhance your processes for MTSS, Gifted, ELLs/ML, and 504



Grouping

Group students based on multiple measures for MTSS tiering, determining program eligibility, early warning systems, and creating rosters that balance academic performance and demographic equity

Intervention, Goals, Progress Monitoring

Create student plans individually or in bulk, enter intervention details, set goals, progress monitor, and report outcomes

Process and Communication Management

Automate workflows through the use of teams, communication logs, meeting management tools, tasks, and reminders

Research-Based Resources

Access LinkIt's customizable Tier 1 Checklists, RFA, Tier 2 and 3 Plans, ELLs, GT, and 504 plans, or import your existing documents



Mike Zwanch

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Quakertown Community School District
Upper Perkiomen School District
BLaST IU
Bucks IU
Montgomery County IU
Dr. Tracey Severns
Michael Cravotta

