



Progress Education is an achievement management, professional services company helping educators raise the performance of the students they serve.

We Optimize Student Performance

Volume 2 Issue 2

Dear Education Enthusiast,

While we celebrate the first anniversary of the Progress Education newsletter, we would like to thank you for your support in making it a great success! Our mission continues to be educating all of our readers on current education issues. In doing so, we also hope to enlighten you of the numerous tools that Progress Education provides to increase the functionality and success of your organization.

This newsletter focuses on a variety of topics, the first of which being the completion of Phase I of our U.S. Department of Education SBIR Grant. We follow that with additional updates on our work, as well as the challenges NCLB faces with a renewal vote around the corner.

As always, we thank you for your continued support and enthusiasm for the solutions offered by Progress Education Corporation.

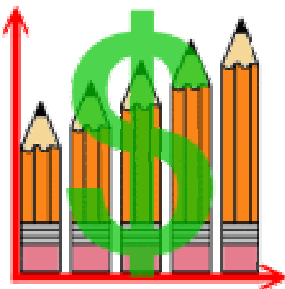
Sincerely,
Thomas P. Jandris, Ph.D.
Chairman and Chief Executive Officer
Progress Education Corporation

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Progress Completes Phase I of U.S. Department of Education SBIR Grant



Progress Education and the American Productivity and Quality Center (APQC) completed the "research phase" for the development of an online, data analysis tool that enables administrators to make informed decisions about the allocation of resources in ways that are meaningfully linked to student achievement.

In order to do this effectively, districts must be able to answer the following questions – What works over time? For which students? At what cost? The ability to provide valid and reliable answers to these questions has the ability to transform the outcomes of our educational efforts for all students.

Our focus, upon successful award of Phase II, will be to develop an online software tool that guides districts through the specific activities and tasks that should be followed to determine the "Total Cost of Ownership (TCO)" as well as the "Dollar Per Pupil Gain Ratio" relative to their spending – in other words their "Educational Return on Investment (ROI)." In other words, educators will have a process/tool by which they can drive purchasing decisions based on the knowledge of the impact of that decision on student achievement and what the unit cost is for that achievement.

The software tool will be designed to seamlessly integrate with existing district information systems (e.g. finance, assessment, and student information) to provide ongoing feedback using real-time indicators. As a result, the district will be able to allocate resources based on data driven analysis of what works and at what cost. We believe that by adapting the model identified during Phase I to an online tool we will make it more accessible to districts that are willing to undertake performance-based resource allocation and thus enable the scalability of the "Cost/Benefit" concept. Additionally, the online tool will be designed in such a way as to allow benchmarking among districts within their states or across the country.

Progress Education Teams with Tacoma Public Schools



Progress Education Corporation was commissioned by the superintendent of Tacoma Public Schools to provide an independent evaluation of the Finance, Human Resources, and Technology Services departments. The focus of this evaluation was to identify the strengths and weaknesses of each department, and to look at ways the District could improve processes and performance, so that it can operate more efficiently and effectively.

For this project, Progress Education Corporation used a two-pronged approach of surveys and in-person interviews to gather the information required for the evaluation of each of the departments. The survey portion was administered prior to the in-person interviews and used the American Productivity and Quality Center's (APQC) Process Improvement In Education (PIIE) benchmarking surveys to gather quantitative information and performance metrics. One-on-one interviews were conducted onsite at Tacoma Public Schools over a three day period the week of October 30, 2006, with the executive directors, directors, managers, and varying personnel in each department. Additionally, a focus group of seven school principals was also interviewed.

The team interviewed nine members of the current Human Resources staff, two members of the Professional Development staff, seven principals and their supervisors over the three-day visit. The finance interviews focused on process, procedures and staffing. In Human Resources, the surveys included the processes of recruiting, selecting, and hiring employees. The onsite Human Resources staff interviews focused on five additional process areas: planning; develop employees; reward and retain employees; redeploy and retire employees; manage employee information. In Information Technology, the surveys included the processes of environment, organization, budget / expenditures, and planning / management. The onsite Technology Services staff interviews focused on five additional process areas: staffing; development / maintenance; technology initiatives; knowledge management; and data usage.

After collecting and collating the data, Progress provided the district with a report that identified areas in which the district was doing well, areas in need of improvement, and suggested strategies the could assist the district in improving these areas.

Assessment in the Classroom

Assessment is now commonly woven into all stages of education: before new material is presented (to assess existing knowledge); during the learning process (to monitor how well a child is grasping a concept); and, after the lesson has been taught (to check whether the child understands the new material). This lets a teacher assess and modify the learning experience in time to make a difference rather than discover a problem just as it's time to move on to another subject.

Assessment is being integrated into the teaching and learning process. It is moving from being conceptualized as an "add-on" to being part of the on-going teaching and learning process. An effective teacher is constantly assessing students' progress through daily and weekly home and class assignments as well as ongoing observations.

With the NEA Teacher Toolkit, available at <http://www.neateachertoolkit.com>, teachers can access over 200,000 questions aligned to grade level subjects and standards. The toolkit allows teachers to formulate their own tests; search for items by subject; create assessments aligned to standards; develop their own personalized item bank of questions; store and manage tests for easy access; and, print tests for students.

After scoring the tests, teachers can easily record student progress using the standards-based grade book. Using the NEA Teacher Toolkit, grades and assignments are managed online. Teachers are then able to generate reports that reflect how their class and individual students are progressing by standard and overtime.

No Child Left Behind Up for Renewal



While the Bush administration commemorated the fifth anniversary of No Child Left Behind in January, members of Congress and educators across the nation argued for changes in what they view as a flawed law.

The law seeks to ensure that all children can read and do math at grade level by 2014, a goal that some teachers see as unattainable given the limited resources many schools are faced with. Secretary Spellings said that the administration would not agree to alter this and other key principles under a rewrite of the law. She stated however, that they were open to debate on how to measure such things as student achievement.

Critics of NCLB tout serious financial constraints, as well as an overemphasis on testing for reasons many schools are not meeting the standards. "There are too many people and too many school systems that are labeled as failing," according to National Education Association President Reg Weaver. Cleveland schools CEO Eugene Sanders said, "Given the right resources, all problems can be adequately addressed, but to expect a level of achievement to occur given that level of inequity...? They basically say to you, 'Make it work,' but they don't give you the resources needed to make it work."

In a meeting with congressional leaders, President Bush pushed for the law's reauthorization but was noncommittal on their request for more money to help schools meet its requirements. In a separate meeting with Secretary Spellings, lawmakers voiced more concerns including; how to test special education and limited-English-speaking students; a desire to give schools more credit for progress even when they fall short of annual targets; and the need to give students access to high-quality free tutoring.

With so many issues to address, and an increasing number of frustrated educators, one of "the most significant federal education laws" in decades will be facing real challenges in its upcoming vote for renewal.

Angela Townsend, Plain Dealer Reporter
Nancy Zuckerbrod, Associated Press

For more information about our company, products, or services, please contact:

Kathleen Fritch
(312) 751-1688
kfritch@progresseducation.com



110 Bishop Quarter Lane
Oak Park, Illinois 60302
Tel: (708) 358-0667
Fax: (708) 358-0727
www.progresseducation.com