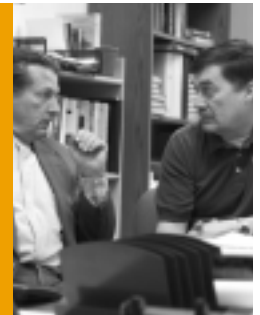


Teachers Take Ownership of Web-Based Remediation Program in PA School District

PLATO Professional Services helps staff become self-sufficient in training needs



Bellefonte School District in north-central Pennsylvania decided in 2000 that their 11th graders' PSSA scores were not acceptable, although they were within the average compared to similar schools. So in the 2001-2002 school year Principal Kathy Wunder-Myers convinced the Board of Education to create a remediation program for reading and math.

Two part-time teachers were hired, and space was provided to conduct the tutoring. However, it soon became apparent that the teachers were overwhelmed with the number of students in the program, and that it was impossible to provide one-on-one tutoring. Halfway through the school year, the faculty decided that they needed to better understand what resources would support a tutorial remediation program. A review team was put together that selected PLATO Web Learning Network (PWLN) based on the content and the anywhere/anytime availability of the web-based product.

Initial staff development and implementation planning

In August 2002 the school district installed 30 licenses of PWLN on the district server. The district created a pilot program in the middle school using PLATO Learning math curriculum and a remediation program and special education for the high school. Fourteen teachers received the initial two-day training, working with PLATO Client Service Manager Greg Greiwe, a week

before school started. They were excited about the possibilities and worked as a team with Greg to develop a detailed implementation plan. An important goal of the plan was to develop an implementation framework that met the instructional goals and that could be replicated at a later date with other groups of teachers.

The plan called for full utilization of the 30 licenses to allow the teachers to become familiar with the program and give the students an opportunity to advance their skills in the process. The plan also called for a reevaluation in mid-January to determine if the district would further expand its use of the system. However, according to Richard E. Knepp, Director of Information Services for the district, the plan quickly changed!

Teacher and student response

By mid-October the initial cadre of teachers was asking for more licenses. The student response was "beyond our expectations" according to Information Services Director Knepp, and teachers had to continually ask students to log out of the program so that others could use it. Cindy Bauman, a high school math remediation teacher, commented, "I love the PLATO Web Learning Network system, because it fills in the gaps in each student's math history." With the support of the superintendent, Dr. Joseph Bonita, and the assistant superintendent, Colleen Qaseem, the decision was made to purchase an additional 70 licenses.

Teacher demand for more staff development

Greg continued to check in with the staff on a monthly basis, working with the teachers on curriculum alignments to PSSA (Pennsylvania State System of Assessment) standards and helping them monitor progress toward the goals of their plan. Thanks to the PLATO Professional Services implementation model, the district was able to quickly become self-sufficient in its training needs.

The faculty wanted to schedule staff development for more teachers. Even though it was difficult to schedule more time for training, the teachers enthusiastically decided to use a "clerical day" for this purpose. Due to broad buy-in and capacity building at the site

level, they scheduled a lab and invited other teachers to come, and they came. "This was a very productive experience and a testament to the teachers' belief in the program," said Information Services Director Knepp.

"It has been a privilege to be part of a team with such an enthusiastic group of teachers," said Greg. "They articulated their vision, and we helped them fulfill it. It was gratifying to note their high level of ownership that allowed them to continue to model best practices and implement effective instructional strategies. As a result, the teachers have become more of a resource for each other and less dependent on the PLATO Professional Services team, which was our primary objective."

Bellefonte School District is made up of four K-5 elementary schools (1,250 students), 1 middle school (750 students), and 1 high school (930 students).