



James Madison High School

Quick Facts

- Public school district in California
- Urban and suburban areas
- 135,000 students
- 225 educational facilities:
 - 119 elementary schools
 - 24 middle schools
 - 30 high schools
 - 37 charter schools
 - 15 atypical schools
- 14,555 staff members

Snapshot

With standards-based student information available right in the classroom, San Diego teachers are focusing their instruction and test scores have begun to improve.

San Diego School District

“Our goal is to raise proficiency and reduce achievement gaps,” said Ron Rode. It’s an objective echoed in school districts around the country. But how do you convert a goal into reality? At the San Diego Unified School District, *DataDirector*™ is a big part of the answer.

This district, the second largest in California, uses *DataDirector* in every school. The online data and assessment management system provides feedback to administrators, principals, and classroom teachers, giving them a greater awareness of which programs and students are succeeding—and those that need more work. “It helps us make sense of a huge range of data,” said Rode, the district’s Executive Director of Research and Evaluation.

“*DataDirector* provides a valuable resource to reflect on student progress immediately,” said Richard Nash, Principal of Madison High School, “That’s what’s been missing in education until now—data we can use right away.”

After two years of using *DataDirector*, proficiency has doubled in both language arts and math in some low-performing schools. Two elementary schools raised their API scores a full 92 points. “It’s phenomenal, remarkable growth,” said Rode.



Challenges

- Reduce obstacles to providing student data in the classroom
- Enable data-driven teaching
- Provide longitudinal data for district planning and analysis

Solution

- *DataDirector*

Benefits

- Teachers have immediate access to easy-to-read reports showing test scores sorted by student, subgroup, and standard
- Standards-based data allows educators to focus instruction in the areas that need the most work
- Sophisticated reports allow educators to analyze program and subgroup performance over time

San Diego

Data to drive instruction

Swaying palms, rolling surf, and near-perfect weather make San Diego a world-class tourist destination. But the city isn't just for vacationers. San Diego is home to three million people, 130 thousand of whom are children served by the San Diego Unified School District.

In the face of shrinking budgets and growing numbers of English language learners, San Diego Unified is working to bring all its students up to proficiency in tough state standards. It's a task that can no longer be left to intuition alone. Data are needed to drive instruction.

"A number of schools have made strong gains on the California API," said Rode, "We've had a tremendous growth in proficiency—a large part is due to looking at the data and targeting instruction."

A teaching tool

Unlike San Diego's previous data management system, *DataDirector* provides valuable information to all district stakeholders: administrators, teachers, and students alike. "Some teachers initially thought *DataDirector* was only valuable to administrators," said Rode, "But after using it for a few months, a fourth grade teacher came up to me and said, 'Now I see how this is valuable to me as a teacher. It's not just an administrative tool, it's a teaching tool.'"

Test scores, once centralized in the district office, are now on hand in every classroom. Reports that once took weeks to generate are now available almost instantly. "This tool overcomes obstacles to data," said Rode.

"Two years ago it took a lot of manpower to get the kinds of results we can get almost instantly with *DataDirector*," said Nash. Back then, it took days or weeks for administrators to collect district benchmark exam answer sheets and then scan them at the central office. Next they'd transfer the results into spreadsheets. After some manual sorting, the administrators would deliver the results back to the schools, where someone would manually parse the data before sharing them with the teachers and students.

Test scores are the starting point, not the endpoint

The previous system made it difficult for teachers to use the results for re-teaching because of the time lag between testing and scoring. "We had a void in the district. Teachers did not have user-friendly access to these types of data," said Rode, "It would take up to three weeks, and by then the students were on to other things."

Now, with data available so quickly, teachers can truly tailor their lessons around their students' needs. A teacher can perform a classroom assessment in the morning, review the results at mid-day, and address the issues with students that afternoon. "Test scores are the starting point, not

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the endpoint,” said Nash. “The immediate feedback allows us to address deficiencies before it’s too late to do anything about them.”

The rapid feedback loop has helped Nash’s teachers make better use of their time. API scores at Nash’s school, Madison High, rose from 653 in 2008 to 689 in 2009. “It’s provided a lot of validation for our teachers,” said Nash.

Flexible, standards-based item bank

With proficiency in state standards the ultimate goal for California students, teachers appreciate the fact that *DataDirector* is in full alignment with the standards. “Teachers know the items are reliably linked to the standards,” said Rode, “They’ve got ready-made items that have already been vetted.”

Teachers quickly and easily build their own quizzes, worksheets, and assessments simply by browsing and clicking through the extensive item bank.

Teachers all around the district are starting to use the item banks,” said Rode, “The staff finds them useful.”

Teachers can create tests for students to take on a computer or on plain paper. The platform is flexible enough to work either way, which is yet another way *DataDirector* fits nicely into teachers’ regular ways of working.

Positive response

San Diego got 180 schools up and running on *DataDirector* within a single school year. How did they do it? Rode’s team used a top-down approach.

During the summer before roll-out, the district trained the principals, effectively creating a top layer of experts on every campus. By training the principals first, the district not only ensured a solid base of expertise at every school, but it also drove home a message about the district’s commitment to data-driven teaching and learning.

After their summertime training, principals went back to their schools and expanded training to a few staff members who in turn trained their colleagues. In-school job aides and a dedicated district trainer also acted as focal points for technical questions.

The teachers were introduced to the system by learning about the reporting capabilities first, studying what they could do with it before how to do it. Then they were presented step-by-step instructions on where to click to perform test creation and scoring tasks.

Finally, the teachers got their feet wet by using the system in small, limited applications. The K-2 teachers, for example, started with short reading diagnostic tests. “With a simple, slow introduction, we’ve had an overwhelmingly positive response,” said Rode.

Incorporated quickly into teachers’ routines

Another reason teachers in San Diego assimilated to *DataDirector* so seamlessly is that the system uses ordinary desktop scanners to score the paper tests. Teachers enter and score their assessments right in their

classrooms and in minutes the results show up on their desktop computers.

It's easy to view the data in a number of ways, so teachers can select the formats that work best for them. "The use of color, bar charts, and pie charts let people in the district incorporate it very quickly into their routines," said Rode.

Students take ownership

The graphical reports have also led some San Diego teachers to share the *DataDirector* reports with the students themselves. The colorful, detailed charts make it easy for the kids to understand their strengths and weaknesses and set their own academic goals.

"The reports provide the students the opportunity to have ownership of their work," said Nash. Educators at Madison High School meet with students to review their *DataDirector* reports and set goals. "If, for example, in standard 2.1 a student missed four out of eight questions, we may set a goal of missing only one or two the next time," said Nash. "We take a realistic approach and plan how the students will get there."

Evidence for strategic decisions

DataDirector reports are accessible enough for students, but they're also extensive enough for administrators. "*DataDirector* gives us a rich and comprehensive body of evidence on which to make decisions," said Rode.

District planners take advantage of the advanced reporting tools to help with strategic decision-making. "The reporting is sophisticated, powerful," said Rode, "We're pleased with the pre-built reports, but the custom reports give us flexibility."

That flexibility lets administrators in San Diego develop one-of-a-kind reports, where they pull in data from an assortment of state tests, classroom work, and district assessments. They also combine multiple data types over time. Rode said, "It's helpful to look at more than one assessment at a time."

This gives planners a longitudinal perspective that can help answer complex questions about program effectiveness. "We can dissect data in ways that are useable," said Rode, "*DataDirector* lets us identify specific needs and address the achievement gap."

For more information about *DataDirector*, visit www.riversidepublishing.com or call 800-323-9540.

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