Using Smarter Balanced Interim Assessment Data to Inform Classroom Instruction

Statewide Assessment Community: Highlighting Local Practices

Glendale Unified School District

Contents

District Profile

Glendale Unified School District, located in the city of Glendale, in Los Angeles County, serves more than 26,000 students in transitional kindergarten through grade twelve. The district's 32 schools include 20 elementary schools, four middle schools, five high schools, a preschool, an independent study school, and a school for students with disabilities.

Over the past two decades, Glendale has become one of the most culturally diverse cities in California. Glendale USD students come from a wide range of ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds and speak more than 51 languages. The composition of the student population is 57 percent white, 21 percent Hispanic/Latino, 12 percent Asian, 6 percent Filipino, 1 percent African American, and 3 percent two or more races. Armenian is the primary language spoken by more than 50 percent of the students who are classified as white. Approximately 51 percent of the district's students qualify for free or reduced-price meals. About 22 percent of the students are classified as English learners, and 10 percent of the students have needs requiring special education services. Foster youths represent less than 1 percent of the students.

Mission Statement

The Glendale Unified School District provides a high-quality education that addresses the unique potential of each student in a safe, engaging environment.

Goal: Develop a System of Data Analysis Designed to Inform Instruction and Planning

In the 2017–18 school year, Glendale USD started gathering information on how interim assessments were being used districtwide in order to understand whether all elements of the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) were being effectively utilized for improved teaching and learning in the district. The information gathered pointed to the fact that most schools used interim assessments mainly as a tool to prepare students for the summative assessments by exposing them to the testing interface and the range of accessibility tools. In order to maximize the impact of the Smarter Balanced Interim Assessments, the district analyzed prior years' summative assessment results to determine the areas for improvement, set growth goals for those areas, and decided how to best reach those goals through the use of interim assessments.

The collected interim assessment data included item-level breakdown, key distractor analysis, and differentiated next steps. The interim assessment data collected was detailed and actionable, which led the district leadership to the decision to make it the cornerstone of the district assessment plan. With the multitude of data points available, the district ultimately chose to focus on data points that could be used by schools to develop specific instructional goals and plans. Taking into account the wealth of information offered by the interim assessment data, the district's leadership was confident that the system would be well received by the teachers and beneficial to the students.

Teachers and administrators were able to use this data to inform instruction and plan their course of action by identifying which questions, targets, standards, and identified areas with which students were struggling.

"Interim assessments also provided targeted and differentiated resources to analyze and interpret the results by linking directly to the Digital Library, and they are timely, providing data within minutes of completion," according to Stepan Mekhitarian, Ed.D., coordinator of assessment and accountability for Glendale USD.

Approach: Ready … Trainings; Set … Website Resources; Go! … Interim Assessments

The implementation of the Smarter Balanced Interim Assessments protocol was guided by the district's Assessment and Accountability department, which initially conducted a site administrator survey to better understand how interim assessments were being used by the

school sites. The survey results showed that many school sites were using the interim assessments to help students become comfortable with the testing interface, but the leadership team was interested in expanding the interim assessment results analysis to inform instruction and planning. The district initiated a plan that started with the analysis of the summative assessment results as a baseline to determine the use of interim assessments for improved teaching and learning.

The district conducted more than 60 customized data analysis trainings with teams of teachers and site administrators during the 2017–18 school year; the following school year, the number of these training was doubled. While customized for the specific needs of each school site, all trainings contained the common elements of summative assessment results review and analysis, identification of areas of strength and future growth, and instructional goal setting.

Next, the district created an interactive online document that included links to claim- and target-level data as well as resources and learning activities intended to facilitate the explorations and a more complete understanding of the assessment blueprints; alignment of claims, targets, and standards; and sample assessment questions. This document was customized for each school in the district.

Once leadership and the faculty at each school site identified their areas of focus, the schools determined how they would address those areas, and then chose interim assessments to administer later in the semester to gauge student progress. Interim assessment data review sessions were conducted one to four times throughout the school year (depending on the number of interim assessments given) with teachers or site level leaders, either by department or grade level, based on the school site's preference. The goal of the data review sessions was to identify areas of strength and focus to inform instruction and planning. During these sessions, participants analyzed distractors, determined which topics and standards required additional support, and reviewed differentiated learning activities from the Digital Library for students performing above, near, and below standard.

Schools were responsible for designing lesson plans that included the pace of instruction to address the areas of desired growth indicated by the data. The assessment and accountability staff provided guidance and recommendations, which included developing plans to address content that was not covered the previous year. However, addressing the various areas of desired growth was ultimately a school/department/grade-level decision.

The power of the district's professional learning community was leveraged in order to promote districtwide adoption of this data-based approach for improving instruction. After a successful data review session at one of the school sites, teachers and administrators were asked to share their experience with other schools to raise awareness and interest in the process. Administrators shared their experiences during monthly meetings, influencing other principals to reach out to schedule sessions.

Conducting data analysis meetings during professional learning communities is essential for teachers to target student learning. Focusing on areas of improvement provides the roadmap needed to improve student proficiency.

—Glendale USD. Principal

Challenges and Successes

The implementation of the trainings and development of new resources was met with just one notable challenge, and the district used this challenge as an opportunity to develop more user-friendly resources for teachers and site administrators.

Challenge: Technology

Some educators encountered technical challenges with accessing data and resources on multiple websites with which they were unfamiliar. To address this challenge, the district incorporated links to resources into one document and created short tutorial videos to guide users on how to access data and resources.

Success: Expanded Understanding of CAASPP Blueprints

The system inspired teachers to look more closely at the standards and at the assessment blueprints, which resulted in increased understanding of students' learning expectations.

Success: Growth in Data Analysis Capacity

In the 2018–19 school year, the district completed more than 100 data trainings, which is twice as many as were completed in the previous year. As a result, a considerable increase in staff members' understanding of how actionable data points work and what role they play in instructional planning has been accomplished.

Educators become very receptive to data analysis when the data is actionable and applicable to their classrooms.

—Glendale USD Assessment Coordinator

Next Steps: Dynamic Dashboard, School-Based Action Plans

The district will continue to expand its efforts to ensure that all educators make data-driven decisions and have access to information that can help them differentiate instruction on the basis of individual student needs.

Glendale USD is building on its success by:

Developing a dynamic dashboard within its student information system that will give schools real-time updates on student academic performance, attendance, suspension, and several other indicators to continue the progress toward formative data analysis. The system will allow the district to identify and address student growth areas early in the school year to ensure that all students are supported on their road to academic success.

Identifying areas of focus at each school and developing action plans using a plan-do-study-act cycle to target identified areas continuously.

Expanding the use of English language arts/literacy and mathematics interim assessments from one per year to one per quarter. Based on teacher feedback, the district expanded the availability of the interim assessments to non-tested grade levels in 2018–19 and expects this trend to continue.

Data gives us things to celebrate and shows our bright spots.

—Glendale USD Assistant Principal

Resources

Access a sample data analysis training document at https://docs.google.com/document/d/17LakaBXliVlUFZib_pJEiWMXO5IEnxzPLbcw84QlFI8/edit.

Watch a video exploring the use of interim assessments in Glendale USD classrooms at https://youtu.be/SGkEfaW-3Ds.

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