

# CASE STUDY

## Fort Osage School District Works Toward Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum

Administrators at Fort Osage School District in Independence, Mo., feel it is their responsibility to provide students with a guaranteed and viable curriculum. Based on Dr. Robert Marzano's model, district leaders set out to alter their curriculum so that it could be taught adequately in the time allotted for instruction. They wanted to ensure that each teacher knew exactly what content their students should learn, and that they had the tools to monitor and assess their students on a daily basis.



Carrie Luttrell & Jeff White  
Fort Osage School District

### Implementing Software to Support Standards-Based Grading

With more than 5,000 students and 12 buildings to oversee, a team of administrators began the search to find the right technology to support their district's unique and ambitious standards-based approach to assessment.

"First and foremost, we were looking for a tool that would help us link our assessment to our curriculum," said Jeff White, Assistant Superintendent for Educational Services, of the Ft. Osage School District.

After reviewing several tools, the committee selected Pinnacle Plus developed by Excelsior Software. As the system has been enhanced over several years of collaborative work with Dr. Marzano, district leaders felt the technology would truly support their goal of creating a guaranteed and viable curriculum.

The Pinnacle Plus system is a multi-platform, multi-networked client/server application designed to help educators and administrators answer the growing demand for higher standards and accountability. Intuitive and easy-to-use, Pinnacle Plus combines the company's electronic gradebook with an Objectives Manager, a comprehensive, standards-based tool for tracking student progress and achievement throughout the year.

"To begin implementing Pinnacle in our district we agreed to 'think big and start small,'" said White. "We started with a pilot program in one of our elementary schools, led by a technology-savvy principal who was willing to use performance data to inform future decision-making."

After Buckner Elementary administrators shared their first-year results, other schools in the district jumped at the chance to implement the solution the following year. Pinnacle gave each school the ability to produce proof of learning – another step toward reaching their curriculum goals. Before implementing the system district-wide, administrators asked school officials to identify assessment categories. The goal was to allow educators to have individual decision-making power, while the categories remained consistent—and therefore viable—across the district.

Surprisingly, building leaders came back to the district with recommendations for identical categories. Assessments would be classified as either Guided Learning (in-class instruction, parents help with homework), Assessment for Learning (no guidance, formative), or District Assessment (district exams, summative). And a percentage of weight would be applied to each category at each grade level. The model provided uniformity, allowing teachers to link their on-going classroom assessments efficiently to the curriculum. At the same time, the model supports the strengths of each individual teacher, allowing for creativity and a level of independence in the classroom. In other words, teachers have the authority to differentiate instruction for each of their students, but in the end, their students will have learned the same content as all other students in the same grade level.

“First and foremost, we were looking for a tool that would help us link our assessment to our curriculum,” said Jeff White, Assistant Superintendent for Educational Services, of the Ft. Osage School District. ”

## Fort Osage School District Works Toward Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum

“Ultimately, the data we can now access demystifies student learning,” White said. “Our teachers don’t fear data any longer—they’re using it to make better decisions for their students every day.” “They are looking strategically at discrepancies in their students’ work, and then at their own teaching,” Luttrell adds. ””

### Technology Turns Grading into Conversation

Fort Osage School District has been using Pinnacle Plus for the past four years. “Our teachers constantly tell us they are now using performance data to identify where students are doing well and where they may need additional guidance,” said Carrie Luttrell, Director of Curriculum and Assessment for Ft. Osage School District. “It is now possible to have real, in-depth conversations about student learning with all the stake-holders.”

Combined with the district’s model, Pinnacle Plus has given administrators and teachers the data they need to engage in conversations about the whole student, including learning patterns, attendance and discipline records. In addition, parents are able to monitor their child’s grades and attendance in real-time via the Internet, and students can access their grades to track their progress.

“Ultimately, the data we can now access demystifies student learning,” White said. “Our teachers don’t fear data any longer—they’re using it to make better decisions for their students every day.” “They are looking strategically at discrepancies in their students’ work, and then at their own teaching,” Luttrell adds. “Our teachers feel comfortable using the results to ask their colleagues to share what strategies they’ve used to teach a similar subject and then make changes to their own methods of instruction. We are learning so much more about our students and ourselves as educators.”

Five years ago, Fort Osage School District scored barely high enough to retain their state accreditation. In fall 2006, the district scored 92 percent, a dramatic improvement. Administrators anticipate that next year’s results will be even better, as their efforts to provide students with quality instruction—and teachers the tools to make formative assessments throughout the grading period and to learn from the collected data—continue to prove successful.

Basing their model on the ideas of several industry leaders, Fort Osage School District aims to show evidence of learning. Generating reports and looking at the curriculum in layers gives teachers, students and parents a picture of what students have really learned and what steps are necessary for future learning. For the 2007-2008 school year, all Ft. Osage building sites (except for the early childhood building) will be using Pinnacle Plus. In addition, the district will be implementing Pinnacle Web, Excelsior Software’s new fully browser-based system for access anytime, anywhere, via the Internet.