

## Case Study

### The Evolution of Assessments in the DeKalb County School District using SchoolNet

By Kathy Shelton

#### I. Identifying the Issue that Needed to Be Addressed

- A. Describe what you determined to be the fundamental issue in this case and how you arrived at that interpretation.
- B. Explain the pertinent facts and events that drew attention to the problem. What data sources did you consider key and how did you make sense of them? If applicable, share how SchoolNet/Pearson aided you in this process.
- C. Briefly summarize any competing explanations of the issue that were considered and share the rationale for the explanation of the issue selected as most critical.

- I. DeKalb County School District was administering district-made benchmarks in Math and ELA for grades K-12 with Science and Social Studies being given to grades 6-12 only. These assessments were administered with paper/pencil and needed manual scoring by teachers. Results were then entered into Excel spreadsheets for all core content benchmarks and reported to the district office. We needed a better way to assess instruction using these benchmarks. The SchoolNet application was introduced into DeKalb County School District during SY 2008-2009 implementing the Account module only for central office and school administrators. The Instructional Data Management System (SchoolNet) as it was named came to be known as **IDMS**. When the **SchoolNet Assess** module was implemented the next year, district content coordinators were introduced to the possibility of providing the district benchmarks within SchoolNet. District content coordinators were trained and began entering the current benchmarks in SchoolNet. District benchmarks were ready beginning January 2009. These assessments could be taken using the plain paper answer sheets generated from SchoolNet for each test in those schools who “volunteered” to pilot the scanning of the answer sheets so results could be captured and uploaded to SchoolNet for Item Analysis. Select school personnel had to be *permissioned and trained* to prepare student answer documents to use with these benchmarks and scanning of student answer sheets since teachers did not yet have access to SchoolNet. SchoolNet provided training on Assess to the district coordinators and the how the scanning would work. Approximately 70 schools participated in the scanning pilot out of the 184 schools in the district. The remaining schools administered the benchmarks as they had in the past and manually reported scores in a spreadsheet. The pilot schools were able to generate their reports from SchoolNet.

All schools were **required** to participate with the scanning of benchmark tests beginning SY 2009-2010. Only a few select personnel at the local school had the knowledge and responsibility to prepare the answer sheets for each benchmark, for each subject, grade level and teacher. This became a very time-consuming process for the “select” individuals and required a massive amount of paper and ink to prepare the answer sheets and scan the results.

## II. Determining the Guiding Principles and Criteria for Approaching the Issue

- A. Summarize the principles or criteria regarding the district goals and mission, professional knowledge, and processes, and/or values that guided your decision making.
- B. Explain how these guided your decision making.

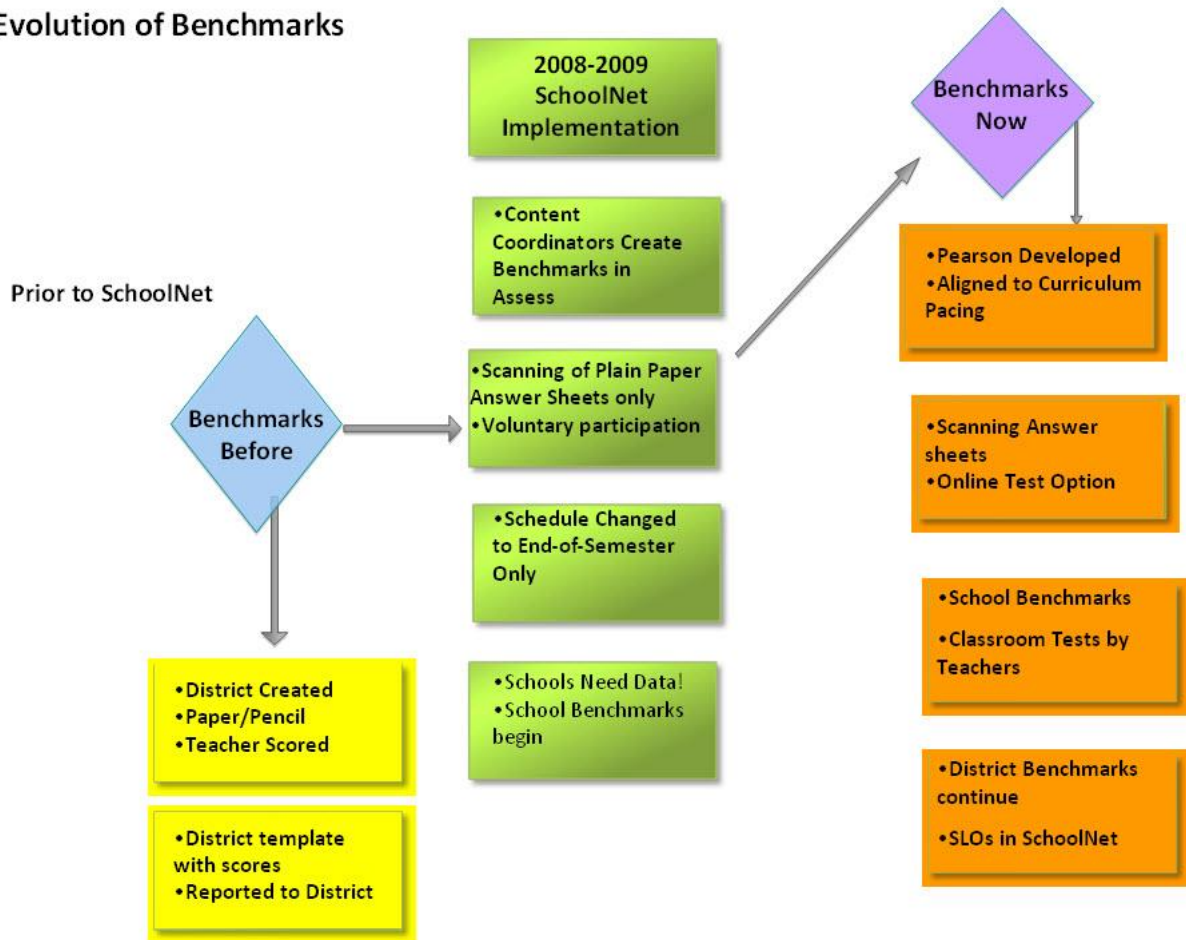
- II. As the benchmark assessment administration continued, it became obvious the number of benchmarks was overwhelming to district coordinators that prepared them for various subjects and grade levels. Pre and Post assessments were being given every six weeks or four times a year depending on the subject and grade level. The content coordinators were understaffed and not able to manage all the entry of the district benchmarks along with their other responsibilities. Eventually the number of benchmarks being administered was modified to just an ***end-of-semester benchmark*** assessment only. This alleviated the burden felt by the content coordinators, but schools cried out for ***More Data!*** This prompted the addition of allowing “school” benchmark assessments to be created at the local school for those that expressed a desire to create their own assessments. Principals designated specific personnel to be “*Test Item Administrators*” having rights to create assessments available for that local school. I provided training to all personnel at local schools named to handle the task of creating school benchmarks. As a result the number of assessments in IDMS SchoolNet skyrocketed. “Answer key only” tests were recommended allowing schools to utilize purchased print materials and creating a test with just the answers and standards aligned was fairly easy to manage. Most schools utilized this option to create assessments for reviewing and preparing state standardized tests such as Georgia’s Criterion Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT), End of Course Tests (EOCT), and Georgia’s High School Graduation and Writing Tests (GHS/GHSWT). The district curriculum was revamped based on the Common Core standards and all DeKalb curriculums were uploaded into SchoolNet by the beginning of SY 2012-2013. This task was begun and completed with the curriculum by August 2012. The process is ongoing with additional curriculum and model lessons being sent to SchoolNet for uploading. This partnership eventually led the district to bring back district benchmarks based on the newly revised DeKalb curriculum. Pearson was contracted for development of benchmarks based on the curriculum and the pacing guide to be administered quarterly. We just completed the first year of the yearly benchmarks based on this new curriculum and partnership with Pearson.

### III. Determining a Plan of Action

- A. Explain briefly the logic model (inputs, outputs, outcome) for your intervention to convey how you intended to achieve the desired results (see also <http://tinyurl.com/ms2sj>)
- B. What enablers and constraints (e.g., school-, district- or community-based programs, practices, tools, structures, procedures, policies, systems, and so forth) were most relevant in shaping the particulars of your intervention(s) for this issue and in achieving fidelity in its implementation?

- III. The diagram below illustrates how the use of benchmarks begin in DeKalb County using paper/pencil and manually scoring and reporting to online benchmarks with item analysis available by standards relieving school staff from tedious work to score and report results.

### Evolution of Benchmarks



The contract between Pearson and DeKalb was funded with money from the **Race to the Top** award granted to DeKalb. Since the curriculum had been revamped to align with Common Core, the goal was to align these district benchmarks based on the pacing guide for units of study within the new curriculum. Pearson accessed our curriculum within SchoolNet as they developed the blueprints and forms, then our Curriculum and Instruction department reviewed the forms and approved or requested revisions. Final assessments were uploaded to SchoolNet by Pearson and scheduled for the designated testing windows. This continued throughout the year until all four quarterly benchmark tests were created and uploaded to SchoolNet. Since this

was successfully being embraced across the district, the Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) required by the state of Georgia were entered into SchoolNet for the purpose of providing a central reporting database. The non-tested subjects which have SLOs ready were entered into SchoolNet for use this year. The results housed in SchoolNet were extracted by SchoolNet for our system to clean and report student growth and academic achievement to the Georgia Department of Education. This year the process was a learning experience as many of these SLO assessments were performance based which do not allow online testing in many cases. Teachers were responsible to assess these performance based questions and manually enter scores into SchoolNet. SLOS will continue this school year with additional SLOs being added and entered into SchoolNet.

#### IV. Implementing Your Plan of Action

- A. Describe how you developed a shared vision for the district about this issue, communicated about it to generate stakeholder buy-in, and monitored organizational performance relative to this vision.
- B. Relate how you prepared people for new duties or roles relative to this issue by supporting reflection, learning, or growth to foster improvement.
- C. Discuss how you strengthened the district culture, modified organizational structures, built collaborative processes, handled internal marketing and PR, and managed the district environment so that your district works to support your intervention for this issue.

- IV. District benchmarks fall under the umbrella of the Curriculum & Instruction department who communicate the details about the procedures, schedules and responsibilities of the assessment at the local school level. Each site has a testing coordinator that works to plan the logistics of benchmark test administration at each site. The Assessment and Accountability department conducted meetings with these testing coordinators to provide the details of all assessments including the district benchmarks. As the SchoolNet Specialist I support the application for all modules for all employees. During the creation process of all benchmarks over the last several years, I have worked closely with district personnel to provide step-by-step directions for the implementation of all assessments within SchoolNet which included training for creating assessments in SchoolNet. My instructional background provides valuable knowledge of content and allows me to interact with teachers and academic coaches with examples of test questions and uses.

The district benchmarks brought the opportunity to offer ‘online’ testing for students instead of the plain paper answer sheets used in the past. Students were provided logins and passwords for accessing SchoolNet and teachers received communication providing the online passcodes needed for their students. Online testing was optional for the first quarter with the goal of all schools participating in online testing by quarter four. The twofold purpose of the district benchmarks was to allow a means of assessing student progress of recently taught curriculum and to prepare students for online test taking. As the PARCC assessment nears in the state of Georgia, our online benchmark testing is providing experience for all grade level students to

participate in online testing similar to the PARCC assessment. We have begun implementing the test question types newly added in SchoolNet Ver. 15. As new types of questions are implemented we plan to amend our assessments to use these new options. Teachers are trained and encouraged to use the additional question types as well.

I have created an **IDMS Resources** website providing “how to” documentation and video tutorials to assist all modules currently utilized by DeKalb County. Working closely with Curriculum & Instruction and providing support and training continues to expand the use of creating and using assessments within SchoolNet.

V. Reflecting Upon The Plan of Action, Its Implementation, And Its Effectiveness

- A. Looking back, describe any lessons learned about the conditions that contributed to the creation of this issue, its identification, or handling.
- B. Looking forward, describe any new systems were established or more routinized to improve the ability of the district to deal with this issue in the future.
- C. Highlight how data or SchoolNet (product, services, or implementation) helped you in recognizing and addressing this issue.

- V. SchoolNet has provided the DeKalb County School System a tool to warehouse student data accessible by all instructional personnel. Administrators and teachers have access to their student demographic information along with academic progress as well. The assessment process using SchoolNet has evolved from a manual process requiring paper/pencil and manpower to an online administration that only requires a code to start the test. The initial use of benchmark assessments within SchoolNet was embraced at the onset but found to be too labor intensive for a select few people in both the creative aspect as well as managing the procedures in the schools. As we moved forward with our benchmarks and allowing schools to create their own common assessments, many school personnel realized this provided easy access to valuable data for an assessment within SchoolNet. Teachers were reluctant at first with the attitude that this was just another task added to their already loaded plates. Use of the Express test using Item Bank questions has turned on quite a few more teachers to utilizing the option of creating their assessments in SchoolNet for daily instruction . As with any large school district, one of the detriments to online assessments is the lack of up-to-date technology. Many schools were limited in the amount of resources that could be used and others, as a result of grants, had ample devices to use. This limitation is something that continues as we have limited resources to replace and purchase new technology. Another lesson learned is that we started the benchmarks after school began and procedures were presented rather hastily before the first quarterly benchmark. This year we will begin from the onset of school in August with a smoother rollout.

As we move forward with continued district benchmarks, SLO assessments and increased teacher use of classroom assessments, I continue to provide training for teachers and

administrators with test creation and online testing. With the new school year, all details, procedures, and schedules will be shared at the beginning of school for the local representative responsible for the communication of district assessments. As the SchoolNet Specialist I continue to provide directions and procedures for testing and offer support as needed. The ability to use SchoolNet for creating assessments at all levels has changed the mindset of many teachers, as they are introduced to the ease of creating Express tests by just selecting standards and how many questions you wish from the NWEA item bank of questions.

SchoolNet /Pearson worked closely with DeKalb to prepare for the first quarterly benchmark administration with program and implementation managers on site to assist with any type of issue that I could not handle correcting within SchoolNet. This support was critical to a very smooth first day of testing even with a few glitches that arose immediately. Additional time was given by SchoolNet/Pearson personnel to physically test devices for online testing options and to provide a possible solution. The collaboration between SchoolNet/Pearson in regards to assessments has been highly engaged and supportive.