



White Paper:

Assessing the ROI of an Instructional Management Solution

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How can educators assess the value of a technology that helps them make data-driven decisions about instruction at every level, from the district to the individual student?

SchoolNet was founded based on the idea that giving districts access to quality and actionable data would allow them to more effectively manage resources and materials, ultimately driving student performance. Over time, SchoolNet has compiled the views of leaders within several large K-12 districts who have implemented SchoolNet's Instructional Management Solution (IMS) to understand what they perceive to be the value of their investment. The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate, through these examples, that districts which implement SchoolNet's IMS realize gains in administrative efficiency, instructional effectiveness and institutional productivity that lead to improved student performance.

Defining ROI

Return on Investment (ROI) measures how effectively a company uses its capital to generate profit; the higher the ROI, the better. ROI is arguably the most common metric to use when comparing the value of one investment to another. In an educational context, the metric used to determine value when comparing investments is the degree of impact on student achievement. Quantitatively speaking, such returns are measured in the currency of standardized test scores. SchoolNet's IMS positively influences student performance in this regard by improving efficiency, effectiveness and productivity from the district office to the classroom.

Improving Administrative Efficiency

Three defining characteristics of a SchoolNet IMS are that it highlights the data that the district has determined to be relevant to its metrics, it makes district data readily accessible to all those that need such data, and it has a flexible and intuitive reporting interface that makes data meaningful for all users. With administrators and staff having unfettered access to relevant data, they are able to perform their jobs more efficiently. All users save time obtaining data and resources are allocated in a more informed and targeted manner.

For many, the challenge of becoming a data-driven district is simply the process of ensuring user access to the right data. At Northside ISD (San Antonio, TX, 74,000 students) the SchoolNet IMS gives teachers direct access to reporting tools designed to

Defining an IMS

An Instructional Management Solution, or IMS, provides the technology that enables district administrators, teachers, parents, students and community leaders, to easily access and analyze relevant data, allowing them to formulate actionable plans that inform instruction and improve student achievement.

Although many technology programs exist for handling one or more of the many data storage, processing and analysis tasks necessary in K-12 institutions, Instructional Management Solutions differ from these "point solutions" by offering a unified system that addresses the end-to-end needs of instructional management. An IMS enables districts to analyze data, assess performance, individualize instruction, deploy curriculum, track professional development and build a connected learning community.

meet their needs in analyzing and monitoring student achievement at both the individual and classroom level. This ubiquity of data helps academic deans and instructional specialists become more efficient, according to Kelly Smith, Assistant Superintendent for Technology Services. "They are now empowered to go into the data and create the reports they need," Smith said in an interview with SchoolNet. "This replaces the old method of getting in a queue and being reliant on others. For instance, their ability to compare grade distribution with standardized test results was impossible without relying on other administrators. Now they can run their own reports and quickly develop strategies to react to what they see."

John DiLello, a Director in the Chief Academic Office of the School District of Philadelphia, (Philadelphia, PA, 190,000 students), says SchoolNet's IMS enabled the district to become more "agile." Previously, staff at all levels were forced into an extensive bureaucratic process that discouraged inquiry; since every request took so long to process, requestors had to make sure they asked precisely the right question to receive the correct information. With the introduction of the IMS, staff now manage their own independent and low stakes investigation of data.

This improves efficiency by:

- Increasing the sophistication of the questions being asked, as users become more comfortable with the data and reach a greater level of understanding.
- Increasing the relevancy of data generated, leading to more targeted and actionable conclusions.
- Allowing end-users to generate relevant reports without relying on other staff involvement.
- Increasing the ability to best target resources based on results.

Improving Instructional Effectiveness

Once district staff have become more efficient in their investigation and understanding of the data, tactical and strategic instructional activities become more effective.

At the district level, the data analysis and reporting tools in SchoolNet's IMS drive more effective resource allocation decisions. As Patricia Renzulli, the Chief Information Officer for the School District of Philadelphia (Philadelphia, PA, 190,000 students), commented in a July 2005 article in T.H.E. Journal, the result of using SchoolNet in Philadelphia has been "...the power to identify strengths and weaknesses in student performance midstream, so administrators can act decisively to make curriculum modifications, target supplemental services and special programs, and apply professional development programs where they are needed most."

At the classroom level, SchoolNet's IMS helps teachers differentiate and target their instructional practices to better meet the needs of their students. Traditionally, standardized test data and even short-cycle assessments have taken weeks and months to get in the teachers' hands. The use of an IMS has, according to Renzulli, "effectively

eliminated the lag time in existing standardized test and response cycles from entire school semesters to hours, if not minutes." With benchmark testing analysis, she noted, "teachers can identify where groups of students, even individual students, are falling behind." This immediacy of access to individual performance data allows teachers to respond to student needs when they begin to show signs of difficulty and when the material is still relevant. As Northside's Smith noted, "Teachers can react and address student's needs and individualize instruction almost immediately. It gets the student on the right path to success."

Similarly in Philadelphia where large class sizes present a challenging environment for individualizing instruction to teachers, Renzulli commented that "for the first time, teachers can view up-to-date student performance data, as well as determine which students need remediation and which would benefit from more advanced instruction. They can also draw upon online curriculum resources to address specific needs."

Improving Institutional Productivity

Gains in administrative efficiency and instructional effectiveness ultimately result in improved productivity across the district. SchoolNet's IMS achieves this productivity by streamlining institutional services, enhancing the value of standardized and benchmark testing and fostering collaboration among administrative departments, principals and teachers, teacher teams, and the parent community.

In Pittsburgh Public Schools (Pittsburgh, PA, 35,000 students) the automation and online availability of reports through SchoolNet's IMS permits the office of the CIO to reduce production of customized reports. This greatly increases productivity, allowing skilled technical staff to solve previously unaddressed complex data challenges. This translates into major resource efficiencies for the district.

As district managers look across their community they are often aware of pockets of excellence among teachers. The tools within the SchoolNet IMS, such as the lesson plan creator and materials bank, allow administrators to expand this pedagogical excellence by distributing exemplary lessons and best practices across the district. As Elbie Yaworsky, former CIO for Pittsburgh, explained, "by sharing lesson plans and best practices, teachers don't have to spend as much time on their own looking for materials; community collaboration is real."

Collaboration among disparate functional groups is one of the key elements in building a professional learning community. Within a district, the presence of this community translates directly into a more productive instructional environment. In Northside, Kelly Smith commented that SchoolNet's IMS enables a higher level of collaboration between the Assessment, Curriculum and Instruction, and Information Services Departments. "No one group is the full owner of data anymore.

Before, Information Services was the keeper of data, and access was limited. Curriculum

and Instruction would have to do a lot of work just to get data that already existed in our system. Now all the information is at the table for Curriculum and Instruction to use to pull together projects like new special ed initiatives." In Pittsburgh, universal access to data makes it easier for principals to ensure that students are assigned to the most appropriate classes, according to Yaworsky. "Principals can look at student course assignments and understand why they were made," he told SchoolNet. When they have questions about student class assignments, he added, principals and department chairs can talk to teachers based on a shared knowledge about the student's history because they all have instant access to student records.

Evaluating Your District

For school administrators to understand the value that an IMS will bring to their district, they must first identify the areas where gains may be made. Conducting a "Needs Analysis" will help a district assess those areas, by evaluating several categories including curriculum, assessment, leadership and strategy and professional development. Answering some of the questions considered as part of a "Needs Analysis" will quickly establish a baseline so that a district can better understand what gains may be made by implementing an IMS. Some categories and questions to consider include:

Leadership and Strategy:

1. What are your district's goals for student achievement?
2. What are your district's policies for using data to improve instruction?
3. Does your district have scheduling policies that support teachers in collaborative planning and data analysis?
4. How does your district determine teacher professional development needs?

Curriculum and Instruction

1. Does your district have a scope and sequence organized by grade and subject area?
2. Is your district's curriculum explicitly tied to state standards?
3. Is the district's scope and sequence aligned to benchmark tests or short cycle assessments?
4. Do all teachers have easy access to the scope and sequence?
5. Do teachers have access to instructional materials aligned to the scope and sequence?
6. Do teachers collaborate daily or weekly to plan lessons and review what works and what doesn't work?

Assessment

1. Does your district provide teachers with access to high stakes test data aligned to standards?
2. Does your district administer short cycle assessments aligned to the scope and sequence?
3. Does your district provide timely access to short cycle assessment data so that it can be used in instructional planning?

Professional Development

1. Are professional development opportunities directly aligned to the scope and sequence?
2. Are professional development suggestions directly aligned to student outcomes?
3. Is regular collaborative instructional planning part of a teacher's job and is it embedded in a professional development program?
4. Can your district's culture be described as one in which teachers feel 'safe' communicating with principals regarding their own professional development needs?
5. Can your district's culture be described as one in which teachers are supported in regular collaborative instructional planning?

Achieving Desired ROI

By unifying district data and providing one-click access to understandable and actionable reports, a solid IMS, such as SchoolNet's, provides educators with a valuable tool to make data-driven decisions that more effectively deploy instruction, align standards curriculum and assessment, and improve human capital. This tool uniquely provides universal access to data across a shared reporting platform that is accessible and customizable for all administrators, teachers, parents, students and community leadership.

The resulting increases in administrative efficiency, instructional effectiveness and institutional productivity provide a foundation for better-informed decisions and sharing of instructional best practices, on a district, school, classroom and student basis. They also contribute to improvements in human capital. The end result is every district's desired return on investment: Measurable improvements in student performance.



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