



# THE NETTER

The Schoolnet newsletter for data-driven decision making

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Virginia Beach City Public Schools speaks to us regarding its implementation of Schoolnet's Instructional Management Suite and what's happening in its district.

## Welcome

Welcome to the fourth issue of *The Netter*, the Schoolnet newsletter for data-driven decision making and student achievement. *The Netter* is written for educators who regard technology as an important component in the success of our districts, schools, teachers, and students.

In this issue, Schoolnet shares an interview with Virginia Beach City Public Schools, a look at what's brewing in our "Schoolnet Lab", and of course, some useful tips and tricks, and much more. As always, we want to hear from you! Send us your feedback!

## Client Spotlight

*The Netter* talks with **Dr. Jared Cotton**, Assistant Superintendent, Department of Research, Evaluation and Assessment at **Virginia Beach City Public Schools**.



**Can you tell us about your district best practices with data a few years back to today?**

We already had a very data-driven culture in place as we had a lot of data that we were utilizing and disseminating to all stakeholders. However, our process for sharing data was challenging and time consuming at times. It did not place the data directly in the hands of teachers in a timely manner in order to effectively inform classroom instruction. What was really an impetus for finding an instructional management system was that we wanted data all in one place, a one-stop-shop, where everyone could access necessary data in a timely manner.

**What are some of your immediate results from having the data all in one place?**

We now have the ability to disseminate our curriculum materials and resources to teachers online. For the past several years, we have provided comprehensive curriculum to assist teachers with delivering high-quality instruction. Today, we continue to provide these valuable resources, but we no longer utilize "hefty" binders that can be overwhelming to teachers. Since the content is now online, we can easily access it and keep it updated in real-time. We update our curriculum frequently (adding lesson plans, etc.). We make the changes right away, and send out an email notification to teachers who are impacted by the changes, as opposed to having everyone make copies to update their binders whenever there is a change.

Moreover, it has really changed how we handle local assessments and the analysis of the results.

Before the move to online assessments, our students were taking local assessments using scan forms or bubble sheets. Each form had to be scanned and results had to be sent to central office as a data file. Unfortunately, the scanners had to be serviced frequently.

(Interview continues on next page)



## Client Spotlight, continued

Schoolnet talks with Virginia Beach City Public Schools

Moreover, central office had to spend time compiling the data to produce division-wide, school-level, and Item Analysis reports for schools.

Because of this process, schools frequently had to wait three to four weeks for this information! The data were sent to the principals in PDF and Excel formats and principals would, in turn, disseminate the results to their teachers. By that time, teachers were already three to four weeks into new instructional material. Now, through online testing, we get the reports and results immediately into the hands of teachers. Once we were able to put assessment data directly to teachers in a timely manner, it became important to ensure that we didn't just provide teachers with data for informational purposes only. We need teachers to use these data for action. As a result, we created data protocols to assist teachers in analyzing student achievement data and to really look at individual students and their specific needs. This has been our focus this year and we are already seeing some positive effects.

Currently, all our secondary local assessments are being administered online through Schoolnet. In addition, we are encouraging the elementary schools to "opt-in" to use the online assessments this year but next year all elementary schools will be required to conduct assessments online. So far, most have opted in as they see the value in receiving immediate results. In addition, we are in the process of creating even deeper reports so that ultimately we will have just one data source for all our reporting needs.

**What are some of the other types of data, besides curriculum and assessment, that you can now access via the one system?**

We now can more easily access disciplinary data, attendance data and student demographics.

**What about historical student data?**

We loaded three years worth of data into the system for the initial roll-out. These data are now readily available in the Student Profile and teachers have this information at their fingertips. There is no longer a need to go to the previous teacher or the cumulative student folder that is stored in the office.

**Did you have to convince teachers to use the data?**

Not at all. We implemented the system using a strategic approach, starting with the secondary teachers the first year and elementary teachers in the second year of the implementation. We actually started with a group of secondary teachers that served as our "test drivers." We gave them access, training and homework! They provided valuable feedback which was used to inform the elementary rollout.

**We have heard quite a bit about the work the district has done to reduce the achievement gap for African American males.**

**Will you talk to us about that?**

We have always disaggregated data by subgroups, including ethnicity and gender. As a result, we uncovered a large disparity when we compared the academic achievement of African American males to all other males in VBCPS. The elimination of this gap was initiated by our School Board and quickly became one of our main objectives in our recently adopted strategic plan. The reports from Schoolnet drill down to ethnicity and gender and provide central office and principals the ability to easily and personally monitor all the subgroups. Thus, the information is now more readily available and continues to be on everyone's radar screen. We can now keep the achievement of all our students, especially our African American males, in the forefront. In fact, we have already seen improvements in the academic achievement of our African American male students.

**21st century skills is also a major part of your district strategic plan, can you tell us more about that?**

We have defined the 21st Century skills for the Virginia Beach Outcomes for Student Success as follows: to be academically proficient; to be effective communicators and collaborators; to be globally aware, independent, responsible learners and citizens; to be critical and creative thinkers, innovators and problem solvers.

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## Client Spotlight, continued

### Schoolnet speaks with Virginia Beach City Public Schools

We cannot assess these outcomes with multiple choice tests. So, we have identified those skills and aligned them to our growing curriculum. We determined that we can create performance-based assessments and utilize scoring rubrics to evaluate student mastery of these important outcomes. We are currently testing this with a few schools and hope to implement division-wide next year. We are also thinking about surveying our students at the end of the online assessment to get their feedback. We have never done this but think that it would be very valuable information as students are our most valuable stakeholders

#### **Are your teachers using the classroom-based testing tool yet?**

We are currently field testing the ETS Item Bank for online classroom assessments. As mentioned earlier, we are very strategic in how we implement and rollout new initiatives. We have identified 10 schools, and asked each school to select a grade level or department to work with staff from central office to create common assessments for each grade level. The method is as follows: assess students using common assessments; analyze the results using data protocols; plan for necessary intervention; and reassess as appropriate. If this proves effective, then we will consider releasing it to all schools next year. We want this initiative to be closely tied to the work that we are doing with Professional Learning Communities. This is the reason why we are emphasizing the importance of developing common assessments across departments or grade levels as this will give teachers common student data to discuss. We don't want teachers to work in isolation because it is important to continue to promote effective collaboration around student learning

#### **Are you using the parent portal?**

We opened the parent portal up to parents of secondary students last year. We are witnessing an increase in parent participation and feedback has been very positive overall. It has created an open dialogue between parents and teachers. Parents are also able to see the gradebook. We don't use Schoolnet's gradebook, but parents can easily access our gradebook through the Schoolnet Parent Portal.

We are also looking to utilize the Student Portal this year so that students can follow their own academic progress and not just use the system to take assessments. In fact, we found that students were asking for it! One student in particular exclaimed, "You don't need a Parent Portal, you need a STUDENT Portal!" Many students use the Parent Portal to see their grades and what their parents are seeing! Giving students access to their assessment results and daily progress is important to helping students develop into independent and responsible learners.

#### **What are your takeaways in the approach to how you implemented Schoolnet and all your moving parts?**

None of us realized the work and planning required in the implementation process. It has many parts that have to be implemented so it is important to be realistic when developing a roll-out plan.

To successfully implement all parts, we established a steering committee with the following subcommittees:

Elementary Curriculum	Local Assessments	Parent Portal	Media and Communications
Secondary Curriculum	Data and Reporting	Teacher Web pages	Staff Training

We really started making progress when we created these subcommittees as each team had responsibility for its focus area. The teams created the action plans and were empowered to make necessary progress. In fact, we just had a year-end-review with the Schoolnet team and it was impressive to see what we have been able to accomplish with this model in place. It's fair to say that it did not start out this way as we had a rocky start from both ends. We had just finished the implementation of our gradebook (from another vendor) and the feedback from teachers indicated that we had implemented too quickly, and people weren't quite ready for another technology solution. When we started working with Schoolnet, we overcompensated and almost moved too slowly. Once we created our current model of the sub-committees, necessary progress was made. We are looking forward to continued, meaningful progress this year.

**Jared, thank you so much for your time and sharing what's happening at Virginia Beach City Public Schools!**



## Events

The Key to Writing  
a Successful  
Innovation  
Grant Proposal



[Register](#) for the Free Interactive Workshop: Data-Driven Achievement: The Key to Writing a Winning Innovation Grant Proposal.

Wednesday, November 4  
2-3pm EST (11am-12pm PST)

## In The News



NBC Philadelphia talks to a student at The School District of Philadelphia about StudentNet, Schoolnet's Student Portal. [See the video](#)

Albemarle County Public Schools Makes AYP with Help from Schoolnet. [Read on](#)

Back to School: Parents check student's progress from home. Austin Independent School District engages parental involvement with Schoolnet's Parent Portal. [Read on](#)

ETS and Schoolnet, Inc. Join Forces to Deliver Integrated Formative Assessment Solution to K-12 School Districts. Schoolnet now offers ETS' researched and proven item banks as a preloaded option within the Schoolnet Suite. [Read on](#)

The School District of Philadelphia's new StudentNet aimed at helping kids plan and organize. [Read on](#)

## School Resources



### Could your school use \$250,000?

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) is requesting applications under the Texas Secondary School Redesign and Restructuring Cycle 6 grant, offering up to \$250,000 to approximately 10 eligible campuses.

Eligible campuses are those that have earned a rating of Academically Unacceptable (AU) for the 2008-2009 school year. The purpose of TSSRR Cycle 6 is to provide middle school, junior high and high school campuses rated AU with the resources to implement innovative, school-wide initiatives designed to improve student performance on the campus. Once selected for funding, grantees collaborate with regional education service center (ESC) 13 to assess needs. Next, grantees select approved service providers (i.e., educational partners with specific expertise in school redesign) from an approved vendor list supplied by TEA. Approved service providers work with grantees to identify resources and develop and implement a redesign plan.

#### Requesting the Application:

RFAs are no longer available in print. The announcement letter and complete RFA will be posted on the TEA website at <http://burleson.tea.state.tx.us/GrantOpportunities/forms> for viewing and downloading. In the "Select Search Options" box, select the name of the RFA from the drop-down list. Scroll down to the "Application and Support Information" to view all documents that pertain to this RFA. Applications must be received in the Document Control Center of TEA by 5:00 PM (Central Time), Thursday, December 10, 2009, to be eligible to be considered for funding.

#### For Further Information:

For clarifying information about the RFA, contact Donnell Bilsky, Division of Discretionary Grants, TEA, (512) 463-9269.



## Tips & Tricks

Amy Cook, Schoolnet's Senior Instructional Designer, shares a few of her favorite tips. You can access all of Amy's Tips & Tricks anytime at the [Schoolnet.com Tips and Tricks Viewpoint](#):

### User Guides Available Online

In case you didn't know, you can easily access User Guides at any time: go to My Schoolnet, and click on the "Take a Tour of Schoolnet" button at the top right of the page. This will bring you to a Support Library with PDFs of the latest user guides available for each product. In addition, you will also find release notes explaining the latest features.

### Renaming Analysis Spreadsheet Columns

You can now rename analysis spreadsheet columns:

1. Set up and run your spreadsheet as usual.
2. Click Column Details.
3. Click the pencil icon next to the current column name.
4. Change as desired and click Save.

The renaming will 'stick' if you save or publish the columns.

### Saving an Analysis Spreadsheet with Students With or Without Students

Did you know that now, with V.10, you can save an analysis spreadsheet in Account with or without students?

When you save columns, choose the option "Complete Report (Parameters + Student Set.)" The criteria that were used to display the students currently in the spreadsheet will be used the next time you view the saved columns.

## Product Spotlight from the:



### Response to Intervention

Schoolnet is working on a module for Response to Intervention, which is due to be released in June 2010. Rtl is a natural next step for Schoolnet, which already enables districts to assess students, manage curriculum, and analyze data, all from one centralized location.

Schoolnet's Rtl solution will allow districts to efficiently implement, track and manage district-wide Rtl initiatives. With Schoolnet's Rtl, educators will be able to evaluate the needs of all students and quickly provide intervention to students who are falling behind. Teachers will identify struggling students, create, track and manage intervention plans, capture progress monitoring assessment data and deliver detailed reports to all constituents.

Leveraging the wealth of student information available in the Schoolnet Suite, Schoolnet's Rtl solution will make it easy for district- and school-level staff to define thresholds for at-risk students and systematically refer them for Rtl programs. Teachers will use standards-based assessment data to accurately diagnose the individual strengths and weaknesses of each child with an Rtl plan to help target instruction. At the same time, parents will be engaged in a variety of ways, including the ability to log in and track progress online.





## The Doyle Report: Lessons Learned: The “New” Urban School District

As they say in the State Department, Governor Pawlenty (R-MN), chair of the SMHC National Task Force (Strategic management of Human Capital), and I had “a frank exchange of views” last year when I was gathering data on Montgomery County, MD. In response to Governor Pawlenty’s observation that few if any urban districts were doing well, I offered Montgomery County as an example of one “urban” district that was.

“Not so fast” he cautioned: “the district is doing well to be sure, but Montgomery County, MD is not an urban district. Name an urban area in Montgomery County.” He has a point, shared by many urban school superintendents: they don’t think Montgomery County and districts like it (such as neighboring Fairfax) are “real” urban districts. In point of fact they aren’t, but they offer a powerful lesson.

The concept of urban districts is important in education policy circles because of the pathologies they exhibit: low achievement, high drop-out rates, extremes of poverty and wealth, high rates of in-migration (which means not only high ELL rates, but high turnover among students and their families), high rates of “bright flight” to the suburbs and private schools; together with high concentrations of racial and ethnic minorities, their circumstances are sobering. (The term “minority” itself no longer means what it once did as minorities become majorities).

The recent murder in broad day light of a Chicago PS honors student is a case in point. But so, too, are formerly suburban bastions, which, until recently, were free of urban pathologies; now they face many of the challenges that were once the exclusive province of big-city schools.

A retrospective tout de horizon is in order. When I attended high school in Chicago the urban pathology was there in attenuated form, but big city high schools were still “good”; (i.e. physical discipline prevailed). They were fairly safe, and by the time 16th birthdays rolled around (the end of compulsory attendance), the drop outs disappeared into the urban economy. As for academic discipline, as Peter Drucker observed, they were schools from which you could “extract” an education. My high school – Morgan Park – had good teachers in abundance but we weren’t spoon fed. For better or for worse, we had to seek them out.

I spent a lot of time in Montgomery County schools in the last year (working on a co-authored book, *Leading for Equity* - which I’m happy to report is available on Amazon.com - and I’ve seen the future. Under Jerry Weast’s leadership, there is high academic achievement in a setting with increasing “urban” pathology: poverty in the midst of plenty, increasing ELL enrollments and shifting racial and ethnic demographics. When I attended Montgomery County elementary and middle schools in the 1950s, they were well-to-do and white. Indeed, so widespread is this phenomenon (at least below the Mason-Dixon Line where districts are few and large) that the Fordham Institute is hosting a Conference on the subject in November.

One reason for the importances of mixed demographic, quasi-urban districts, is that they have an incentive to improve across the board: small suburban enclaves like Lincoln or Wellesley, MA, Orinda or Palo Alto, CA, and New Trier or Maine Township, IL have no incentive to improve the big urban centers they adjoin. They have challenges of their own.

Indeed, the problem may be simply that we need new nomenclature as their demographics change: perhaps we should simply drop the sobriquet “urban” and describe them as “troubled districts”. Indeed, even in conventional terms, the first suburban ring becomes the “new” urban district; just as in LA, Watts, didn’t look urban to those of us who went there with a Middle Western or Eastern frame of reference, so too Montgomery County, MD and the Virginia suburbs around DC.

The US is the only country I know of in which the “slums” are in the central city and not in the suburbs -- in the UK, Mexico, Brazil, Australia, France and Spain, for example, the slums are on the outskirts and the central city remains the prime residential area; that is beginning to happen here in the U.S. with gentrification.

Indeed, gentrification follows long-cycle pattern; first white flight, then bright flight (the Black and Latino working and middle class); then childless working couples of all races/ethnicities move back in, then middle-class couples with children. As the patterns continue, central cities will revive as schools snap-back and we may – over time – see more suburban than urban problems.

Without being unduly optimistic, the urban story of the mid-twentieth century may be played out differently in the 21st, with the suburban fringe avoiding trouble – as is the case in Montgomery and Fairfax -- by learning from their urban brethren.

[Sign up to receive The Doyle Report automatically, each week.](#)



## About Us

Schoolnet is the national leader in data-driven instructional and professional development management for K-12 school districts. Schoolnet's award-winning Instructional Management Solutions (IMS) suite gives districts a group of integrated, web-based software tools to analyze district-to-classroom data, manage curriculum and benchmark test administration, communicate intra-district and with parents, and manage professional development.

Over 40 school districts of every size across the country, including Chicago Public Schools and The School District of Philadelphia, use Schoolnet's IMS successfully as part of their everyday educational process. Schoolnet has been recognized in Inc. Magazine's Top 500 List and in Deloitte's Fast 50 and as one of the fastest growing private companies.

## The Schoolnet Team

Schoolnet has always valued input from our customers and we want to make sure that we have an open, honest dialogue about what works well, and what we can improve. For your reference, below is the list of our senior management team. Feel free to drop them a line about The Netter, at [newsletter@schoolnet.com](mailto:newsletter@schoolnet.com), or any other thoughts you might have about Schoolnet.

- Jonathan Harber, CEO
- Mark Chernis, President and COO
- Denis P. Doyle, CAO
- C. Andrew Johns, CFO
- Luyen Chou, CPO

***NYC Headquarters***  
*Schoolnet, Inc.*  
*525 Seventh Avenue, 4th Floor*  
*New York, NY 10018*  
*Phone: (646) 496-9000*  
*Fax: (212) 675-0815*