



NCTI 2009 Innovators Conference

Podcast Interview

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Transcript

Great, Chauncey, thank you. It's a pleasure to be here and to speak on this important issue. I'm excited to share some of the innovative work we're doing in New York City around assessments for all students so that we can better inform our instruction, differentiate instruction, personalize instruction for every student's learning needs. To give you a sense of context, in New York City we have more than 1500 schools, serving 1.1 million students, approximately 90,000 educators, so everything we do in New York City is big, and the scale is tremendous; and so when we launched our formative assessment program to support data-informed instruction in 2007, we faced some formidable challenges.

We offer formative assessments to inform instruction to about 875,000 students eight times a year, four times each in Math and English. In addition we offer formative assessments for English language learners, and a computer adaptive assessment that is used primarily to serve our special education population. So the administration scoring data management and then training of our teachers is a significant undertaking to manage a program like that. And so, some of the lessons that we've learned in the last two years in implementing that program are on how important it is to develop teacher capacity to use data effectively. It's one thing to have good quality assessments, and good quality data. It's really important to have good tools that make that data intelligible to teachers, but unless you're training teachers to know what to do next, the "so what?" of that data, you're just not going to move the needle on improving student learning.

Our approach to formative assessment is to try to individualize a learning pathway for every student and we've taken a few strategies to do that. The program that we use for our special education population – it's not exclusively for our special education population, but our special ed educators find it especially usable and worthwhile – is a performance series assessment that's a computer adaptive test that levels the difficulty of the assessment to where the student is; and so irrespective of grade or age, within two or three test questions the assessment, the computer adaptive system will level where that student's learning challenges are, and really hone in on what those student's needs are in specific skill areas. Our special ed educators can then use that information, it's immediately available, it's computer-driven, computer delivered, and can immediately use that to group students around instructional needs, rather than the host of other ways that special education compliance regulations require us to group our students. And so re-thinking how we're approaching our special ed instructional design really



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from an instructional perspective, and that's been critical I think to the success that we're achieving with these students.

Most of these assessments, given the scale, are primarily multiple choice assessments. In order to get the turnaround time, either immediately with computer delivered, or if they're paper and pencil within five days, a lot of the assessment is multiple choice. We do have some open-ended items on some of these assessments, but we know that that's not sufficient to really richly measure with multiple measures our students' learning needs. And so we are piloting this year a portfolio-based assessment where we can measure students' performance on richer, interdisciplinary performance tasks that are really closely aligned to a wider set of skills and knowledge that we want our students to develop. We are developing these performance tasks within the city with educators, developing common performance tasks so that we can look across schools and across grade levels, look at longitudinal growth and progression and have a reliable measure of students' growth and progress using something other than just multiple choice but with a richer set of assessments, and we know this will be really valuable as well for our special education students and educators.

I think another innovation that we're piloting this year is what we call the "School of One", premised on the goal that we should be designing personalized learning plans for every student based not only on where they are within their academic achievement but as well around their personal profile, their learning preferences, their areas of interest in topics. And using a fairly sophisticated learning algorithm that's based on daily checks for understanding with that student's daily learning plan we can optimize the fit between, with a class of thirty students, for every single student in that class we can look at what should the next day's lesson be to move them forward on their learning progression, while also taking into account their areas of interest, their preferred learning styles- whether they learn best in small groups, with direct instruction from a teacher, peer-learning, online self-paced learning, online learning with a remote tutor- all of these modalities we're looking at how can we blend them optimally to meet every individual student's learning pathway. It's a really exciting pilot, we piloted it this past summer in one of our middle schools, it was a six week summer school in 6th grade math, and we found that we were able to accelerate students through more than a year's learning of math in less than six weeks. Thank you very much it's a pleasure to be able to tell you about our good work here in New York City.