

Using Technical Assessment Data to Improve Programs: Northwestern Pennsylvania

Erie County Technical School (ECTS) is located in Erie, Pennsylvania and serves eleven school districts in northwestern Pennsylvania. ECTS houses about 800 students that can be classified as concentrators. There are eighteen programs which fall under the classifications representing nine of the career clusters. ECTS maintains twenty-one CTE teachers and eight secondary administrators who staff these programs.

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania maintains a state contract with NOCTI and NIMS so ECTS uses those assessments exclusively. Their experience has been that other industry certifications are not able to provide timely or analyzable data. Like most secondary school systems, ECTS also participates in a state academic assessment. Students participate in three years of “soft skill” training including materials in leadership, business principles and total quality management.

In lieu of state specific occupational standards, ECTS has utilized NOCTI “blueprints” as its default program standard and program content is aligned accordingly. ECTS uses assessment data with its staff to develop individual teacher action plans for program improvement. In a number of instances the data gleaned from the assessment is used to make equipment purchase decisions and decisions regarding textbooks, workbooks, and audio visuals. More specifically, the end of year assessment was used to redefine an electrical program’s state approval (the program transitioned to a different CIP code). One of the strongest compliments that can be paid to the use of this data and the teacher action plans is that it encourages faculty engagement and ownership in program improvement.

Thanks in part to the analysis of end of program technical assessment data, and a team of fourteen dedicated educators, ECTS was among the first schools in Pennsylvania to achieve the ISO 9001 certification.

This site is a mature site with an experienced administrative team and a seasoned staff. Their longitudinal use of data has given them the ability to predict success of new teachers, effects of long-term substitutions, and better indicators of the type of teacher to hire. The administrators and staff have collaboratively been able to “drill down” to find “root causes” of curricular issues impeding program improvement. There is a solid understanding of the relationship between standards, assessment data and program improvement. It is clear that this site has incorporated the use of assessment data into its overall philosophy and that they provide an excellent role model for other sites in the Commonwealth.

VBCPS is the most senior school division in Virginia in terms of technical assessment data use, but still relatively new when compared to others across the nation. They are making great progress as evidenced by their collaboration with economic development and their recognition by state government. In a recent survey of the 316 high schools in Virginia reporting CTE Certification data, VBCPS had nine high schools in the top twenty-five. This school’s diverse use of technical assessment data indicates that they are on a solid path to deliver an even better program for their students and the economy that supports them.

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