

## **Managing Curriculum: Rapid Implementation and Sustainability of a Districtwide Data Initiative**

**Jeffrey C. Wayman and Katherine Conoly**

Article appeared in the Spring, 2006 issue of ERS Spectrum. Full reference:  
Wayman, J. C., & Conoly, K (2006). Managing curriculum: Rapid implementation and sustainability of a districtwide data initiative. *ERS Spectrum* 24(2), 4-8.

### **Introduction**

In March 2003, the Corpus Christi Independent School District (CCISD) received a Curriculum Management Audit report from the Texas Curriculum Management Audit Center of the Texas Association of School Administrators. One of the findings of this audit was that CCISD lacked a clear comprehensive management plan to define and guide the design, delivery, and evaluation of curriculum. The audit also revealed that curriculum guides in place at the time were inadequate resources to align teaching with state and local assessments.

In response to this audit, CCISD administration decided to acquire a curriculum management system (CMS) that would support and facilitate curriculum alignment in terms of how the curriculum was defined, taught, and tested, and allow all educators efficient access to student data for instructional improvement. CCISD personnel decided that the CMS and the new curriculum/data initiative should be implemented simultaneously because of the mutual support offered. CCISD administration endeavored to complete implementation in one school year, expecting participation from all district personnel in this initiative. Successful implementation was achieved during the 2004-05 school year, and CCISD personnel now face the inevitable next step: how to sustain and grow use of this system.

In this paper, we describe the process of establishing the curriculum management system in support of the CCISD curriculum and data initiative. We will describe the selection and implementation process, discuss successes and challenges encountered along the way, and explore questions of future sustainability for CCISD.

During the spring of 2003, establishment of a multi-stakeholder team to explore and evaluate commercially available curriculum management systems was undertaken by the assistant superintendent for elementary instruction and the assistant superintendent for secondary instruction. The Curriculum Management Selection Committee also included individuals from other areas of administration, such as Technology Services. This committee reviewed numerous commercially available systems, inviting some companies to give presentations to the committee. This process enabled the committee to learn various functions available on the market, while helping the committee further define which type of system would offer the best fit for CCISD. This process continued through the summer of 2003.

In August 2003, some administrative reorganization occurred that resulted in reorganization of the Curriculum Management Selection Committee. The assistant superintendent for elementary instruction left the district, resulting in the elimination of

that position. The director of technology services (second author) was reassigned as executive director for instructional support and was named leader of the CMS search project. At this time, the committee was expanded to include teachers, principals, curriculum consultants, technology staff, and teacher union representatives. The aim of this expansion was to involve every educational role that would be affected by the implementation of a CMS and associated data initiative. For example, not only were teachers included, but teachers' union representatives were also, because the implementation of this initiative would portend changes in the ways teachers would be expected to plan and deliver instruction. Given the groundwork laid by the previous committee, the charge of the new committee for the 2003-04 school year was a new one: move beyond information gathering to identify and implement a CMS for the district.

### **Choosing a System**

Learning afforded by committee work in spring 2003 had provided the committee insight into which vendors might be good fits for the CCISD initiative, along with ways in which these vendors could be evaluated. The committee designed an evaluation rubric and used it to review four different curriculum management systems. These four systems were narrowed to two systems that competed for the final choice.

As part of the evaluation process for these two systems, the committee asked each vendor to recommend a district that was currently using its system. A subcommittee of the Curriculum Management Selection Committee traveled to both of the recommended districts for an on-site review. On-site reviews offered an opportunity to evaluate the systems in a practical setting, and gain an "end user" perspective with the systems.

The sub-committee also interviewed teachers and staff at these districts about their experiences with the systems. Upon returning to the district, the subcommittee again scored the two systems, using the established rubric, and submitted their recommendation for SchoolNet ([www.schoolnet.com](http://www.schoolnet.com)) to the larger committee. SchoolNet was chosen in part because teachers found the interface intuitive and easy to navigate. Other positive features were the capacity for teachers to easily access curriculum and develop lesson plans. Examples of these features seen in the site visit were important in the recommendation of SchoolNet for CCISD's CMS.

In December 2003, individuals from the Curriculum Management Selection Committee conducted a presentation of the committee's findings and recommendations to the CCISD Board of Trustees which approved negotiations to purchase SchoolNet. The district purchased SchoolNet in January 2004. SchoolNet offers a variety of modules; the CCISD purchase was structured to include three modules: (1) the Account module for data warehousing, integration, and access; (2) the Align module to facilitate curriculum storage and information access; and (3) the Assess module to offer administration and processing of periodic formative and benchmark evaluations. The Account and Align modules were slated for implementation at the start of the 2004-05 school year, and the Assess module was slated for implementation at the start of the 2005-06 school year.

### **Implementation of the CMS and Data Initiative**

In January 2004, CCISD and SchoolNet began a five-month process of designing and building the data architecture and interfaces for the Account and Align modules. For this process, a team was established within the Department of Technology, including a

programmer, two instructional technology consultants, and the director of the Department of Instructional Support. The technology team met with SchoolNet representatives weekly by phone to further progress on building the system, which was finished by May 2004 and ready to be rolled out to district educators. “Rollout” began in June 2004 when staff from key administrative offices (Curriculum and Instruction, Instructional Support, Technology, and Research, Testing, and Evaluation) participated in a month-long training to familiarize them with the system.

Preparation of all 2,500 district employees began in July 2004, with a goal of training each employee by the start of the 2004-05 school year. To fully prepare all employees to use the SchoolNet system, the district implemented a “train-the-trainer” approach. Every campus and each instructional office in the district was asked to send one staff member to a district-provided SchoolNet certification program, resulting in 88 certified staff members. These 88 certified employees were to serve the district as resident experts in the effective use of SchoolNet, rather than as technology troubleshooters. A graduation ceremony was held for the certified individuals, and the superintendent of schools handed out SchoolNet Certification Diplomas to all 88 graduates.

Two weeks later, these 88 trainers provided training to a number of school-based teams from across the district—500 employees in all—in an event called the “Superintendent’s Leadership Conference.” These teams then returned to their schools to prepare their faculties for effective use of SchoolNet to access data and inform instruction. In this way, all 2,500 district employees were prepared to use SchoolNet by the opening of the 2004-05 school year.

The Curriculum Management Selection Committee identified five achievable goals for year one implementation, to be achieved by each school. Under these goals, each educator would be able to:

1. Access state learning standards (Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills) from the Align module.
2. Access state testing standards (Texas Academic Knowledge and Skills) from the Align module.
3. Generate pre-formatted student data reports in the Account module.
4. Generate custom student data reports in the Account module.
5. Develop lesson plans in the Align module.

The school-based teams attending the Superintendent’s Leadership Conference were trained to use SchoolNet and to master the five district goals. During the conference, the teams were asked to develop a year-long professional development plan unique to each school that would allow all campus-based staff to be trained in SchoolNet and to achieve the five stated goals.

### **Professional Development**

Members of the Curriculum Management Selection Committee understood this initiative was more than just selecting technology, aligning curriculum, and expecting data use. Rather, the implementation of a CMS-supported initiative represented a dramatic change in the way district educators were expected to do their jobs. Whereas a loose curriculum, subject to educator interpretation, existed before, this initiative would provide a clear, specific, easily accessible curriculum. Whereas before, student data were

used by administrators, this initiative would provide easy access for teachers to a wealth of student data with the expectation it be used in everyday practice.

Educators also were rarely engaged in extensive use of computers to support pedagogy; now they were expected to use a new computer system to access curriculum and student data to inform improvement of student learning. The implementation of this initiative represented a change in CCISD culture.

On the committee's recommendation, CCISD took measures to build readiness and understanding of the initiative. Attention to this matter began during the selection process in spring 2003, with the establishment of an Implementation Committee, separate from the Curriculum Management Selection Committee. Although separate, the two committees worked closely and shared information. The charge of the implementation committee was threefold: (1) identify professional development strategies to ensure that educators could benefit from the initiative in their everyday professional lives; (2) implement sound, research-based change strategies to ensure the needed cultural shift proceeded as smoothly as possible; and (3) develop internal marketing strategies to build interest, awareness, and support for the initiative.

The Implementation Committee used numerous resources to develop strategies and plans toward professional development and effective change. For instance, the committee drew heavily upon information provided by the National Staff Development Council ([www.nsd.org](http://www.nsd.org)) for specific professional development information. References such as Moore (1991) aided with the technology adoption process. Other scholars were referenced for effective change strategies (Fullan 1993; Hall and Hord 1987; Pankake 1998; Schwahn and Spady 2001).

Toward the third charge, the Implementation Committee built a marketing campaign within the district to help build interest in and awareness. Educators were inundated with information about the upcoming initiative. For instance, a series of articles, flyers, and other forms of communications were built and distributed weekly to all educators in order to maintain awareness and build momentum. Also, using a movie premiere theme, information about SchoolNet was disseminated into brief, comprehensible "sneak previews." These internal marketing efforts began in March 2004 and continued throughout the following year.

### **SchoolNet Usage Statistics**

CCISD personnel were pleased with the success of the training model and the timeline for implementation, and anecdotal feedback from principals suggested the five goals for first-year implementation were met.

SchoolNet use statistics suggest the rollout was successful in involving every educator in using the system. Usage statistics for the month of May 2005 provide an indication of system use after one school year of implementation. In May 2005, there were 2,093 individuals who accessed SchoolNet at least once during the month, and 1,064 (51 percent) of these individuals accessed SchoolNet more than one time, for an average of 2.94 visits per user. Individuals averaged 17.2 minutes per visit.

Fifty-two percent of SchoolNet activity was within the Align (curriculum) module, while 47 percent of activity was within the Account (data) module. Within the Align module, 90 percent of activity was from teachers, with 8 percent from principals and building staff, and 2 percent by district administrators. The most commonly visited

areas by teachers were areas that enabled them to review curriculum materials and plan lessons.

Within the Account module, 65 percent of activity was by teachers, with 31 percent by principals and building staff, and 4 percent by district administrators. The most commonly visited Account areas by teachers were areas that enabled them to browse data on an individual student, and those that enabled them to define sets of students for examination.

### **Discussion**

CCISD administrators are cautiously optimistic regarding the success of their ambitious initiative. Within one school year, CCISD was able to implement and involve all district educators in the use of SchoolNet, and this represents an important benchmark. Rapid implementation of a data system is not uncommon, as most vendors promise a working product within months of system purchase (Wayman, Stringfield, and Yakimowski 2004). Teacher involvement in a data initiative is not uncommon (Young, in press; Supovitz and Klein 2003; Wayman and Stringfield, in press), and instances have been described where isolated schools have involved entire faculties in a computer-supported data initiative (Wayman and Stringfield, in press). But before the CCISD implementation, we were not aware of any instances where full faculty involvement was shown throughout an entire district, and CCISD's approach in linking the data system rollout with expectation of teacher involvement is thought to be unique.

There were a number of practices employed by CCISD during this process that may have contributed to initial implementation success. For instance, CCISD implementers endeavored to promote involvement and awareness throughout the district, as evidenced by the diversity contained in the Curriculum Management Selection Committee and the aggressive marketing program undertaken. CCISD officials cite the review process as a contributor to success, in particular noting the scoring rubric and the on-site review as processes that enabled them to choose the system that best fit the CCISD context. Additionally, professional development and training prior to launch of the CMS facilitated success, as careful attention to the train-the-trainer approach yielded full development coverage throughout the district.

There were also events that served as barriers to implementation success, such as turnover in CCISD administration. Although common in any district, CCISD experienced an uncommon amount of turnover during the implementation process; one assistant superintendent position was filled by four separate individuals during the selection and implementation processes. Also, although a curriculum audit was the impetus for implementing the data system and initiative, there was a disconnect between the office of Curriculum and Instruction and the implementation committee. Turnover affected the curriculum office also. This office has had two directors since implementation of the initiative, and CCISD has yet to implement an official, unified curriculum for use in SchoolNet. Other barriers included technical issues at the vendor, district, school, and classroom levels that are not unique to CCISD or SchoolNet, but are common to system implementation (Mieles and Foley 2005; Wayman and Stringfield, in press).

While initial implementation was deemed successful, the district now faces the inevitable challenge of growing the initiative so that educators are using student data

more frequently and more deeply in connecting curriculum, instruction, and practice. Sustainability questions include:

- How can CCISD promote deeper educator involvement? Use statistics show nearly all CCISD educators were accessing SchoolNet by the final month of the first year of implementation; however, these statistics also showed an average of three visits per educator in this month. What practices and supports can be implemented that would help educators make daily use of the CMS to examine student learning?
- How might CCISD promote more principal involvement and leadership? Other research has noted the importance of principals in the ongoing and increasing success of school data use (Supovitz and Klein 2003; Wayman and Stringfield in press). Increasing principal involvement, helping principals learn effective ways of using data, and helping principals utilize effective methods of leading faculty in using data are ongoing sustainability concerns for CCISD.
- What types of professional development could help educators efficiently use data to improve instruction? Educators are often unprepared to make effective use of student data (Wayman and Stringfield, in press), so CCISD is engaged in an ongoing search and evaluation of methods and information that can be helpful in making the data initiative an effective support.
- How can the curriculum and initiative be reciprocally supportive? Implementers of the data initiative and the CMS are finding that problems with establishment of a unified CCISD curriculum are barriers. Besides ensuring the most efficient use of SchoolNet, a clear curriculum is essential to connecting student data to instructional improvement.
- Does the initiative depend too heavily on certain individuals? Stringfield, Reynolds, and Schaffer (2001) found successful school data initiatives often depend on the efforts of one or more specific individuals; such initiatives often fade when the individual is no longer involved. CCISD has taken measures to avoid this hazard by involving individuals with a diversity of district roles.

### **Conclusion**

The Corpus Christi Independent School District has achieved success in implementing an ambitious curriculum/data initiative, supported by a computer curriculum management system. In doing so, CCISD has shown it is possible to implement such an initiative rapidly—one school year—and full participation throughout the district is attainable. Still, CCISD faces many challenges in sustaining and growing this initiative past initial implementation success. Measures undertaken by the district in the coming years will tell if the implementation is fully supportive of educators in their everyday work.

### **References**

- Fullan, M. (1993). *Change forces: Probing the depths of educational reform*. London, U.K., Falmer Press.
- Hall, G.E., & Hord, S.M. (1987). *Change in schools: Facilitating the process*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Mieles, T., and Foley, E. (2005). *Data warehousing: Preliminary findings from a study of implementing districts*. Philadelphia: Annenberg Institute for School Reform.

- Moore, G. (1991). *Crossing the chasm*. Oxford: Capstone Publishing.
- Pankake, A.M. (1998). *Implementation: Making things happen*. Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education Publishers.
- Schwahn, C.J., & Spady, W.G. (2001). *Total leaders: Applying the best future-focused change strategies to education*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press.
- Stringfield, S., Reynolds, D., & Schaffer, E. (2001, January). *Fifth-year results from the High Reliability Schools project*. Symposium presented at the meeting of the International Congress for School Effectiveness and Improvement, Toronto.
- Supovitz, J., and Klein, V. (2003). *Mapping a course for improved student learning: How innovative schools systematically use student performance data to guide improvement*. Philadelphia: Consortium for Policy Research in Education.
- Wayman, J.C., and Stringfield, S. (in press). Technology supported involvement of entire faculties in examination of student data for instructional improvement. *American Journal of Education*.
- Wayman, J.C, Stringfield, S., & Yakimowski, M. (2004). *Software enabling school improvement through analysis of student data* (CRESPAR Technical Report No. 67). Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University. Retrieved on March 16, 2006, from <http://www.csos.jhu.edu/crespar/techReports/Report67.pdf>
- Young, V.M. (in press). Teachers' use of data: Loose coupling, agenda-setting, and team norms. *American Journal of Education*.