



Executive Viewpoint

Kevin S. Casey, Executive Director

Multiple Meanings of Opt Out

At the time of this writing the next round of 3-8 testing is fast approaching. This has prompted a number of calls to our office asking how SED recommends dealing with those students who opt out of testing. The short answer is that it makes no such recommendations.

SED does not acknowledge an opt out as a policy issue outside of the context of an absence from part of the district's instructional program. The district is expected to follow its absence policy, but we all know that not all such policies address

the circumstances of a student actually arriving at school, but declining to participate in a part (the testing) of the instructional program. That leaves the district with the typical choices of having the student sit and stare, read, or engage in educationally appropriate activities, possibly in a location separate from the exam. While an opt out will count against the school's participation rate, the reality has been that the number of actual opt outs at the state level has not been great, although there is continued concern about the potential adverse impact of opt outs. In

most districts the opt out has not yet had a material effect on the district, and one can only hope it does not have a material impact on students or individual educators.

Regardless of the extent of opt outs, it seems to me that SED should confront this reality and provide clear direction to districts on how to handle opt outs, even if it's an express delegation to district policy. Failure to do so is akin to opting out of the responsibilities of leadership.

It seems that opting out is not limited to students opting out of tests. The state of Indiana

has recently enacted legislation making it the first state to purportedly opt out of the Common Core Learning Standards. I say purportedly because the extent of the opt out is unclear to me from the news reports I have read.

Apparently the law in Indiana does not prohibit parts of the common core from being incorporated into the "new" learning standards being developed in Indiana. Further, the USDOE must consider any new standard to result in college and career readiness in order for Indiana to continue to receive a waiver from provisions of NCLB. According to the INDY-STAR, the monetary value of that waiver has been placed in the range of "hundreds of millions of dollars." These factors

have many believing that the new standards (as of this writing not yet finalized) will look a whole lot like the common core standards. However, this will allow the Indiana politicians to claim that they took education policy back from Washington, D.C. It seems more politically than educationally motivated. That seems to me like a poor reason to change standards.

I wonder how the development and implementation of new (semi-new?) standards will impact the educators and students in Indiana. How damaging is a rollercoaster of seemingly endless education reform? What else may one opt out of? Perhaps more importantly, what else *should* one opt out of? ■

Data Organization and Analytics Within a Systemic Approach: From a Historical Perspective

Opinion piece by Scott B. Crowder, CEO, Educational Vistas, Inc.

In the late 1970s, I got into computers and very quickly was hooked. Machines that could store, organize, and retrieve information on demand... what a concept! Word processing, spreadsheets, and databases were the most popular software products. We were all promised that access to these "television typewriters" would change

our lives forever and put data-driven decision making at our collective fingertips.

In the business world, the institutionalization of this technology happened very quickly. However, school districts had a much slower path with several fits and starts. Initially, computer labs were created as islands within

schools and disconnected from the first curriculum. Administrators experimented with how to integrate computers into their workflow and teachers had very limited or no access to PCs.

Fast-forward to the present and no one in public education can imagine working without the warm glow of our high-tech gadgets. The reduction in price while exponentially increasing the capabilities of these devices has resulted in access and affordability by just about any individual. In fact, hardware is no longer an issue. Even software offerings have improved to the point where most if not all needs may be met. The primary

issue is integration. Schools are now drowning in a sea of data stored in multiple programs in varying formats. Historically, school department-level data is not easily assimilated by district or state systems.

Zone Integration Server (ZIS) processes have emerged as the most efficient way to gather "all of the critical (intermediate) transactional data into a district-level "data warehouse." The data is scrubbed, validated, and even translated into standardized formats for local decision making, district and state reporting, and state portal and RIC uploading. This is the most important data

organizational step that a district can take!

Data dashboards and drag-and-drop analytics are only possible once ZIS has been adopted. True, some technologies will directly link multiple databases, but without that data integrity layer, confidence and reliability are reduced. However, when a systemic approach is taken and internal push-pull with a data warehouse is implemented, then, and only then, is data-at-a-glance possible. Information visualization and rapid monitoring in real-time on every device from PC to tablet to phone have finally arrived. The path is clear. The time is now! ■

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