

# Catoosa County Public Schools Uses Pearson Inform to Improve Student Achievement

Teachers in Catoosa County Public Schools are no longer crouched on the floor in “the vault” searching through paper files for achievement data on their students. Since this fast-growing district in northwest Georgia implemented Pearson Inform to manage assessment information, the data are now as close as their computers.

“Our teachers are very thankful for this product because they’ve all spent time looking for data the hard way,” said Steve Sawyer, the district’s director of technology. “Everyone is extremely receptive – they just can’t believe all that it does.”

Pearson Inform is a comprehensive, Web-based analysis and decision-support solution for accessible and effective reporting on student, school and district performance. It links to data in Pearson’s SASI Student Information System, which Catoosa began using six years ago. Adding Pearson Inform to SASI was “an easy conversion,” Sawyer said.

Leveraging data from multiple sources such as Student Information Systems, assessment tools and data warehouses, Pearson Inform captures, shares and reports on a variety of student and assessment information, including student demographics, grades, state tests, standardized tests, district tests and more. It further enables districts and schools to perform comparative and longitudinal analysis and provide the types of reports and accountability demanded by federal and state requirements.

## A District Experiencing a Population Boom

Although Catoosa is in Ringgold, Ga., it’s just 14 miles south – and effectively a suburb – of Chattanooga, Tenn. It serves 10,760 students, with a free/reduced lunch population of 36 percent, in a community of 2,400 residents. In this district, students consistently score above state averages on standardized tests.

With population in this area on the rise, the district has built a new school nearly every year for the last six years, for a total of 16 buildings. Sawyer attributes the rapid growth to the high quality of education Catoosa offers, as well as to the influx to the state for its HOPE (Helping Outstanding Pupils Educationally) program. This Georgia-lottery-funded program provides funding for students who have earned good grades to attend public technical colleges and eligible public and private colleges and universities in the state.

## Revamping Data Collection

The reason Catoosa purchased Pearson Inform was to “tie all kinds of goals together to raise student achievement,” said Sawyer. Teachers and administrators need to be able to see strengths and weaknesses of students, so “we were looking for a tool for informed decision-making,” he said.

With Pearson Inform, the district is able to change data analysis from summative to formative. “If you look at data, make some graphs, say ‘that’s nice’ and don’t do anything about it, it doesn’t do any good,” said Sawyer.

“In the past, we’d see data showing we needed to improve in math by 5 percent. As a teacher, I wouldn’t know if it was my students who were weak. If history scores were low, a teacher would have no idea which area needed improvement. Was it geography? Now we can look at achievement over time, and do something differently when we see a trend in a negative direction.”

The state of Georgia offers numerous assessments and Catoosa teachers use Pearson Inform to analyze the results of those tests. The district has also taken advantage of the data-transfer utility to import its own custom tests.

District administrators and teachers have designed benchmarks so they can see how student achievement changes, and they are anticipating more opportunity for growth. “Instruction is based on weakness or strength that you see,” said Sawyer. “Inform has given us instant access to strands of data. It’s always a work in progress, and we can measure ourselves against where we are today.”

## Using the Data to See Student Progress

Belinda Brown, principal at the district’s Boynton Elementary, appreciates all Pearson Inform has to offer. “It’s put the data right at our fingertips,” she said. “It’s all in a neat little package that shows us how our students are learning.” Her staff is using it to gather data on at-risk students so teachers and parents can collaborate to help these students achieve at a higher level. “The graphs are really useful for sharing information because it’s easy to understand when it’s right there in a picture.”

Teachers at Boynton Elementary are “very impressed and excited” about Pearson Inform, Brown said. “It’s easy to use, and they were able to put it to work right away,” she said. “Several teachers have been printing graphs to show data in their parent conferences.”

Brown said her school is using Pearson Inform to see where students need more or less instruction in a subject. Teachers are sharing data with students, too, so they know where they need to devote more attention “They can see the specific domain they need to work on,” she said. “It’s motivational for them to see where their strengths are and how they can make progress.”

## Harnessing the Power of Pearson Inform, Seeing Results

After more than a full school year of using Pearson Inform, Pearson Inform to Catoosa, Sawyer says teachers have come to rely it on as a tool for evaluating progress and targeting instruction. “Teachers love it, because it allows them to look at the kids sitting in front of them – the current reality,” he said. “They can choose data items, make goals, check goals and see success.”

Catoosa is using Pearson Inform to compare data from different assessments, looking at how interim tests are predictive of high-stakes tests, said Sawyer. “If a first grader is assessed as ‘at risk’ for reading at grade level at the beginning of the school year, and with a teacher’s intervention, he is at ‘some risk’ by spring, the odds are 80-20, not 50-50, that he’ll be at grade level at the end of the year,” he said. “Inform allows teachers to change the outcome and to see what will happen if they don’t.”

In the past, students who are “on the bubble,” barely passing each year of school, eventually reaches a point where they fail. With Pearson Inform, teachers and administrators are able to identify individual learning needs and intervene to address them immediately. “Instead of looking at who didn’t pass, we are looking at why,” Sawyer said.

The data also give teachers the opportunity to see what interventions worked so they can document, share and repeat them, said Sawyer.

He sees Pearson Inform as an easy-to-use resource that allows teachers to stay on track with the curriculum. “Teachers can see what skills or concepts their students need to learn each week,” he said.

Sawyer believes his district has come a long way and harnessing the “real power” of Pearson Inform. School by school, he has trained teachers and administrators how to use the online tool, and it has become a staple in the district’s elementary schools, which were first to implement. The middle and high schools are making strong progress and seeing measurable results as well.

“Now we’re looking at reality, not perception,” he continued. “First- and second-grade math and 11th-grade science have seen the most significant increases. We are using our data and working smart.”

As a coach, Sawyer sees improving student achievement as analogous to creating a winning season. “In sports, every week you prepare for a game the best way you can, with a clear goal in mind,” he said. “In the classroom, everything we do needs to be set up to win, too.”

## About Pearson

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