

# North Kansas City Schools Builds Technology Infrastructure That Supports Student Achievement

Today's education technology is focused on improving student achievement, and no district understands better how to harness this power than North Kansas City Schools (NKCS) in Kansas City, Mo.

"Technology is an integral part of everything we do at North Kansas City Schools," said Janet Herdman, the district's executive director of Information & Technology Services.

NKCS, spanning an 82-square-mile region, serves 17,500 students at 29 schools. The community is a combined suburban/urban area with a population of more than 100,000, 10 minutes north of downtown Kansas City. District boundaries lie within the "Northland," an 800-square-mile, two-county region north of the Missouri River.

More than a decade ago, NKCS superintendent Tom Cummings introduced a collaborative learning culture focused on preparing students for success in the 21st century, and one of the key components was the use of technology to support teaching and learning. Since that time, the district has made a deep and strategic investment in technology – always with the goal of ensuring that it helps its students achieve at the highest levels.

## Preparing Students for 21st Century Success

Shortly after Cummings launched his initiative, NKCS adopted Pearson's SASI – a comprehensive student information management system providing access to student records, enrollment, scheduling and attendance information, as one of the first pieces of its information technology infrastructure. Then in 2000, the district installed a 49-mile, fiber-optic wide area network and provided high-speed Internet and data access to all of its schools.

Building on this firm foundation, NKCS has continued to select technology tools that will help its teachers keep students on the right track. NKCS added Pearson Inform to its integrated infrastructure for managing and analyzing student achievement data and performance, and then rolled out Pearson Benchmark to provide teachers and administrators with another tool for measuring, managing and maximizing student achievement through testing, reporting and analysis of data.

## Using Data to Ensure Student Achievement

“We’re in an accountability mode today,” said Herdman. “With data in a concise, easy-to-use format, we are more able to make informed decisions.”

Pearson Inform allows NKCS to capture, share and report on a variety of student and assessment information, including student demographics, grades, state tests, standardized tests, district tests and more. NKCS can perform comparative and longitudinal analysis based on aggregate and disaggregate performance data and meet federal and state reporting requirements. Primarily using it at the building leadership level, administrators are “looking at trends and students, and where things may need shoring up,” she said.

Herdman said what she likes most about Pearson Inform is “the way that the variety of data give you a full view of any student or group of students.” She notes, “The principals really like the kind of data they can pull from it, and I’ve only heard very positive things about it.”


Marla Walker, technology coordinator for the district’s Winnetonka High School, considers Pearson Inform “the missing tool.” She explained, “We have 1,700 students in our school, and we had file cabinets in the office to look at their data. Teachers at the high school level – with six classes of 25 students each, filed according to their study hall classes – had to look through a tremendous number of files to find information on their students.”

Walker said teachers can work more efficiently now that they have data from student assessments to reveal where they need to focus instruction. “With Pearson Inform, they can see all that information. Now teachers can look at their classes, see what they need to work on at the class level and take it down to that one student, too.” Special education teachers are now seeing great gains when tracking students with Individualized Education Plans. “The ease of that is huge,” she said.

NKCS educators are reaping the benefits of Pearson Benchmark as well. It allows districts to take multiple measures of student performance against standards at any time throughout the school year. With the data collected over time, teachers and administrators can monitor student progress against standards, address deficiencies and recheck mastery. The result is more targeted instruction, shorter assessment cycles, more effective teaching delivery and better student results. Pearson Benchmark provides a new core set of capabilities, including the ability to quickly and accurately assess student progress against standards, use the data to diagnose student learning needs and target instruction to address those needs.

Associate Superintendent Kendra Johnson said that the Missouri Assessment Program testing and the requirements of the federal No Child Left Behind Act were part of the reason that NKCS selected Pearson Benchmark.

“It more specifically identifies for teachers what students need,” she said. “Our school district needs to do a good job at assessing and understanding what kids can and cannot do. Academic performance and progress – that’s part of No Child Left Behind.”



“We chose Pearson Benchmark because it allows us to centrally store, manage, update and secure all of our critical data,” said Herdman. “It puts the information we need at our fingertips – to evaluate our school improvement plans and to ensure that our students achieve at the highest possible levels.”

NKCS teachers and administrators continue to make progress with Pearson Benchmark, having added the district curriculum to the system, with plans to use it to build their own tests. Training is complete for the district’s elementary teachers, and secondary teachers will be next. “Everyone says it’s so much easier to use and manipulate data than another product we just phased out,” said Herdman.

Herdman is finding Pearson Benchmark to be a useful tool for gathering data, a process that must happen very quickly to inform instruction, she said. “We now have the ability to use it as a formative tool rather than an autopsy piece.”

As the district’s electronic curriculum coordinator, Matt Pearson works primarily with teachers. He said they find Pearson Benchmark “very easy to learn and use,” and one of their favorite features is the ability to look at item responses. “If a lot of students answered a question incorrectly, they can see why and reteach and retest,” he said. Teachers and administrators alike are asking for data more often because it’s so quick and easy to access, he said.

Pearson told the story of sitting down with a group of teachers to review a class mastery report for an elementary math district benchmark assessment. The current and past teachers of a particular student were surprised at the student’s success and suspected he had copied from another student. After checking the item response analysis report, they were surprised to see that while the two students showed the same degree of mastery, they had missed different items. “This shows how viewing test results more closely can help overcome teacher bias,” he said.

## Investing in Student Potential

The impact of NKCS’ creative use of technology to support teaching and learning is apparent in the academic progress of its students. The district faces many of the same challenges as other districts in suburban/urban environments around the country. With 36 percent of the students qualifying for free/reduced lunch and more than 40 languages spoken, nine NKCS schools qualify for Title I funding. Yet, the district has shown consistent growth in test scores for several years.

The state of Missouri named NKCS a “Distinction in Performance” school district in 2005 because it met 12 of the 12 performance standards set by the state. Overall, NKCS students consistently score above state and national averages on standardized exams, with many students recognized through the National Merit Scholars, Missouri Bright Flight Scholars and Missouri Scholars programs. NKCS student scores on MAP, the Missouri state assessment, exceed state averages in nearly every tested content area. In addition, Cummings was named Missouri Superintendent of the Year in 2005, in recognition of his leadership and technology-driven student successes.

NKCS is dedicated to continuing to maximize its technology investments in ways that will help students achieve academic excellence, said Herdman. She is very pleased with the progress her district has made and looks forward to “continued maturity of the Pearson products from a data view,” she said.

“SASI has been an excellent tool for our district, and we are experiencing great things from the Pearson assessment products,” she said. “These products are helping us as we look at our school improvement plans. By making smart use of technology, we can help students achieve their highest potential.”

## About Pearson

Pearson is the global leader in educational publishing, assessment, information and services, helping people of all ages to learn at their own pace, in their own way. For students preK-12, Pearson provides effective and innovative curriculum products in all available media, educational assessment and measurement for students and teachers, student information systems, and teacher professional development and certification programs. Our respected brands include PowerSchool, Chancery SMS, Pearson Inform, Scott Foresman, Prentice Hall and many others. Our comprehensive offerings help inform targeted instruction and intervention so that success is within reach of every student. Pearson’s other primary businesses include the Financial Times Group and the Penguin Group.

**PEARSON**

For more information, visit  
[www.pearsonschoolsandcolleges.com](http://www.pearsonschoolsandcolleges.com)  
on the World Wide Web  
or call 877-873-1550.

Copyright © 2000-2007 Pearson Education, Inc. or its affiliates.  
All rights reserved.