

Case Study

Best Practice Conference

The Binghamton Regency Hotel was filled to capacity for Broome-Tioga BOCES' inaugural best practices conference for middle level math on December 10, 2002. Presenters came from across the State and attendees from five regional BOCES.

Benchmarking

"We designed this conference using a standard benchmarking methodology," said Deputy Superintendent Brenda Myers, "so we needed to begin answering three key questions during the conference. Who are the benchmark schools? What are their best practices? How do we transfer their best practices to other schools?"

Frontier Analyst[®]

Prism consulted its Frontier Analyst[®] study of nearly 4000 NYS schools to identify four rural, four suburban and two urban schools that had demonstrated benchmark performance in Grade 8 Math over the past three years.

Rural schools included Parishville-Hopkington, Avoca, Salmon River, and Panama. Suburban schools included North Colonie's Shaker Junior, Williamsville's Transit Middle, Brighton's Twelve Corners and Skaneateles Middle. Urban schools included Buffalo P.S. 68 and Ithaca Boynton Middle.

"These schools did a great job describing the systems and strategies they have in place to achieve high performance," Myers said.

Best practice presentations

Presenters were asked to answer these questions, among others: How does your school

- Use time, student groups or classroom structures to support student learning?
- Involve parents and community?
- Use teacher evaluation to support effective practice and learning?
- Describe and monitor student learning?
- Secure and allocate resources to support learning initiatives?

Some practices that were common to a number of the benchmark schools included

- Having math teachers loop from the seventh to the eighth grade.
- Eliminating study halls and/or redefining their purpose.
- Restructuring the school day to extend time on task (e.g., by the use of block scheduling.)

Early in the learning curve

Benchmarking is new to the school improvement toolkit of New York State educators. “We need to build on the success of this first best practice conference,” Myers said. “Over time the benchmark schools will become even more adept at articulating the strategies that contribute to their great success, while schools attending will become more skillful in the replication of those best practices in their schools.”

The methodology explained

For detailed explanation of the Frontier Analyst[®] benchmarking methodology, see the case study entitled “[Benchmarking and target-setting for 4000 New York State schools.](#)”