

## Staying Connected

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### Best practices

PRISM used its Frontier Analyst<sup>®</sup> study of nearly 4000 NYS schools to identify the 10 benchmark schools that presented at BT-BOCES best practice conference for middle level Math.

### School-wide planning

PRISM teamed with new Superintendent Dr. Peggy Wozniak to facilitate concurrent building-wide planning sessions for Binghamton's East and West Middle schools.

### Homeland security

PRISM has begun the process of getting security clearance in order to assist RGS Associates of Arlington, Va. with work at the National Security Agency.

### On the web

Please visit PRISM's new website for the latest news, services, and resources: [www.prismdecision.com](http://www.prismdecision.com)

### Training

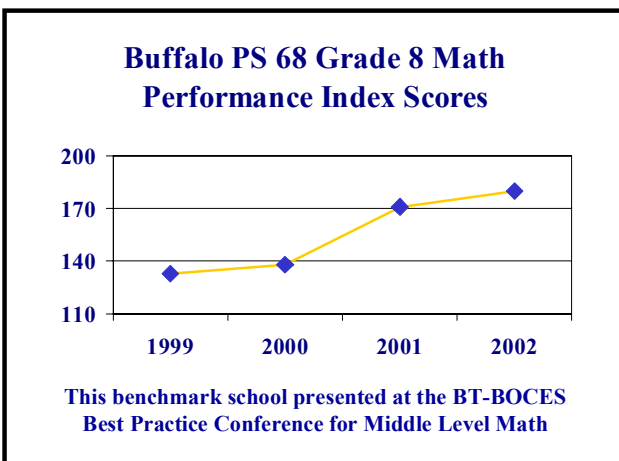
PRISM delivers training in efficient team planning and decision-making, including creative problem solving, conflict resolution and consensus building. For other, upcoming training opportunities, see page two.

### Best practices

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<sup>®</sup>

PRISM consulted its Frontier Analyst<sup>®</sup> 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  
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### School services

PRISM Decision Systems has provided consulting services to dozens of school districts and hundreds of schools in NY and PA.

### Getting results—fast

PRISM uses Frontier Analyst<sup>®</sup> for benchmarking, target setting and the exchange of best practices and CoNexus<sup>®</sup> and the Concept System<sup>®</sup> to develop powerful plans for

- Academic improvement (CDEP).
- Academic intervention services.
- Professional development.
- Special education.
- Alternative Ed.
- Annual professional performance review.
- Technology.

*From column 2...*

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?

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## Best practices cont'd

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

- 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."

## School-wide planning

PRISM teamed with new Superintendent Dr. Peggy Wozniak to facilitate concurrent building-wide planning sessions for Binghamton's East and West Middle schools this past fall. Approximately 65 staff members participated at each site. The goal was to identify each building's top academic improvement strategies.

The day began with a 90-minute presentation that included a detailed overview of the No Child Left Behind legislation and its potential consequences to schools in need of improvement, as well as each building's

- Three-year performance trends.
- Available analyses of student performance.
- Comparison to benchmark peers.
- Current improvement initiatives.

Working first in small and then in large groups, each staff

- Completed a comprehensive building audit, identifying current strengths and weaknesses, new opportunities and emerging threats.
- Generated improvement strategies.
- Prioritized those strategies.

## Optimal thinking tips

Often when problem solving, we converge too quickly and do not explore all available options. Creativity experts call this premature closure. And it can be hazardous. One easy strategy for sustaining divergence is to reframe the problem being solved. Case in point: I know a surgeon, a really sharp guy. He is building a wooden kayak in his basement and has decided that he needs more room. His old, octopus furnace is taking up too much space.

### The problem first defined

He framed the challenge: In what ways might I extend my basement to create more space? His initial plan: rip up the back deck, excavate beneath it, remove and add foundation walls, address new drainage concerns, and extend the basement underneath the back yard.

### The problem reframed

With some gentle prodding, he redefined the challenge: In what ways might I increase the usable space within the basement's existing footprint? His revised plan: Replace the giant old octopus with a small, high efficiency furnace. The benefit: he gains both the space he needs *and* lower energy bills—for a fraction of first option's cost.



When problem solving, avoid premature closure: reframe the problem, generate all possible options, and increase the likelihood that you'll converge on the optimal solution!

### Strong consensus

The top two priorities in each building were identical: (1) to design and implement a schedule that is more conducive to learning and (2) to improve academic intervention services. Within a few weeks, each building's shared decision-making team began implementing detailed action plans for each priority.

According to Dr. Wozniak, "Working together with PRISM has helped us quickly identify priority improvement strategies. The teachers at East and West said this was the most productive planning day they have experienced. At the end of the day each school staff left with appropriate action plans to begin the process of improvement."

### Training

PRISM delivers training in efficient team planning and decision-making, including creative problem solving, conflict resolution and consensus building. Other upcoming training opportunities include:

*18th Annual International Conference on The Positive Power of Humor, Hope and Healing*: April 4-6, 2003, in Saratoga Springs, New York. Go to [www.humorproject.com](http://www.humorproject.com)

*The 48th Annual Creative Problem Solving Institute*: June 22-27, 2003, Adams Mark Hotel, Buffalo, NY. Go to [www.cpsiconference.com](http://www.cpsiconference.com)

*Peter Senge in Schools that Learn*: June 30 – July 2, 2003, Marriot Marquis, NYC. 1-800-531-0082

### Sample engagements

Arnot Medical Services  
Binghamton City School District  
Borough of Fanwood, NJ  
Broome Tioga BOCES  
Chenango Memorial Hospital  
City of Grand Rapids, MI  
City School District of Albany  
Education 21, Inc.  
First Heritage Federal Credit Union  
GHS Federal Credit Union  
The Greater Boston Visitor and Convention Bureau  
Johnson City School District  
*The Los Angeles Times*  
Lockport City School District  
Mercy Health System of Philadelphia  
National Institute for Health  
New York State Education Department  
New York State Electric & Gas  
Oswego City School District  
Science Applications International Corp.  
Syracuse City School District  
Telcordia Technologies  
Three Village Central School District  
Times Mirror Company  
United Health Services  
United Medical Associates  
Washington, DC Metro Transit Authority