

## Staying Connected

May 2003  
Volume 5 Issue 2

### Mission

Provide dynamic processes and state-of-the-art systems to accelerate group decision-making.

### Vision

Maximize the human potential of collaborative groups to make and implement decisions that achieve their preferred future.

### School-wide planning

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

### School benchmarking

PRISM provides detailed benchmarking analysis for 4000 NYS schools. The analysis identifies benchmark schools of every demographic profile whose operating practices can be examined to establish a guide to best practice.

### Training

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

### Engagements

See page 2 for a sample list of PRISM engagements.

## 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 a variety of decision support technologies to assist schools to benchmark, set improvement targets, and develop school improvement plans including

- Comprehensive plans.
- Academic intervention services.
- Professional development.
- Special education.
- Alternative Education.

## Improvement plans

“PRISM Decision Systems superb facilitation combined with the skilled use of CoNexus® enabled our team to develop a comprehensive Title 1 school-wide plan complete with concrete goals, roles and time table,” said Christopher Arnold, principal at Lockport City School District’s Anna Merritt elementary.

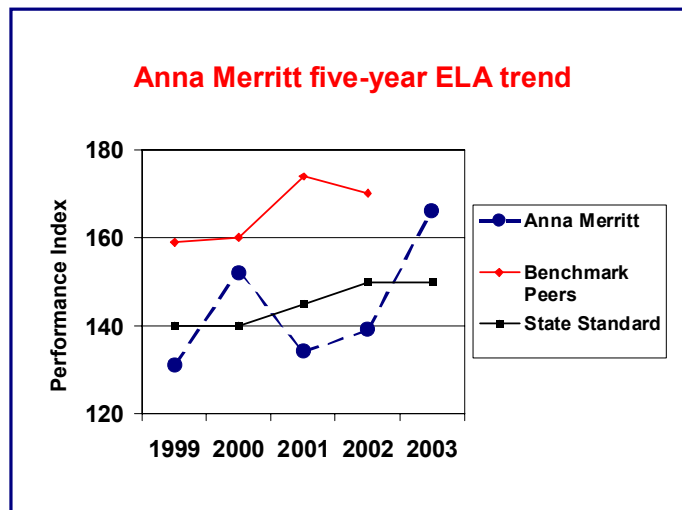
“As a result, we realized a 23% increase in our ELA score, the highest increase in our district.”

### The challenge

Anna Merritt needed to improve its ELA performance. It was below the

State standard and at risk of SINI status. Assistant Superintendent Susan Nablo retained PRISM to lead an improvement planning session.

The first task was to build a shared knowledge set so that the planning team could draft improvement strategies



- Annual professional performance review.

### CoNexus® decision support

PRISM uses CoNexus®, a group decision support technology. Its real-time voting applications help teams

- Identify academic improvement opportunities and immediate priorities.
- Align resources with new improvement priorities.
- Make sound decisions by assessing multiple options against weighted criteria.

confidently based on sound information, not weak speculation.

Presentations covered four-year performance trends, comparisons of Anna Merritt to its four benchmark schools, analysis of student performance on the TONYs, and State ELA and Math assessments, and available budget.

### A focused, measurable objective

The team quickly converged on a single improvement objective: Improve our ELA performance index score from 139 to 150.

“Anna Merritt” continued page 2

## **Anna Merritt cont'd**

After a broad audit of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, the group drafted and then reached consensus on five key strategies, among them:

- Use analysis of the TONYs to inform building and classroom decision-making and to schedule and deliver AIS services.
- Maximize the impact of all staff, including the learning center and special area teachers, on ELA performance.

The five strategies were backed up by 21 detailed action steps each with an owner and due date. The entire meeting occurred in the course of a single school day.

## **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.

### **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

## **School benchmarking: a key differentiator**

PRISM provides detailed benchmarking analysis for 4000 NYS schools. The analysis

- Identifies benchmark schools of every demographic profile whose operating practices can be examined to establish a guide to best practice.
- Matches all lower performing schools with a discrete set of benchmark peers, including comparative charts showing the gaps between their current performance and the performance of their benchmark peers.
- Sets realistic improvement targets for lower performing schools based on the actual performance of their unique set of benchmark peers.

How do these benchmarking results assist school improvement efforts? First, they eliminate staff complacency. When staff see clear evidence of schools with similar demographics that are achieving considerably higher performance, they are less likely to insist that "the Commissioner doesn't know our kids" and that "we are doing the best we can with the kids we have."

Second, they provide a framework for the transfer of best practices. Indeed, more than 20 years of research into the identification and dissemination of best practice in the private, public and not-for-profit sectors unequivocally demonstrates that *the identification of benchmark, or best-in-class performers, is prerequisite to any search for best practices.*

Benchmarking results are based on analysis of three-year trend data in the NYS State report card using a powerful mathematical modeling tool, Frontier Analyst<sup>®</sup>. For more information, go to [www.prismdecision.com](http://www.prismdecision.com) and click on "School Benchmarking."

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. We highly recommend PRISM Decision Systems."

### **Sample engagements**

Albany City School District  
Arnot Medical Associates  
Binghamton City School District  
Borough of Fanwood, NJ  
Broome Tioga BOCES  
Chenango Forks School District  
Chenango Memorial Hospital  
City of Grand Rapids, MI  
DOT Federal Credit Union  
Dutchess County BOCES  
Education 21, Inc.

Erie 1 BOCES  
First Heritage Federal Credit Union  
Greenburgh School District #7  
GHS Federal Credit Union  
The Greater Boston Visitor Bureau  
Hancock Central School District  
Herkimer BOCES  
Heuvelton Central School District  
Johnson City School District  
*The Los Angeles Times*  
Lockport City School District  
Mercy Health System of Philadelphia  
Maine-Endwell School District  
Mountain View School District  
National Institute for Health  
New York State Education Dept.  
New York State Electric & Gas  
Newark Valley School District  
Oswego City School District  
Potsdam Central School District  
Science Applications International  
SCT BOCES  
Susquehanna Valley School District  
Syracuse City School District  
Telcordia Technologies  
Three Village Central School District  
Times Mirror Company  
United Health Services  
United Medical Associates  
Union Endicott School District  
Wash. DC Metro Transit Authority