

# From Vision to Action: How School Districts Use Data to Improve Performance *Executive Summary*

With the passage of *No Child Left Behind* in 2001, schools are expected to provide a standards based curriculum for students to attain math and reading proficiency and demonstrate progress each year. NCLB requires more frequent student testing with publicly reported results in an effort to close the achievement gap and to inform parents, teachers, administrators of student progress. Meeting these ambitious accountability goals requires transparency in the workings of the organization and the cooperation of everyone involved in the education of each student.

These mandates have accelerated change already underway in the nation's schools and in the teaching profession. Leading school districts have developed advanced technological systems and professional expertise for analyzing data to deliver timely information for the improvement of operations and instruction. They have embarked upon a process of using data in decision making at all levels of the organization, borrowing management models from business and from each other.

Published in 2003, *Vision to Know and Do: The Power of Data as a Tool in Educational Decision Making* defined a vision for continuous improvement, identified leadership districts creating a climate for change, and reviewed the implementation of systems and processes to enable data-driven decision making (DDDM). *From Vision to Action: How School Districts Use Data to Improve Performance* moves beyond the vision and visits districts that are acting on their data, testing the process, and seeing improvement in student learning.

## **DATA-DRIVEN DECISION MAKING**

A process of making choices based on appropriate analysis of relevant information.

The paper draws from interviews with more than 30 experts in the field, including teachers, principals, district administrators, entrepreneurs, consultants, researchers, and other professionals. Additional interviews were conducted with multiple stakeholders from three school districts to better understand how data-driven decision making is used throughout the organization. Profiles of Lemon Grove School District (CA), Fulton County Schools (GA), and Cleveland Municipal School District (OH) at the end of the paper show how different school districts use data throughout their organizations.

### School Districts Using DDDM and Described in This Report

DISTRICT	SCHOOLS	GRADES	POP.
Pearl River School District, NY	5	K-12	2,591
Lemon Grove School District, CA	8	K-8	*4,588
Palo Alto Unified School District, CA	17	K-12	*10,341
Consolidated Community School District 15, IL	20	K-8	*13,057
Beaufort County School District, SC	26	K-12	18,500
Grossmont Union High School District, CA	18	9-12	*24,447
Plano Independent School District, TX	65	K-12	52,063
Cleveland Municipal School District, OH	125	K-12	*69,000
Fulton County Schools, GA	88	K-12	75,188
Montgomery County Public Schools, MD	192	K-12	140,492
Clark County School District, NV	301	K-12	280,600

\*Indicates 2003-2004 enrollment.

Other enrollment statistics are projections for 2004-05.

These school districts have proven the value of data as an asset to the learning organization and paved the road for more districts to pursue data-driven decision making. They have developed processes to use objective data measures to determine resource allocations, instructional strategies, and professional development. District and school teams define goals and objectives based on standards, measures, and community needs, then use data to test their assumptions and track progress throughout the year.

As data-driven decision making becomes integral to the educational institution, it is transforming the role of the teacher. The doors to the classroom have opened. Assessments throughout the year monitor all students' progress. Teachers team together to share strategies, goals, and student plans with principals, site support staff, and district administrators as well as students themselves and their parents. The best instructors have always held themselves accountable. Now they have the tools and information to share their success with the whole organization.

*From Vision to Action: How School Districts Use Data to Improve Performance* is written for school district leaders and K-12 educators who are seeking ways to implement a data-driven decision making process. All districts can benefit from the efforts of these leading school districts. DDDM is not a one-time implementation, but a commitment to continuous improvement. Each year instructional and administrative teams become more sophisticated in what they want to know and more expert in how they use their knowledge. Data-driven decision making frames a vision for what is possible and creates a plan for action: the vision to know and do.