CRESPAR

Research & Development Report

Putting Data in the Driver's Seat: Web Site Eases Way for Educators

THE RIDE JUST GOT A LITTLE EASIER for educators who are data-driven—or would like to be.

A consumer-focused web site, recently introduced as part of CRESPAR's Systemic Supports program at Hopkins, will help direct teachers to student data, and save them some dead-end searches. The web site, www.csos.jhu.edu/systemics/datause.htm, grew out of a research project on educational technology availability by CRESPAR researchers Jeff Wayman and Sam Stringfield with Mary Yakimowski of the Baltimore City Public School System. Their intention is to present up-to-date software reviews, sample screen shots and other pertinent information, making their research easily accessible by teachers and administrators who are working toward data-driven decisions in their schools and classrooms.

"This is as much as we can find of software that delivers existing student data into the hands of teachers," says Wayman, who led the effort. "It's a nice store of information."

THE WEB SITE includes reviews of 13 commercially available software products that help school districts gather data, warehouse them, and ease educators' access. Each review gives an overview of the product, describes how schools work with the company to compile and manage data, and details the kinds of reports available and the query tools that educators can use for individual searches and reports—to look at a student's permanent record, for instance, or at the performance of a specific group of students.

The data—test scores, demographic information, attendance figures, and more—are already available, but not in one place, Wayman says, making it difficult for teachers to access and use—to know their students better, and ultimately make teaching and learning more effective.

Wayman sees the web site as a consumer shortcut that can be updated every few months, as new products become available and others change. "A principal interested in data access might run across this site and realize somebody did the work for them," he says.

THE MOVEMENT toward more data-driven classroom practices and curricula gained tremendous momentum from the accountability and testing requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act. "Everybody's telling teachers to be data-driven, but they don't necessarily have the tools or the time to do that," Wayman says.

Because research on this technology is scarce, the CRESPAR researchers are at the forefront of this knowledge. Stringfield and Wayman were invited to a recent expert forum on the National Education Technology Plan, which is being revised by the Department of Education. The three authors first presented their work on teacher-friendly options for data analysis at a Harvard University Graduate School of Education conference last spring. A technical report on the full research project is forthcoming from CRESPAR.

"This project really cuts to two basic tenets of our job as researchers—to get information to the schools, and to get information out to the research and political communities to help them be better," says Wayman.

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