



**CASE STUDY**

**Using EPAS in School Improvement:  
Illinois Township High School District  
214**

**Challenge**

District 214, a large high school district located northwest of Chicago, is like many school districts across the United States in that it faces intense public scrutiny of students' test scores. Faced with 12,500 students from about 30 sender schools, district administrators realized the need to engage their students in a more systematic program of career and educational planning. They needed a long-term assessment system to not only sustain progress made in the past, but also incorporate improvements to reach goals. Key elements of the program included: providing the skills and knowledge students need to be ready for postsecondary work; incorporating Illinois state standards into the curriculum; ensuring that students' educational goals are met so they are ready for post-high school opportunities; promoting high achievement in the school; and making effective change in the school using data to make informed decisions, among others.

**Solution**

The district implemented ACT's EPAS™ Educational Planning and Assessment System. The program includes monitoring student progress throughout high school, guiding students toward taking the right college preparatory courses, and making timely interventions with those students who need help. An important element of the district's program is an open and supportive atmosphere that uses assessments for learning rather than to restrict student opportunities. Students and parents are involved in the entire process, using the student's Life and Career Planning portfolio to track progress throughout high school.

The program began in 1994 with administration of EXPLORE® to all of the district's 8th-grade students and PLAN® to all 10th-grade students. With all students taking both assessments, administrators could begin to evaluate student growth and make timely interventions to promote student achievement. They started programs to instruct lower-scoring students in the skills in all four areas measured by EPAS assessments: English, mathematics, reading, and science.

The district also began testing students with retired forms of PLAN and the ACT prior to the scheduled dates of these assessments in 10th and 11th grades. This was done to measure student progress, strengthen student skills, and evaluate effectiveness of the core curriculum.

In 2001, the Illinois State Board of Education began providing the ACT to all Illinois juniors as part of the Prairie State Achievement Examination (PSAE). Prior to this, only college-bound students took the ACT on a voluntary basis. The ACT works with EXPLORE and PLAN to provide all students at District 214 with educational and career planning information.

EPAS results are used in course placement and screening, remediation, monitoring student progress, the district's test prep program, curriculum alignment, and college and career counseling.

## **Why EPAS?**

District 214's experience with EPAS has provided focus and accountability to the assessment process. Each year that the district has administered the tests, administrators have grown more confident in their ability to plan and implement strategic instructional improvements based upon student needs. They are intervening when and where it matters. EPAS allows all students, teachers, and administrators to use assessment results to promote learning.

## **Results**

The results District 214 achieved in implementing EXPLORE, PLAN, and the ACT show steady student growth. Results include:

- An increased number of students who are ready for college-level work in English, math, and science
  - A higher percentage of District 214 students meeting state standards than the state average
  - District 214's average growth in composite scores on EXPLORE, PLAN, and the ACT exceeding national averages
- **Increased participation**
    - Between 1994 and 2001, District 214 participation in the ACT grew 7 percent, based on students who took the ACT voluntarily. Between 1994 and 2003, the most recent year when all students were required to take the ACT as part of the PSAE, District 214 participation grew 38.6 percent.
- **Increased ACT scores**
    - The district saw increased ACT scores in nearly all areas in 2003 compared to 1994. This is most impressive given that all students were tested in 2003, while only college-bound students were tested in 1994.
      - Average Composite score increased from 21.9 in 1994 to 22.1 in 2003
      - Average English score increased from 21.1 in 1994 to 21.5 in 2003
      - Average Mathematics score increased from 22.2 in 1994 to 22.5 in 2003
      - Average Reading score increased from 21.9 in 1994 to 22.0 in 2003
      - Average Science score was 22.1 in 1994, 21.9 in 2003

- Scores increased for both males and females, and the district experienced improvement in scores for some racial/ethnic groups. Most notably, average scores for African American students increased in all four test areas, narrowing the gap in performance between African Americans and other groups.
- Performance increased compared to state results. District 214's progress outpaced the progress of all Illinois schools on average between 1994 and 2003.

■ **Increased readiness for college**

- Using ACT's College Readiness Benchmarks (scores of 18 in English, 22 in mathematics, and 24 in science):
  - In 1994, 83 percent of District 214 college-bound students were ready for a standard college English composition course. In 2003, 83 percent of *all* the district's students were ready.
  - In 1994, 65 percent of college-bound students in the district were ready to enter a college algebra course; in 2003, 63 percent of *all* District 214 students were ready.
  - In 1994, 34 percent of the district's college-bound students were ready to enter a college biology course; in 2003, 35 percent of *all* students in the district were ready.