

Spotlight Strategy: Use Assessment Results to Target Instructional Strategies

Columbia Montour Area Vocational Technical School

Columbia Montour Area Vocational Technical School (Columbia Montour) is a full-time area comprehensive school that serves students from Columbia and Montour counties in Pennsylvania. Since 2007, a majority of the initiatives at Columbia Montour have been driven by their "Getting Results Plan."

This two-year plan is part of a school improvement program designed to help the school reach its targets for Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) under the state accountability plan. Columbia Montour did not make AYP in 2009, and according to Dr. Thomas Rushton, Administrative Director, this setback is largely based on poor PSSA scores.

In order to boost students' academic achievement and a sense of ownership of their academic and PSSA performance, the administrators are focusing on targeted interventions and building student buy-in. "Our students are smart, but they see no value in the PSSA. They just fill in the bubbles so they can be done," stated Dr. Rushton. To further this point, according to Dr. Rushton, several honor students scored "below basic" on the test. This is particularly notable as the NOCTI scores at Columbia Montour average 78 percent, which is among the highest averages throughout the state.

The leadership team and staff are taking a multi-step approach to increase student academic performance as well as PSSA test scores. Primarily, they are using data to evaluate exactly how students are performing throughout the year on reading and numeracy – content related to the PSSA. Test scores are analyzed, weaknesses are identified and, if necessary, remediation is implemented. In subject areas where the majority of the students are performing poorly, the faculty will intensify the curriculum and remediate entire classes in the recognized weak areas. While there is not yet test data to validate the impact of these efforts, the school has seen an increase in classroom student achievement as evidenced by improved grades.

Another approach used by Columbia Montour to improve PSSA scores is the 2009 roll-out of their marketing campaign, "PSSA, It Matters." With a background in sales and marketing, Dr. Rushton is spearheading this initiative in an effort to change students' view of the PSSA. The school is promoting the importance of the test to students by using banners, cafeteria tray liners, bulletin board messages, scrolled announcements in hallways and regular classroom announcements. The message that the PSSA *does* matter is an integrated message throughout Columbia Montour. In order to help ensure buy-in and give ownership to the campaign, students designed the banners, cafeteria tray liners and wall posters. This initiative has been cost effective, and the school hopes that the small monetary investment will result in increased PSSA test scores for the 2009-2010 school year.

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Columbia Montour Area Vocational Technical School is located in Bloomsberg, Pennsylvania. As a comprehensive career and technical education (CTE) school, it enrolls approximately 650 students in grades 9 through 12 and provides 19 CTE programs. Columbia Montour serves seven school districts.