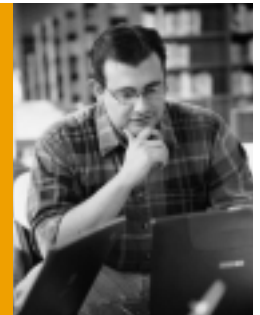


Driving Results with Kids and Their Parents

School district and surrounding community work together to achieve success



A startling 44 percent of adults in Lawrence, Massachusetts don't have their high school diploma, thus limiting their families' economic opportunities and seriously jeopardizing their own children's interest and success in school. To make matters worse, the public high school recently lost its accreditation. For the Lawrence School District, the problem had gone far enough.

Cultural landscape

Lawrence, Massachusetts has approximately 72,000 citizens, more than 60 percent are Hispanic – one of the largest per capita percentages of Hispanics in the continental U.S. This changing cultural landscape has provided numerous challenges to Lawrence educators. Working with concerned members of the community, they have implemented an aggressive grassroots campaign that complements national education strategies.

Technology as a solution

The Lawrence community and PLATO Learning are working together to improve educational achievement for children and adults. "Since we began using PLATO Instructional Solutions software in the high school in 1999, test scores have gone up, more kids are achieving standards and attitudes about education among our students and parents have dramatically improved," says Superintendent

Wilfredo T. Laboy. In fact, because of the response PLATO Learning software generated in the high school, Laboy ordered it for every school serving grades 6-8 in the district.

Trickle-up effect

"We wanted to find a way to reach out to the considerable number of Lawrence parents without high school diplomas," says Patricia Knox, Supervisor of Instructional Technology and Media for the district, "We think that PLATO Learning's user-friendly courseware will get more adults excited about earning their GEDs." So, the Lawrence School District has installed PLATO Instructional Solutions software in its Parent Technology Center, where parents of students can go for basic to advanced study and hands-on coursework using modern technology applications. PLATO Instructional

Solutions software has also been used in Lawrence's Adult Learning Center as well as both campuses of the Northern Essex Community College. "PLATO Learning software is ideal for a classroom full of adults studying various courseware whether it's English as a Second Language, basic reading and writing, or career skills," added Knox. "Parents like coming in and working with PLATO Instructional Solutions software," says Veronica Harris, Technology Staff Developer for the district, "Not only do they learn math, science and social studies, but important computer skills as well." One of Harris' students is a mother of three children in the Lawrence public schools who likes the printable certificates she gets for successfully completing a lesson. "She takes the PLATO Learning certificate home and puts it on the refrigerator next to her kids' best homework assignments. She has a well-deserved sense of pride to share her own progress with her children," said Harris.

A little help from friends

The Lawrence School district isn't the only one making moves to improve the state of its education, members of the community have also stepped up to contribute time and resources. Retired local businessman Ed Warnshius has created a one-on-one mentoring program made up entirely of local volunteers to help high school students study for the MCAS (Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System) test. Lawrence faces an uphill battle – they recently finished 208th

out of 208 Massachusetts districts in students passing the MCAS. But Warnshius believes he has a secret weapon – PLATO Instructional Solutions software. "We plan to use PLATO Link State Test Prep Program this year to prepare the kids for the MCAS. PLATO Link is formatted to resemble the MCAS and will familiarize students with the types of questions they'll see come test time," says Warnshius.

One step at a time

The Lawrence School District, together with the community at large, has made achieving their goals a priority not only for its children, but its parents, as well. Improvements are already being realized – last year was Lawrence's most successful school year in the last decade and a half. For example, based on the Gates - MacGinitie reading tests, Lawrence experienced a five point increase at the 9th grade level in its reading percentile ranking. The Lawrence community may have a long way to go, but they are taking those very important first steps.