ASSESSMENTS

SURVEY DELVES into Educators’ Use of Assessment Data

BY SANDRA PRITZ AND PATRICIA KELLEY

The term “data-driven decision making” has become ubiquitous in education, and yet it seems to be most often discussed with reference to policy decisions related to reporting requirements and accountability. What deserves at least equal attention is what would enable teachers and administrators to use student assessment results to learn about students’ skills and about the effectiveness of instruction—and then to apply that learning to instructional improvements. As a partner in the National Research Center for Career and Technical Education (NRCCTE) funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Adult and Vocational Education (OVAE), NOCTI determined to give the issue attention by conducting a research survey.

NOCTI has a long history, well over four decades, of providing comprehensive occupational skill assessments to measure student achievement. One of the organization’s core beliefs is that comprehensive career and technical education (CTE) student assessment is one of the most effective tools for increasing student achievement and motivation through educators’ use of data for instructional purposes. This study investigated how secondary CTE educators, both teachers and administrators, use technical assessment data to improve program curriculum and to identify individual/group instruction needs. Of particular interest in developing the survey was to ask, how do they use the data? what specific types of professional development were provided, if any, their perception of the effectiveness of this training; and what types of professional development they would consider most effective for the future.

The study design involved e-mailing the survey to a purposeful sample of CTE educators in five states (Illinois, Missouri, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, and Virginia). The survey was distributed thanks to the survey administration, NOCTI subcontracted that process to the Pennsylvania State University Survey Research Center (PSUSRC). The value of having the survey administered by an external and impartial organization was weighed against the loss of time working with another entity. In addition to the surveys, a variety of small case study interviews were conducted with individual schools in the five states that were known to be using assessment data to make instructional improvements. The information gleaned from these case studies will be included in the project final report, which will be available after OVAE clearance.

Data Analyses and Findings

The data set was reviewed from a descriptive standpoint (e.g., response frequencies), the hypotheses have been examined as much as possible, and several potential trends related to the study hypotheses could be seen in the data set. Of the respondents, the vast majority indicated that their CTE students took end-of-

Figure 1: Changes Made in Instruction of the Class as a Whole Based on Data

Figure 2: Examples of Changes Made With Individual Students Based on Data

Techniques  NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2009  www.acteonline.org

www.acteonline.org

34

35

www.acteonline.org
program technical assessments. The results of these assessments were used for a variety of purposes, the most common of which was maintaining a continuous improvement process, making improvements to programs in areas in which scores were weak, and reporting to outside bodies.

A primary objective of this study was to investigate the extent to which CTE educators used technical assessment data to inform instructional improvement and the sources of their knowledge that enables them to do so. A majority of the respondents indicated that they do use technical assessment data to make instructional decisions, and professional development. Of those who had received such professional development, most seemed to feel that the training contained information they needed at an appropriate level. A third objective of this study was to determine how educators rated the types of professional development and what forms of professional development on use of assessment data they felt would be most useful. The results were mixed, but they did seem to indicate that a mixture of formal training and practical follow-up would be most helpful. Respondents were also asked about areas for which they did not have professional development but wished it were available. Figure 1 shows the most frequently cited topics. Respondents were also asked whom they would prefer as a delivery agent for professional development on the topic. Various responses were identified, with the most helpful. Respondents were also asked about areas for which they did not have professional development but wished it were available. Figure 1 shows the most frequently cited topics. Respondents were also asked whom they would prefer as a delivery agent for professional development on the topic. Various responses were identified, with the most helpful. Respondents were also asked about areas for which they did not have professional development but wished it were available. Figure 1 shows the most frequently cited topics. Respondents were also asked whom they would prefer as a delivery agent for professional development on the topic. Various responses were identified, with the most helpful. Respondents were also asked about areas for which they did not have professional development but wished it were available. Figure 1 shows the most frequently cited topics. Respondents were also asked whom they would prefer as a delivery agent for professional development on the topic. Various responses were identified, with the most helpful. Respondents were also asked about areas for which they did not have professional development but wished it were available. Figure 1 shows the most frequently cited topics. Respondents were also asked whom they would prefer as a delivery agent for professional development on the topic. Various responses were identified, with the most helpful.

Next Steps In addition to the objectives and research hypotheses discussed above, the survey also solicited information on a variety of other factors that were determined to be potentially helpful in addressing a fourth objective to be completed next year—that of creating a professional development system geared toward improving educator understanding of the use of technical assessment data, and increasing the use and effectiveness of such data in making instructional improvements. Findings from the survey will be combined with insights gleaned from the literature to provide a basis for the creation of professional development that can be piloted-tested and later provided in response to technical assistance requests from states.

Significance U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, in testimony before the House Education and Labor Committee, said, “…states must build data systems that can track student performance from one year to the next, from one school to another, so that those students and their parents know when they are making progress and when they need extra attention. This information must also be put in the hands of educators so they can use it to improve instruction” (Ed.gov, 2009). This study was especially timely because this is the first time that, through the 2006 reauthorization of the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act (Perkins IV), states must report on the technical skill attainment of student concentrators in CTE programs. It is time to help educators learn from data so that they can improve student performance.

Sandra Pritz, Ph.D., manages the Assessment Division of NOCTI and The Whitener Group. She can be reached at nocti@nocti.org

Patricia Karley, Ph.D., is a senior consultant to NOCTI and The Whitener Group. She can be reached at nocti@nocti.org

Interested in exploring this topic further? Discuss it with your colleagues on the ACTE forums at www.acteonline.org/forum.aspx.

Furniture Designed for Technical Education

Solutions that Fit:
- Ability to design furniture to maximize available space and square footage
- Wire management system conceals wires and cables while allowing easy access
- Lifetime Warranty means low maintenance and low total cost of ownership
- Furniture contributes to a healthy indoor environment

Call us or visit us on the web to find your local representative
800-678-5550 - www.interiorconcepts.com

### Visit Our Booth #223! 
Compliant with BIFMA X7.1

*Certified Green* 

Visit us at the ACTE Expo in Nashville, Booth #223!
The new online version of **Techniques**:

- has a clickable table of contents and a robust search feature, so finding the story you want is a breeze
- can be e-mailed, printed and converted to .pdf for easy sharing
- includes a full-screen mode and zooming and cropping capabilities for easy reading
- offers dynamic content like embedded video and active hyperlinks
- allows you to easily research pressing CTE issues
- includes product demonstrations from video advertisements

Visit [www.acteonline.org/techniques.aspx](http://www.acteonline.org/techniques.aspx) today and give it a try!