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# How Sylvania Schools Drives Adoption with Professional Development

Find out how teacher-led professional development for Achieve3000 resulted in higher usage and more engaged students at Sylvania Schools.



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Alexander Clarkson knows the secret to great [professional development](#). And he didn't have to look too far to find it.

"The basic theme for us is that if the teacher owns the resource, then it's successful," said Alexander, digital instruction specialist for Sylvania Schools in Sylvania, Ohio.



For Sylvania, helping teachers own Achieve3000 meant moving away from traditional professional development models, and placing teachers front and center.

"We included the actual teacher in an ownership model – showing them how Achieve3000 was a program that allowed them to add layers of literacy instruction to plans they already had on the table – and it worked."

This is the story of how Sylvania got started with Achieve3000, their lessons learned, and where they go from here.

### **Shifting Assessment Models**

Before the new Ohio State Tests (OST) were introduced, Alexander says that the district really didn't place much emphasis on [differentiation](#).

"I don't think there was a point where we saw a need that differentiation was necessary to solve a problem," he recalls.

However, he noted, district leaders did know that the assessment model would be

shifting from achievement to growth.

Sylvania's state report card also revealed that the district was deficient when it came to progress of gifted and talented students, as well as students with learning disabilities.

*"We're a suburban district, and passage rates are high," said Alexander. "But that's based on a model of achievement. That means if we have a gifted and talented student in 8th grade, in 2010 she's seen as a shining star, but in 2015 it may be a problem because she's not growing at the rate she should."*

He added that with the new model, students would continually need to "stretch and push" to achieve the required growth levels.

"The new model began to show problem areas that we had never seen before," said Alexander.

It's because of this shift that the district began taking a closer look at differentiation.

"That added a little bit of incentive to differentiate more often, and not only achieve benchmarks, but grow year after year," said Alexander. "At the same time, we started to see new technologies with differentiated reading."

### **Diving into Differentiation**

Before getting started with Achieve3000, Alexander – who was a classroom teacher at the time – was using Newsela, a site that publishes news articles for students at different reading levels.

Because he knew the reading levels of his students, he would serve the content and then ask students to choose the level appropriate for them. He used the platform along with other assessment data from another disconnected system to gauge student progress.

However, after seeing a presentation for Achieve3000 one year during the Ohio Technology Conference, he realized that there was a better way.

“Achieve3000 was everything I was doing with Newsela, but there was more to it,” said Alexander. “The student management was attractive, and it was leveled at 12 different levels as opposed to just five with Newsela.”

But the deciding factor for implementing Achieve3000 in their grade 6-12 classrooms?

“With something like Newsela, we needed teachers to be on their game to really be able to use it in a way to impact literacy in classroom,” said Alexander.

“Achieve3000 takes the burden off of teachers. They can administer [LevelSet™](#) tests, and the program automatically serves articles to students at their level and adjusts as necessary month by month. It was that sort of automation that was key to our adoption, and the reason we selected Achieve3000.”

He added that the automation of student proficiency and growth has opened the door for all of Sylvania’s teachers to positively affect teaching and learning.

“Any teacher regardless of skill level could effectively help their kids grow,” said Alexander. “We weren’t seeing that in any other resource.”

### **The Move Toward Creative Ownership**

In the past, Sylvania experimented with professional development models that Alexander noted were not very effective with their teachers, so he decided to take a different approach.

He began reaching out to teachers, and working with model lessons that supported what they were already doing in their classroom.

“I said to them: ‘I want to talk about what you’re doing, and how Achieve3000 can support that.’”

Armed with this input, he developed a program that incorporated the following elements:

- [Teacher leaders develop model lessons](#) to display to other teachers
- High school teachers are released from class during four periods to watch fellow teacher teach a lesson live in the classroom
- Teachers then have a discussion around what worked and areas for improvement

“We tried to have those conversations before, but were never successful until we showed how technology could be used to supplement what teachers wanted to do in the classroom,” said Alexander.

“When an English teacher can see how the other teacher used Achieve3000 to teach about *Catcher in the Rye*, they say, ‘Oh, it’s about *Catcher in the Rye*, not the technology.’”

He also pointed out that, although they have implemented a teacher-led professional development model, the people at Achieve3000 are still an essential part of the equation.

He gives special recognition to Sharon Wajda, curriculum implementation manager at Achieve3000.

"I cannot speak highly enough of Sharon," said Alexander. "I adore the way she supports us. During sessions, she advises and guides, rather than dictates. When a question comes up, she speaks up to help."

It's this continued communication that has helped strengthen the partnership between the district and Achieve3000, and has resulted in improved outcomes.

"The only way to succeed is by embracing collaboration and providing support at every level," said Alexander. "We appreciate the support Achieve3000 has given us in embracing our district's unique needs."

### **High Usage, More Engagement**

Since teachers have become more involved in the professional development program, Alexander has noticed positive changes in the ways that both students and teachers interact with Achieve3000.

"Teachers are using the system, students are more engaged, and teachers feel ownership," he said. "Students have said they appreciate that Achieve3000 presents something to them in a way they can understand."

And, although he says it's too early in their implementation to quote any numbers, they have seen some preliminary quantitative results.

"Our latest district report showed growth from Achieve3000 internal modeling," he said.

Their next step is to do a comparative analysis between Achieve3000 and their Renaissance Learning Star Assessment data to see if there are corresponding gains

between both systems.

Because the district has been going through so many changes – including implementing a 1:1 model with Chromebooks® – Alexander says it’s hard to pinpoint success for any of their initiatives.

“In the last three to five years, the change has been so quick – abandoning textbooks, implementing student-centered learning, leveled text through Achieve3000, next-generation assessment models. So much has happened in such a short period of time, nothing has been implemented long enough to show it has been successful.”

But he is sure about one thing: creative ownership works.

“These teachers are brilliant. They’re invested. They’re passionate. Once we recognize that and let them know it, they come on board and they become leaders.”

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