

# ProFiles

Pearson Assessments products and services at work.



## A Florida high school strives for gains on FCAT with systematic approach and Prosper™ assessment system

**D**awn Lamb, principal of Suwannee High School in Live Oak, Fla., is sold on continuous improvement, a systematic approach to helping students succeed on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT).

In the first year of continuous improvement, Suwannee ranked among the top 10 percent of Florida high schools based on its point gain on the FCAT. However, Lamb realized that the northern Florida school was not equipped for quick turnaround on scoring and data analysis of assessments – a vital component of continuous improvement.

“Manually processing tests for 850 students was overwhelming,” she recalls. “By the end of the year, we were only providing basic analysis, which is not what we wanted. It became clear that I needed an automated solution to track performance.”

### Automate Testing

Lamb soon learned about the Prosper™ assessment system from Pearson Assessments. The system combines the reliability of scanning technology with the power of PC processing and data analysis.

*“The data you get is so rich and valuable and can really help kids,” Lamb says. “With Prosper we’re able to give feedback to teachers the next day. It’s very quick and very specific. Teachers know exactly who mastered a skill and who didn’t. They can see who needs more attention.”*

Working in tandem with an OpScan® or EZData® scanner from Pearson Assessments, the system automates testing.

### Saves Time & Simplifies Testing Process

With a grant from The College Board the school purchased the Prosper assessment system. The system saves time and simplifies every step of the testing process with the ability to:

- Generate tests that target specific learning objectives.
- Create tests from a test item bank or your own custom questions.
- Choose from a variety of scannable test answer sheets.
- Scan completed forms to capture the performance data.
- Provide detailed results normally available only on district or state level assessments.

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The Florida Department of Education grades schools based on their results in math, reading and writing on the FCAT. Schools that get an 'F' must use a Continuous Improvement Model (CIM) in an effort to improve student performance.

If CIM works for needy schools, then maybe we could use the process to bring our grade up and help our students be successful," Lamb recalls thinking.

*"Probably the most dramatic change in performance has come from awareness," Lamb says. "There is no mistaking what is our skill for the day. We announce it each morning and post it in classrooms. Everyone in the school becomes engaged in improving FCAT skills."*

CIM is a system of using data analysis to plan instruction, gauge how it works, and make adjustments in weak areas. The process involves a repeating cycle of four phases:

**1. Plan** - After analyzing state-provided data on how Suwannee students performed on the most recent FCAT, the staff set priorities on skills from Florida's Sunshine State Standards. Then they developed a calendar for the specific skill to be practiced on each day.

**2. Do** - Twice a week all students attend a 30-minute literacy session. Juniors and seniors who have passed both parts of the FCAT go to a study hall for ACT and SAT preparation.

**3. Check** - At the end of a benchmark series, the teachers give a five- to 10-question quiz on the practiced benchmark. Staff members developed the assessments using the ExamView® test generator software included with the Prosper assessment system.

**4. Act** - Test results allow teachers to tailor their instruction. Students who don't pass a skills test receive tutoring, and those who do pass get a dose of enrichment with more advanced practice.

The QuickTest Wizard goes step-by-step through the process of creating a test that assesses content using 13 question formats options. The test layout options allowed Suwannee to match the format of the FCAT.

The staff developed its own banks of test items on reading. Optionally, ExamView test banks are also available free with over 2,500 textbooks. For the math benchmark quizzes, Suwannee accessed Pearson Prentice Hall test item banks.

The administration scans the answer sheets. Prosper instantly scores and analyzes the test data. Teachers receive student reports and group reports. School reports go the language and math departments.

*"Having the flexibility to build our own custom tests was very appealing. And it was easy to do," Lamb says.*

The school also uses the Prosper assessment system to create, score and analyze strand tests, which cover a cluster of related skills.

The school district purchased a test to monitor FCAT preparation in four assessments during the year, but next year Suwannee High School plans to replace the district test with its own assessments.

*"This is where you really make continuous improvement work. The process is dependent on analyzing data," Lamb says. "With the analysis provided by Prosper, we could see trends and common mistakes that teachers could then address during class time."*

"We feel that we can do a better job monitoring student performance using the system we have in place with Prosper. The data provided by Prosper allows us to speak to specific needs of individual students," Lamb says.

The cycle begins again with results guiding improvements, whether it's to refine a lesson or help a teacher improve instruction.

"There are all sorts of ways to manipulate the data to see what we can do better," Lamb says.

This summer teachers will be trained to do their own processing of benchmark tests. Lamb says she hopes they'll also use Prosper to create their own chapter tests and analyze student performance on all types of assessments.

"When they see how easy it is and the kind of information they can get, I think they'll be eager to use it," she says. "It's a tool I wish I had when I got started in education."