

Case Study

Firelands Local Schools Oberlin, Ohio



Summary:

Firelands Local Schools utilizes Acuity® to inform instruction, promote data-driven decision making, and improve student learning. With accurate, reliable data from the Acuity InFormative Assessment™ solution, educators have created a culture of professional collaboration focused on students' academic growth and progress.

From 2009 to 2011, students achieved significant gains on the Ohio Achievement Assessments (OAA) and the district raised its designation from "Effective" to "Excellent."

Firelands Local Schools Improves Collaboration and Student Performance on Ohio Achievement Assessments

Challenges

- Stagnant student achievement
- Poor student performance in Grades 5–8
- Lack of consistent data tracking students' progress toward state standards
- Lack of predictive assessment data

The Firelands Local School District encompasses more than 89 square miles and serves 1,887 students in Lorain and Erie counties. In the rural district, 24 percent of students come from economically disadvantaged homes and 29 percent are from households with single or divorced parents.

"Prior to the use of Acuity, student achievement at Firelands Local Schools was stagnant and very poor, especially in Grades 5–8," said David Brand, curriculum coordinator for the district and principal of South Amherst Middle School. "The district hired a new superintendent, Greg Ring, in 2008 to help improve instruction and student achievement. Among other important decisions, he knew the district needed to begin utilizing common assessments and analyzing the results of those and other assessments."

District statistics:

Schools: 3

Students: 1,887

Grades: K–12

Website:

<http://www.firelandsschools.org>

Student population:

1% Asian/Pacific Islander

94% Caucasian

2% Hispanic

3% Multiracial

24% Free and reduced meals

11% Special education



"Acuity was the perfect fit for our district because of its ease of use for teachers and students, its rigorous content, and its robust reporting systems," said Brand.

"CTB/McGraw-Hill has also been very helpful in training our staff and customizing the product to fit our needs."



Solution: Acuity

Firelands Local Schools began using Acuity in fall 2009. Developed by CTB/McGraw-Hill in collaboration with educators nationwide, Acuity is a unique integration of predictive and diagnostic assessments, reports, instructional resources, item banks, and item authoring—all aligned to state standards and designed to improve student achievement.

"Acuity was the perfect fit for our district because of its ease of use for teachers and students, its rigorous content, and its robust reporting systems," said Brand. "CTB/McGraw-Hill has also been very helpful in training our staff and customizing the product to fit our needs."

All students in Grades 2–8 participate in the Acuity Predictive, Diagnostic, and Custom Assessments in reading, language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. All algebra students at the middle and high school levels also use Acuity solutions.

"When we first implemented Acuity, we talked with our teachers about why we were seeing poor performance in areas like mathematics. Teachers told us it was not because of a lack of content knowledge or a desire to improve. What they lacked was consistent data about what students actually understood," said Brand. "With Acuity, our teachers now have valuable information about student progress relative to our state standards and assessments. Acuity has helped us truly individualize student learning and improve teachers' instruction."

Predictive and Diagnostic Assessments

The Acuity Predictive Assessments provide immediate information about student progress and growth, and allow educators to predict student performance on the OAA. This information helps teachers prioritize their instruction and concentrate efforts where students most need intervention.

Firelands Local Schools administers the first two Acuity Predictive Assessments online in mid-September and early December. In mid-February, the third predictive assessment is administered via paper and pencil.

"With the third assessment, we try to mirror the experience of the OAA. This allows us to make sure we're creating a comfortable climate for students and that the day of the test is not a high-pressure situation; it's just like any other day," said Brand. "A key benefit of Acuity is that it has shown a very high correlation to how students actually score on the state test."

The Acuity Predictive Assessments are also used as a universal screener in the district's Response to Intervention (RTI) program. "The assessments give us reliable data we can compare to classroom tests and other assessments to help us identify students who are struggling and may be in need of intervention," said Brand.

In between the predictive assessments, teachers administer the Acuity Diagnostic Assessments. With each of the four pre-built diagnostic assessments, teachers can quickly diagnose each student's strengths and needs, and focus their instruction on the standards students have yet to master.

"We try to administer the diagnostic assessments quarterly to make sure we're meeting state standards and properly pacing our instruction," said Brand. "Acuity helps us see where we are, where we're growing, and where we need to improve. Teachers say this makes their instruction easier. Since they can see the areas they need to focus on, they're no longer wasting time on things students already know."



Custom Assessments

To monitor student progress between the predictive and diagnostic assessments, teachers use the Acuity Item Bank and Item Authoring to develop custom assessments.

"The item bank has a comprehensive database of questions and provides good practice for students," said Brand. "It gives teachers daily and weekly chunks of data they can use to identify students who need intervention and the areas where they need help."

Instructional Resources

To help teachers intervene early and effectively, Acuity allows teachers to automatically assign instruction directly from the assessment reports. While students are engaged with interactive practice activities, their answers are captured and viewable by teachers on helpful reports. With these reports, teachers can quickly evaluate whether or not the additional instruction is helping students to master a concept.

"The interactive practice activities are good tools for reinforcement and re-teaching," said Brand.

"Acuity helps us see where we are, where we're growing, and where we need to improve. Teachers say this makes their instruction easier. Since they can see the areas they need to focus on, they're no longer wasting time on things students already know."

Reports

Acuity features dozens of reports at the student, class, school, and district levels to help educators easily measure student progress and growth throughout the school year.

In Firelands Local Schools, after every Acuity Assessment, Data Teams meet to review the results and develop improvement or intervention plans. The meetings include grade level teams in Grades 2–5 and departmental teams in Grades 6–8. The special education department holds its own meetings.

“The Acuity Reports help promote data-driven discussions and decisions that truly impact student learning,” said Brand. “The first report the Data Teams usually review is the Class Item Analysis Report. Teachers can examine how their students performed versus the whole grade level and discuss strategies that are getting positive results. Teachers can also see what misconceptions students have. For example, if 70 percent of students choose the right answer but 30 percent choose the same wrong answer, we know students have the same misconception and can address that. It helps us better understand what students are thinking.”

The district also encourages administrators and teachers to review school, class, and student reports to identify their needs for professional development, instructional resources, and student support.

“The Acuity Reports are so robust that we can drill down to nearly any desired level,” said Brand. “What we find may lead us to provide tutoring for students or lesson modeling for teachers, or to develop school or district improvement plans. The variety of reports helps all involved—students, teachers, coaches, parents, and administrators.”

Having access to detailed breakdowns of student performance has also helped the district achieve gains for targeted subgroups. “Last year, we placed a heavy focus on special education,” said Brand. “By allowing us to drill down and examine data for students with disabilities, Acuity helped us identify and address specific needs. As a result, the growth we saw was amazing. We met Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) requirements for special education students in 2009–2010 and 2010–2011—those are the only two years our district has done that.”

According to Brand, the Acuity Reports have also helped to create a culture of professional collaboration. “Because Acuity provides us with an objective source of data, it makes professional conversations easier, more honest, and more productive,” he said. “It gives us timely information and a common basis for discussion, which has helped us focus on learning—not just teaching.”

“Teachers can also see what misconceptions students have. For example, if 70 percent of students choose the right answer but 30 percent choose the same wrong answer, we know students have the same misconception and can address that. It helps us better understand what students are thinking.”





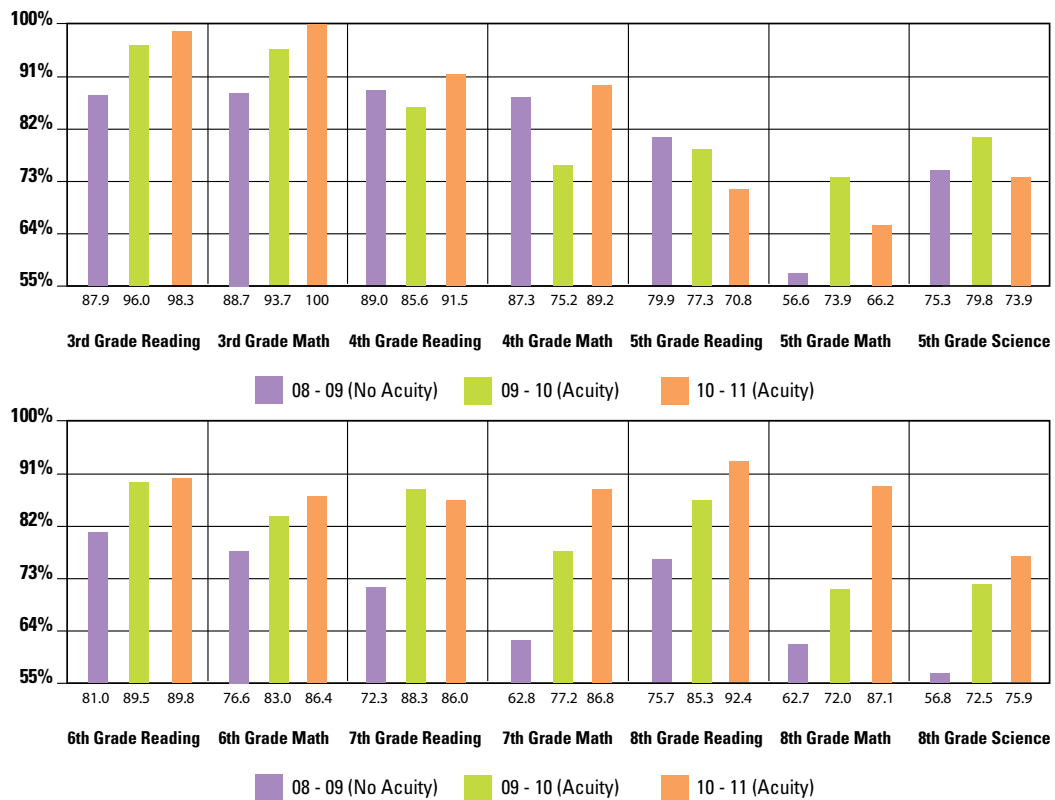
Results

- Improved OAA performance
- Improved district rankings on state measures of performance
- Increased collaboration
- Increased data-driven decision making

Since Acuity was implemented in 2009, students have achieved significant gains on the OAA in reading, mathematics, and science.

“From 2009 to 2011, the average improvement in student performance on the OAA in Grades 3–8 was 14.9 percent,” said Brand. “Our scores clearly show the benefits of our increased focus on performance in mathematics and the middle school grades. We’ve shown nearly a 40 percent gain in seventh and eighth grade math.”

*Ohio Achievement Assessments
Firelands Local Schools*



In addition to state test score gains, the district showed gains on key measures of performance in the state of Ohio, including Performance Index, AYP, and Value-Added measures.

State of Ohio District Ratings Firelands Local Schools

Performance Index (0-120 points)	District Designation	
2008–09 (No Acuity)	95.2	Effective
2009–10 (Acuity)	98.4	Effective
2010–11 (Acuity)	101.1	Excellent

“From 2009 to 2010, Firelands had the largest increase in Performance Index in northern Ohio. We had a 5.9 point increase from 2009 to 2011, which is a huge leap, and we raised our district designation from Effective to Excellent,” said Brand. “The Acuity Reports helped us achieve AYP, and also helped us exceed the Value-Added measure for the first time.”

Ohio’s Value-Added measure shows whether a district or school meets, exceeds, or is below one year of growth for its students. In 2009–2010 and 2010–2011, Firelands Local Schools exceeded the expected gains on the Value-Added measure.

According to Brand, the district’s leadership and emphasis on data-driven decision making have played critical roles in students’ academic growth and progress.

“I attribute the success of our district, first, to our superintendent—his vision, his accountability, and his support in giving us the time and resources to have professional conversations,” said Brand. “Acuity has also played a pivotal role in our improvement because it’s the starting point for all our conversations. Through the use of Acuity and its resources, not only has student achievement improved dramatically at Firelands Local Schools but the culture has greatly improved, too. The culture of our district has become that of striving for excellence and professional collaboration. It’s been only two years but the growth we’ve seen is significant.”

“Acuity has also played a pivotal role in our improvement because it’s the starting point for all our conversations. Through the use of Acuity and its resources, not only has student achievement improved dramatically at Firelands Local Schools but the culture has greatly improved, too.”

Looking Ahead

In the coming year, Firelands Local Schools looks forward to exploring the expanded Acuity solutions that support authentic assessment relative to the Common Core State Standards.

“The new Acuity Assessments will help us make sure we’re teaching to the new standards and that our students are progressing,” said Brand. “Plus, as states move toward online assessments, we’re already ahead of the game because our students are very comfortable taking online assessments with Acuity.”

For more information on Acuity and to view an online demo, visit CTB.com/Acuity or call 800.538.9547 to schedule an in-person demonstration.