

edCount Case Study: Technical Assistance to the Puerto Rico Department of Education for Their implementation of No Child Left Behind

The Puerto Rico Department of Education (PRDE) oversees one island-wide education system comprising more than half a million students and more than 40,000 teachers. As a recipient of federal education funds, the PRDE faces the same responsibility that states face to implement and comply with federal legislation. Because Puerto Rico does not differentiate its education system into different districts, the stability and quality of the PRDE's education and technical assistance services have direct and significant implications on the academic systems and outcomes for the entire territory.

As a Spanish-speaking territory with a unique cultural heritage, Puerto Rico faces a few distinctive challenges relative to other states, particularly regarding support and resources. Because English is the language of instruction in the fifty U.S. states, instructional materials, standards, and assessments in Spanish are not readily available, and the PRDE does not have any other state agencies to partner or share resources with to develop rigorous Spanish-language materials and assessments. The island also relies almost exclusively on its own residents to serve as teachers, meaning it has a limited pool of educators to hire, and shortages are frequent.

Like the 50 states, Puerto Rico has been working since the 2002-2003 school year to implement the requirements of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB). Over the years, the PRDE had worked to develop rigorous standards for Spanish language arts, mathematics, science, and English as a second language; it has also developed a system incorporating general assessments (the *Pruebas Puertorriqueñas de Aprovechamiento Académico; PPPAA*) as well as an alternate assessment for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities (the *Pruebas Puertorriqueñas de Evaluación Alternativa; PPEA*). As states have done, the PRDE has worked to submit evidence to the U.S. Department of Education demonstrating its compliance with the law's mandates, and the validity of its implemented standards and assessment systems for their intended purposes.

Despite great effort, however, the PRDE was finding that its students' performance on the PPAA, and on other academic measures such as the National Assessment for Education Progress (NAEP) were still disappointingly low. The PRDE was also struggling to respond to all of the Department's peer review responses about the validity and compliance of its assessment system.

In 2010, the PRDE hired edCount to help guide them through the remainder of the peer review process. Because our team includes individuals who have both prepared and reviewed peer review packages for other states, edCount is uniquely able to help clients ensure that their evidence package is thorough, accurate, and meets federal expectations. We identified what evidence and information the PRDE needed to gather to complete its submission and then designed and implemented studies that would collect this information.

In the process of visiting schools and meeting with teachers and principals to collect data for PRDE's peer review package, edCount observed a number of ways in which the PRDE could potentially improve its systems to provide teachers with better supports, and students with better instruction. In turn, these improvements could strengthen the validity of the PRDE's overall assessment system, as well as strengthen the meaning and appropriate uses for scores from its assessments. Student learning and achievement could benefit from these changes as well.

Thus, the PRDE has engaged edCount to complete a number of additional research and technical assistance activities to meet these ends. The majority of these activities focus on providing teachers with the resources and supports necessary to provide instruction that is aligned to the PRDE's academic content standards. Our services for this client have included:

Technical assistance and capacity building:

- A gap analysis comparing the PRDE's standards to the common core state standards (CCSS), to identify any content that is covered by the CCSS that is not currently included in PRDE's standards.
- Collaboration with PRDE to develop Spanish language arts and Spanish mathematics standards that correspond to the CCSS.
- Development of a comprehensive, standards-aligned curriculum for grades K-12 in Spanish language arts (SLA), mathematics, science, and English as a second language (ESL).
- Professional development conferences and seminars for instructors to help them understand how to use their new materials to support instruction.
- Establishing communities of practice for teachers throughout the island to support collaboration.

Policy development:

- Redesign of accommodations manual to ensure that it meets peer review requirements and provides teachers and administrators with adequate tools to properly identify students for available testing option.

Evaluation and validity studies:

- An alignment study evaluating the quality of alignment between Puerto Rico's academic content standards and its academic assessments in SLA, mathematics, science, and ESL.
- Consequential validity studies related to the general and alternate assessments to answer questions about the resources and supports available to teachers, as well as their knowledge and implementation of standards-based instruction.
- A cognitive validity study to determine whether and certain extraneous factors such as calculator use may influence student performance on the PRDE's general assessment.
- A study of the performance level descriptors (PLDs) associated with the PRDE's general assessment.

The PRDE faces some unique challenges when it comes to implementing NCLB. edCount is proud to provide specialized assistance to this client that allows them to create systems and materials that are reflective of their culture and their needs, rather than forcing them to comply with or implement materials that are not relevant for their population. We are also working to help the PRDE emerge as a leader in developing Spanish language materials and resources that may ultimately be useful for other states who wish to use these materials to educate English learners in other states.

PRDE Theory of Action

Visit the *Interactive Theory of Action for this Case Study* online:

<http://edcount.com/newsite/index.php/case-studies/nclb-technical-assistance>.

See the Appendix for static images from the interactive TOA.

Lessons Learned

One of the biggest lessons the PRDE and edCount have learned while working together is that test scores are about much more than simply tests. Other factors of an education system, such as school culture, teacher support, access to resources, and well-conceived systems, play a critical role in ensuring that scores used for decision-making are valid and meaningful for their various purposes. While our work for the PRDE started out with a focus on assessment, over time our activities have shifted more heavily towards instruction, classrooms, and the interactions that take place before a child ever even sees a test.

Puerto Rico's unique situation in terms of culture, geography, history, and language, have also been central to our work with this client. We have collaborated extensively to ensure that we deliver work that is appropriate for the PRDE and reflects the island's population; in some cases, this has required that we create or adapt new products and services for this client to address its unique needs and priorities.

Conclusion

edCount's work with the Puerto Rico Department of Education is extensive, far-reaching, and ever-growing. In doing this work, pacing has been important; we have sought to introduce new systems gradually and manage their implementation closely to ensure that those involved understand their roles and have the support they need to do their jobs well. Over the next few years, as we continue scale up these efforts across the island, quality control will be important as we seek to ensure that all educators have access to the support they need. We are also working with the PRDE to help it establish and maintain presence in national, collaborative projects with other states, to ensure that the students and teachers of Puerto Rico are represented in the design and development of the next generation of standards and assessments.

Case Study Appendix: Theory of Action Slides for PRDE

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