







Using Ability Data as a Bridge to Equity with Jefferson County Public Schools in Colorado

Quick Facts:

-  Over 84,000 students
-  Over 26,000 students qualify for free and reduced lunch
-  Serves a land area of 774 square miles
-  A top 40 largest school district in the US
-  155 Schools
-  11,000 Employees

Executive Summary:

Jefferson County (JeffCo) Public Schools in Colorado has administered the *Cognitive Abilities Test™ (CogAT®)* for decades but over the past eight years, they have refined their resources and training processes to maximize the use of *CogAT* data for student learning.

Key Challenges:

1. Creating an organizational structure capable of supporting teachers throughout *CogAT* administration and implementation into lesson planning
2. Developing a *CogAT* training structure for every teacher regardless of their experience level
3. Providing the support and resources necessary for parents to understand *CogAT* testing
4. Making *CogAT* results and resources available and decipherable for all teachers at a moment's notice
5. Convincing teachers and administrators that *CogAT* results can serve as a guide to instruction in every classroom

Overview of Products:

JeffCo Public Schools employs *CogAT* to differentiate between student ability and achievement to accurately inform decisions for gifted programs, special education programs, and ESL programs and to guide instruction consistently across every classroom in their district.



JeffCo uses *CogAT* in three main ways in their school system:

1 To adapt instruction to the needs and abilities of students

2 To provide an alternative measure of development for program placement

3 To identify students whose predicted levels of achievement are markedly discrepant from their actual levels of achievement

Overview of Key Use Cases:

The past eight years in JeffCo brought procedural and structural changes to *CogAT* administration and implementation that allowed the use of *CogAT* data to play a prominent role in **all student instruction**. What used to be a paper and pencil test given to every second grader over a week is now an online test administered over a month-long window. This creates **flexibility** for schools to test when it suits their schedules and frees up their *CogAT* team from working through 6,000 paper tests to devoting their time to training and guiding classroom instruction based on the results.

Moving to an online platform also affords JeffCo the opportunity to create an online hub for *CogAT* that provides teachers with **every resource imaginable**. The hub hosts references like test instructions, Riverside Insights' *Score Interpretation Guide*, written by Dr. Joni Lakin, PowerPoint presentations on reading the data, and a handy PDF that breaks down student profiles, student needs, and the teacher's role for each of the nine stanines in the Verbal, Nonverbal, and Quantitative scores.

In addition to the online resources, JeffCo hired six more Gifted and Talented Resource Teachers and ten more Social-Emotional Learning Counselors to provide in-person support. They also designated a team of Subject Matter Experts to assist in the technical aspects of administering *CogAT* throughout the month-long testing window.

Reworking the *CogAT* training program also proved fruitful – particularly in regard to inevitable turnover in a district with 11,000 employees. Marla Caviness-French, JeffCo's *CogAT* guru, designed the following four-tiered training approach with the goal to “create time and space for teachers to learn and review the *CogAT* resources.” – Caviness-French

Marla's Four-Tiered *CogAT* Training System

- **I Intro for those who have never administered *CogAT***
 - **Part A:** Online Course
 - Basic overview of procedures, emphasis on practice tests, combining *CogAT* data with MAP data to guide instruction
 - **Part B:** In-person Course
 - Overview of how to read student profiles
 - Overview of all available *CogAT* resources online
- **II Level 1**
 - Focus on practical/procedural aspect of *CogAT*
 - Overview of tech needs and the process of administering *CogAT*
- **III Level 2**
 - Review of technical aspects of DataManager (the testing platform that hosts *CogAT*)
 - Emphasis on understanding working memory
 - Breaking down the batteries of Verbal, Quantitative, and Nonverbal
- **IV Level 3**
 - Deep dive into the *CogAT* Dashboard and collaborating with MAP data
 - Emphasis on equity for all students

That effect spread beyond general education and gifted programs to special education and ESL programs. As Caviness-French says, “When we realized we should be playing on the same team as our special education department, we identified more 2E (twice exceptional) students who have a discrepancy between academic and cognitive ability, as *CogAT* is designed to do.”

At first, not all teachers wanted support from the *CogAT* team but in providing a consistent and sustainable training structure, a few teachers began to see the benefits of using that data. Over time, the undeniable results spurred curiosity and interest and ultimately led to the vast majority of teachers seeing *CogAT* data as essential in their classrooms.

She goes on to say, “Teachers can be relieved and even emotional when receiving the *CogAT* scores for students who haven’t achieved up to their ability, and teachers knew the students had the ability but couldn’t show it. Even principals will see the scores and say, ‘Oh, now I get why we use *CogAT*.’”

Insights and Impact:

Parents can latch onto *CogAT* scores and want to know all they possibly can about that aspect of their child’s education, so JeffCo responds by giving parents a 90-minute presentation on understanding the *CogAT* profile and the gifted and talented identification process.

Additionally, JeffCo created a library of handouts for parents, and each resource is translated into eight different languages to ensure equitable access to the information:

1. How are *CogAT* scores calculated?
2. *CogAT* universal assessment overview
3. The difference between an Advanced Learning Plan (ALP) in neighborhood school classrooms and a Gifted and Talented Center classroom
4. Steps for GT/ALP identification for parents
5. FAQs submitted by previous families

JeffCo is also intentional about when they release *CogAT* data by waiting until after parent-teacher conferences. Otherwise, the parents only want to talk about the data. The paper copies of the tests arrive at schools the day before Thanksgiving to give teachers breathing room during Thanksgiving break before parents unleash their *CogAT* questions.

JeffCo’s parents are instrumental for the gifted and talented programs, even starting a nonprofit and advocating for resources with the board. Parents always want the best for their kids and their education.

On the CogAT Dashboard:

Riverside Insights' Vickie Driver outlines the benefits of the *CogAT* Dashboard, which JeffCo utilizes to spur further insight into *CogAT* data: "The *CogAT* Dashboard allows for a quick look into where students' scores fall in relation to each other in a given class. The student roster allows users to filter the data by any number of variables (ethnicity, gender, percentile, free/reduced lunch, etc.)."

Driver says, "When you combine this ability to drill down into the data with the guidance for instructors, you wind up with a powerful asset for teachers."

Summary:

JeffCo serves as a prime example of how *CogAT* can serve school communities in myriad ways if the structure and support surrounding *CogAT* remains consistent and sustainable. Here are some of the steps they took to employ *CogAT* to the fullest degree:

- 1. Moved *CogAT* testing online**
- 2. Changed to a month-long window for testing**
- 3. Created an online hub of *CogAT* resources**
- 4. Added staff in the gifted and talented department and technical support**
- 5. Developed a tiered *CogAT* training structure**
- 6. Collaborated with special education and ESL departments**
- 7. Provided parents with resources and opportunities to have their questions answered**
- 8. Utilized the *CogAT* Dashboard to focus on individuals and classes**