



# POSITIVE DEVIANCE INITIATIVE

NEWSLETTER  
VOLUME 2, ISSUE 4  
MAY 2011

## Positive Deviance Approach Used to Reduce MRSA Infections in 153 Veterans Affairs Hospitals

A *New York Times* article entitled “**Study Finds Drop in Deadly V.A. Hospital Infections**” was published on 04.13.2011 and highlights a study that used the positive deviance (PD) approach to trigger cultural changes resulting in the reduction of MRSA infections by 62% in a study of 153 Veterans Affairs hospitals nationwide over a 32-month period. Although the article does not mention positive deviance directly, it mentions the encouragement of “cultural changes aimed at empowering frontline workers, whether nurses or janitors, to innovate ways to control infection.”

The *New York Times* article links directly to the study, which was published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* (NEJM) on 04.14.2011, entitled “**Veterans Affairs Initiative to Prevent Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus aureus Infections,**” which identifies positive deviance as the “recommended approach to achieve culture change.” The principal author of the NEJM article, Dr. Rajiv Jain is the Chief Consultant of Specialty Care Services for all of the Veterans Hospital Association, and National Program director of the nationwide VA MRSA Prevention Program which he established in 2007.

In the *New York Times* article Dr. Jain mentioned the importance of universal screening of all patients because “testing every patient brings the infection control initiative into the thinking of the entire staff. The staff takes more ownership,

not only of hand hygiene and other precautions but also of doing whatever is necessary to prevent the spread of these infections.”

PDI staff members recently had the opportunity to speak with Dr. Jain about the positive deviance work going on in the VA hospitals, and Dr. Jain reemphasized the importance of staff ownership of the process, clarifying that the PD approach is a long term cultural change process.



Dr. Jain said, “The staff knew from early on that this was not just the flavor of the month; this was going to be a new way of doing business, that is number one. Number two, I think having a system where you track and report these results in a public place, for example, our secretary takes pride, and our infection rates are reported nationally. It is very fascinating that when you make the results transparent and

available to the staff and you have then a culture where everyone takes pride in their work, then they would not slip back because it does matter if the transmission rate goes up, it does matter if you have infections. The staff is engaged, the MRSA Prevention Coordinators are very engaged and involved, and the leadership keeps an eye on it even at the highest levels. I think it is a combination of a lot of those strategies that really give the message to the staff that this is not going to go away, this will be the way we will do it and we will have to keep going forward.” Click directly on article titles to read in full.



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## Focus on: Education

This issue of the PDI newsletter focuses on how positive deviance is being used in education to address issues like the reduction of high school drop-out rates, absenteeism, disruptive behavior, and violence among teens in the US, and the creation of opportunities for girls to access education in Burkina Faso. In recent weeks there has been increasing news coverage about PD and education in the US, and we'll share those articles, along with information about past PD education projects.



### Clairton district's 'positive' initiative shows results

In March, Mary Niederberger of the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* wrote an article entitled "Clairton district's 'positive' initiative shows results" which highlighted the impact of positive deviance work being done to address absenteeism, tardiness, and disruptive behavior in the Clairton City School District in Clairton, PA. The PD process in Clairton involves a core group of parents, students, administrators, and teachers, and has had a significant im-

pact in addressing these issues. The core group of students have been involved in this process since August and dedicate afterschool time as well as Saturday mornings to trainings.

As community coordinator Alexander Lewis mentioned in the article, members of the core group of believe that improvement in tardiness, absenteeism and disruptive behavior will keep students from dropping out and becoming involved in

violence on the streets.

Momentum for the initiative has increased significantly since in-school teacher training time was devoted to orienting all teachers to the PD concept and allowing them time to identify current challenges and barriers as well as successful strategies used by colleagues. [Click here to read the full article.](#)

## Positive Deviance: Combatting High School Dropouts

Also in March, Vivian Po of New America Media wrote an article entitled “Positive Deviance: Combatting High School Dropouts,” which focused on how positive deviance is being used to address the alarmingly high drop-out rate in Merced High School (MHS) in Merced, CA,



where over 45% of students who enter high school do not graduate. Positive deviance is being used to identify students among the 55% who do graduate who are able to remain in school and succeed despite family issues, poverty, and gangs. The article chronicles the successes of a few students who are thriving against all odds. The project in Merced kicked off in February 2009 under the leadership of Sheila Whitley who teaches math at MHS, and who applied for the grant from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation which funds the positive deviance work. [Click here to read the full article.](#)

## Girls’ Access to Education in Burkina Faso

As was featured in our May 2010 issue of the newsletter, a five day workshop was held in Ouayiguya, Burkina Faso, West Africa in April 2010 to train Peace Corps staff, volunteers and host country nationals in the PD methodology to be applied to a pilot project addressing girls’ access to education. Although the project is in a very early stage, a recent update from Mamoudou Ouedraogo, the Director of the pilot school in Tangaye, Burkina Faso, indicated that PD is beginning to have an impact. Mamoudou updated PDI with news that, “In Tangaye, during the rest of the school year, we noticed a marked improvement in parental involvement. Each day, parents came to the school to inquire about the school work of their children or to make sure that they were attending school. This was not something that happened before we were exposed to PD. Also, students met in groups after class to study.” To find out more, [click here.](#)



# PD Education Projects



## Girls' Access to Education in Ethiopia 2002-2003

Save the Children (US) used the PD approach to increase the number of girls attending school in the Afar region of Ethiopia. Staff reported a marked increase in girls' enrollment since the inception of the program.

## Improving Student Achievement in NJ Schools 2008 - present

The New Jersey Board of Education in collaboration with the PDI and Plexus Institute has begun to use PD to improve educational outcomes. A pilot program is underway in four inner city schools around the state of New Jersey to improve student achievement and other intractable issues. The four participating pilot schools are Asbury Park High School, Broad Street School, Marquis de Lafayette School and the Chaplain Charles J. Watters School 24.



## Primary School Student Retention in Argentina 2002-2003

With support from the World Bank, the Department of Education in Misiones, Argentina used the PD approach to address high rates of primary school student drop out in the province of Misiones. Community members from ten schools in two districts with high drop out rates went to observe a few schools with low drop out rates and identified specific strategies that these schools were using to prevent drop-out before the 5th grade. By adapting these strategies and developing innovative activities, the communities were able to reduce the drop-out rate by 50%.



# Dermi's Story: Educational Success Against All Odds

Dermi is a 14 year old girl from Oromiya, Ethiopia. She has three younger sisters and three younger brothers. All five children, including Dermi, are in school. When her parents are asked why they decided to send Dermi to school, her mother says, "Because an educated person is always gaining while an uneducated one is always losing."

Dermi's parents are worried that Dermi may elope with a boy from school. They have trouble meeting school expenses and costs for clothing and soap. They worry about how they will support all of their children to finish school. They face these challenges by encouraging Dermi to stay in school, by selling grain and borrowing money.

Dermi also faces challenges. She has to do house work before and after school, in addition to her schoolwork. She feels bad about not having good clothes and the right school supplies. She has received a letter from a classmate requesting a "sexual friendship." Dermi overcomes these challenges by keeping her morale up, sharing one pen with her sisters, and working for daily wages during school breaks.

Dermi's mother says that she has tried advising other parents to send their children to school, but "Since education is a long process, I can't convince them because people are focused on immediate results."

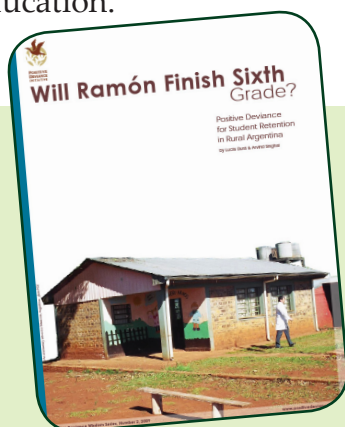
[Click here to read more Stories From the Field about Education.](#)

## Successful PD messages from parents and students in Ethiopia

"An educated person is always gaining, but an uneducated person is always losing."

"I want to be a teacher. My teacher used to be a student just like me and now that he is grown he can support himself by being a teacher and I want to do just like that."

"I want to send both my boys and my girls to school because they are equally my children."



### *Will Ramón Finish Sixth Grade? Positive Deviance for Student Retention in Rural Argentina*

The Positive Deviance Wisdom Series is a collection of powerful stories about how the Positive Deviance (PD) approach has been used in the field. This highly illustrated, and captivating case study documents the use of Positive Deviance approach to increase school retention in Argentina. [Click here to access this issue of the Wisdom Series.](#)