Harnessing the Power of Meaningful Data

Districts transform their response to student needs with timely, actionable insights

Last May, leaders at Santa Clara Unified School District were disappointed to see themselves on a list of Bay Area districts with stagnant high school graduation rates. They resolved to implement solutions that would improve student performance, and began by consulting research which suggested it is nearly impossible for a freshman entering their sophomore year behind in credits to catch up and stay on track to graduate.

To start digging deeper, leadership used a data dashboard to identify ninth-graders who were already off-track. In less than a minute, a member of the district's research and assessment group had a list of all the students that fit that description and sent it off to the high schools. Teachers and administrators at the school level then worked student by student to assign appropriate credit recovery programs for the upcoming summer.

Santa Clara's realization came courtesy of a major push across the county to make data more accessible and actionable in order to eliminate achievement gaps and promote continuous improvement practices. As part of a robust plan launched in 2012 by the Santa Clara County Office of Education (SCCOE), educators of every level, in every district and school have access to support from the SCCOE to become proficient in the use of the County's DataZone, a new data tool powered by Hoonuit District Enterprise (formerly Versifit) to give teachers and administrators more insight into how their students, schools, and districts are performing.

"It's no longer about why students are failing, it's about how teachers are teaching," explained Marcy Lauck, Director of Data Governance for SCCOE who trains educators and administrators on how to maximize the use of data. "This is a paradigm shift. Good data changes how teachers are thinking about their work with students."

> **Access to actionable data for administrators, counselors, and teachers is making a tremendous difference in the myriad ways students are experiencing school.**
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> Marcy Lauck,
> Director of Data Governance
> Santa Clara County Office of Education

LCAP: Where Data Meets Accountability

As part of California's Local Control Funding Formula that allocates funding for the state's schools, every district creates a three-year plan for improving outcomes for at-risk students.

Called the Local Control Accountability Plan, or LCAP, this sprawling document is divided into eight priority funding areas, and serves as a roadmap for districts, giving them a chance to outline their vision for the future, as well as how they are providing supports for targeted populations, such as English language learners and students from low-income backgrounds.

As might be expected from a document of this magnitude, districts are required to set goals that outline how. DataZone's LCAP dashboards provide detailed, district-specific metrics enabling each district to monitor their progress in meeting the goals upon which their funding is based, such as the percentage of students meeting or exceeding ELA and math standards on the Smarter Balanced

assessment, the number of suspensions and expulsions compared across subgroups, and the number of students completing CTE pathways.

In addition, DataZone's LCAP metrics also display a district's leading indicators: locally-determined interim assessments that are used to measure student progress towards proficiency on the Smarter Balanced assessment. These local assessments vary from district to district, but support rich data conversations among schools' professional learning communities and are key to helping teachers differentiate instruction.

These metrics are invaluable to districts who may otherwise be challenged to track progress toward improved outcomes for their students – especially their most at-risk students. As Lauck put it, "Having these metrics organized and updating nightly in one place is tremendously helpful for our district partners."

Powering Decision-Making & Driving Student Achievement

The DataZone, a central data warehouse powered Hoonuit District Enterprise platform, is able to support the county's 31 districts. The DataZone is also the education repository for the Silicon Valley Regional Data Trust, and supports data-sharing between county agencies and school districts, pulling from a number of disparate sources, including foster youth and probation databases, student information systems, state and local assessment platforms, and curricular software.

The Hoonuit District Enterprise data solution, which features a suite of early warning and at-risk monitoring tools, serves as the system's backbone. The result is a network where every caseworker, probation officer, school administrator, and teacher has access to timely, comprehensive, and role-appropriate information about the students they serve.

District officials use aggregated data to make planning decisions at the 30,000-foot level, while individual teachers use a more tailored view to organize their students. "Right now we have over 90 dashboards and 350 metrics in the DataZone," stated Lauck.

"Integrated into coordinated district planning, the DataZone metrics have the potential to change the trajectory for our students."

Education data is at the core of the Silicon Valley Regional Data Trust that includes Santa Clara, San Mateo, and Santa Cruz counties, and is part of an integrated data system to help school districts and agencies determine the efficacy of services supporting at-risk students who may be served by more than one agency. The first application of cross-agency data sharing is FosterVision, which combines data from schools, juvenile probation, and foster youth services.

The application enables authorized personnel to have timely access to the legally allowable education records for children. "Having education data at the core of robust data sets enables districts, agencies and researchers to study issues, inform policies and allocate resources toward effective interventions. Data enables a coordinated approach for multi-service teams," Lauck said.

Changing Big Systems

Although SCCOE began building the DataZone four years ago, it was primarily an internal data warehouse for the County Office. In the fall of 2015, the COE decided to create two demonstration districts to build out the dashboards to meet district needs. Seven districts are now core DataZone districts and others are preparing for membership. "Implementing a data warehouse and the resulting access to comprehensive data involves changing how districts make decisions, and then grounding decisions in data," Lauck said.

For Lauck, that all starts with training educators to see things differently using data. While teachers and administrators can be intimidated at first, that dissipates pretty quickly once teachers see the way SCCOE has set up the Hoonuit District Enterprise platform. "The dashboard and the DataZone are easy for people to navigate," Lauck said. To prove it, she typically starts with a quick treasure hunt, giving staff a list of things to do in 30 minutes: explore filters for different subgroups of students, create a cohort of at-risk students and find an individual student's history. "When they see how easy it is, it always ignites a desire to know more and to engage colleagues in discussions about how they might develop action plans based on data."

Acclimating educators to the idea that data is a powerful tool in transforming student outcomes also requires a lot of listening. When Lauck speaks with teachers, she asks them what kinds of information they need to improve their classrooms. "They want data from local assessments, not state ones, and they like master rosters," Lauck said. "They need to be able regroup students who are at different levels of skill mastery, and they don't want to hunt down data from three different sources."

Since districts typically see the most value from access to early warning data in one central place, Lauck often helps them delve deeply into those data sets. "The Early Warning dashboards support powerful conversations among teachers and administrators," Lauck explained. "The ease of assigning students who are high risk in several domains—for example, attendance and behavior—to targeted interventions is a high leverage activity."

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