

Schoolzilla

Using Data to Drive St. Louis Public Schools' Transformation Plan

Schoolzilla Case Study:

St. Louis Public Schools

801 N 11th St
St. Louis, MO 63101

Total Schools: 78

Grades: Pre-K–Grade 12

Total Enrollment: 27,017

***“Getting teachers,
school leaders, and
district leaders access
to a comprehensive
data dashboard is
game changing.”***

–**Colette Owens**, Director of Academic
Strategy and Special Projects, SLPS

St. Louis Public Schools (SLPS) is in the midst of a dramatic transformation. In 2007, after years of consistent and low student achievement in addition to budget shortfalls, the Missouri State Board of Education revoked the district’s accreditation, stripped the local school board of power, and granted governance authority to a three-member Special Administrative Board (SAB). The following year, the SAB appointed Dr. Kelvin Adams to serve as superintendent of the beleaguered district—the eighth person to hold that position in the previous five years. Upon starting his new job, running the largest school district in Missouri, Dr. Adams set improvement processes in motion that relied heavily on the use of data to drive operational and instructional decisions. By the 2011–2012 school year, the district had shown enough improvement to earn back the provisional accreditation but remained under the governance of the SAB. The upward trajectory of SLPS continued. In October 2015, the district became eligible for full accreditation for the first time since 2000 after increasing its annual performance review (APR) points by at least 75 percent for each of the two previous years. The district aims to achieve full accreditation by 2017. Full accreditation is a goal outlined in the district’s Transformation Plan 2.0. Dr. Adams stated earlier this year: “This is a marathon, not a sprint. So we still have a lot of work to get done.”

The Need for Better Data Tools

When asked about the district's improvement under his leadership, Dr. Adams is quick to credit his team's focus on data. Dr. Adams said, "We look at data every single week; attendance data, academic data, enrollment data. We look at data probably like nobody else on a regular basis. And we feel comfortable that looking at that data helps us make the right decisions to support kids."

Despite the strong data culture and leadership at SLPS, district leaders recognized that their data tools were insufficient. In an interview, Colette Owens, director of academic strategy and special projects explained, "The district had a data culture and systems to look at data holistically, but the data was not in one place." She further stated that the various data systems did not "talk to each other" and that the staff was spending "a lot of time and energy to get pretty basic information." She recalled that they were printing reports from different sources and comparing them side-by-side in an effort to extract meaning from the data. Ms. Owens recognized that their current systems and tools were ill equipped to provide "the right data on the right timeline." It was this realization that led SLPS to release an RFP for a data tool to meet the district's needs.

SLPS considered seven vendors and scored each on the following criteria:

- ▶ Qualifications
- ▶ Past experience with similar projects
- ▶ Costs of service
- ▶ References
- ▶ Minority business enterprise/woman business enterprise participation

Schoolzilla outscored all of the other vendors and was selected by SLPS to manage and monitor dozens of disparate sources of data. SLPS found Schoolzilla to be the right match for them. In an interview, Cheryl VanNoy, interim deputy superintendent for accountability and technology services, explained, "Schoolzilla listened to what we needed instead of telling us what we needed." Colette Owens added that Schoolzilla offered the most flexibility to build custom reports aligned with the goals outlined in the district's Transformation Plan. Deputy Superintendent

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Kelvin Adams,
Superintendent, SLPS

of Academics David Hardy said of the partnership: “We are absolutely thrilled to have Schoolzilla as a partner in our district’s transformation. Their commitment to making sure we have the information necessary to make sustainable change for our kids is not only powerful but inspiring. Not every partner operates the way Schoolzilla does and I wish more would!”

Implementation: Integrating Schoolzilla within Existing SLPS Structures

An important strategy of the SLPS implementation process was to integrate Schoolzilla within existing district structures and initiatives, beginning with the district’s Transformation Plan. Schoolzilla worked with SLPS to develop the Excellent Schools Transformation Tool (ESTT) dashboards to keep track of the district’s KPIs at the district, school, and student levels. The KPIs reflect the goals outlined in the Transformation Plan and the criteria in the state’s annual performance review, which determines eligibility for full accreditation. As depicted in figure 1, the District Profile provides district leaders with a quick snapshot to let them know if the district is on track to meet its goals in three priority areas: attendance, academics, and climate/culture.

Figure 1: District Profile

Note: At Schoolzilla we take both data visualization and data privacy very seriously. For these reasons we are displaying real Schoolzilla reports with 100% fake data.

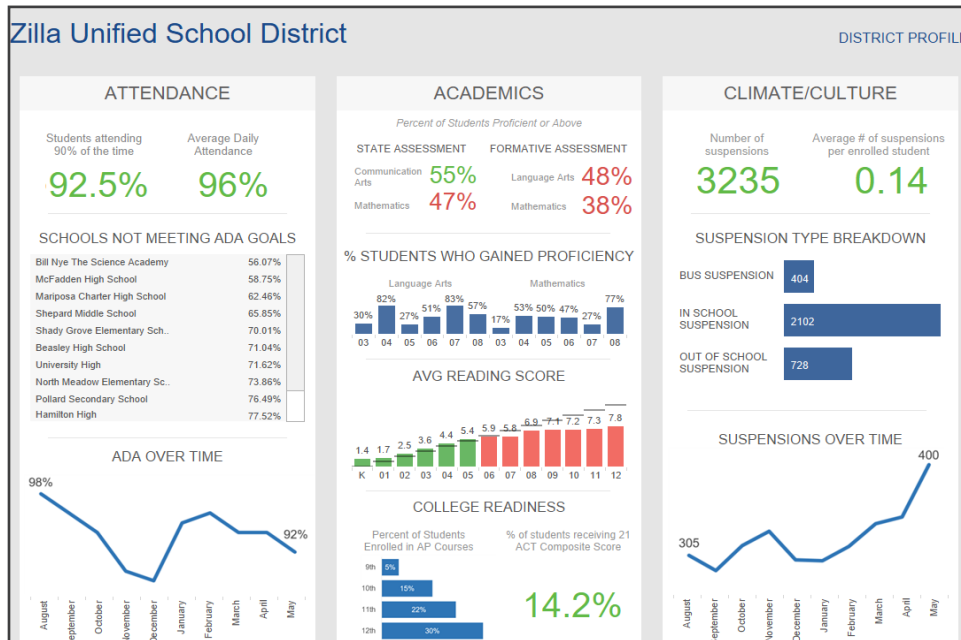
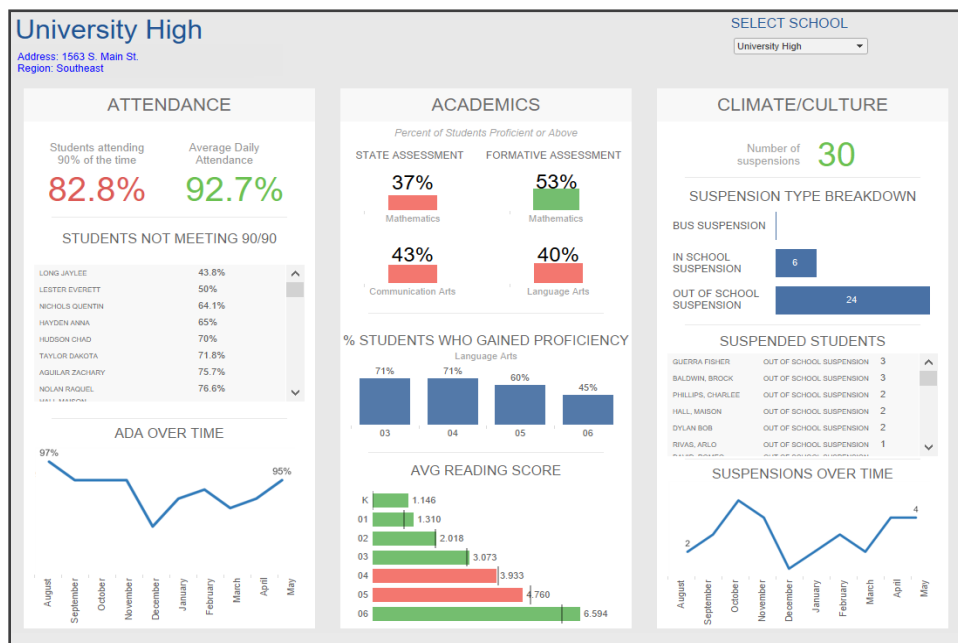


Figure 2 depicts a sample school profile, which provides school-specific data in the same categories of attendance, academics, and school climate/culture. The District and School Profile dashboards are updated nightly and provide users with actionable data from multiple sources all in one place. For example, a district leader can easily see the district’s average daily attendance trends over time, as well as the specific schools that are not meeting the attendance goal. Equipped with this data, the leader can implement timely intervention and deploy resources strategically to address areas of need. Schoolzilla and SLPS worked collaboratively to develop dashboards that address the particular needs of the district. Through a process of “usability testing,” Schoolzilla solicited feedback on multiple beta versions of the dashboards—district, school, and student—to ensure that the metrics are aligned with the district’s Transformation Plan and that the content and design of the dashboards are responsive to the types of information that school leaders and teachers need to do their jobs well.

Figure 2: School Profile

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Another key strategy for the implementation of Schoolzilla was the creation of two Data Cabinets—one focused on central office data and one focused on school-level data. The central office Data Cabinet comprised data users from each department and was instrumental in identifying the district’s data needs across all departments. The Data Cabinet also provided the initial push during the implementation phase. The school-level Data Cabinet comprises representatives from different schools and will be key as

the district rolls out the new data tools across all schools to all leaders, teachers, and support personnel. This cabinet will serve as an essential feedback loop from users at the school level; will identify and share best practices among schools; and will play a key role in providing training for users at the school level. Colette Owens and Cheryl VanNoy believe that both

“Dr. Adams wants Schoolzilla to serve this function—to provide the data for decision-making and to prompt collaboration among schools.”



Cheryl VanNoy,
Interim Deputy Superintendent for
Accountability and Technology
Services, SLPS

Data Cabinets are leveraging the existing and rich data culture at SLPS to facilitate deeper, data-focused conversations throughout the district.

Early Indicators of Impact

District leaders at SLPS have already recognized clear indicators of Schoolzilla’s impact, namely, improved data quality and the generation of demand for data. Before data can be actionable, it has to be accurate and credible. Although SLPS had a strong record of data quality, Schoolzilla’s data quality reports were able to identify errors that had not been flagged by the input systems. Colette Owens described the process of running data quality reports as a “really helpful exercise to see what we’re looking at and what we need.” Ms. Owens found this to be an essential step in making decisions based on data. In an interview, Ms. Owens explained, “We want to put data in front of people that they can trust and that feels meaningful to them.” Schoolzilla’s data quality tools are helping to ensure that the data is accurate, complete, credible, and actionable.

In Superintendent Adams’ meeting room is a large whiteboard with key data points for each school in the district. When network superintendents and principals come in to meet with Dr. Adams, the data looms large in the discussions and serves as evidence for or against various decisions. “Dr. Adams wants Schoolzilla to serve this function—to provide the data for decision-making and to prompt collaboration among schools,” explains Cheryl VanNoy. If everyone has access to the data on that board through the ESTT dashboards, and the data is trusted, then everyone is equipped and accountable to make the best decisions for students.

As SLPS continues to utilize the ESTT dashboards, Ms. Owens hopes to build on the demand for data that Schoolzilla has helped to create. However, the real value in the data is the extent to which it is used to make good decisions at the district, school, and classroom levels. With this ultimate goal in mind, in June 2016 the district rolled out the School Profile dashboard to its network of superintendents and the academic leadership team. The network provided additional insights and feedback that are being used to further ensure that the dashboards will be meaningful and actionable to users at all levels throughout the district.

What's Next for SLPS?

SLPS will continue its strategic and phased implementation of the ESTT dashboards. SLPS will roll out the School Profile dashboard to the leadership team before the start of the 2016–2017 school year.

During the school year, SLPS also plans to roll out its Student Profile (figure 3) dashboard to all of the teachers. The student profile provides attendance, academic, and climate/culture data for each student in the district. Having comprehensive and specific data for each student will allow educators to strategically differentiate instruction and utilize appropriate interventions. Ms. Owens describes the student

Figure 3: Student Profile

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profile report as “rich and meaty,” “high impact,” and responsive to “what people want.” The student profile will prompt teachers and leaders to think more critically about their own practice and to internalize the use of data as habit.

While Ms. Owens views the increase in demand for more data as very positive, her ultimate goal is to ensure that the data is not only widely viewed but also strategically used to make good decisions. With this goal in mind, district leaders are deliberately determining which additional reports will be rolled out and the optimum timing for the release of each report, based on when data is available and when key decisions are made.

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Colette Owens,
Director of Academic Strategy
and Special Projects, SLPS

With the new ESTT dashboards launched and a strategic plan for the district-wide implementation in place, SLPS will begin the 2016–2017 school year well equipped to meet its transformation goals. Ms. Owens noted, “Getting teachers, school leaders, and district leaders access to a comprehensive data dashboard is game changing for our ability to make decisions that will fuel student achievement gains. The district and school profile—and access to multiple sources of data in one place—are essential for us in our path to gain full accreditation and to continue to support a system of excellent schools.”

At Schoolzilla, we’re constantly learning from the school systems we work with and are inspired by the ways that education leaders are using data to transform students’ lives. Our recent collaboration with SLPS has paved the way for **Mosaic**, our new **multiple measures dashboard system**. Through Mosaic, we hope to provide more districts with a curated and intuitive way to monitor progress toward their key goals and drive achievement.

For more information about Mosaic or about tracking your district’s KPIs, contact us at info@schoolzilla.com.

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–**Colette Owens**, Director of Academic Strategy and Special Projects, SLPS

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