

A School Board with Data at Its Fingertips:

HOW THE SCHOOL DISTRICT OF UNIVERSITY CITY IS PIONEERING DATA-DRIVEN GOVERNANCE



The school board in University City, MO is abuzz. The seven Board of Education members now have access to real-time data on some of the district’s most important metrics, an item that had long been on their wish lists. “In the past, [static] reports would be generated; however, it would be difficult to access if [updated] information was needed later,” explains Board President Dr. Lisa Brenner. Now, things are different.

Access to Common Data

When reflecting on prior years, Director of Innovative Learning Dr. Robert Dillon describes the Board of Education’s data access as similar to that of many other school boards: “Boards of Education have always had common language like vision and mission statements, but we haven’t always had common data.... They wait for end-of-year results and then they ask questions, but rarely do they have guideposts along the way.”

Sensing that stakeholders across the district would benefit from common data ‘guideposts’, University City decided to invest in a real-time data dashboard that board members, district administrators, principals, and teachers could share. Frustrated with the cumbersome analytics package provided by their student information system, they set out to find a new tool that would spark data insights in a single, simple view.

The district found that elegance in [Mosaic District Progress Monitoring](#), a multiple measures dashboard from [Schoolzilla](#). As Dr. Brenner puts it, “we



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Dr. Sharonica Hardin-Bartley, Superintendent



THE SCHOOL DISTRICT OF
UNIVERSITY CITY



University City, MO



8 total schools



Grades Pre-K-12



2,700 total students

can clearly and easily see trends over time and measure specific variables related to district goals.” As for Dr. Dillon and the others in the district involved on sharing out data, a reduction in support requests started saving them time only a few weeks after introducing it to their users.

“Interesting Discoveries”

Already, easy access to key data has led to what Dillon describes as “interesting discoveries” and changed the district’s understanding of its own challenges and opportunities.

For example, by looking at enrollment patterns by grade level, the board discovered that long-held concerns over student attrition during school level transitions actually amounted to a “false premise”. As it turns out, the data showed that enrollment decreases between 5th and 6th and 8th and 9th grades were far less dramatic than assumed.

When looking at attendance data, the board was also able to clearly see both average daily attendance and “90/90” data, a Missouri state-mandated chronic absence goal. Having both perspectives side-by-side illuminated what looking at average daily attendance alone had obscured: there was an opportunity to improve attendance for chronically absent students.

“In real-time, a group of folks can sit around and ask themselves, ‘what happens if we change that element right now, what would that do?’ You can’t do that on a piece of paper. And being able to build scenarios and solutions is certainly a lot easier when you have a dynamic system in front of you.” Dr. Brenner agrees: “Having ready access to data helps the Board prioritize the allocation of resources and gives us pertinent information to evaluate the success of initiatives.”

As the school year progresses, University City is looking forward to more discoveries to come. “Effective utilization of data is critical to our transformational efforts,” says Superintendent Dr. Sharonica Hardin-Bartley. “Mosaic has provided a framework for transparent dialogue regarding district and student progress and will help to shape district decisions and overall organizational priorities.”



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*Dr. Lisa Brenner,
Board President*



Data privacy note: screenshots do not display The School District of University City’s data. Data depicted is fictional, used for demonstration purposes only.

University City's Tips for Bringing Data to Your School Board:

For districts ready to offer their school boards greater access to data-driven decision-making, Dillon and Coordinator of Data and Assessment Mark Basi emphasize balancing transparency with simplicity to build board members' trust in data. They recommend other districts:

- ▶ **Invest in dynamic, user-friendly tools:** Self-serve tools that inspire questions and spark new ideas must be robust enough to provide key information and elegant enough to do so without overwhelming. [Click here to see if Mosaic District Progress Monitoring would work well for your school board!](#)
- ▶ **Involve your board early:** Allow board members to make requests early and familiarize themselves with the limits of your data. With ample time to consider the data their constituents are interested in and how it might be shared, they'll be more likely to use it when it's made available.
- ▶ **Be precise and intentional about data quality:** "Look at every single report and the data behind it and make sure that it is as accurate as possible... If people don't believe the data, they won't use it," advises Basi.
- ▶ **"Build that relationship with data."** Start with a short list of metrics at district-wide level and build from there as the board's appetite grows.
- ▶ **"Set bumpers":** That's Dillon's way of saying: be clear with board members about what will be available when. With reasonable expectations, the board will be able to provide feasible feedback.
- ▶ **Release data in concentric circles:** University City devised a 'concentric circle' rollout strategy, with smaller, more enthusiastic stakeholder groups in the inner rings and larger groups in outer rings. "We took it slow, first working with senior leadership, then the board members," Basi explained. "We now have a group of principals, counselors, and social workers. Next, we roll out to teachers with student-level data." Moving a step at a time afforded Dillon and Basi a chance to adjust the data in between groups while interest in Mosaic grew organically through word of mouth.



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Board of Education

