FROM 'C' TO 'B'

SANGER ISD USES LOCAL ASSESSMENTS AND PARENT ENGAGEMENT TO IMPROVE ACCOUNTABILITY SCORES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the 2017-2018 school year, following receipt of a mediocre accountability score, district leaders recognized that disparate data sources were a major factor for a disappointing 'C' rating.

Following the return of local assessment scores Sanger ISD now uses SchoolStatus to identify at-risk students and opportunities for growth. Then, they create improvement plans to better prepare those students for the state test. Next, using SchoolStatus communication tools, Sanger is able to track that teachers are reaching out to the parents of those students.

Administrators at Sanger ISD credit SchoolStatus with the improvement in their accountability score, now a solid 'B', by putting assessment data in the hands of teachers, and giving teachers easy tools with which to engage parents.

THE PROBLEM

Since 2011-12, the state of Texas requires that students in grades 3-8 be tested once a year in selected core courses using STAAR, or State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness. High school students will typically take up to five End-of-Course (EOC) exams per year. In addition, Sanger ISD uses Texas College and Career Readiness and TELPAS, or Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System.

Educators at Sanger ISD were familiar with vigorous preparation and methodical administration of standardized assessments. Even with extensive planning, however, Sanger ISD received an accountability score of 79, or 'C', in the 2017-2018 school year, a major disappointment for district leaders.

"We are not a 'C' district, but we didn't know what steps we needed to take," asserts Jennifer Mulkey, Director of Assessment and Accountability. "Our teachers were teaching as hard as they could. They were following their scope and sequence, the vertical alignment- they were doing their PLC's....everything the gurus say to do to get your scores up."

Accountability in general was causing some frustration for the district after the state changed from a system where schools earn either a "Met Standard" or "Improvement Required" rating in 2016-17. The following year, each district was given an A-F rating which advocates say offer a strong signal of how a school is doing teaching critical core skills, including early literacy.

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SchoolStatus

"Believe it or not - I know this is a surprise to you - but our accountability is based entirely on STAAR" says Mulkey. With just one round of testing, the stakes are pretty high to do well.

And the rest of their student data? It was all over the place. "We have to keep an eye on our kids that take TELPAS, on our kids that take STAAR," says Mulkey. "TEA has all these things, Texas Career Readiness has all these things." Mulkey grapples with the complexities involved in keeping up with accountability.

Demographic subgroups within the student population as well as groups that take various other exams all need attention from district leadership as well as teachers. "As the Director of Accountability, that's a lot to keep up with," says Mulkey. "How are the EL kids doing? How are our special Ed kids doing?" Each group is broken down further by their own individual needs within the Special Ed group or English Language Learners.

Sanger ISD uses DMAC for local assessments, and TxEIS Student and Administrative

Software for their information system - two more locations from which to gather data. "Principals and district level people had to go to several different places to get all the same information. We really wanted some place we could put everything together," remembers Mulkey.

The issue of scattered data sources finally came to a head quite unexpectedly. A Sanger system parent skipped the normal communication path - perhaps calling a teacher or principal first - and went straight to the superintendent at home to raise an issue. "The superintendent was lost," Mulkey recalls. Without knowledge of the incident or the student, she could not respond to the parent with an informed solution - a situation that would make most any administrator sweat.

Not only did data need to be available for assessment preparation, it needed to be ready to inform conversations with parents. From that point on, district leaders were focused on finding a tool that pulls all student data into one place. That tool was SchoolStatus.

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DATA ACCESSIBILITY

When every educator has access to the data they need on an individual level, bigger, more complex goals can be reached on the district level.

For Sanger ISD, that means having availability and transparency of important data that's gathered daily, like attendance counts and discipline details. When teachers spot a problem, the tools to engage parents are right at their fingertips, on the computer or the mobile app. Metrics that detail how frequently teachers are conversing with parents provide further insight to administrators about whether or not communication is having the desired effect.

Busy district leaders receive important updates without a login action.SchoolStatus provides a daily email to district level admin with an overview of the previous day's metrics. "With one glance it shows your attendance for the previous day. It even breaks down how much money you lost because of absenteeism," explains Mulkey. The Daily Digest is a favorite amongst administrators everywhere. "Superintendents love this! We can look at trends." she says. The quick, easy-to-read email offers a snapshot of the most important events on campus and acts as an alert for Superintendents when issues like an uptick in discipline events, for example, need a deeper dive.

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TURNING SKEPTICS INTO BELIEVERS

Mulkey admits that the initial reaction to the introduction of a new technology wasn't exactly warm. "I'm sure you hear this same story everywhere, but our teachers said, 'This is just one more thing you are putting on my plate.'" It wasn't long, however, before opinions began to change.

SchoolStatus integrates Sanger ISD's SIS, benchmark, state assessments and parent communication data, giving educators tools for analysis, reporting relationship building and ultimately, a holistic view of each student. And while easy access to student information was highly valued, it was the communication tools that won over teachers. The automatic recording of conversations, transcriptions, and translations opened new worlds of parent engagement. "After a month or two they were thrilled with it," Mulkey says of the teachers. "We have diagnosticians, interventionists, and other special programs that want access to it...I don't think we could ever get rid of it without a mass mutiny."

COURSE CORRECTIONS

An abundance of student data can conceal important information if it's not presented in a way that can be easily analyzed. "No surprises! That's our motto." says Mulkey. For administrators at Sanger ISD, data transparency using SchoolStatus was the key element in being able to make course corrections mid-year. "You can't wait until May to start remediating your kids for STAAR...or March or April." Administration at Sanger knew that to get their accountability scores where they want them to be, they would have to be aware throughout the year where the students stand.

It's important to have a solid understanding of where all students stand - not just those with the lowest scores. "You have to watch every kid very closely," asserts Mulkey. "SchoolStatus has helped us do that." Instead of logging separately into DMAC, STAAR, and TxEIS to pull reports or look at grades, educators are accessing that information behind a single screen, ensuring that no student moves backwards. With SchoolStatus, holistic reviews can easily happen every day - an important note when you know that local assessments are taking place all the time.

Students at Sanger ISD take local assessments online. SchoolStatus automatically pulls data nightly and integrates it within the platform to be analyzed alongside all other student data. The ability to view the local assessment data this way was game-changing for educators, particularly with parent engagement.

"Somewhere on the campus, someone is taking one every day. So it's really important to us that we had that information quickly. We didn't want lag. We wanted to be able to see that along with everything else," explains Mulkey. "Our teachers can go in and they can look really quickly."

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COMMUNICATING WITH PARENTS FOR INCREASED ACCOUNTABILITY

It's an unfortunate understanding amongst educators that students who struggle the most are also the students for whom parents are difficult to reach. Perhaps these parents are unable to come to conferences because of work schedules or don't return phone calls due to language barriers. Regardless of the frustration, Mulkey finds empathy in these scenarios, "A lot of the time it's parents who have had terrible school experiences as a youngster, so they don't have any intention of coming back." It is imperative that educators have tools to reach out to parents that have the power to connect. That means communication that doesn't reveal the personal contact information of a teacher, that goes straight to a parent's phone without an additional app or login, and that's easy to use. SchoolStatus gives them that.

"This is the key to us going from a 'C' to a 'B'," Mulkey states simply. "It's created a two-way dialogue without sacrificing the teacher's privacy or time." SchoolStatus allows teachers to text parents without giving up their phone number. Instead, SchoolStatus provisions a local number that creates a one-to-one connection with the parent. In fact, parents can save the number for the teacher in their own phones- every time the teacher calls, it will be the same. "It's easier for them," explained Mulkey. "They can text back." Texting is a common and easy way to reach most parents since it doesn't require them to download a special app. "Research has proven over and over again that parent involvement is huge for student success and texting is a way to get our parents involved in a way they're comfortable with."

Sometimes the barrier for communication goes deeper than personal comfort and past experiences. Language barriers, for example, are one particularly difficult challenge to overcome if you want to connect one-to-one with parents. SchoolStatus helps Sanger ISD reach their Hispanic population. "It's one of the most wonderful things about SchoolStatus," said Mulkey. "We're about 25% Hispanic, and it translates so a teacher can do the engagement piece with a Spanish-speaking parent and translate it. When [their message] comes back, we can translate it back to English." Giving teachers the ability to translate their parent messages [in real time] on their own phones or on the computer relieves some of the demands on the district translator, and brings families into the fold. "Teachers love that. They use it all the time," said Mulkey.

Barriers to parent engagement are numerous, but Jennifer Mulkey is optimistic about being able to reach the hardest to reach stakeholders, "Sometimes parents are intimidated sitting across the table from a teacher or a principal. But they aren't when on their cell phone." High School English Teacher Beth Sullivan concurs, "Building relationships with parents is a lot easier when you remove barriers like language and the necessity to opt-in to an app."

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PARENT COMMUNICATION TRACKING OFFERS NEW METRICS FOR SUCCESS

Communication logs are not a new concept in education. Teachers have been keeping written call logs for years. Automatic digital call logs, however, change the way communication records are utilized. With SchoolStatus, "It's all logged. Every conversation. There's a transcript of it, so we've got a record of every conversation, every exchange between a teacher and a parent," said Mulkey. As a district level administrator, communication records and metrics allow for comparisons to test scores, attendance, or to familiarize themselves with the specifics of a student's situation - particularly helpful when an administrator receives an unexpected phone call from a parent or a student gets called to the office. "If a student gets called to the office, the principal could easily pull up SchoolStatus. They have STAAR scores, they have attendance, they have discipline, they have local assessments, and they've got all the

engagement with home, so they are not going into a conversation blindly," says Mulkey. "It really helps everyone get on the same page."

Communication records can also serve to improve performance, professionalism, and even prevent negative action for the district. Jennifer Mulkey remembers an occasion where a teacher and a parent had unpleasant exchanges regarding the student's 504 accommodations. By reviewing the call recordings, administrators were able to sort out the miscommunication and resolve the dispute. "I think we probably avoided an OCR visit with that one because we had transcripts," Mulkey recalls. That incident also led to a staff meeting where appropriate responses were discussed. "We did a little presentation about what to and what not to say in SchoolStatus. That probably saved us thousands and thousands of dollars."

RESULTS

Sanger ISD's focus on analyzing local assessments and communicating with parents using SchoolStatus has ultimately paid off. Sanger ISD was able to move up from a 'C' to a 'B' and credits their integrated data and parent engagement tools with their improvement. "We made a big step," said Mulkey. "We got past that 'C' and we believe with SchoolStatus teachers can quickly look at their local assessments to see how they're doing and if they are falling behind."

When data and parent communication work together, conversations are informed and productive. "Teachers can see if they need to remediate. They can communicate with parents. Parents can help at home," said Mulkey. The administrators at Sanger ISD place a lot of value on parent engagement for student success. "We feel like just the sheer piece of parent engagement and interaction helped us to get to a 'B'," Mulkey said. "I can't promise you that you'll jump up a letter if you use SchoolStatus; nobody can promise that. But I can promise that it will help you get there."

ABOUT SANGER ISD

Located in Denton County, just north of Denton, Texas and just west of Lake Ray Roberts, the town spans approximately 10.9 square miles and home to an estimated 8,540 people. The small, rural town was founded in 1886 as a stop on the Santa Fe Railroad and became home to families and businesses who farmed and raised cattle as part of their livelihood. Currently, Sanger ISD is home to eight schools and 2,655 students. Population across the district consists of 66% white, 25% Hispanic, 4% two or more races, 3% African American, 0.9% Asian, 0.7% Native American Indian, 0.1% Pacific Islander.

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SchoolStatus

ABOUT SCHOOLSTATUS

SchoolStatus is the only data analytics platform turning student insights into parent conversations. Through powerful reporting tools, automatic integrations, and customizable data points, educators easily identify students most in need of engagement. Then using the communication tools built right into the platform, instantly connect with guardians through calls, texts, or e-mails to reach families where they are. We focus on the data, so educators can focus on education. Contact with us at schoolstatus.com, like us on Facebook and follow us on Twitter @schoolstatusapp.

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