CASE STUDY

Data-Based Gains in San Antonio Independent School District

PUTTING THE MOMENTUM METRICS INTO ACTION

- ✔ Adopt momentum metrics as a core measure of success.
- ✔ Set goals for improvement.
- ✔ Deploy capacity to offer direct student advising and assistance.
- ✔ Communicate about the most predictive indicators of student progress and success.

The San Antonio Independent School District (SAISD) serves roughly 49,000 students across more than 90 schools; 89 percent of SAISD students are Hispanic, 89 percent quality for free and reduced price lunch, and 20 percent are English learners. SAISD's five-year strategic plan calls for 70 percent of district graduates to attend college. As recently as 2016, only about 20 percent of college-bound San Antonio graduates went to a four-year university; for the class of 2018, this rate more than doubled, with more than half of the college-bound graduates enrolled in a four-year institution. SAISD has achieved this tremendous progress in part due to the development of robust data systems to track and transform student progress, including the use of several key Momentum Metrics.

OVERALL DATA APPROACH

When Eduardo ("Lalo") Sesatty, Director of Postsecondary Initiatives, first joined SAISD, he had come from the KIPP charter network, which already had a strong culture of progress monitoring around the postsecondary outcomes of their graduates. He began to think about how he could bring some of the key components of KIPP's model to SAISD, and with his team, identified four key pillars to guide their work: exploration, preparation, access, and success.

SPOTLIGHT DISTRICT

SAISD

San Antonio Independent School District
San Antonio, Texas

DISTRICT GOAL

70 PERCENT OF GRADUATES ENROLL IN COLLEGE

ANNUAL OBJECTIVES

65 percent meet readiness in the SAT/ACT/TSI

90 percent of seniors apply to at least one college

85 percent of seniors complete the FAFSA or TASFA

85 percent of seniors are accepted to at least one college

MOMENTUM METRICS

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LEVEL UP

Sesatty and his team set a data-specific vision to accomplish two things. The first goal was to delineate the leading indicators of college enrollment, which SAISD Superintendent Pedro Martinez had set as the district's north star. The second goal was to place an emphasis on interoperability so that any staff member within a school could easily engage with the data at both the aggregate and student levels. The district invested in a platform called SchoolLinks to build the capacity to meet those goals.

To make progress more tangible, the team also developed a pacing chart that operationalizes the targets the district needs to meet over the course of each school year to meet its goals.

This pacing is set for different student constituencies (e.g. English language learners, students with disabilities, immigrant students, students enrolled in ROTC, etc.) to help high school counselors and school leaders know how best to target support to students. These tools have made it so that the district team can focus less on compliance and data entry and more on providing training, support, and innovation.

COLLEGE MATCH

Where a student attends college matters. Research shows that students of color and students from low-income families are more likely to attend less selective universities that their academic credentials would otherwise allow, known as "undermatching." Students who are undermatched are significantly less likely to complete their postsecondary degree given that these institutions often have lower graduation rates and offer less financial aid and support services. Given this, supporting students around college match remains an ongoing priority for the district. While it is currently able to provide guidance on whether an institution is a "likely," "match," or "reach" school based on students' SAT and ACT scores, district leaders are working to broaden their definition to address the nuances of various institutions' admissions policies.

In order to make college match meaningful, Sesatty first realized that he needed to build awareness that undermatching was an issue among school and district staff. He began to talk with SAISD alumni, and he told their stories about how their institutions were failing to help them meet their potential to other district staff. His team also analyzed data to look at trends for students who enrolled at a two- or four-year institution, but ultimately did not attain a credential.

Currently, the district is attempting to overcome the persistent undermatching of its students by helping them feel a better sense of belonging. The district has trained advisors to have conversations around belonging and fit, with the idea that match will follow. They want their students to be able to see themselves in the colleges they're aspiring toward — and to get them to set their sights higher. They also align conversations around match and fit around students' career interests, building their understanding that college is a conduit to accessing the profession they're interested in.

ADVANCED COURSEWORK POTENTIAL

SAISD has built a strong district-wide culture and expectation around advanced course taking. The district leveraged the data in the College Board's AP Potential report to generate a series of customized reports that list the potential to succeed for every student at every high school campus for every AP course offered by the College Board. Rather than simply using the binary definition of AP Potential—either a student has potential or does not—SAISD went further by grouping students into 10 percentage point bands, starting at having a zero to 10 percent chance of passing the AP exam in a given course prior to enrolling to having a 90 to 100 percent chance. Throughout the year, educators use the reports to scaffold the support they provide to the students enrolled in their class, with students with a lower AP Potential score receiving more support than those who entered the course with an already-high chance of success. At the district level, AP teachers are evaluated based on the AP Potential scores of their enrolled students, the course grades students receive, and the AP exam score students achieve.

Schools also receive a report listing the potential for all incoming students to help guide their advising practices around enrollment in advanced coursework, with school counselors targeting outreach to students who were identified with potential. Schools also use this report to make decisions about course offerings, adding courses with high numbers of students with the potential to succeed and removing—or finding alternate delivery options, such as dual enrollment—those with low numbers of students identified with potential.

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For example, seven campuses in SAISD offered AP Computer Science Principles this past school year after seeing the high numbers of students identified with potential, whereas the district no longer offers AP Physics and instead encourages interested students to take advanced physics courses through dual enrollment. Schools also receive a report card for successful AP enrollment, which lists the number of students identified with potential for each course and the percentage of students who actually enrolled, to hold them accountable for enrolling students.

These reports are bolstered by other policies aimed at expanding advanced coursework enrollment in SAISD. Most notably, the district has an open enrollment policy for AP courses, meaning that any student that has an aptitude or interest in taking an AP course is allowed to do so without needing to meet additional requirements, such as prior grades or parental or counselor approval.

SCHOOLS ALSO RECEIVE A REPORT CARD FOR SUCCESSFUL AP ENROLLMENT, *which lists the number of students identified with potential for each course and the percentage of students who actually enrolled,* TO HOLD THEM ACCOUNTABLE FOR ENROLLING STUDENTS.

SAISD has also set the expectation that all students will take at least one advanced course—whether AP, IB, or dual enrollment—before they graduate.

Due to this policy, SAISD sees at least one-third of high school students in grades 9–12 participating in an AP course each semester, and they have the second highest IB enrollment in the state. All students are also required to take the AP exam if they are enrolled in the course; if they do not, they are removed from the course. Given the stringency of this policy, the district pays for all course costs for every student.

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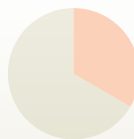
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