

A circular photograph showing three children of diverse backgrounds looking intently at a laptop screen. The child on the left is a girl with dark hair, the middle is a boy, and the right is a girl. They are all smiling and appear to be engaged in a collaborative learning activity. The background is bright and out of focus, suggesting a classroom or library setting.

Improving Student Health and Safety with Better Data Management

From food insecurity to school violence to early-onset mental health conditions, K-12 students face many challenges inside and outside the classroom that can hinder their academic success. Schools increasingly provide services to help children with these challenges, and government leaders have started funding these services through legislation. The 2022 Bipartisan Safer Communities Act is only the latest bill supporting states in providing mental health services to youth in school settings.

“The school has become the hub, the access point, for students and family members to connect to the resources they need to thrive,” says Tre Cabrera, a professional urban and regional planner with a 16-year career in economic development and community planning. “The needs of families are growing, and there is now unprecedented funding to support an increase in social services in schools.”

Schools today have a vast amount of data on each student that could be used to help improve social and mental health services. But many schools store student data in legacy technologies, including paper binders and spreadsheets. This data tends to be siloed, preventing social services staff from obtaining a well-rounded picture of each student.

With a centralized data system, schools can more easily see patterns among individual students and across programs. “All the fine-grained data schools receive can help performance managers see if their strategies are working in real time,” says Steven Lucas, public sector enterprise account executive for Social Solutions. “With this data, managers can swiftly and thoughtfully adjust their strategies to improve outcomes for students.”

The Limitations of Siloed Data

K-12 schools utilize multiple technologies to gather data on the services they provide to students.

“Many schools have student information systems (SIS), but these are typically built to track academic indicators,”

Lucas says. “They are not built to manage programs and student relationships at the field level.”

As such, social workers and other front-line staff use a variety of point solutions to capture and track student data, including multi-tiered systems of support, visitor management software and survey tools. Most of these tools serve one specific purpose, preventing staff from easily sharing data across departments. Some staff still rely on spreadsheets or physical files, which can be even more difficult to share in real time.

The result is a complicated, disconnected stack of applications that are difficult for IT to support and that limit program managers’ ability to get holistic data on every student.

Turning to Case Management: Akron Public Schools

By implementing a modern case management system, schools can collate data, observe patterns and better support students. Akron Public Schools (APS) in Ohio shows how a case management solution can positively impact assessments of student outcomes.

Many of the roughly 20,000 APS students face non-academic challenges, including homelessness and poverty. APS supports students and families with resources like tutoring, counseling, and college and career academies.

Carrie Evans, technology training specialist for APS, says the district has faced multiple data-related challenges. APS once utilized an SIS platform, but it did not include a place for staff and volunteers to include relevant data.

“When staff members recorded information on what they were doing with students, that data went into a document or a spreadsheet,” Evans says. “This siloed data made it hard to see what the whole student looked like, including who was working with which student, and how many interventions each student was receiving.”



The district decided to implement a case management system to address its data challenges. APS needed a system that would allow staff to import and export information from other systems. The district also wanted a solution that would allow staff to pull real-time data to quickly see how effective a program was or how specific students were doing.

“Our case management system gives staff the ability to see the whole student without having to look for data within a dozen different systems,” Evans says. “The tool also provides a lot of flexibility, allowing our school district lots of room to build and expand the programs we need.”

Case Management System Best Practices

Although a modern case management system can enhance a school district’s ability to measure students’ well-being and gauge program success, implementing such a system requires strategic thinking. Here are best practices every school district should keep in mind before starting the process.

Start Small

When implementing a new case management system, do not try to replace every point solution simultaneously. Think about your goals around data, and then select a program that could benefit the most from improved data management.

Evans encourages leadership to “start with a bite-sized piece of data management. This will give you time to think about where you want to go in terms of scalability. Once you understand that, you can move along your trajectory in a meaningful way.”

Invest in Support

Teachers and staff are already overloaded with professional development training. Instead of focusing time and money on staff training for a new case management system, invest in ways to provide support for staff.

“Think about how to iteratively grow your solution as staff adopt it,” Lucas says. “With support, staff will learn and grow alongside the solution.”

Get Buy-In

Project leaders and performance managers need to show front-line staff the value of a transition away from paper and spreadsheets and toward a case management solution.

One way to do this is through data. Once a district adopts a case management system and applies it to one program, education leaders should demonstrate the impact of the system to teachers and staff.

“We started small with just one or two programs,” Evans says. “Staff and teachers quickly saw the outcomes: They saw that data was being provided in real time, and they saw how beneficial it was for students.”

The Whole Community

Schools are increasingly becoming a support space for students, their families and other community members.

Many schools turn to community partners to help further support their students. APS, for example, has more than 300 community partners, including organizations that provide food, shelter, career programs and college counseling.

Community partners can also benefit from the data management technologies adopted by educational institutions. A case management system can make it easier for schools to communicate across departments and organizations, allowing community partners to better see and address the needs of families. Evans has even seen community organizations throughout Akron express interest in developing their own case management systems.

“For all organizations, data is a foundation for impact,” Cabrera says.

Indeed, as kids continue to grapple with non-academic challenges, schools and communities with flexible and comprehensive data systems will be better equipped to identify and respond to the various social needs of individual students.

This piece was written and produced by the Center for Digital Education Content Studio, with information and input from Social Solutions.

Produced by:  CENTER FOR
DIGITAL
EDUCATION

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