

Data-Driven Instruction

St. Mary's County Improves Student Performance on State Tests and Graduation Rate with Data-Driven Instruction



St. Mary's County Public Schools (SMCPS) is a rural school district in Leonardtown, Maryland. St. Mary's County is located on a peninsula in Southern Maryland, bounded by the Potomac and Patuxent Rivers and the Chesapeake Bay. The county has the highest population of high-tech employment as well as the 2nd fastest growth rate in the state. Serving almost 18,000 students across 27 schools, SMCPS is a leader in academic programs and service while maintaining a personalized learning. SMCPS has faced challenges in tracking student data and making meaningful decisions based on that data. Thanks to a focus on rigorous standards and data-driven instruction, student performance has steadily increased across the board.

A Daunting System

Prior to 2005, SMCPS used a spreadsheet system to track student performance, but that left data siloed and difficult to cross tabulate. In 2005, the district made significant changes in the way it manages student assessment data, moving from spreadsheets to the Unify assessment platform. This move transformed the way teachers and students think about assessment in the classroom.

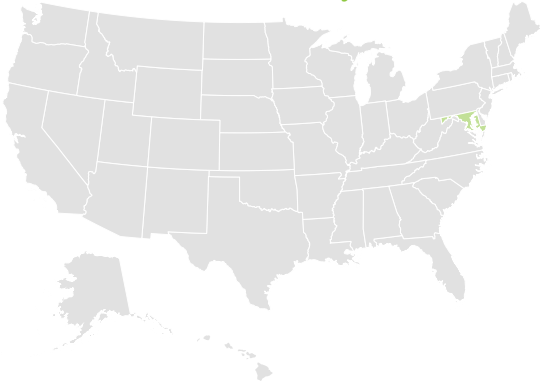
SMCPS's primary challenge was making meaning from the data they collected. Because it was largely siloed and disparate, the district lacked the ability to gain meaningful insights into that data and to connect data from multiple measures. While teachers could easily see student performance indicators and test scores, they could not dig deeper into those measures to see exactly where individual students were struggling or successful.

"We've been using assessment data to measure student performance and to guide our decision making for years. We were doing this even back in 2005, when we were still managing this data with spreadsheets," said Regina Hurley Greely, director of learning management for SMCPS. "The problem with spreadsheets, however, was

that we couldn't disaggregate the data by item or view the data by standard without adding to the teachers' workload."

School Stats

St. Mary's County Public Schools,
Leonardtown, Maryland



District Statistics:

SCHOOLS: 27	GRADES: K-12
STUDENTS: 17,887	SETTING: RURAL
TEACHERS: 1,044	
NON-TEACHING STAFF: 975	

A Solution for Spreadsheets

With Unify, SMCPS teachers can pool their resources and work together to create, share and review assessment content. This not only engages teachers in the assessment process, but it makes the development of high quality items and assessments economical. SMCPS teachers now regularly use Unify to create and administer exit slips and assessments using district, third party and state-provided item banks, and by developing their own

ability to create technology-enhanced items (TEIs). “To create TEIs, you have to really understand the depth and breadth of each standard. So, these new interactive item types are helping teachers dissect our standards to a much finer extent,” said Greely. “Teachers also love that the TEIs allow them to reach diverse learning modalities, and that they more accurately reflect the different types of teaching and learning that go on in our classrooms.”

“Unify is the most dynamic platform we could possibly use because it reflects the needs of our state and our school system — and that’s the power of Performance Matters.”

Regina Hurley Greely | Director of Learning Management

items. The district is working to make online assessment with Unify available to as many teachers and students as possible. Toward that end, all elementary schools now administer district-created “problems of the week” in mathematics using Unify. In addition, at the secondary level, all English teachers now administer problem-based assessments (PBAs) with Unify.

Unify is also helping teachers dive deeper into Maryland’s College and Career-Ready Standards, by giving them the

SMCPS also launched the Early Warning System, a customizable reporting and filtering module that integrates with Unify. The district uses the Early Warning System to track attendance rates, absences, truancies, behavior, course failures, retentions, state test performance, local assessment performance, and mobility. Educators then use these measures to quickly identify at-risk students so they can intervene as needed and monitor their progress.

Teachers at SMCPS can better focus their teaching strategies and content, making every instructional moment count now that the district can disaggregate data from the student level all the way up to the district-wide level. The data pulled from Unify also enables the district to customize professional development and resources on opportunities that will have the greatest impact on teaching.

As a result of this shift, SMCPS has seen an increase in the percentage of students performing at the

Proficient and Advanced levels, and a decrease at the Basic level. They’ve also seen their graduation rates increase. In 2014 the four-year cohort graduation rate climbed to 93.5 percent, an increase of 10.7 percent over five years. At the same time, the four-year cohort dropout rate fell from 10.98 percent in 2010 to 4.44 percent in 2014.

