Five Ways SMART SCHOOLS Are Using Data to Drive Performance

What has data ever done for you? Do you have paper files piling up on your desk or Excel spreadsheets monopolizing your hard drive space? With so much data and so little time to crunch it, maybe the most consistent thing that data has done for you is give you a headache.

It doesn't have to be this way though however, the sheer amount of data available can be daunting once you wrangle it data can drastically transform your school, making qualitative improvements based on quantitative information, and making smart schools smarter. The smartest schools use data to make smart decisions. New Beginnings Family Academy, a Pre-K

through 8th grade school in Bridgeport, Connecticut, and Sci Academy, a college prep high school in New Orleans, provide examples of how using data improves their schools.
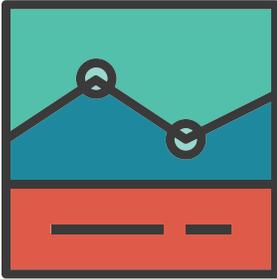
1) Transparency

Let's consider a practical example from New Beginning Family Academy. The school has a "no cell phone" policy. Each time a student uses their phone improperly at school that behavior is recorded. When New Beginning recently called the parent of a student who violated the policy several times, the parent claimed this was the first they heard of an issue with cell phones at school. The teacher was then able to communicate the exact number of offenses and detail when they occurred. Likewise, administrators are able to check to see whether teachers have reached out to parents when a situation arises.

DATA TRANSPARENCY EMPOWERS STUDENTS

At Sci Academy data transparency empowers students. Every Monday each student receives a progress report with a full breakdown of their performance from the previous week. This report details their current attendance, academic, and behavioral status. Over time, students at Sci Academy come to rely on their weekly progress reports. Teachers find that students become increasingly invested in their academic progress when they are given the opportunity to engage with the results of that progress. Access to this information enables Sci Academy students to proactively address items in their report. Taking the initiative to talk to teachers about their progress helps students develop the soft skills they will need to succeed in college and in the work force.

Hard data provides benefits for all of your educational stakeholders. For example:

Students gain instant awareness of their academic progress. They can also be updated regularly about their behavioral trends. One incident away from a detention? That information is readily available. Students become acutely aware of the impact of their actions. There are consequences for negative behavior and praise for positive behavior and good grades.

Families receive an in-depth look into their child's education. Data takes all the guesswork out of whether their child skipped school, missed an assignment, or acted out in class. Parents also know when their child reaches an academic milestone, or succeeds outside the classroom.

ADMINISTRATORS CAN SEE THE PERFORMANCE OF BOTH THEIR STUDENTS AND STAFF IN REAL TIME
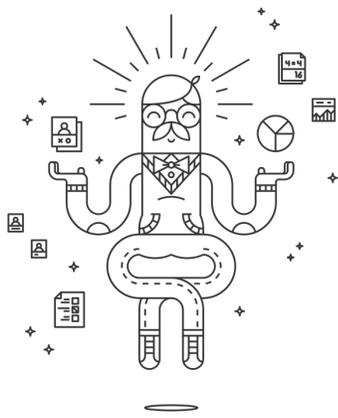
Teachers can immediately discern trouble areas for students and work to correct them before those at risk fall too far behind. The ability to communicate these issues and successes with students, parents, and administrators builds rapport and trust within the school community.

Administrators can see the performance of both their students and staff in real time. You are also able to engage the broader school community in a constructive manner and cement the trust link between schools and families.

2) Culture

Numbers don't create culture. If numbers created culture, salons would be run by math books. People create culture. Understanding how and why people make decisions improves the relationship within your school's community.

New Beginnings initiated an overhaul of their school culture at the same time that they started to embrace the data driven education approach. Data has helped New Beginnings to understand the effectiveness of their new programs and to adjust them as necessary. Before the school embraced data only the students having trouble academically or behaviorally would receive feedback. When New Beginnings began tracking everything digitally they noticed that students who earned good grades and behaved at school did not receive the same amount of feedback. This led to a culture change where teachers ensured that every student received comments on their progress reports. Teachers got into the habit of documenting positive behaviors just as much as negative ones, creating stronger relationships with their students.

3) Efficiency

Everyone is familiar with the concept of doing more with less. What that generally translates to is one person doing the work of two or three people. That's not efficiency, that's just cruel. The solution is in the data. Data empowers administrators and teachers to spend more of their time on instruction. While software crunches numbers, teachers are free to focus on building trust in the community, developing school culture, and adapting their lesson plans to meet the needs of their students.

Many schools already recognize the value of incorporating data into educational decision making, but the zeal for data often creates an avalanche. Organizing that data and generating specific actionable intelligence is difficult—especially when the data lives across a variety of different mediums. Teachers are spending a huge chunk of the time they should be spending

acting on data wrestling with papers, spreadsheets, and disparate collections of databases.

When Sci Academy moved to a central data system the difference was staggering. It provided faculty, staff, and administration with a holistic view of their students at a global level. The documentation collected was more consistent than the old approach which relied on stitching together scraps of paper. With everyone on the education team working from the same playbook, Sci Academy demonstrated that doing more with less is possible.

YOUR DATA SHOULD GIVE YOU THE INFORMATION YOU WANT, WHEN YOU NEED IT.

4) Access

Your data should give you the information you want, when you need it. You should be able to generate reports that are accurate and updated on the fly.

Presenting student data to parents and students alike is very easy to do when you have the right software at your disposal. Providing this type of access reinforces your school's commitment to transparency and accountability.

Non-faculty staff members also benefit from access to student data. Take the school nurse for example. New Beginnings has a policy that students who vomit at school need to wait twenty-four hours before returning to school. The nurse can record that incident in the centralized data system and the teachers will know not to expect the student the next day. Or if a student is suddenly ill every Tuesday at 1pm, when they should be in gym, the nurse is able to easily see that information and

relay it to the student's teachers so they can get to the root of the issue.
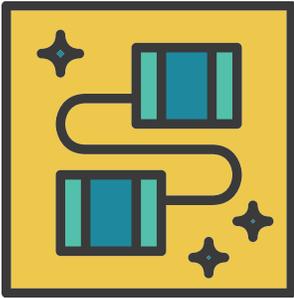
5) Action

There is no need to rely on gut feeling, intuition, or spidey-sense when you know exactly where your strengths are and how you can leverage those strengths to address the pain-points that have crept into your school. Data generates actionable intelligence.

Both of the institutions mentioned above have something in common: they share a desire for data-driven results and they rely on Schoolrunner to provide them with the tools to keep them informed. Schoolrunner brings all of your data into one place, crunches the numbers, and presents the data to you in the way you want to see it. All of your current information systems can be piped into Schoolrunner, so the task that took you five hours to put together last week, will only take minutes once Schoolrunner starts watching your back.

SchoolRunner.org

For example, New Beginnings uses Schoolrunner to help teachers determine whether their Pre-K students are ready for Kindergarten. When it comes time for Brigance Testing, teachers record student results and then identify the domains with the largest gaps. Recently, the school was able to show that 72% of those in the Pre-K class scored successfully in language development, but just over 50% were on track in gross motor skill development. This allowed Pre-K teachers to place greater emphasis on gross motor skills before the school year ended and to establish a summer work plan for each child to ensure that they are prepared for Kindergarten in the fall.

The ability to take informed action exists at every grade level. From screening four year olds in Pre-K to helping you get your students to the finish line of graduation, Schoolrunner gives you whatever information you want at the click of a button. Or at the tap of a screen. Yes, Schoolrunner even has a mobile app so that teachers can record information in the hallways, at recess, or at any other location on campus. Need to call a student's parent? The number is right in the student's profile and can be accessed in no time at all. The app even prompts users to document the call after it's finished and the information is still fresh.

In just four weeks, you'll be maximizing your school's educational prowess with Schoolrunner. That's it. Four Weeks.

New Beginnings and Sci Academy are just two schools that show how powerful and effective using data is in an educational setting. What they've done is impressive. Schoolrunner simply makes smart schools even smarter.

Schoolrunner

We invite you to see what Schoolrunner can do for your school. Test our responsiveness first hand by emailing us at hello@schoolrunner.org and we'll schedule a no pressure demo of our school data solutions.