



Garden City Public Schools

A diverse district achieves a valid and reliable comprehensive assessment system that makes data actionable for teachers.

OVERVIEW

District

Garden City Public Schools

Location

Garden City, KS

Numbers

Number of students: 7,433

Number of staff: 626

Number of schools: 18

Illuminate Education Customer Since

2017

About Garden City Public Schools

Located in Garden City, Kansas, a southwestern section of Finney county, the Garden City United School District is home to a vibrant community of over 7,400 students across 11 elementary schools, two intermediate centers, two middle schools, one high school, a pre-school, and an alternative education program. Garden City Public School's growing immigrant population features a unique blend of students from Hispanic, southeast Asian, and other minority group backgrounds, and is known as one of the most ethnically diverse communities in the state.

The district envisions the ability to improve student outcomes by setting high expectations for all students through a strong, student-centered data culture. Garden City's leadership feels that high-quality data must live in the classroom, and that a teacher's ability to quickly and accurately plan differentiation, address misconceptions, and pinpoint needs directly translates into student success. Leadership feels that quality assessment is purposeful assessment; if it won't yield data worth using, it's not worth administering.

Tackling Barriers to Data-Informed Action

In 2017, the district was struggling to realize its vision of a valid, reliable assessment system that provided meaningful information and easy-to-use reports for teachers. School leaders at Garden City Unified were tasked with developing an extensive plan for a district-wide assessment system. This project would entail assembling various components around data and assessment to deliver quality information to stakeholders.

As a part of this work, the faculty and staff knew they'd also need to overcome barriers preventing them from taking action based on their assessment data. "We needed one location to collect and store the different data we have gathered on students. Data was being collected and stored in various formats around the district which made it very difficult for that data to be easily accessed when needed," said Crystal Steinmetz, who serves as Director of Curriculum and Assessment. "It was also very difficult to aggregate and analyze multiple pieces of data since it was not being collected in the same place." This created frustration

in PLCs and staff meetings, in which teachers were struggling to engage in any meaningful discussions around the results.

Their team set out on a mission to discover a solution that would bridge the gap between assessment and action. Their requirements for the platform included:

- Creation and administration for their standards-aligned common assessments
- Ability to collect, store, and manage assessment data in one place
- Permissions for various roles and site levels, allowing staff members to view only relevant data
- Creating and customizing reports for focused, data-driven conversations

After evaluating several options, the Garden City team selected Illuminate Data and Assessment (DnA), an assessment administration and custom reporting platform, along with high-quality item bank Illuminate Inspect Plus, to address its data issues and collect and analyze student data.

Illuminate DnA Delivers on Assessments and Reports

Within the first couple months of implementation, district leaders and staff were absorbing all the uses and features of their new platform. With guidance from instructional coaches and building lead teachers, teachers were trained on tasks ranging from administering common assessments to creating and customizing their own reports. The benefits were immediately felt.

“We had been looking for a way to create common assessments and then have meaningful conversations around these assessments.” said Steinmetz. Their newfound ability to provide common assessments via DnA began empowering collective conversations about student performance, both at the classroom and building levels.

It didn’t take long for Garden City to build out additional features within the platform. One of the features was the student profile page, a customized widget for both students and staff.

Along with housing key pieces of student data, the page was used as a resource for educators when collecting data for student improvement team meetings or for cumulative student record folders. “The student profile page saves our teachers valuable time that they would have previously spent gathering student data from multiple sources,” said Steinmetz. To ensure parents were kept in the loop of their child, teachers also utilize form letters to communicate with parents about their student’s performance.

In addition, the team developed several custom reports for knowledge gathering and sharing via the Business Intelligence (BI) tool. The reports serve as a weekly or bi-weekly newsletter that act as a launching pad for deeper conversations around data. “By building specific Illuminate reports, we are able to create a resource that can be used for data conversations,” said Steinmetz. “These reports help guide reflection within our collaborative group meetings and direct conversations around how to most effectively support students.”

Adding Illuminate FAST into the Mix

After the first year of implementation, the Garden City team looked for a solution to further complete their district-wide comprehensive assessment system. The team decided their next step was to adopt Illuminate FAST, an assessment solution that offers valid, reliable, and evidence-based universal screening, diagnostic, and progress monitoring assessments. The product also features a social-emotional component and the ability to monitor behavior, “which we haven’t found elsewhere, or at least not in the capacity where you can examine data at the building or district-wide level,” added Steinmetz.

In particular, the computer-adaptive tests (CAT) serve as an integral piece for their ability to measure student learning. FAST’s adaptive assessments adjust based on the correctness of a student’s previous response, in order to better measure the student’s skill mastery. This was an important aspect as students had frequently timed out on the district’s previous screener and yielded results that teachers didn’t trust. “We appreciate the adaptive piece not only because it eliminates the timed factor, but it also adjusts the level of the questions presented based on the student’s responses. We are able to get a better overall picture of the student,” said Steinmetz.

FAST has also proven to be an important tool in the district's multi-tier system of supports (MTSS) implementation, which is guided by annual recommendations from the Kansas Technical Assistance System Network (TASN). In 2019, TASN released updated best practice recommendations regarding the usage of data to identify students in need of intervention. Steinmetz and her team were delighted to find that FAST was already tightly aligned to those recommended best practices. "It was exciting because it confirmed that we had chosen the right assessment tool. FAST reporting aligns with newly released research and recommendations from our state department of education."

Building Capacity and Moving Forward

With a clear direction and the proper tools in place, Garden City Public Schools was able to develop a district-wide comprehensive assessment plan to support student success. Once difficult and daunting, the task of making data actionable to teachers has become much easier. Educators now feel empowered to dig deeper into the data and identify the students who need the most help.

"A goal of our district was to develop a systematic system to measure, monitor, and report student success," said Steinmetz. "Illuminate has played a large role in accomplishing that goal because we now have a system in place to analyze multiple pieces of student data to ensure that we are supporting students effectively based on their individual strengths and weaknesses."

Moving forward, Steinmetz and her colleagues are working on gaining greater staff buy-in, while adjusting their assessment strategy to fit the evolving needs of each student. As they look ahead, they are excited about the capabilities of the platform to improve outcomes for all students in Garden City.

Illuminate supports districts and schools nationwide in creating a comprehensive assessment system that meets their unique needs. [Reach out](#) to learn more.



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