



# Newton County School System

A large Georgia district discovers a data visualization solution that makes supporting every student a reality.

## OVERVIEW

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### **District**

Newton County School System

### **Location**

Covington, GA

### **Numbers**

Number of students: 21,240

Number of staff: 2,000

Number of schools: 23

### **Illuminate Education Customer Since**

2014-15

## About Newton County School Systems

Located just east of metro Atlanta, the Newton County School System (NCSS) is the twenty-first largest district in the state of Georgia. It is home to 13 elementary schools, five middle schools, three high schools, a theme school (grades K-6), a charter school, and an alternative education program. The diverse district is 57% African American, 29% Caucasian, and 8% Hispanic. Seventy-two percent of the student population is economically disadvantaged, and the district's high mobility rates can reach up to 52% in some buildings.

The district's preeminent core belief is "Students are our first priority." NCSS culture is defined by district-wide dedication to supporting every single student, meeting students where they are, and focusing on growth. They work toward these goals through a strong, engaged data culture and responsive systems of support.

As student needs evolve, teachers and administrators work to monitor all students through many data lenses. In addition to achievement data, student behavior, attendance, social emotional, and mental health data all provide invaluable information about student needs.

## Seeing Every Student in a Large District

Monitoring and responding to the needs of every student is no small task—particularly in a district of over 20,000 students. But NCSS's 2014-15 implementation of Illuminate Data and Assessment (DnA) helped the district make huge strides toward that goal.

Teachers started using DnA to administer formative, common, and district-level assessments. They were thrilled at their increased ability to monitor data for all students. Today, Dr. Allison Jordan, who serves as Director of Testing, Research & Evaluation, sees the impact of DnA in every classroom. "The use of DnA has completely transformed the way that we look at and use data. It has become part of who we are."

In Fall 2018, the district decided to supplement their Illuminate DnA implementation with Illuminate eduCLIMBER, a data analytics and visualization solution. Jordan was immediately

drawn to the range and depth of data that could be automated into eduCLIMBER, as well as the product's ability to automate alerts when specific data criteria are met—a function she anticipated would be used to track students who are at risk of falling behind grade level.

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The interactivity and drill-down functionality also meant that teachers could pinpoint student needs—any student's needs—across many lenses with precision. “It brings so much together for every child,” said Jordan. “We can really focus on the individual needs of the student. I was almost speechless.”

## Implementing for Long-Term Success

The district approached its eduCLIMBER implementation in the context of previous implementations and experience around what worked for their team. They knew that they wanted to “go slow to go fast.” In addition, they wanted their implementation to be informed by school-level feedback around which features resonated the most and best supported teachers in their daily work.

For that reason, NCSS started with an eduCLIMBER rollout in three schools: two elementary schools and one middle school. They also planned a wider rollout for the following year, based on the experiences and feedback of these schools.

After providing basic training, the district suggested that the schools start by selecting and using eduCLIMBER for a single job-embedded task. This approach was a nod to teachers' workloads and intended to curb any initiative fatigue. The schools initially gravitated toward different tasks. One school started using eduCLIMBER to monitor and analyze attendance

data for trends, and another used it to monitor the office discipline referral incidents. District leaders hoped that the schools would naturally start exploring the system more, discover additional applications for using eduCLIMBER, and become excited about the system through the process—and it worked.

Administrators and coaches alike saw proof positive that eduCLIMBER could make their jobs easier. Today it is no longer a matter of using eduCLIMBER for a single, job-embedded task. “Teachers are looking at it from the perspective of, ‘How can we use eduCLIMBER to eliminate ten other things we’re doing?’” said Jordan.

Educators were delighted by the amount of data available in the system and more importantly, that much of the data were automated, including the data that lived in DnA.

eduCLIMBER now houses NCSS’s academic data, such as progress monitoring data from FastBridge Learning and state assessment data. The system automates behavior incident data, attendance data, gradebook information, and social and emotional behavior risk data from FastBridge Learning’s SAEBRS.

## **Giving Teachers Back Time to Focus on Kids**

The ease of integrating and visualizing data immediately began to streamline data processes. Teachers no longer had to pull together data from spreadsheets and multiple websites and three-ring binders. Everything about a student was automatically in one place and interactive. Teachers could drill down into scores, skills, and strands in academic data, and then do a deep dive into attendance or behavior.

eduCLIMBER has also started to eliminate double-entry—a common struggle for data-driven districts, and a huge burden for NCSS. As a former site administrator, Jordan believes that protecting teachers’ time and keeping them in the classroom with students is paramount. “Our kids need us to be present, and we cannot be present if we are inundated with manual entry,” she said. “Our teachers were spending so much time entering the same data into two

systems that didn't even talk to each other." This double-entry was especially time-consuming for data that apply to every student, such as PBIS behavior incidents. With the data automations in place, double-entry is poised to become a thing of the past.

This simple solution to a frustrating problem made the schools curious and excited about other ways to use eduCLIMBER, and Jordan watched those applications develop right before her eyes. Some educators started using the Meeting module to take notes and assign action steps during their meetings. Others started using the built-in classroom observation tool. Importantly, these were all tasks the educators selected for themselves and truly needed. "They think it's magic. That's exactly the response you want to see."

Interest has also grown quickly among the schools who did not use eduCLIMBER in the 2018-19 school year. At the district level, leaders, department heads, and specialists are eager to discuss plans for implementing eduCLIMBER for their own work next year.

## Social Emotional Learning & Transforming MTSS

Many of those specialists are connected to the district's systems of support and services. "It's going to completely change the way we approach MTSS," said Jordan.

eduCLIMBER gives the district instant visibility into Tier I instruction effectiveness, and also makes it easy to record and analyze Tier II and Tier III interventions and supports. That information can be viewed for individual students and at the district, school, or group level.

For Jordan, eduCLIMBER's ability to automate data-based alerts and monitor for at-risk students has direct connections to MTSS. She sees the opportunity to never miss a signal that a student is in immediate need of support or at risk of harming themselves or others. "Education is changing. We need to change, too, if we are to serve our students."

When eduCLIMBER is fully implemented district-wide, Jordan hopes to effectively automate many of the district's MTSS data processes. With the Thresholds module available in edu-

CLIMBER, NCSS can set automated alerts across many whole child data sources. It means that the right teachers, counselors, specialists, and principals would receive instant notifications when their students are in need of additional or different supports.

In a large district, the automated piece is key. It would be a first line of procedural action to enable immediate, responsive, and collaborative action for kids. That lift off teacher workloads would also give them back the time and focus they need to act on data and provide the interpersonal, deep connection that students need to thrive.

Ultimately, it would bring them that much closer to NCSS's goal of supporting every single student, no matter where they are and what they need to succeed.

## **Illuminate Education Supports Effective, Data-Informed MTSS Implementations**

Illuminate provides the whole child data visualization, valid and reliable assessments, and MTSS tools districts need to support each student. Our Student Performance System provides:

- Interactive whole child data in one place, including academic, behavioral, social emotional learning, and intervention data
- Valid, reliable, evidence-based universal screening (Reading, Math, and Social Emotional-Behavioral), skills diagnostic, and progress monitoring assessments that cut test time in half
- Academic and behavioral intervention tracking, program effectiveness reports, and collaboration tools

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