

CASE STUDY:

SANTA CLARA UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT HARNESSING THE POWER OF MEANINGFUL DATA

“Schools simply can’t tackle the hard work of creating a more just and equitable education system without good data,” says Santa Clara County Office of Education (SCCOE) Senior Director of Data Governance Marcy Lauck.

Santa Clara Unified School District (SCUSD), a district served by the SCCOE, came face-to-face with this truth in 2012 when it sought to improve stagnant graduation rates.

Like countless districts across the country, SCUSD was struggling to leverage its data in a manner that promoted continuous improvement of student outcomes. Due to the nature of student information systems (SIS), data that’s housed in there tends to be “dirty” — often disorganized and peppered with inaccuracies and duplications. When multiple people are tasked with entering data at the same time — as is almost always the case in a large school district like SCUSD — these inaccuracies are all but inevitable.

putting the right data in the right hands at the right time. Good data changes how educators think about their work with students. Once educators see how easy it is, they always express a desire to know more and to engage colleagues in discussions about how they might develop action plans based on data.”

Highlights

30 School Districts

250,000 Students

1 Data Warehouse

90 Data Dashboards

350 Metrics

Achievements

Increased graduation rate by **6%**
in one district

50% reductions in suspensions of
Latinx students

15% reduction in total disciplinary
actions against Latinx students



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educators think about their
work with students.**



Fortunately, harnessing the power of data-driven educational insights can be straightforward for educators — so long as data governance teams have laid the groundwork for an efficient, effective reporting system. As Lauck points out, “It’s just about

A NEW BREED OF DATA WAREHOUSE

SCUSD is a prime example of the remarkable progress that can be made when district stakeholders pair a strong commitment to data with an equally strong set of data tools. In the fall of 2015, SCUSD became one of two pilot districts for DataZone, an educational data warehouse that aggregates, streamlines, and cleans data from disparate, siloed sources.

DataZone facilitates collaboration among agencies in the 3 counties comprising Silicon Valley — San Mateo, Santa Clara, and Santa Cruz. DataZone’s mission is to equip school districts with actionable data that can drive tangible outcomes for educators and students. Powered by the Hoonuit’s data analytics solution, DataZone currently houses aggregated information on 280,000 students across 32 school districts, and is actively expanding to nearby districts and counties.



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“As of right now, we have over 90 dashboards featuring 350 metrics in the DataZone,” Lauck explains. “If integrated into coordinated district planning, the DataZone metrics have the potential to change the trajectory for any district’s students.”

Due to the cooperative set-up of DataZone, it is a viable option for districts of all sizes. For smaller districts, that means providing the necessary permissioning and technical infrastructure that they may not have otherwise had the resources to create. For larger districts like SCUSD, DataZone can play a crucial role in gathering, cleaning, and streamlining an overabundance of student data with the power to help identify and solve for systemic issues.

And for all educators, the DataZone user community provides a channel for collaboration, idea sharing, and development of best practices.

Further, DataZone has identified state and regional specific needs and partnered with Hoonuit to make sure they are available. “Many California districts work with high needs special populations, and it is critical for administrators to tie program effectiveness to funding,” says Lauck. “Those correlations can be crucial in continuing — and evolving — specific programs.”

Regional Context by the Numbers



- Student Population **412,486**
- **39%** Free/Reduced meals
- **44%** gap between ethnic groups meeting UC/CSU requirements
- Only **33%** of Hispanic youth score Proficient or Advanced in ELA on the state test compared to **73%** of White students

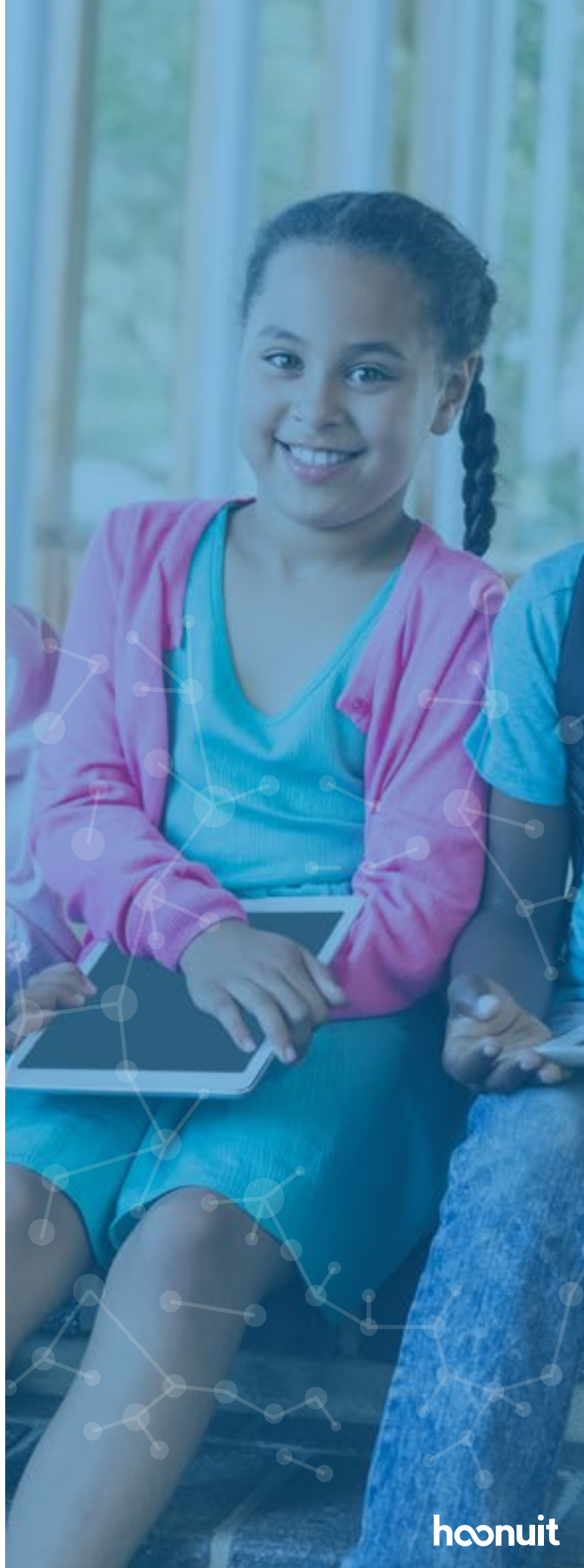
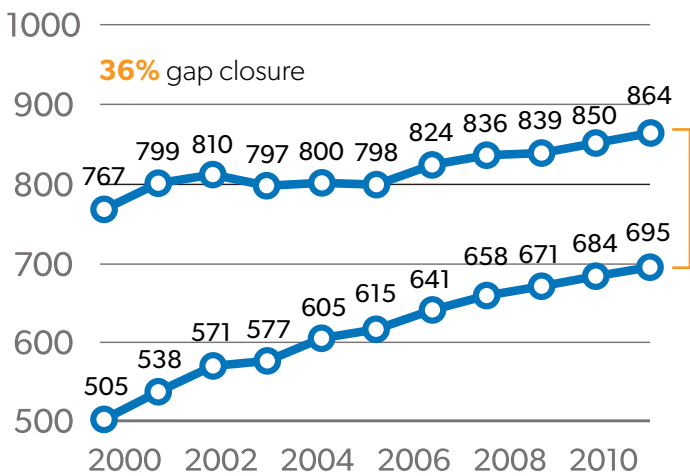
LIFTING THE DISTRICT-WIDE GRADUATION RATE

In SCUSD, administrators were searching for a way to improve stagnant high school graduation rates. District stakeholders had put a great deal of work into trying to understand the source of the stagnation, but they had had trouble querying their SIS to figure out which students were at risk of becoming credit-deficient during any given semester.

Using DataZone, administrators were able to build custom metrics related to common early warning indicators, enabling them to pinpoint critical student cohorts like ninth graders who were already credit-deficient after their freshman year. At the end of the 2015-2016 school years, administrators went into DataZone, noticed that 99 rising sophomores were credit-deficient, and within minutes sent notifications to each of the students' schools. As a result, these students were quickly enrolled in credit-recovery programs over the summer, helping many of them get back on track almost immediately.

SCUSD subsequently started performing similar audits within DataZone for sophomores and juniors, resulting in the district's graduation rate jumping by 6 percent in just three years.

Closing The Gap



Two sharpened pencils, one light blue and one dark blue, are positioned diagonally on a bright yellow background. The pencils are sharpened and have dark erasers.

IMPROVING DISCIPLINARY EQUITABILITY

In addition to lifting its district-wide graduation rate, SCUSD used DataZone to decrease disciplinary disproportionality.

Prior to adopting DataZone, the district was suspending its Latinx students at twice the rate of any other subgroup. By using DataZone to aggregate socioeconomic data and information gleaned from extensive community conversations and student focus groups, administrators were made aware of a “suspension pipeline” that was at the root of the district’s disciplinary disproportionality.

Many of the district’s Latinx students were coming from a low socioeconomic background and thus were expected to care for younger siblings or work a part-time job on nights and weekends. When these students were assigned detention or Saturday school for some minor misdeed, they were forced to choose between their extracurricular responsibilities and their school punishment. More often than not, they (understandably) felt compelled to choose the former, opening the door to more severe disciplinary action. As a result, their punishments for small transgressions — skipping a class or two, for instance — were quickly and repeatedly escalated to suspensions.

Once DataZone helped reveal this structural inequality, SCUSD stakeholders altered their disciplinary procedures to avoid unfairly penalizing students from lower socioeconomic strata. The outcome? A 50 percent reduction in suspensions of Latinx students and a 15 percent reduction in total disciplinary actions against Latinx students.

EXPANDING AP ENROLLMENT

Finally, SCUSD leveraged DataZone to increase district-wide enrollment in Advanced Placement (AP) courses. For years, the district had been trying to get more students — especially those from underrepresented subgroups — to take AP courses, but in the absence of a well-defined recruitment process, it kept enrolling the same self-selected cohort of ambitious high-achievers.

With the granular insights provided by DataZone, administrators started to identify students with high — but previously unencouraged — potential, enroll them in AP courses, and provide them with robust support, especially during the first six weeks of each semester. SCUSD stakeholders believed that by exposing students from underrepresented groups to rigorous coursework early and often, the students would become far better-prepared for postsecondary success.

Over the course of the past four years, SCUSD has managed to enroll 200 new students in AP courses, all while maintaining its district-wide AP exam pass rate of 70 percent.

THE POWER OF HOONUIT

According to Lauck, SCUSD's broad-based, sustained success would have never been possible without a platform like Hoonuit supercharging DataZone's capabilities.

"The vision for the DataZone has always been to return value to our districts by providing them with the tools and professional development resources to support their continuous improvement efforts," she says. "The scalability of Hoonuit's solution really empowered us to think beyond a single district. Their skills and support continue to give us the tools we need to do the hard work of transforming our education system and the lives of all the children that walk through our doors every day."

That said, SCUSD could never have experienced this kind of positive transformation without the tireless work of the district's committed educators. "When you're used to doing things a certain way, changing behavior in the district is tough," says Lauck. "What SCUSD has done is so admirable. It is very difficult for districts to make these significant changes, and they worked hard to make it happen."

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ABOUT HOONUIT**

Address

15088 22nd Avenue NE
Little Falls, MN 56345

Phone

+1 320 632 5064
866 259 6890 (Toll-free US)

Website

www.hoonuit.com/district-enterprise