PSJA ISD
studentGPS™

CASE STUDY

About studentGPS™ Dashboards

THE studentGPS™ DASHBOARDS:

- Give vital information in one easy-to-use dashboard, so that educators can save time by not having to search multiple sources for student data.

- Help educators make informed decisions to improve student performance. Educators can use information to see patterns, gaps and opportunities to make adjustments.

- Use colors, symbols and flags to make information easy to see and use.

- Provide tools to monitor, assess and take needed steps to enhance student performance to help educators be more effective in their jobs.

The studentGPS™ Dashboards give educators a view into the whole student, providing an easy-to-understand picture of how a student is performing by combining multiple types of student data, such as grades, attendance, discipline, standardized test scores, program areas and demographics all in one place. By using the dashboards, educators can easily see trends and make more timely and informed decisions.

student**GPS**™

studentGPS™ Dashboards Make the Tough Mission at Pharr-San Juan-Alamo ISD Easier

QUICK DISTRICT STATS:

- 44 campuses including 26 elementary, eight middle, five high, four special purpose and one early start school

- 4,500 professional staff members

- 32,000 students (99% are Hispanic and 88% are economically disadvantaged)

- Started studentGPS™ Dashboards rollout in August 2012

Pharr-San Juan-Alamo Independent School District (PSJA ISD) has rapidly become a state and national leader in creating more academic opportunities for all students. A border school district serving 32,000 students (99% Hispanic and 88% economically disadvantaged), PSJA ISD once had a dropout rate almost double the state average.

However, the district initiated a comprehensive plan to change the way the school is run. The number of annual high school graduates has almost doubled and the four-year graduation rate and overall high school completion rate, once woeful, now surpass the state average by a significant margin. As a result, PSJA has become a state and national model for dropout prevention and recovery with its innovative initiatives being replicated across Texas and the nation.

As part of PSJA's package of reforms, the LEA decided to participate in the studentGPS™ Dashboards. Many PSJA counselors, teachers, principals and administrators already have successful stories to share.

This case study focuses on how teaching professionals at regular and special purpose schools in PSJA ISD have been using the dashboards to better guide and accommodate the students. Because these students transfer in and out of the special-purpose schools, the historical data on the students is very helpful to quickly get students into the right classes, accommodations, language assistance, etc.

Read on to learn about their personal stories.

Benefits in the Classroom

At Treviño Elementary, Counselor Violeta Cantu works with students from Pre-K through fifth grade to make sure they get everything they need to have a bright future. Dealing with all types of students from the gifted and talented to those with special needs, Cantu uses the studentGPS™ Dashboards to pinpoint each individual student's specific needs. According to Cantu, "The dashboards are a global software that gives me everything I need to figure out what kind of support I can provide the students."

For her Response to Intervention (RTI) students, Cantu finds it useful to be able to print out test scores by six weeks instead of by semester. "It really gives me the immediate feedback I need as far as grades to make sure my intervention efforts for students are timely and effective," Cantu said.

With the information and insight from the studentGPS™ Dashboards, Cantu is able to ensure the success of each and every one of her students in elementary school as well as at the middle school level. All of the information stays with the student as they transition from fifth to sixth grade, letting middle school teachers know from day one what each student needs in terms of special testing accommodations and intervention measures.

At Alamo Middle School, sixth grade math teacher Linda Corpus benefits from such transferred information. The dashboards display an 'A' next to the names of students who need accommodations, so she doesn't have to rely on the students to tell her themselves. Corpus said, "The benefit is students don't always know or they just don't tell you that they need accommodations, so by having a system that lets you know exactly who needs them, you can avoid the situation where a student scores badly simply because he didn't use the accommodations that were available to him."

Over at Elvis Ballew High School, Spanish teacher Dalia Sanchez uses the dashboards to keep her students on track to graduate. Elvis Ballew is an "option school" that provides the classes students need to avoid dropping out. With the dashboards, Sanchez keeps track of her students' grades, attendance, behavior, special needs such as Limited English Proficiency (LEP) and whether or not they are taking the right classes, helping her better deal with the complex issues facing her option school students.

Recently, she used the dashboards to confirm that a student was in fact in the wrong class and needed to be moved. Sanchez said, "We were giving credits one day and one of my students said, 'Mrs. Sanchez, I think I've taken that class,' and I said let me check, and I went in to the dashboard, and he was right. He was in the wrong class, and I was able to talk to the counselor and get her to change it."

The dashboards also serve as a "checklist" for Sanchez during a parent conferences," Sanchez explained, "I can just log into the system and pull up all of the student's information to make sure I go over everything I need to with the parent.

"It's very good to work in, and it keeps us informed about the student. Simply put, the more we know, the more we can help."

Dalia Sanchez, Elvis Ballew High School

KEY BENEFITS of studentGPS™ DASHBOARDS

- **Pinpoints students' specific needs**
- **Makes interventions more timely and effective**
- **Ensures all students get the accommodations they need**
- **Provides an easy "checklist" for parent conferences**
- **Monitors student performance**

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Counselor Violeta Cantu
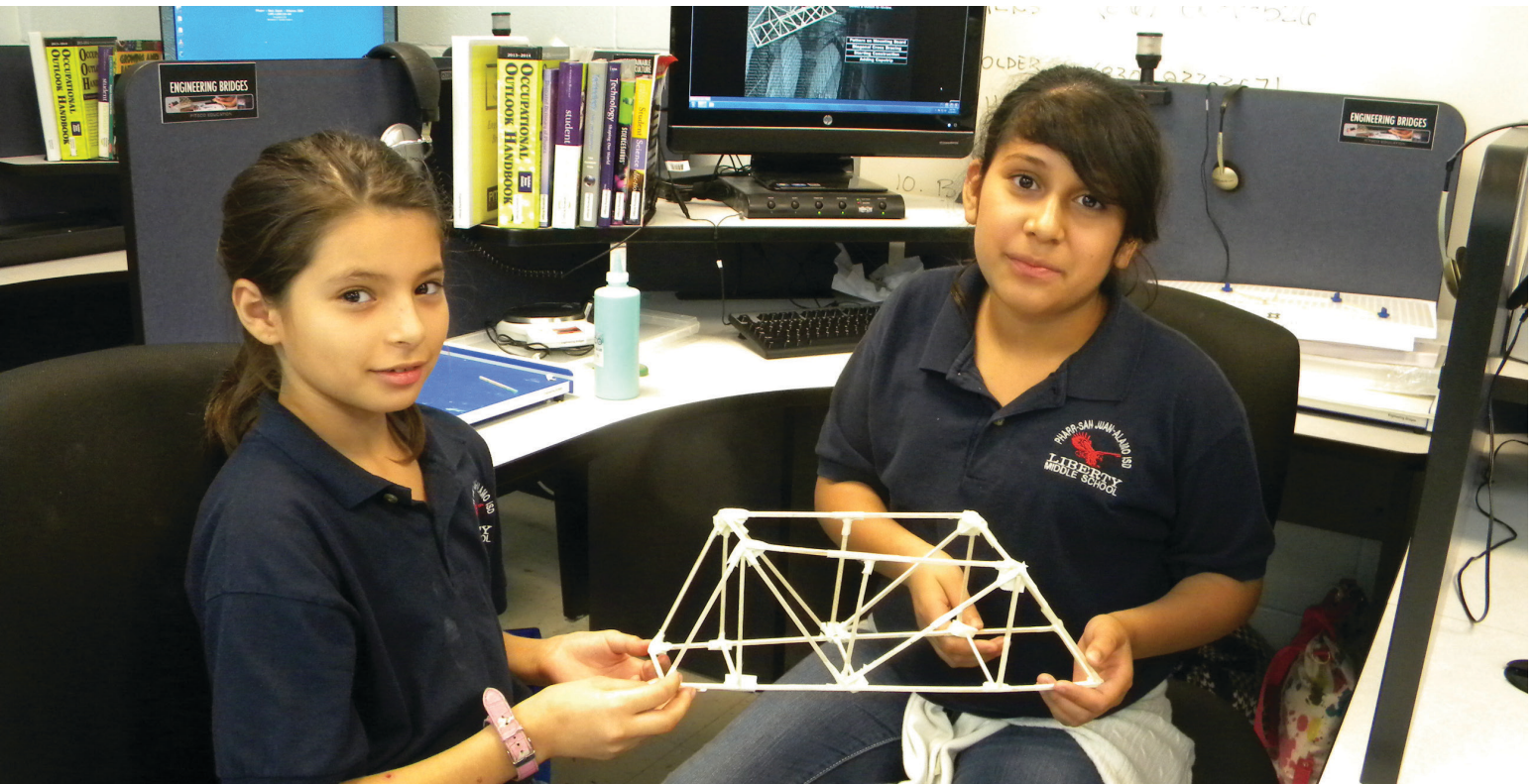
From an Administrator's Point of View

Hired specifically to help implement the studentGPS™ Dashboards at PSJA ISD, Database Administrator Joel Garcia, Jr. led the development of an online manual for his district, viewable at gps-p3.psjaisd.us. Discovering that many of his users were asking the same questions during training and encountering the same problems as they began using the dashboards, Garcia's team developed an online manual consisting of training materials, videos and frequently asked questions organized by job role. The manual focuses on policy, practices and procedures and ultimately helped users at the district pick up the dashboards more easily and use them more effectively.

Based on his experience implementing the dashboards, Garcia also offered Texas Student Data System (TSDS) feedback on ways to make the implementation process smoother and the dashboards more useful. First on his list of suggestions was making the watch list in the dashboards self-maintaining. One of the biggest complaints he gets from staff members is that while the watch list is a neat feature, they don't have time to manually add and delete students from them. With a self-maintaining watch list, he feels staff members will find it more convenient and easier to monitor issues like attendance and discipline.

Additionally, Garcia sees the need for districts to develop an official policy outlining how the dashboards should be used in context with other computer programs available to staff, such as student management and reporting systems.

"We have to remind users that it is a dashboard, not a full-blown reporting tool. The first place they should look for data should be the dashboard, but if the information's not in there, they should go to some of their other tools."

Joel Garcia, Jr.
PSJA ISD Database Administrator

Garcia believes such a policy will help staff better understand the benefits of the dashboards and view them as an easy-to-use effective tool as opposed to another application. Commenting on how he sees the dashboards benefiting users, Garcia said, "I'll go to the campus and see that they are looking through folders and papers to get information, and I'm sure if they just looked in the dashboard, they'd get the information a lot faster," Garcia said.

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Database Administrator
Joel Garcia, Jr.

DASHBOARD USAGE RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Develop an online manual consisting of training materials, videos and frequently asked questions organized by job role

- Make watch list self-maintaining to make them more useful and convenient for staff

- Develop an official policy outlining how the dashboards should be used in context with other computer programs available to staff

HELPFUL HINTS FROM PSJA FOR IMPLEMENTATION:

- Determine proper access to the system based on job role, as some roles at your district may not map directly onto those predefined in the system

- Set up protocols and expectations for individuals in different roles

- Identify missing and inaccurate data in current system

- Help users understand the dashboard metrics

- Be prepared for some initial user resistance to having to learn a new system, and be proactive in helping them understand the benefits of studentGPS™
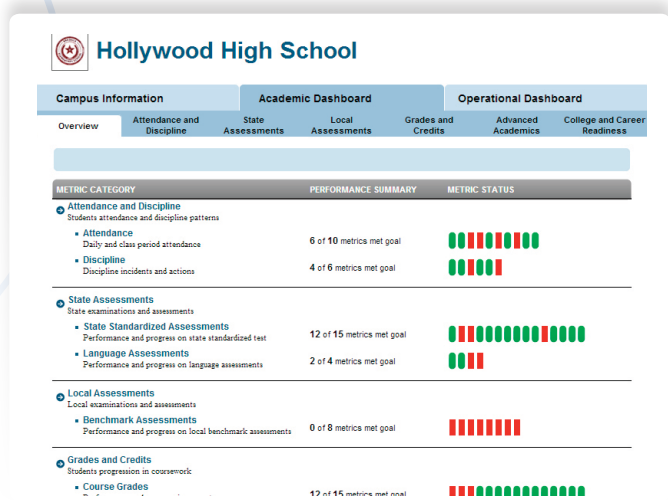
Turning Data into Creative Education Programs

A quad-school librarian for PSJA ISD, Lisa Hernandez services four alternative campuses: a boot camp school, a teenage parent program and two dropout recovery programs. At these schools, Hernandez works with at-risk students to improve their literacy through her award-winning "Rekindling the Joy of Reading" program.

With this program, Hernandez helps her students overcome their dislike of reading by modeling it for them in a positive way as they get started in the Accelerated Reader (AR) Program. As her students make progress through the program, she challenges them to become AR millionaires by reading a million words. This past year, she had six millionaires at her boot camp school and three in the teen parenting program. She looks forward to even more this year.

Her efforts have translated into improved TAKS scores in the classroom, and through the studentGPS™ Dashboards, Hernandez gets timely feedback that helps her fine-tune her reading program. Recently, she discovered from the dashboards that those students who read at least two novels, or about 100,000 words, during the school year end up passing the TAKS test their first time.

Through such feedback from the dashboards, Hernandez was able to validate the effectiveness of her reading program, saying, "The highlight for me with the dashboards was seeing the increase and seeing that what I was doing in the classroom with the short amount of time I had with the students was making a big difference. For me, I think that was a big eye opener, making that correlation by identifying the students that passed and going back to AR to see whether they took the AR tests or not. When I saw that most had, I went, 'This works!' so it just solidified what I'd been thinking."

KEY BENEFITS *for* EDUCATORS

- Gives feedback to educators on how well their programs are working

- Helps educators adapt programs to student needs based on data

- Shows correlation between classroom instruction and test performance

"*The highlight for me with the dashboards was seeing the increase and seeing that what I was doing in the classroom with the short amount of time I had with the students was making a big difference.*"

Librarian Lisa Hernandez

Using Data to Guide Special Purpose Schools

Elvis Ballew High School principal Larissa Saenz uses the dashboards to keep track of her option school, whose student body is constantly changing as its at-risk students come and go. "I log into it every morning," Saenz said. I like that the first screen includes student data for gender, enrollment and special population because when I'm asked about certain things that I need to know, instead of going into a separate program and having to count, I can just pull up my screen, and there it is.

"It's very easy. That's what really starts my day off."

Saenz has also seen the dashboards become a useful tool for her teachers to understand their students' needs. Saenz explains, "It's a good tool to have when you meet with parents or talk to kids because our kids are different. Our kids are coming from all over the place, and their transcripts aren't always accurate. With the dashboards

giving us better information, we can do a better job of understanding their situation and get them what they need to stay on the right track."

Over at PSJA ISD's district alternative education program for grades 6–12, Principal Ruben Borrego finds himself in similar circumstances, dealing with a constantly changing student body of at-risk youths. As a disciplinary campus, Borrego's school averages around 130 students per a six-weeks period, with students staying there for anywhere from a 10-day to 18-week placement.

"These are students who have historically fallen through the cracks at their home campuses," Borrego said. "The gap for these kids is extremely big, and we also have to deal with the baggage they have from home. Some of them come from broken homes or third generation gang member families, but we do have success stories. We have kids who come over and graduate and are able to go on to community college."

So far, Borrego has found the studentGPS™ Dashboards to be a useful tool at his campus. "We have to know exactly what is ailing the patient, so we need diagnostics. We need to run tests so we can make sure we know exactly what to prescribe to a student to make him get better, and the studentGPS™ Dashboards definitely help with this," Borrego said.

KEY BENEFITS *for* EDUCATORS

- Provides a convenient program from which multiple types of information can be pulled

- Gives educators better information to work with

- Pinpoints individual student issues

"We have to know exactly what is ailing the patient, so we need diagnostics. We need to run tests so we can make sure we know exactly what to prescribe to a student to make him get better, and the studentGPS™ Dashboards definitely help with this."
Principal
Ruben Borrego

Borrego also noted some ways in which the system could be tweaked to serve his population better. "For my school specifically, we need real-time data. The situation with our kids is so dynamic that they often arrive to our school before their data even gets updated so if the dashboards could somehow offer the data in real-time, that would be really helpful." Borrego also added that he would like the discipline data to reveal what the student was disciplined for and for the school credits to be separated between middle school credits and high school ones so that his teachers can better see what students need in order to graduate.

With these improvements, Borrego would ideally like to see his teachers use the dashboards as a "'one-stop shop' like at Walmart where… they can go in and find out exactly what is going on with every student from transcripts and grades to demographics. This will really help our teachers be more effective with everything they have on their plates."

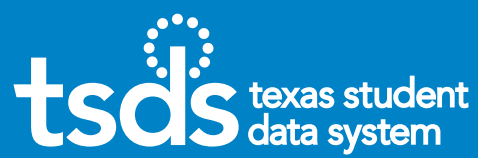## PSJA Looks Forward to a Bright Future with studentGPS™ Dashboards

As the studentGPS™ Dashboards continue to be integrated into the district and the day-to-day activities of educators, PSJA looks forward to using them to further its mission of creating more academic opportunities for all students. With more information available faster and easier, PSJA believes the dashboards will better position the district to help students of all circumstances make their way to a bright future.

A major initiative by the Texas Education Agency, the Texas Student Data System is a *new statewide system* that modernizes and improves the quality of data collection, management and reporting in Texas education.

* In addition to participating in the limited production release program for studentGPS™, PSJA will also be part of the early adopters program, implementing the next release of the dashboards in the 2013-2014 school year.

tsds texas student data system