



CASE STUDY:

FAYETTE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Fayette County Public School District encourages everyone from custodians to bus drivers to counselors to use Hoonuit.

Servicing nearly 42,000 students in the Lexington, Kentucky, metropolitan area, Fayette County Public Schools (FCPS) is the second-largest employer in the state's second-largest county. With an annual working budget of just under half a billion dollars and a staff of just over 7,500 workers, FCPS runs 36 elementary schools, 12 middle schools, 6 high schools, 3 career and technical centers, and 10 alternative education programs.

As a large, diverse, and rapidly growing district, FCPS has faced its fair share of challenges in recent years. For instance, on May 14, 2015, former Kentucky Education Commissioner Terry Holliday warned FCPS leaders that "the district faced state action if immediate and significant changes were not made." A month later, the Fayette County Board of Education hired Manny Caulk as the district's new superintendent.

Caulk undertook a series of steps to improve the district's standing with the state, culminating in last year's 2017-2021 Strategic Plan: Expect Excellence. The plan identified five "imperatives" according to which Caulk hoped FCPS would proceed:

- **Excellent Student Opportunities**
- **Excellent Staff**
- **Excellent Schools**
- **Excellent Support**
- **Excellent Relationships**

Thus far, early results have been encouraging. "It would normally take a district of our size three to five years to accomplish what we've done in just one," Caulk writes in his introductory letter to the district's most recent annual report. And while Caulk is quick to credit "the hard work of [FCPS] employees, students, and families" and the "unwavering support of elected officials, business leaders, faith communities, and civic organizations," he also recognizes the pivotal role that data-driven decision-making has played in propelling FCPS forward.



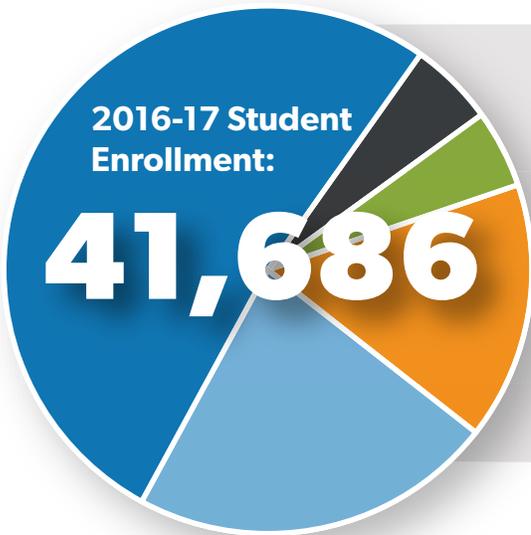
It takes an entire community to ensure the success of our public schools.



A NEW KIND OF SIS

As detailed in the annual report, FCPS has been able to make significant progress under the "Excellent Supports" imperative by "invest[ing] in a data infrastructure to integrate and analyze data to inform all aspects of district operations" and "contracting with [a] nationally recognized leader in data systems to build and implement a comprehensive data analysis and reporting platform to drive decision-making."

FAYETTE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS BY THE NUMBERS



- White: **52%**
- Black: **22%**
- Hispanic: **16%**
- Asian: **4%**
- Other: **5%**



8,846 Students identified as gifted and talented **21.2%**

4,820 Students identified for special education **11.6%**

5,907 English language learners **14.2%**

82 World languages spoken

22,559 Percent qualified for free or reduced-price meals **54.7%**

978 Students experiencing homelessness **2.3%**

\$481.5 million working budget

Preschool Enrollment: **899**

Elementary Enrollment: **19,810**

Middle School Enrollment: **9,262**

High School Enrollment: **11,715**

Enrollment figures reported in October

Schools and special programs:

36 Elementary Schools

12 Middle Schools

5 High Schools

3 Career and Technical Centers

10 Other stand-alone academic and alternative programs

According to Billy Buchanan, FCPS Director of Data, Research, and Accountability, the district chose Hoonuit as its data partner because of the company's "willingness to venture outside of where most EdTech data warehouse vendors are willing to go — or even capable of going."

To Buchanan's point, many data warehouse vendors focus exclusively on information that already exists in a district's student information system (SIS). While these datasets — standardized test scores, attendance records, etc. — are certainly important, they don't paint a complete picture of the underlying forces that shape a district's progress (or lack thereof). "Running a district is really like running a very large business," Buchanan explains. "To do that successfully, you need to be able to monitor and manage all aspects of your 'business' — HR, finance, operations, transportation, etc."

BUILDING A DATA CULTURE

When Buchanan joined FCPS from Minneapolis Public Schools in July of 2016, the district's data culture was essentially nonexistent. Despite this widespread unfamiliarity with data best practices, Buchanan's numerous Hoonuit-powered initiatives have been met with an overwhelmingly positive response from teachers and administrators alike.



You can't gain efficiencies or gain effectiveness if you have no visibility into what works.



At one recent training session, an elementary school administrator approached Buchanan with a series of questions about how Hoonuit could streamline the way her school identified students for potential summer intervention.

"I showed her how to create a cohort around a certain set of test scores, and how to share that cohort with multiple people on her team," Buchanan recalls. "Instead of having to manually build a cohort by combing through countless student records, this administrator was able to immediately view the lowest quartile of scores on the assessment in question, look at these select students in the context of other relevant data, and precisely target the students who were most in need of supplemental services. This alone saved her at least two or three hours."



UNIVERSALIZING DATA USAGE

Successes like these have inspired FCPS to make Hoonuit available to stakeholders throughout its broader educational community, thereby facilitating adherence to two of the district's core values — "It takes an entire community to ensure the success of our public schools" and "Leadership, capacity building, shared accountability, and collaboration are keys to success."

From custodians and bus drivers to cafeteria workers and central office staff, every single person employed by the district has access to at least some of the data stored in the Hoonuit warehouse. Access privileges are limited according to the scope of one's responsibilities — Caulk can see data on every student in the district, whereas a classroom teacher can only see data on their own students — but everyone is given a stake in ensuring the district delivers the best educational experience possible.



Analytics infrastructure is not just an expense; it's an investment.



As he points out, if a bus driver is consistently getting students to school late, that means this otherwise unconnected cohort of students is receiving less instructional time. Similarly, if disruptive behavior is preventing certain students from getting breakfast before school — FCPS serves breakfast to more than 11,000 students every day — these students' academic performance is likely to lag.

Buchanan is adamant this broad-based buy-in is essential to driving real results. In the first year of Hoonuit's implementation, roughly half of the district's staff have already been trained to use the platform, and over 885 staff members logged into the platform during the final six months of the 2017-18 school year.

"Some staff use the tool more regularly than others, but we hope to continue to grow the culture around data usage in our district, and to cultivate data fluency in all of our staff members," says Buchanan. "It's really important that everyone is able to see the overall health of the system, and this simply wasn't possible before we rolled out the Hoonuit platform."

INVESTING IN OUR FUTURE

In May 2017 — just two years after he ascended to the superintendency — the Kentucky Department of Education issued a report stating that "Caulk has brought stability to the district," and that FCPS now "has capacity to lead future improvements." This progress has been driven by a remarkable community-wide effort, an effort that wouldn't have been nearly as effective without its underlying commitment to data-driven decision-making.

For Buchanan, the most salient lesson of the past two years has been the indisputable importance of placing data at the center of education. When asked whether he would recommend a data platform like Hoonuit to other districts, he responded with an unequivocal, "Yes!"

"As a district administrator, it would be an absolutely horrible decision to not invest in your analytics infrastructure," he says. "You can't gain efficiencies or gain effectiveness if you have no visibility into what works, no ability to determine why it works, and no way of sharing that information — that story — in a way that helps your staff and community really understand what it is you're spending their resources on."

As for any remaining skeptics, Buchanan assures them that the grass really is greenest — or, in Fayette County's case, bluest — on the data-driven side of the fence. "Analytics infrastructure is not just an expense; it's an investment," he concludes. "At the end of the day, it's in our collective best interest to ensure that everyone — most of all our students — gets the highest possible yield from this investment."

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