Spotlight On
MILLARD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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PUBLIC SCHOOLS
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Millard Public Schools is a school district in the southwest part of Omaha, Nebraska that has received praise for achieving world-class results through effective strategic planning. Millard is one of three U.S. school districts profiled in the book: Leading Change, The Case for Continuous Improvement, published by The National School Boards Association. At the 2011 U.S. Tableau Customer Conference, director of assessment, research and evaluation Tami Williams shared how Tableau is helping the district turn student data into student stories.

TABLEAU:

How does Tableau help you identify opportunities for students?

TAMI:
Tableau allows us, as a school district, to be able to help tell the story in a 'data way' about each and every student. For any school district, large or small, you have the issue of trying to tell the story of a student—or trying to provide opportunities of letting the data bubble forth—and be able to identify opportunities for a student.

JOE:
We have 150 administrators, district leaders, 2000 teachers. They're all using dashboards—all on Tableau servers—and those dashboards provide quick insight into what's happening.

JAC:
As we look at the data points, the real story is what happens between those data points. And that's really the true story with the kids, but they need a catalyst to help bring about the discussion.

TABLEAU:

What is the impact of Tableau?

TAMI:
It's amazing to be able to communicate quickly. When someone has a data request, or a question that needs to be answered, we're able to provide that answer in a timely way. It doesn't get bottlenecked in that production process.

JOE:
It's about decisions that impact students today and not next week. And so the speed to insight that Tableau gives us is to be able to meet those high expectations that are presented to us —and just exceed the expectations, actually.

TAMI:
Conversations are immediate, they're fruitful. It's not waiting for someone to spend their weekends or evenings putting spreadsheets together. Instead it's focused on spending the time to talk about the students, the interventions, the extensions, what their needs are.

TABLEAU:

What is the power of visualizing data?

JOE:
There's so much in the data that we don't know, and just by looking at numbers, you don't get the story. With the visualization, you get to dive into it, discover, and just really search for those ah-ha moments in the data.

JAC:
It really helps tell a much bigger story of the kids, and who they are, where they're coming from, and how their needs need to be addressed.

JOE:
It's actually seeing something—not just as a bar, not just as a number—but as meaningful.

"For any school district, large or small, you have the issue of trying to tell the story of a student. Tableau allows us, as a school district, to be able to help tell the story in a 'data way' about each and every student."

What was implementation like for you?

TAMI:
Within five months of accepting Tableau as our product, we were able to do amazing things, and put it into the hands of some really fantastic users.

JAC:
This fall it is truly reaching every teacher, every administrator in the district is being empowered with being able to go to Tableau, to use the resources that are there. It is having a far-reaching impact.

TAMI:
Like any exciting project, there was a lot of enthusiasm, electricity, almost anxiety associated with it. We made sure that our data was arranged in the way that we wanted it to be, that things were working as efficiently as possible. And now we're ready to take it to the next step.

TABLEAU:
Can you give an example of how Tableau saves the school district time?

TAMI:
(Before Tableau), I spent a lot of time merging multiple spreadsheets of random data that I was trying to keep on students.

JAC:
With Tableau, we're able to really save them work, rather than them tracking all these individual things, we're able to put it together in one place.

TAMI:
Tableau allows a building administrator to select the assessments that they want, the students that they want, and create a grid quickly, saving our administrators hours.

JAC:
Having a self-service model is great, because I'm not inundated with request after request that I have to put all together. Instead, I can put out a few tools and they can work with those and get a lot of the answers that they need.

TABLEAU:
What is your vision for Tableau in the future?

TAMI:
I'm looking forward to using Tableau Public, and making sure that we can use a platform that is accessible to our public stakeholders, helping ease the transparency for all people that need to know our data.

TABLEAU:
What would you say to another school district interested in Tableau?

TAMI:
It is easy to put together the information that you need in a visualization. It's accessible. You don't have to be a SQL database person to get it. And because you're able to put in a lot of different data sources, as a user of Tableau you're able to pull whatever you want at any time.

JAC:
The neat thing is when the stories come back to me that say, "You know what, the information I was able to look at and use has made an impact in this way with this kid."

JOE:
It's just an amazing resource to be able to dive into your data. It's no longer just tables and rows of information; it's a visual story about what that data actually means. It takes that data and makes it information, something usable.

TABLEAU:
In your opinion, what are the barriers to using Tableau?

TAMI:
There's really no barrier to using Tableau, except maybe your creativity.

Tableau Software helps people see and understand data.
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