



Barrow County School System, Georgia Tyler Pulse Provides Situational Awareness; Educators See Results

Organization Profile:

Industry: Public School System

Location: Winder, Georgia

Employees: 1,500

Population: 70,000

Student Population: 13,300

Years as Tyler Client: 13 years

Tyler Products Used: Munis[®], Tyler Pulse,
Versatrans[®]

Contact: www.barrow.k12.ga.us

In their Own Words:

“Situational awareness is the most valuable information we can obtain from a database. Knowing the capabilities and historical performance of every student, or tracking specific data on a key group of students, is not a luxury – it’s an imperative. Being able to get that type of information almost effortlessly – that’s a luxury.”

— *Jamie Gordon, Information Systems Manager*

Key Challenges

Barrow County School System spans eight elementary, four middle and three high schools. County educators are challenged to meet the needs of a student body where more than 60 percent of the students come from economically disadvantaged households, 12 percent have special needs and 8 percent speak English as a second language. But lesson plans, teaching and testing are only part of the job.

“Public schools regularly commit numerous man-hours and resources to data entry, collection and analysis tasks that require teachers and administrators to spend a significant amount of time performing basic analytic functions with the myriad of data that each district is provided, continues with district personnel compiling data for transmission to the state, and ends with often very little of value returning back to the classroom teacher,” said Matt Thompson, director of student and data services for Barrow County School System. “Performing the kinds of analysis and data entry we were tasked with typically robbed teachers, administrators and leaders of valuable time that was better spent on instruction and leadership.”

Barrow County wanted to find a way to change this pattern — a way to aggregate existing data sources, reduce the amount of time collectively spent to yield information that is current, easy to understand and actionable. Data should work for the stakeholders, not the other way around.

Action Taken

In 2012 Barrow County invited 30+ data-savvy personnel from across the district to conduct a formal review of the Tyler Pulse system. Those invited had been exposed to numerous data warehouse solutions on the market. They found many with large storage and processing capacity but realized that they were too complex for the average user. Extracting usable data might require a dedicated staff to design reports and manage inquiries. “We needed something better, a solution that would provide consistent and actionable data accessible across all segments of our district,” said Jamie Gordon, the information systems manager for Barrow County School System.

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Barrow's team wanted a system that could aggregate data from their Munis financial and HR systems, their third-party student information system and still have the capacity for additional data sources as plans evolved. They also wanted to be able to customize data views for different types of users. "Tyler Pulse so closely matched our immediate and strategic list of requirements that it felt as if we had designed it ourselves," Gordon added. By February 2013, Barrow's team had the go-ahead from the school board to move ahead with Tyler Pulse.

Implementation was staged to coincide with the academic calendar year. In late spring they convened a group of stakeholders from the district support teams to evaluate Pulse's data and benchmarking standards. Did Tyler Pulse's risk indicators and other criteria correlate with Barrow's existing standards? They needed to be certain that the change would not skew their metrics. After 4-6 weeks of review they were confident that they could proceed with only a few minor adjustments.

Next, they scheduled a three-day training session in September for principals, assistant principals, counselors and teachers who were most vested in data-driven decision making. These high-end users moved quickly through the basic training and then on to envision future uses, "such as providing data required by various educational and research grants, or by establishing friendly academic competitions across the district," Gordon explained. Barrow plans to continue its staged training as resources allow until a majority of its 1,500+ staff and teachers are able to access the system themselves.

Results

With hundreds of built-in models for standard assessments, benchmark testing, disciplinary and attendance tracking, Tyler Pulse delivered immediate results. "The pre-built report models easily convert seemingly incomprehensible data into easily understandable information," Gordon notes. "They are so well designed that it only takes a few minutes to demonstrate how this tool will make the educators' daily professional lives easier." Its dynamic charts and graphs are easily understood and can be drilled into for supporting data. Suddenly, users had access to data that could make an immediate difference in their classrooms. Gordon added, "We measure our return on investment in terms of student performance. At Barrow, Tyler Pulse truly helps us track and measure our students' performance."

Gordon continues, "We are seeing gains in student performance by identifying trends in absenteeism that were previously hidden. For example, tracking the impact of influenza across all grade levels, observing patterns in discipline referrals, or identifying consistent achievements in high school math from students graduating from a specific group of middle school teachers, used to be tasks that took so much effort they were simply not done. Doing them makes a difference."

Tyler Pulse's quick results have created a ripple effect throughout the district. "The quality of the tool has provided confidence for stakeholders in making data-driven decisions concerning our most valuable asset, our students. This climate is on the rise, as is the impact of professional learning and development sessions, when highly accurate and up-to-date information takes the place of best guesses and personal bias," Gordon concluded. "Tyler Pulse allows us to stop working around software so we can concentrate on working with information. The results speak for themselves."