



Harmony Public Schools

CASE STUDY

Case Study: Harmony Public Schools

Harmony Public Schools is a network of Pre-K-12 college-preparatory charter schools in Texas. With a focus on project-based learning in science, technology, engineering and math, they prepare students for college and careers. Since its founding in 2000, Harmony has grown to include six regions in the major metropolitan areas of Texas. Demand for Harmony schools is so high that eager students sign up on waiting lists, hoping to win a spot through the annual enrollment lottery.

The Challenge:

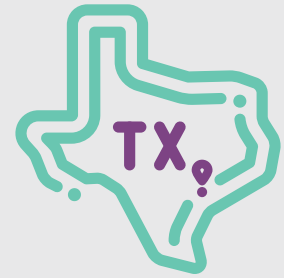
Farjana Yasmin, Curriculum Director for Biology, My Learning Plan Support Specialist and Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) Grant Manager, and Carnita Thomas, Director of Mentorship and Curriculum Director for Art, Music and PE, teamed up to support teachers and administrators at all 56 Harmony campuses. They grappled with the challenge of overseeing the professional learning and evaluation of almost 2,400 teachers spread across the state of Texas.

"You have this big chunk of data and you have to do something with it. It was overwhelming. That was our challenge."

— Farjana Yasmin, Curriculum Director

Harmony had a centralized program to track professional development activities, but it lacked features like comprehensive reporting, surveys, alignment and tools for differentiating professional learning. Attendance records were collected without enough data to evaluate the effectiveness of instruction. Teacher evaluations were managed through a separate platform, so it was a challenge for the central office to make sense of it all.

When HPS received a large grant through the U.S. Department of Education's TIF, they used the funds to launch the Harmony Supporting Top Educators Program. To improve the effectiveness of HPS educators, the curriculum team focused on deepening and differentiating professional development for teachers and administrators. They would reward teaching and leading with financial incentives. Meeting those goals meant Harmony had to find a single platform that could manage both evaluation and professional learning under one umbrella.



District Background

LOCATION: Houston, TX

PreK-12 ENROLLMENT: 35,000

FACILITIES: 56

DEMOGRAPHICS:

Caucasian/White: 21.3%

Hispanic: 49.3%

African American/Black: 16.1%

Asian: 11.1%

Multi-racial: 1.8%



Solutions Used

Frontline Professional Growth

- Employee Evaluation Management
- Professional Learning Management

Frontline Absence & Time

- Absence Management

The Solution:

Now it's a different story. Harmony tracks all observations and evaluations using Frontline. Professional learning is aligned to Danielson's Framework. Harmony's Instructional Playbook includes Teach Like a Champion strategies and High Impact Instructional Strategies to make sure teachers receive differentiated professional development opportunities based on their evaluation scores. As incentives, teachers can earn bonuses for two full observations with an average score of 2.0 and stipends for delivering PD. Principals earn bonuses for observing all teachers at least once a year.

All professional learning opportunities, including site-based and online learning, are available in one catalog. The central office, district offices and campuses now have the ability to evaluate participant feedback and make adjustments to offerings accordingly. Using heat maps, the curriculum team reviews each component of teacher evaluations. Based on that data, they can customize professional development opportunities throughout the entire Harmony network of schools.

What really helped was learning how to manipulate data to find answers to their questions. For example, Farjana wanted to make sure that campuses met the requirements for Harmony's Performance-Based Compensation System by ensuring that all teachers had two completed observations each year. She formulated the Frontline data to create a report showing precise clusters of teacher evaluation results, separating data by district, campus and teachers' scores.

Other reports show how many observations have been completed and which ones are still in progress. Combining the score report with the completed observations report helps ferret out glitches. If an administrator inadvertently marks a form as complete without entering scores, the errors are quickly identified and corrected. That attention to detail gives the Harmony curriculum leaders confidence that their completion reports will be accurate at the end of each school year.

With Frontline, the team can find answers to just about any question about their data. Observation data can be sorted by teacher names, scores and completion dates. They can see

whether all teachers have had at least two observations, check their rubric scores and identify teachers who still need to be observed.

The Results:

"You have to know the data you want out of it. Otherwise, it's like walking into a big-box warehouse store with no clue what you're going in to get. You could end up everywhere and buy a little bit of everything."

— Carnita Thomas, Director of Mentorship and Curriculum
Director for Art, Music and PE

A STRONG MENTORING PROGRAM PAVES THE WAY FOR SUCCESS

Because it is so important for beginning teachers to have solid support and coaching, mentors work with all new teachers, whether they're first-year teachers or just new to Harmony. Mentors report their progress through Frontline. Using Mentoring Program Activity forms, both mentors and mentees provide feedback to the central office about activities taking place between them.

Harmony uses Mentoring PLC Reflection Forms to capture information about professional development materials sent out to the campuses several times a year. Those materials are created specifically for mentors to build their skills as teacher leaders.

Reflection forms provide feedback to the curriculum department about how effective the content is and whether the mentors are using the material to support the teachers they work with. Mentees use them to reflect on how the professional learning is helping them develop skills in classroom management and effective instructional strategies.

With so many campuses to monitor across the state, the documentation in Frontline provides valuable information. To better serve Harmony teachers, Carnita uses both the quantitative and qualitative data that Frontline collects. Survey results and narrative responses show when professional development activities are effective and how they could be improved in the future. The feedback is useful for the central office as well as for campus principals.

MEASURING HOW TEACHERS TEACH

Frontline Professional Growth has been a valuable tool for Harmony's teacher incentive program. Funded by a federal TIF grant, bonuses are paid to teachers who deliver professional development activities or lead professional learning communities. Frontline reports provide the documentation required by the TIF grant for bonus payouts when teacher leaders facilitate professional development.

Classroom teachers are eligible to earn bonuses after two observations are completed by their principals with scores at or above benchmark. If scores don't meet expectations, teacher observation data is analyzed to determine areas of improvement needed. Based on those teacher evaluation results, school administrators recommend courses aligned to the HPS evaluation tool.

Campuses use Learning Loops that allow school leaders to customize and address areas of improvement and to support the unique needs of every teacher. HPS provides professional learning opportunities from multiple sources including Teach Like a Champion, Jim Knight's High-Impact Instruction and HPS-developed micro-credentials. Having so many options makes it easy for teachers to enroll in assigned courses along with any other offerings of interest to them.

Courses are modeled on best practices and designed to be quick and efficient. Video links, additional reading and suggestions about how to use the strategies in the classroom are embedded in each course document. After teachers complete online courses, they submit reflection forms through Frontline to document how they implemented new strategies. They also plan next steps and enroll in additional courses.

Without a doubt, having such a wide range of resources and the right tools to track and measure professional learning has a positive impact on teacher effectiveness and student learning in Harmony schools.

DATA DRIVES IMPROVEMENT

Although many new teachers leave the profession within their first few years, there has definitely been a recent uptick in teacher retention at Harmony schools. Strong support from

the curriculum department, including coaching, mentoring and a wide range of professional development opportunities, have played a large role.

Frontline provides a selection of different reports to track progress and evaluate programs. Since they've become so familiar with creating customized reports, Farjana and Carnita can quickly make adjustments to help the central office and site-based users access any data they need.

Using Frontline has made the evaluation process easier from the teachers' perspectives too. They use feedback from mentors, coaches and principals to improve their skills in the classroom. Because their progress over time is documented in Frontline, administrators recognize the efforts teachers have made to complete courses and improve skills.

BETTER TEACHING LEADS TO BETTER LEARNING

"We know that Frontline is impacting students because we are seeing the data. We can pull heat maps showing walkthroughs and observations. Because we are collecting data points for core teachers, we can actually compare whether classroom discussions have increased over the years or not. If the teachers are getting higher scores, that means there's an increase in student participation in the classroom."

— Farjana Yasmin

When you consider how Frontline Professional Growth has impacted student learning, clearly, it's through the growth and professional development of the teachers. It's gratifying to know that teachers are developing new skills and feeling supported. There is visible evidence when administrators walk through classrooms that teachers are using the strategies they've learned to improve instruction.

EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT OVERSIGHT

"What makes Frontline really powerful for us is being able to manage all six districts – 56 campuses – from the central office."

— Farjana Yasmin

Frontline saves time and increases productivity because it takes away the paperwork. Users can run reports on all the districts statewide or narrow the data to a single cluster in a particular school with the click of a button.

That work would take hours without the software. Site administrators can request any kind of reports they need, from feedback data on professional development activities to evaluation results on teachers. For the mentoring piece, it helps to be able to pull a report for a specific district's cluster just by aggregating the data.

With Frontline, district leaders keep their fingers on the pulse of all 56 schools. They can monitor professional learning, instructional coaches and teacher observations without having to leave the office. Nobody has to collect papers or scan them – they're already in the system. And they can compare data over time – it's all there.

STELLAR CUSTOMER CARE AND COLLABORATION

"I think the collaboration with Frontline is probably one of the most beneficial parts of using it. They hear our questions and concerns and understand our needs. They always help us find a way to get what we need done. That means we get the most out of the product."

— Carnita Thomas

Farjana and Carnita have developed a strong collaborative relationship with their Frontline client success representative. When they have a question or need assistance with a report, help is just a phone call away. Thanks to the support they've received, both of them have become skilled in creating customized reports that provide information about anything they want to know.

The collaboration flows both ways. Frontline uses resources Harmony created as examples of best practices, providing them to other schools and districts as training materials. It's no surprise that the work the Evaluation and Growth Team does with Frontline solutions has made a tremendous difference in the quality of instruction at Harmony schools.

About Frontline Education

Frontline Education is the leading provider of school administration software, empowering strategic K-12 leaders with the right tools, data and insights to proactively manage human capital, business operations and special education.

Educational organizations representing over 80,000 schools and millions of educators, administrators and support personnel have partnered with Frontline Education in their efforts to develop the next generation of learners. Frontline is dedicated to driving engagement across K-12 school

systems and supporting the continuous improvement of employee effectiveness and efficiency with solutions for proactive recruiting and hiring, absence and time, professional growth, student information systems, special education and interventions, payroll, benefits and financial management.

Frontline Education corporate headquarters are in Malvern, Pennsylvania, with offices in Andover, Massachusetts; Rockville Centre, New York; and Austin, Texas.