In 2015-16, St. Louis Public Schools (SLPS) launched a pilot of the Kickboard school culture system in five elementary schools. The schools saw dramatic reductions in suspensions and discipline referrals, and increases in positive behaviors. Thanks to the success of the pilot, SLPS expanded the use of Kickboard to 20 additional schools during the 2016-17 school year.

“To maximize the learning experience for every child, it’s essential to focus on academic rigor, and school climate and culture,” said David Hardy, deputy superintendent of academics for SLPS.

This is critically important because of what we’re seeing in St. Louis and in schools across the country. At the national level, the data show that black students are suspended and expelled at a rate three times greater than white students. The data also show that 70 percent of students who are involved in school-related arrests or referred to law enforcement are black or Hispanic.
“In St. Louis Public Schools, the majority of our students are African-American and are living below the poverty line. When we asked parents about our schools, they said their biggest concerns were the learning environment and academic rigor. They said they want to feel confident that their children are getting a high-quality education, and that they feel safe physically, emotionally and socially,” he explained.

“Yet, when we began reviewing our policies related to student discipline, we realized that some were very punitive. We saw that our schools often assigned severe consequences for minor misbehaviors, instead of creating environments where students could learn from their mistakes. When we looked at our in-school and out-of-school suspension rates, we realized they were much higher than they needed to be. We knew we needed to intervene to find a way to support our schools in the shift to create a more positive culture and a stronger foundation for academic success.”

Solution

**After careful review, SLPS decided to pilot the Kickboard school culture system,** which includes a highly configurable, web-based platform and collaborative, research-based professional development.

With Kickboard, educators can improve school culture through positive behavior reinforcement, intervention management, classroom management, and district-wide school culture analysis. This unique combination of technology and personalized leadership coaching allows schools and districts to directly impact student achievement, attendance, discipline, and more.
SLPS selected five elementary schools to pilot Kickboard during the 2015-16 school year.

One of the schools, Lyon Academy at Blow Elementary, had begun using Kickboard in fall 2014 and was already seeing significant reductions in in-school and out-of-school suspensions.

The others — Carver Elementary, Farragut Elementary, Patrick Henry Downtown Academy, and Sigel Elementary — launched Kickboard in fall 2015. The schools’ goals were to help teachers and administrators establish consistent behavior expectations; collect, analyze and act on real-time behavior data; address behavior issues; conduct responsive interventions; and create a more proactive, positive learning environment.

In addition, all five schools participated in Kickboard’s Leadership Coaching program throughout the year.

The tightly-aligned technology, training, and coaching are designed to support school leadership teams in developing the action plans, skills and best practices needed to create high-performing schools.

“We believe that climate and culture are paramount to increasing student achievement,” said Dr. Nicole Conaway, SLPS’s coordinator for school climate and culture. “As educators, we often spend a lot of time focusing on academics and instructional practices, but the reality is that until we have a safe environment, those things aren’t going to make much of a difference. Our goal is to ensure that our schools are safe and caring places where our students can thrive.”

Setting behavior expectations and streamlining data management

With Kickboard, educational leaders can set school- and district-wide behavior expectations to help teachers keep students on task. With just a tap, teachers can easily record and reinforce the behaviors that make up the school’s ideal culture — without adding extra work to their day.

“From the beginning, we let our school leaders and teachers know that this is not just a ‘flavor of the month’ program,” said Hardy. “It’s simply taking a lot of what they’re already doing and making these processes much faster and easier.”
Using data to identify and address needs

In SLPS, teachers use Kickboard to record student behavior and character strengths as they narrate and praise examples of positive behaviors throughout the school day. With this real-time data, teachers and school leaders can build more positive relationships with students, intervene at the right time and place, and get even the most at-risk students back on track.

“We’re very data-driven in our district,” said Conaway. “Before Kickboard, some schools were using a communication app for the classroom to try to create a positive culture. The problem was that this app only allowed us to look at individual classrooms; we couldn’t see the interconnectedness within the school. With Kickboard, we can take a holistic look at the school and district levels, and then drill down to see what’s happening with specific grade levels or classrooms or individual students. It gives us the ability reflect on our practices and have deeper conversations about what’s going on with our students and how that relates to their academic performance.”

With Kickboard’s student reports, for example, educators can get an entire snapshot of a student’s behavior and contribution to the school culture over any period of time.

“Kickboard allows us to dive deeper to see what’s behind the numbers, so we can intervene before small problems become large. Recently at one of our schools, I had a chance to speak to a young man who had just won a medal for his behavior. Three months ago, he was the student who misbehaved the most in class. Seeing the high ratio of negative to positive behaviors, his teacher began to carefully shift the focus from what he was doing wrong to what he was doing right in order to strengthen the relationship and motivate him to make better choices. Now he’s a leader who’s being honored for his positive behaviors — and he’s beaming with pride. When students can see what they’re doing right, they take pride in their growth and they want to continue growing,” said Hardy. “Our use of school culture data is changing the way we’re supporting our students and teachers to be successful. With this data, we can now get down to a granular level to create an environment where each student feels empowered to make good choices.”

“This approach is also teaching students to set their own behavior goals and to think carefully about the action steps needed to achieve those goals,” said Conaway. “It’s helping them take more responsibility for their actions and their role in creating a positive culture.”
In addition, classroom, school and multi-school dashboards allow teachers and administrators to see detailed analyses of their culture data so they can make impactful decisions and see how their efforts are paying off over time.

“Before we began working with Kickboard, we couldn’t pinpoint some of the key challenges our schools faced. With Kickboard, we were able to identify these missing data points to show our schools where they were struggling. We were able to help them measure the extent to which students were making positive choices, and evaluate the quality of teachers’ relationships with their students. Kickboard also supported our schools in creating practical, data-driven action plans to transform their cultures in a measurable way,” said Hardy. “Together, the Kickboard software and leadership coaching are pushing our schools to think differently about what makes students and teachers successful, how they can create stronger cultures, and how they can sustain this improvement over time.”

“During the 2015-16 school year, we saw a dramatic decrease in the number of students who received office referrals or suspensions, due in large part to our partnership with Kickboard,” said Hardy.

At Carver Elementary, the number of office referrals dropped from 250 per week to only 35 per week — an 86 percent decrease. Farragut Elementary recorded an 84 percent decline in recess detentions, and a 64 percent drop in suspensions. Lyon Academy saw a 79 percent decrease in referrals to the school’s reflection room. At Patrick Henry Downtown Academy, the number of suspensions fell from 48 in 2015 to only seven in 2016.
In addition, Kickboard enables school leaders to accurately measure the impact of positive culture programs, such as Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS). For example, in 2015-16, Patrick Henry Downtown Academy recorded a 149 percent increase in the number of occurrences of “active learning” taking place in the classroom.

“With Kickboard, we have much greater insight into how to effectively use school culture data to improve student outcomes.

Instead of looking only at suspension rates and attendance, we’re now looking at data such as the ratio of positive to negative behaviors in the classroom or in a school. Having that data available at our fingertips is helping us to drive conversations that are different than the past. It’s aligning our thinking around the culture and the behaviors we want to see in our classrooms and schools. It’s allowing us to look at each child and each classroom in a holistic way, so we can provide targeted support to meet the needs of our students, teachers, leaders and schools. Our students and staff are truly invested in our partnership with Kickboard and in the results we’re achieving.”

Starting the school year ready for success

Based on the results of the pilot, SLPS kicked off the 2016-17 school year by expanding the use of Kickboard to 20 additional schools. “We’ve had a great start to the school year. Unlike previous years, there have been no suspensions or major discipline infractions to date. Our school leaders have been very dedicated in their efforts to prepare for this shift in their culture and build capacity among their staff to ensure they’re successful,” said Hardy. “By setting consistent behavior expectations and then having teachers model, narrate and praise those behaviors, we’re being more intentional about fostering stronger relationships with our students. Further, when we sit down to discuss or create action plans around school culture, we now have a robust data set to see how our efforts are working, and where we need to focus our attention and resources.”

SLPS is also making policy changes to support stronger school cultures district-wide. For example, children in preschool through second grade will no longer receive out-of-school suspensions for acting out, but instead will learn about classroom expectations and receive counseling.

“When students are suspended, they lose valuable class time. This can negatively impact their learning, including their ability to be reading on grade level by the third grade. We’re working very hard to ensure that our code of conduct and our interventions are aligned to support our students,” said Hardy. “With Kickboard, we’ve made great strides in creating a shared vision and expectations for what’s possible for our schools. We’re building an understanding of who our students are as individuals, which cannot be undervalued. This partnership and the use of school culture data are key drivers in changing the way we’re supporting our students to be successful.”
Lyons Academy at Blow Elementary
How We Went From 200 Suspensions to Just 3

Behavior was a big issue at Lyons Academy at Blow Elementary, according to Wesley Owings, dean of students. During his first year there, the preK–8 magnet school had over 200 suspensions — and one of the highest percentages of out-of-school suspensions in SLPS. By the 2014-15 school year, the school had only 3 out-of-school suspensions.

How did they go from 200 suspensions to just 3? First, the school implemented Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS). Then, in 2014, it began using Kickboard to help teachers move from punishing negative behaviors to recognizing positive behaviors.

BEST PRACTICE 1
Assign and track scholar dollars for positive behaviors.

To promote positive behaviors and feedback, the school leadership team implemented a paycheck-based reward system in Kickboard by assigning a dollar value to each positive behavior. The team then developed a consequence hierarchy to identify which actions would be triggered by specific negative behaviors in Kickboard.

“While we use Kickboard to track all behaviors, our focus is on the positive,” said Owings. “This not only supports our PBIS model, but it’s changed the way teachers interact with students. As a result, we’ve transformed our school culture from being negative to being positive.”

With just one click, teachers can record positive behaviors and have Kickboard automatically assign scholar dollars to students for those behaviors. They can then easily track each student’s “Liger Bucks” throughout the week. At the end of each week, students receive a “paycheck,” which they can use in the school store or for incentives such as dress-down days or school dances.
BEST PRACTICE 2

Track the positivity ratio.

In addition, before teachers can enter a negative behavior in the Kickboard system, they're expected to recognize at least three positive behaviors. This helps them make sure their focus is on the positive.

The school’s efforts are having an impact on in-school suspensions as well. During the 2015-16 school year, referrals to the school’s Reflection Room decreased by 79 percent.

“Since we began using Kickboard, we’ve seen a huge transformation in our school culture,” said Owings. “Students are happier, teachers are happier and we have a lot fewer discipline infractions. We’ve also drastically reduced the number of students being sent to our Reflection Room. It’s the positive reinforcement. Before, students were scared of getting in trouble for doing the wrong thing. Now, students and staff are focused on the right thing — recognizing, rewarding, and repeating those positive behaviors. That’s a big shift and it’s made a big difference in our school.”
Patrick Henry Downtown Academy struggled with attendance issues. To make matters worse, students who were tardy were often marked as absent. To improve the culture and create a safe, happy school that students would want to attend, Principal Colby Heckendorn implemented Kickboard in fall 2015. Teachers and school leaders use Kickboard to track culture and attendance data, and award scholar dollars to students for making good choices.

With Kickboard, the minute students show up for breakfast or class, teachers can mark their attendance on their iPads. Each day, students receive $10 in Kickboard for attending school and $10 for being in uniform. They can also earn scholar dollars for positive behaviors.

“Kickboard is great because it’s one platform that tracks everything from attendance to culture data,” Heckendorn said. “It’s helpful when everything is on the same system and you don’t have to go back and forth to get the information that you need.”

**BEST PRACTICE 1**

**Identify which students are absent for phone calls home.**

The school has a four-person attendance team that makes phone calls home when students are absent. With Kickboard, the team can instantly see who’s present and who’s not. During each call, they can also make notes in Kickboard about whom they speak with and the details of the call, if needed. “The calls are very effective because they’re about accountability but with a positive mindset,” said Heckendorn.
BEST PRACTICE 2
Flag consecutive absences for phone calls or home visits.

Within Kickboard’s configurable framework, schools can also set “triggers” to instantly alert educators to potential problems. If a student is absent two days in a row, a flag appears next to the student’s name. This signals the attendance team that additional intervention may be required, such as a home visit.

PATRICK HENRY DOWNTOWN ACADEMY
Percentage of students at school at least 90% of the time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCHOOL YEAR</th>
<th>% OF STUDENTS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2013-14</td>
<td>81.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2014-15</td>
<td>83.1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>FALL 2015</td>
<td>91.9%</td>
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“At a turnaround school like ours, school culture and attendance have to be in place before you can see academic gains,” said Heckendorn.”

When students are here on time, we preserve that instructional time. We’re excited because more students are now coming to school, which sets them up for more learning to take place. It’s great to see that so now we can start to move past attendance and focus on improving student achievement.”
To create a more positive culture and help teachers make the most of their instructional time, Carver Elementary began using Kickboard in fall 2015.

With just a tap, teachers can track and reinforce the behaviors that make up the school’s ideal culture, and automatically keep track of each student’s scholar dollars for positive behaviors. Students work toward weekly scholar dollar goals at each grade level. If they reach the goal, they can attend an hour-long celebration at the end of the week on “College Friday.”
BEST PRACTICE 1

Take a strategic approach to weekly celebrations.

“Before, teachers did their own Friday celebrations in their classrooms, so they weren’t aligned to our school focus. A few teacher leaders came to me and said that they wanted to take a more strategic approach, so we created the ‘Friday Celebration Major,’” said Westlund.

As a result, scholars can now choose a “major” each quarter from one of several courses offered by the school, including journalism, engineering, culinary arts, fine arts, chess, “Gentlemen 101,” theater, and dance, among others.

“Our goal is that scholars get to choose something they want to study, just like in college. When they can choose, they’re more engaged and invested in what they’re learning. It also helps them feel like they have more ownership over their scholar dollars because the Friday Celebration Major is so meaningful to them,” she said.

CARVER ELEMENTARY

Average number of office referrals per week

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2015-16</th>
<th># OF REFERRALS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1ST QUARTER</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4TH QUARTER</td>
<td>35</td>
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By consistently reinforcing positive behaviors and making rewards meaningful to students, **Carver Elementary saw the average number of office referrals drop by 86 percent** from the first quarter to the fourth quarter of the 2015-16 school year.