



# Data-informed Decisions with Campus-level Dashboards

How Mercedes ISD empowers district and campus leadership with easily accessible student data.

Mona Guerra is a Data Fellow at Mercedes Independent School District in Texas, about 10 minutes north of the Mexican border. The student body is 98.45% Hispanic, nearly a third of students are emergent bilingual, and 92% are economically disadvantaged.

With such a wide variety of needs, the district needs to be strategic with resources to provide the instruction that's needed. This means ensuring they have enough staff to provide Spanish-only instruction for students who need it as well as paying attention to families of need and how they can be supported. ***"A lot of that is identifying the kids, identifying their families, and getting interventions started and implemented before problems grow,"*** said Mona.

Mona was hired with grant funds to analyze data for the district's Resilient School Support Program (RSSP) with a focus on K-2 literacy, but in a small- to medium-sized district like Mercedes ISD, people often wear multiple hats. As Mona spoke with leaders across the district, she realized the need for data analysis extended beyond literacy, and her scope expanded to help with "pretty much all data for the district."

## "Excel is not everyone's favorite thing."

Before Mona arrived, data analysis often fell to principals and other leaders — people who are pulled in many different directions. The data itself resides in 10-20 different places: their student information system, other software systems, state, local, and national testing systems, and more. That often meant chasing down reports from different departments. ***"If you're a principal and you want to find a report and try to make some connections, you're going to a bunch of different people who have stuff to do during the day,"***

Compiling multiple datasets is a specialized skill not everyone has, so decisions were often made based on incomplete information. When Mona started at the district, she would manually export data from various systems, cobble spreadsheets together, and build her own pivot tables, tasks that busy principals don't have time for.

Mona would often hear administrators talk about how they wished they had access to certain kinds of data to make programming decisions. With the blessing of the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum & Instruction, she began searching for a tool that would let her bring datasets together and make information accessible to users across the district.

Several factors were non-negotiable: cost-effectiveness, usefulness in decision-making, user-friendliness, and usability by multiple users including principals and other decision-makers in each school. ***"We wanted to have as many people use this as possible, because there was a need for everyone at the campus to know their kiddos. You have got to know your kids' strengths. You need to know their needs. You need to know who they are."***

They chose Frontline's Student Analytics Lab.



### Mercedes ISD at a Glance:

**LOCATION:** Mercedes, Texas

**K-12 ENROLLMENT:** 4,500

**SCHOOLS:** 9

### Solutions Used:

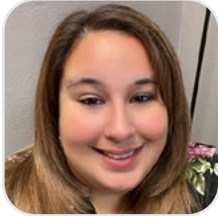
Student Analytics Lab

### Learn more about Frontline Student Analytics:



## Faster Access to Data

Student Analytics Lab aggregates student data from many different sources. Rather than logging into ten different systems to pull data together for reports, she can find it all in one place. *"I'm able to put stuff together a whole lot quicker," she said. "What's really great about this system is I can just go to one place, build out what I want, export it, make a graph, and then call it a day."*

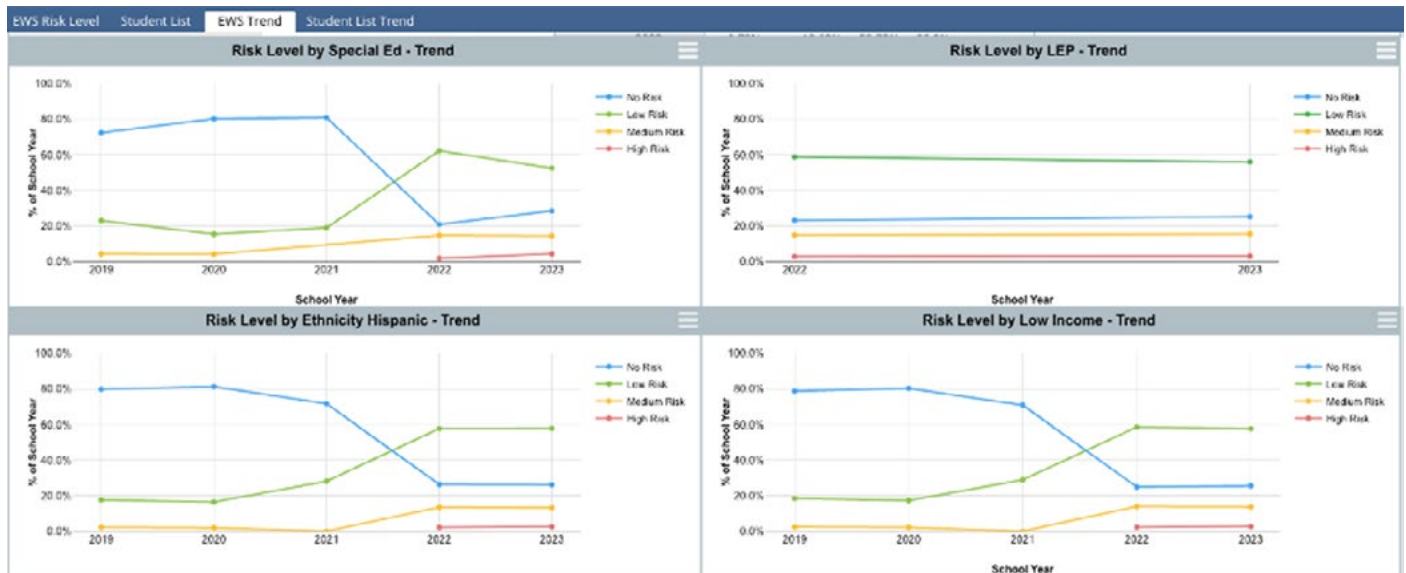


*"The turnaround time is way faster. If you're in a leadership position, you need that information now so you can make that decision as opposed to tomorrow when you've got a whole new set of problems to deal with."*

– Mona Guerra, Data Fellow

## Telling the Story Visually

One thing Mona appreciates about Student Analytics Lab is the ability to quickly generate visuals to help her tell the story. *"The majority of the people would prefer a nice, pretty graph. That's been very helpful for a principal. They can take the graph from there and put it in a PowerPoint and then show it to their teachers. If they're presenting to the school board, it's very drag-and-drop. A lot of the district-level people have really enjoyed the fact that they don't have to reinvent the wheel because it's already there, which saves them time and allows them to do other things."*



## Self-Service Access for Campus Users

Mona built a dashboard that would bring all the student data into one place so teachers and principals could use it to make actionable decisions in real-time. *“The idea is, as the kiddo moves from grade level to grade level, the teachers will have this source of data that they can go back to and review and utilize.”*

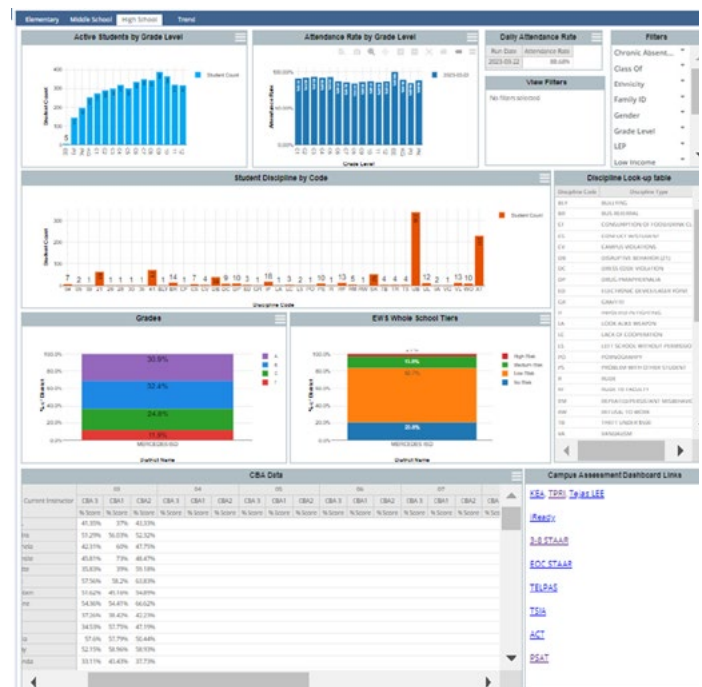
Mona said that Frontline lets her leave principals with tools to use that will remain even if she's no longer at the district. *“Because I'm grant funded, I'm only here for a certain amount of time, so I've got to leave them with some capacity, and develop the capacity in them to be able to look at their data, to dive deeper if they need to.”*

Mona said they have already begun to see administrators make programmatic decisions based on the data they now have access to.

*“We are utilizing Frontline Student Analytics and it has really revamped the way that we look at and utilize data for our school leaders to help make quick, informed decisions that have really helped impact our student growth.”*

— Mona Guerra

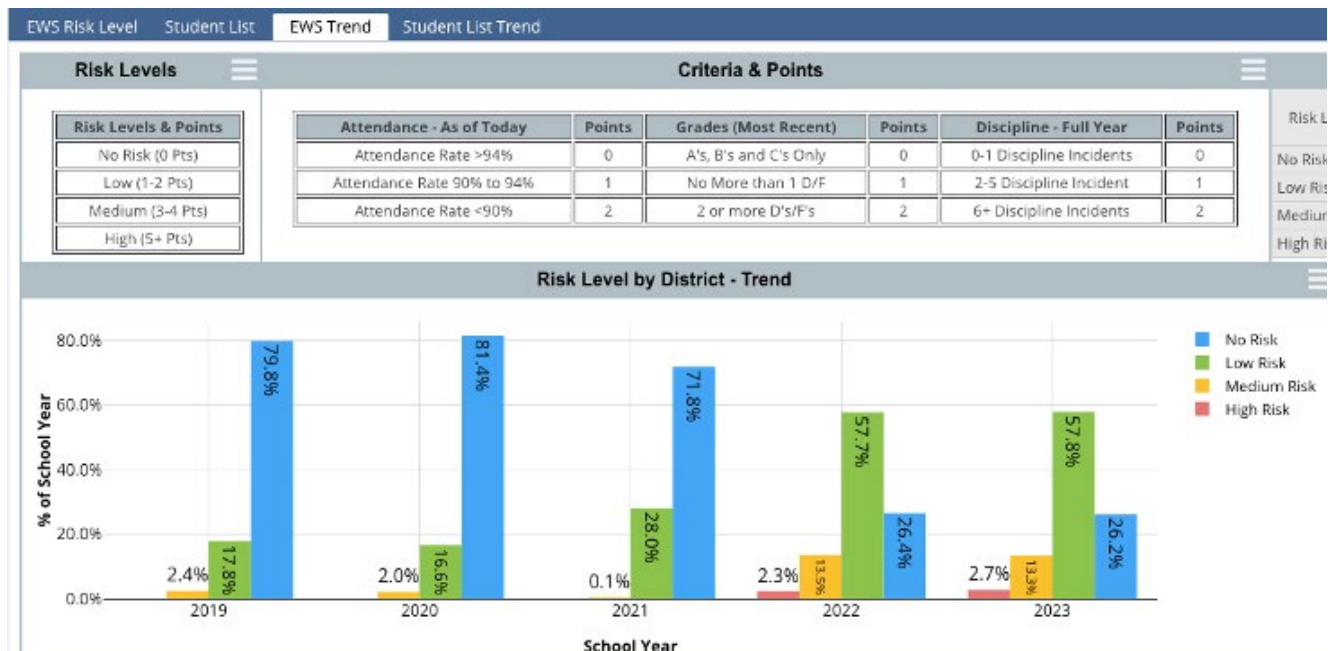
Principals appreciate having easy access to the data they need. If the superintendent asks about building enrollment, they don't have to ask the attendance clerk to pull data out of the SIS, they can simply log into their dashboard. *“You take all of the data and you put it in one place, which saves you time and it allows you to make decisions more efficiently and more accurately because you've got good, accurate data all in one spot.”*



# Dashboards

Each principal has access to a campus snapshot dashboard that shows enrollment numbers at each grade level, segmented by any student subpopulation they wish to see. They can also access attendance for the previous day by period, course grades, assessments, and discipline records. *“They have all the discipline incidents and where they happened. So as a principal, you can say, ‘Shoot, this hallway is really a hotspot, maybe let’s move some people.’”*

One dashboard allows them to look at student grades, discipline, and attendance, and see students at the family level to see if there are resources that they can offer to engage those students. *“We’re able to filter by family and say, ‘Is this family having an attendance issue? Is there a discipline issue?’ And then at the district level or campus level, we can have a conversation about whether something is happening outside of school that’s affecting school.”*





## An Early Warning System

Mona said that being able to look at that data around discipline, attendance, and grades enabled them to create an early warning system to help them provide the support and resources students need. *“The thing that we’re probably most proud of and that our principals have utilized a lot is our early warning system,”* Mona said, noting that Mercedes ISD uses a restorative justice model and principals can use the system to identify at-risk students and help discern how to address issues.

*“Attendance has been an issue for quite a few years now. Getting those kiddos and having those conversations and getting interventions put in place before the kids are chronically absent has made a huge difference.”*

*“That’s probably been the most powerful thing: it’s more proactive and less reactionary.”*

— Mona Guerra



## Aggregate Data and Individual Data

If someone needs district-level or school-level data such as how many kids need intervention, that aggregate data is easy to access. *“But I think the powerful thing, and what our principals have really loved, is being able to say, ‘I need this student group. And look, this list is already made for me. I just have to export it to Excel.’”*

Principals can also drill into the data all the way down to the individual level. *“The fact that they can go from a really big view to saying, ‘I just want to know, who are my kiddos that are absent? Who are my kids that are getting into trouble? Where are they always getting into trouble? Why?’”*

*And that’s been the big thing: it allows them to ask why. When we ask why, then we start to really think about things, and say, ‘These are the changes we’re going to make.’ That’s how they can make those actionable decisions.”*

*“We really love this program. This program helps us do our jobs better. And because it takes the time of getting all the data, putting it once place, and visualizing it, we’re able to spend that time impacting kids’ lives, which is what we’re all here for. So, it’s been amazing.”*

— Mona Guerra



## About Frontline Education

**Frontline Education** is a leading provider of school administration software, connecting solutions for student and special programs, business operations and human capital management with powerful analytics to empower educators. Frontline partners with school systems to deliver tools, data and insights that support greater efficiency and productivity, enabling school leaders to spend more time and resources executing strategies that drive educator effectiveness, student success and district excellence.

Frontline's broad portfolio includes solutions for proactive recruiting and hiring, absence and time management, professional growth, student information systems, special education, special programs, Medicaid reimbursement, school health management, inventory control and asset management, payroll, benefits and financial management, and analytics solutions that help district leaders tap into their data to make more informed decisions for the benefit of their students and communities. Over 10,000 clients representing millions of educators, administrators and support personnel have partnered with Frontline Education in their efforts to develop the next generation of learners.