Demopolis High School

Demopolis High School (DHS) is the sole high school in the Demopolis City Schools district in Alabama. DHS created a tracker using Google Sheets to monitor student progress and facilitate targeted interventions, demonstrating how a small, rural school can build student success systems with foundational tools and internal capacity.

Location	Alabama
Setting	Rural
Students Served	~1,800, including about 575 at DHS
Schools	4 schools, including 1 high school
Key Demographics	50% Black, 42% White, 6% Hispanic/Latinx 50% qualify for free or reduced price lunch
Tech Infrastructure	Foundational: Leverages existing basic tools and standard technical capacity
Implementation	In-House: Built internally, limited external support
Scalability	School-level: Single-school or small-scale solution

Student Success Vision

The DHS vision is anchored in the belief that all students deserve consistent and personalized support to ensure they remain on track for graduation and post-secondary success. They emphasize an inclusive approach to student success, involving all faculty and staff in grade-level teams that include teachers, counselors, administrators, career coaches, and support staff.

DHS systematically identifies students in need of support based on the ABC indicators (Attendance, Behavior, and Course performance), and prioritizes meaningful connections between students and caring adults through long-term mentoring for identified students. Mentors support students beyond academics, noticing what is going on with individual students to deeply understand what they need and connect them to key resources and services.

Watch a video to learn more about DHS' Student Success Teams.

Pain Points

Before implementing their DLI, DHS experienced challenges with **Data Access** and **Cost Barriers.**

Data Access: There was no centralized location for staff from a range of roles to view relevant student data in a timely manner to take action.

- Mentors faced significant challenges accessing real-time data for students who weren't enrolled in their courses. Staff had to contact administrators or other teachers to gather information about students' academic performance, attendance, and behavior issues. This created delays in intervention and made it difficult for mentors to have informed conversations with their mentees.

Cost Barriers: DHS did not have sustainable access to premium features of PowerSchool that would have supported more comprehensive student tracking.

- As in many districts, procurement decisions at DHS occur at the district level, leaving school-level staff with minimal insight or influence regarding platform investments. Additionally, since PowerSchool SIS is provided by the state to all Alabama districts, neither the district nor individual schools have control over the core functionality or available features. This disconnect can create situations where those closest to student needs have insufficient input into technology purchasing decisions.

- As a smaller district, Demopolis must make difficult financial choices, especially in the current economic climate. The district must balance competing priorities across multiple schools with limited resources. As DHS is the only high school in the district, some of their specific needs are not relevant to the district's other schools.

District-Led Innovation

To address these challenges, Demopolis High School developed a custom Google Sheets-based student tracking system that monitors student success indicators over the four-year high school journey. Administrators regularly pull data manually from PowerSchool SIS into the tracker. Key features and functionality of the system include:

- **Comprehensive Student Tracking**: Each grade-level team maintains a spreadsheet that monitors every student's attendance, behavior, and course performance every nine weeks.

- **Risk Classification System**: Students are categorized as "On Track," "Monitor," "Moderate Risk," or "High Risk" based on their ABCs.

- **Progress Monitoring**: DHS staff are able to track changes in student status between reporting periods (e.g., "Monitor to On Track" or "Moderate to High").

- **Historical Data Retention**: Information rolls over from year to year, giving each new grade-level team insight into students' historical patterns.
- **Connectedness Tracking**: Annual observations of student involvement in extracurricular activities to identify students who may need additional connection points.

Tracker in use

Indicator Guidelines

Indicator	Moderate Need		High Need
Attendance	8-10 % absences=3 or more absences		10 % or more absences= 4 or more
Behavior	Step 4 Tiger Tiers or 1 office referral		Step 5 or more than 1 office referral
Grades	1 F		2 or more F's
Connectedness	Student is not involved in any determined extra curricular		Student is not involved in any determined extra curricular

Zoomed in on ABCs and Connectedness

Mentor	End of 2nd Nine Weeks (High, Moderate Monitor)		Attendance	Behavior	Course Work	Connectedness
[Name]	On Track ▼	Monitor to On Track				Band
	On Track ▼	No Change				Band
	On Track ▼	No Change				Band
	On Track ▼	No Change				Band
	On Track ▼	No Change				Band
	On Track ▼	No Change				Band
	Monitor ▼	No Change	28			baseball
[Name]	Moder… ▼	Monitor to Moderate	12	2	2-F's	Basketball
[Name]	On Track ▼	Monitor to On Track				Cheerleader
	On Track ▼	No Change				Cheerleader
	On Track ▼	Monitor to On Track				Football
	On Track ▼	No Change				Football
	On Track ▼	No Change				Football/Baseb
	On Track ▼	No Change				Softball
	On Track ▼	No Change				Tennis
	On Track ▼	No Change				Volleyball
	On Track ▼	No Change				Volleyball
	On Track ▼	No Change				Volleyball, Soft
	On Track ▼	No Change				Water girl
	On Track ▼	No Change			1	

Intervention Menu

The Intervention Menu is a living document that complements the tracker and is accessible to all staff. When the team identifies and successfully implements a new intervention, it can be added to the document for future reference.

Intervention Strategy	How It Works	Best for Improving…
2x10 Relationship Building	Spend two minutes for 10 consecutive school days developing a positive relationship with a student.	Behavior, SEL
Attendance Incentive Plan	Create an individualized attendance plan with the student and provide positive reinforcement when the student makes progress towards the goal(s).	Attendance
Behavior Improvement Plan	Develop an individualized success plan to address a specific behavioral issue.	Behavior
Check In Check Out (CICO)	At the beginning of each day, meet with the student to review the goals you've set together. Observe the student throughout the day, and talk about whether they were able to meet the goal at the end of the day.	Behavior
Counseling	Refer the student to one-on-one counseling services.	Behavior, SEL
Guardian Meeting	Call a meeting with the student's parents or guardians to discuss a specific concern about the student and generate potential solutions.	Attendance
Graphic Organizer	Use a diagram, chart, or outline to help students arrange information, see the relationships between ideas, and apply the information in assignments.	ELA

Impact on Practice

Structured collaboration process

- Grade-level teams meet every nine weeks for 1–1.5 hours to review the spreadsheet and discuss students' needs one by one using a structured protocol.

- Mentors and advisors use the reports to identify students needing support. Faculty and staff attending grade-level meetings are able to add their own insights into what is happening with these students based on their caring relationships.

- The Student Success Team tracks progress of identified students weekly.

Increased data literacy

- Conversations about student support are anchored in comprehensive data rather than anecdotal observations.

- Staff now have access to students' patterns over time, giving a fuller picture than viewing each semester in isolation allows.

> *"Having access to a student's historical data allows support teams to track progress and evaluate which interventions have worked—or haven't. This broader perspective gives new team members valuable insight into how to best assist the student's continued growth. Even though a student may be assigned a new mentor each year, effective support must be consistent and ongoing."*
> *—Terina Gantt, Principal, Demopolis High School*

Timely intervention cycle

- DHS staff are able to identify struggling students, including those with multiple risk factors, earlier in each grading period rather than waiting for semester failures.

- Students with persistent or severe issues are referred to the Problem-Solving Team for more intensive intervention. The indicator data systematically guides assignments to appropriate support tiers, with mentoring provided to students identified through the data and Tier II and Tier III supports assigned based on level of need.

- Staff are aligned on assigning evidence-based intervention strategies.

- Since implementing this system, student check-ins and proactive supports have increased, DHS has seen a **7% drop in chronic absenteeism** in students, **over 3% change in graduation rate**, and teachers have reported increased job satisfaction and renewed sense of purpose.

Key Insights

Critical Success Factors

- DHS partnered with the [Rural Schools Collaborative](#) for training and change management. Targeted support from experts helped generate staff buy-in for the new approach.

- Involving all staff members in grade-level teams created shared ownership of student success.

- Leaders adopted what they called a "Just Start" mentality. This willingness to begin with a manual solution, rather than waiting for the ideal system, showed the rest of the team how important it was to be data-driven.

Recommendations for Other Districts

- Focus on relationships first. Building authentic connections between students and mentors is a critical foundation for intervention.

- Design systems that allow staff to see student history across grade levels and years. This context is critical for understanding students' backgrounds and needs.

- Effective student success systems don't require sophisticated technology, particularly in a tight-knit community where people know and have access to each other. Simpler solutions may be better and more cost effective where the feedback loops are reasonably small and local and the team shares a commitment to keep every student on track.

Thank you to the following team members for their exceptional commitment to student success and willingness to share their innovative data practices:

- Kelly Gandy, Business Information Technology Program

- Terina Gantt, Principal

To explore the complete stories, implementation insights, and lessons learned from other innovative schools and districts, check out the full District-Led Innovation Showcase report.

Recommended Citation