



## **BENEFITS OF DATA-DRIVEN EDUCATION ACCORDING TO TEACHERS & EDUCATION LEADERS**

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In most cases, teachers and education professionals don't choose their career because they love data, but because they want to see children learn and succeed. However, many educators come to see how data can equip them to support learners. For example, the Data Driven Districts (DDD) programme creates an understanding of data among professionals and empowers them to help learners realise their goals.

Adopting data tools and technology requires professionals who are already busy, to incorporate a new process into their routine. While some immediately see the benefit of a new tool, others need time and perseverance. We talked to a handful of educators about their moments of realisation in interacting with the DDD programme and the dashboard. Below, read about their "lightbulb moments"—the situations when they realised DDD insights were empowering them to help learners.

### **A Principal's Lightbulb Moment: Improving School Management**

Alex Muthelo, principal of Marude Secondary School in Limpopo province, first learned about DDD in a South Africa Department of Basic Education (DBE) workshop at the end of 2017. He started using the dashboard at the start of the school year in 2018 and was immediately impressed by how the dashboard could assist him to identify and prioritise support for his learners.

"DDD assists me with the identification of learners at risk of failing. Along with the subject performance reports, I can plan interventions which assist me to improve the performance of learners in each subject."

With DDD, he found he could compile reports easily and quickly — checking subject performance, doing term-by-term comparisons, and monitoring absenteeism. He appreciates being able to use the tool in the evenings at home, rather than having to stay late at school. Having this information at his fingertips has saved Alex time that he can use for school improvement planning.

As a veteran DDD user, the programme continues to help Alex improve his leadership of the school. The data available enables Alex to understand the subject performance of learners who are over age or do not have identity documents, which means they would not be allowed to write national school-leaving exams.

This information helps him communicate with parents, letting them know how learners are doing and when there is cause for concern. He can also inform subject advisors of where support is needed to improve overall results.

### **A Chief Education Specialist's Lightbulb Moment: Promoting Accountability**

Like Alex, Chief Education Specialist Hector Nxumalo was introduced to DDD about three years ago by the DBE. He had a user account but didn't fully understand the tool until he began engaging with it as part of his management practices with subject advisors. He became more enthusiastic about DDD when learner performance was included in the data, as this directly impacts his work.

Hector, based in KwaZulu-Natal, is responsible for subject advisors serving Zululand schools. He says DDD promotes accountability as subject advisors report on learner performance, alert schools to any underperformance, and design support interventions.

“I use it to set up the accountability sessions with my advisors,” he says. “Everybody has to account to someone. Whenever someone is reporting, they must use the DDD for those reports.”

Before visiting schools, Hector makes a point of analysing learner performance via DDD to see if further support is needed.

“By the time I arrive at school I already know the performance. I can say, how can I assist you because I see you are doing well here and not here,” he says.

Hector monitors all the schools in his district with DDD, using the data to compare results for individual subjects, circuit performance, and term-by-term improvements.

### **A Circuit Manager's Lightbulb Moment: Addressing Learner and Educator Attendance**

Bonga Mdluli, a circuit manager for Umkhanyakude District in KwaZulu-Natal, discovered DDD at a planning session in 2018.

“I didn’t start using it immediately,” he admits. “I was having some challenges, and I was not seeing how useful it would be then. And I kept forgetting my password. But last year I used the dashboard more than any time before.”

Bonga persevered because he knew the information contained in DDD was timely, accurate, and relevant to his work. “It gives a clear picture about the school. For example, one school says they have 100% learner and educator attendance, but the class register says something else. If there is a low rate of learner attendance, performance won’t be as high as expected, so your strategy should focus on motivating learners to attend school. And similarly with teacher attendance.”

Drawing on DDD analysis, Bonga and his colleagues formulated an academic improvement plan that included teachers visiting neighbouring schools on weekends to support learners. The results have been impressive.

“This circuit has never been in the top five, but in 2020, we got fifth position out of 19 circuits in the province,” he says. He also saw marked subject-level improvement, with learners achieving 100% in maths and 20 distinctions in history. And when results improve, that serves to motivate educators even further, helping them realise their full potential.

DDD offers powerful support to the education sector and promotes school resilience. Alex, Hector, and Bonga show that the benefits are different for each user. But one thing is certain: the programme’s broader relevance, ease of use, and performance tracking enable improvements at all levels.