Data Storytelling

Executive Summary for Decision-Makers | Lincoln Unified School District | Mid-Year 2024-25

This report demonstrates **Data Storytelling** — the art of presenting data in formats that move decision-makers to act. The same data, presented differently, can either sit in a binder or reshape a budget. This is the version designed for a school board audience.

The One-Sentence Story

Lincoln USD is losing 152 students before they fail — and we have 8-12 weeks of warning before each one reaches crisis.

Every data story needs a headline that answers: **So what?** Decision-makers don't need to see every chart — they need to understand what the data means for students and what action it demands.

The Three Numbers That Matter

152	9.2 weeks	34%
Students Declining	Avg Warning Window	Current Intervention Rate

We identify 152 students with significant negative trajectories. Our data gives us an average of 9.2 weeks between first alert and crisis point. Currently, only 34% of flagged students receive any intervention. **The data is telling us something — we're only listening a third of the time.**

The Cost of Inaction

Outcome	Students at Risk	Estimated Annual Cost	Prevention Cost
Course Failure (Repeat)	48	$192,000	$38,400
Grade Retention	12	$156,000	$24,000
Dropout Trajectory	8	$1,200,000+	$64,000
Chronic Absenteeism	84	$420,000	$126,000

Table 1: Conservative cost estimates based on per-pupil expenditure and district resource allocation. Prevention costs assume counselor time and program enrollment.

Data Storytelling principle: Lead with impact, not methodology. Board members need to know what it costs, not how you calculated the delta.

Where Early Intervention Works

When we do intervene early, outcomes improve dramatically. The chart below compares students who received intervention within 4 weeks of alert versus those who received no intervention.

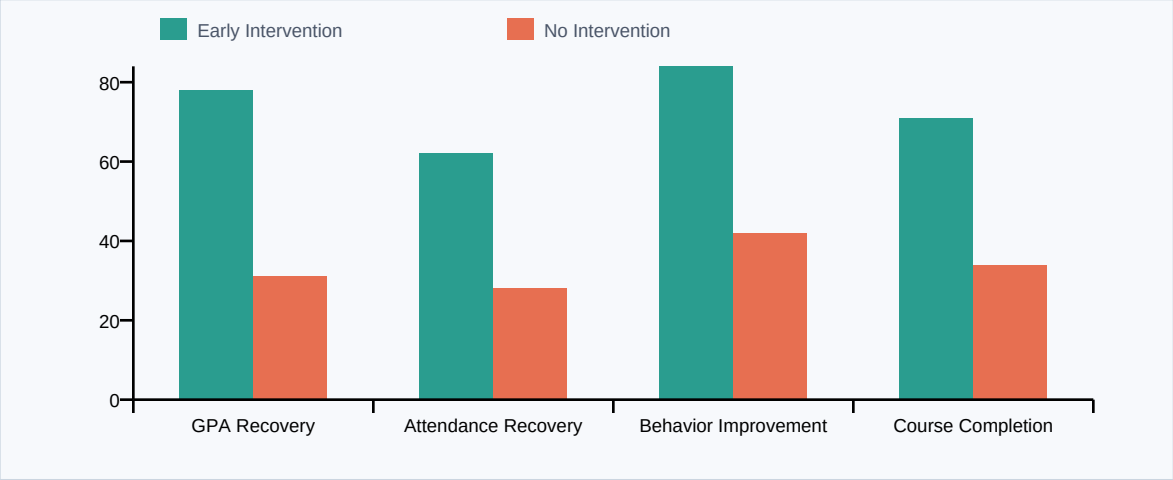

Figure 1: Early intervention more than doubles positive outcomes across all metrics.

The Equity Dimension

The 152 students with declining trajectories are not evenly distributed. Students from lower-income zones are 2.8x more likely to appear on the alert list, but only 1.4x more likely to receive intervention. **The gap between flagging and responding is itself an equity issue.**

Student Population	% of Alerts	% Receiving Intervention	Gap
Free/Reduced Lunch	62%	38%	-24 pts
Non-FRL	38%	52%	+14 pts
South/West Zone	58%	31%	-27 pts
North/East Zone	42%	48%	+6 pts

Recommendation to the Board

Invest $126,000 in expanding the early alert response capacity — two additional counselor FTEs and a data coordinator position. Based on our trajectory modeling, this investment prevents an estimated $968,000 in remediation, retention, and dropout costs. The ROI is 7.7x in Year 1.

Mandate equity-adjusted response protocols — Ensure intervention rates match alert rates across all demographic groups. Current protocols produce unequal responses to equal need.

Require trajectory reporting alongside snapshot metrics — Every quarterly report to the board should include delta metrics, not just static averages. We cannot act on what we don't see.

This executive summary uses synthetic data generated by the DataInEd District Factory. Cost estimates are illustrative. Real implementation requires district-specific analysis.