

Working Smarter, Not Harder

Updating EverDriven's District Portal



Kayla Goodison, 2024



The Problem

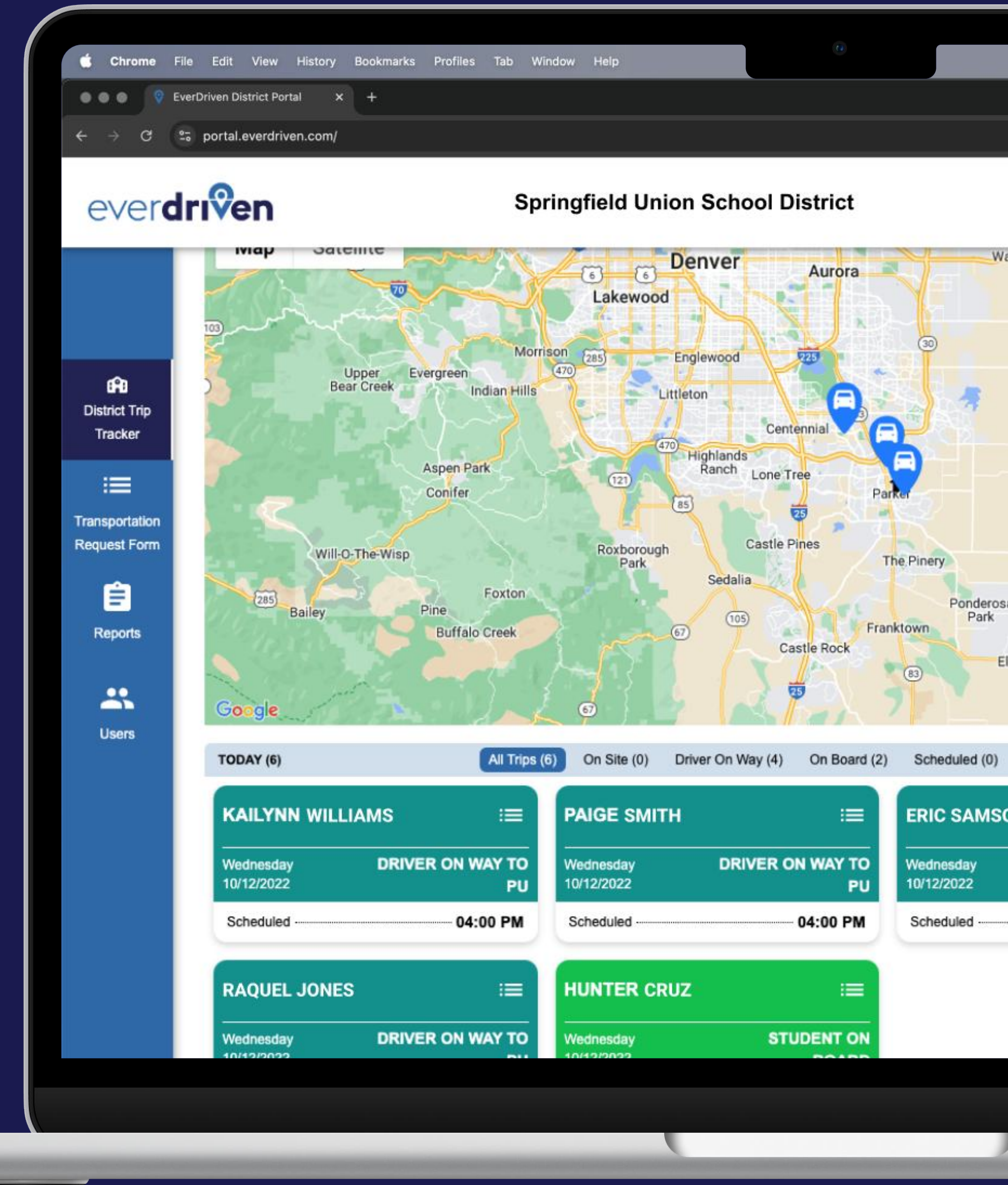
EverDriven's District Portal was supposed to be a one-stop shop for school districts to request and track student transportation. But something wasn't working.

We knew the portal wasn't delivering the user experience we wanted. Districts seemed frustrated, and our internal teams were fielding more support requests than expected.

What We Suspected

- Users were struggling with the interface
- The workflow might be too complex
- Districts needed better tracking capabilities
- Our support teams were getting overwhelmed with requests

But we didn't know the real scope of the problem or what was actually causing it.



The Research Mission

After the Transportation Request Form project taught me that stakeholder interviews alone aren't enough for complex workflows, I knew I had to talk directly to actual users this time.

My Approach

- 7 internal stakeholder interviews across different departments
- 14 interviews with people in 10 school districts across the country
- 60-point audit of the portal's UX and UI
- Behavioral data analysis from QuantumMetric to see where users were struggling

The goal was to understand what was really happening and quantify the impact.

The Basics

Roles

UX Research, Information Architecture,
UX/UI Design

Timeframe

1+ Years, starting in July 2023

Tools

Figma, Miro, Jira, Confluence,
QuantumMetric

The Challenge

Figure out why our most important users seemed frustrated with our main product, and fix it without starting from scratch.



What I Actually Discovered

The research revealed the problem was much bigger than we thought.

The Real Impact

- **30% of districts weren't using the portal at all**, forcing manual processing of thousands of requests
- Users were **spending 15-30 minutes on hold** with dispatch for basic information
- Large districts were abandoning the platform because **it didn't scale to their needs**
- Users gave the portal a **C- usability grade**
- **5-7 minutes per form completion** meant hundreds of requests = hours of work

The Surprise

The assumption was that districts found the portal "too complicated." But that wasn't it at all. Districts could handle complex workflows just fine - the problem was they couldn't access basic information.

The Real Problems

Information Imprisonment

Districts had all the data they needed, but our portal wouldn't show it to them in useful ways. They'd log in, fail to find basic trip information, then call dispatch.

Wrong Process Flow

Our portal was built around EverDriven's internal processes, not how districts actually work. We were making users learn our system instead of building around their workflows.

Solutions Built on Assumptions

Previous attempts to fix scalability issues (like a bulk import feature) got less than 10% adoption because nobody asked users what they actually needed. Districts needed better information access, not just faster form completion.

In Users' Own Words

On Usability

- *"I think it's user friendly for the most part."* - Garland ISD
- *"Well, it's pretty easy to use."* - Irvine USD

The Underlying Need

"The goal is to work smarter, not harder."

These quotes validated our hypothesis - it wasn't about complexity, it was about value and information access.

But the Real Issues Emerged

- *"I just feel like it needs more information..."* - HEB ISD
- *"I don't log on that much because it doesn't really do that much for me."* - Capistrano USD
- *"I'm not sure how compatible the portal will ever be with regards to what I would really want it to do."* - Escambia County SD, non-DP user

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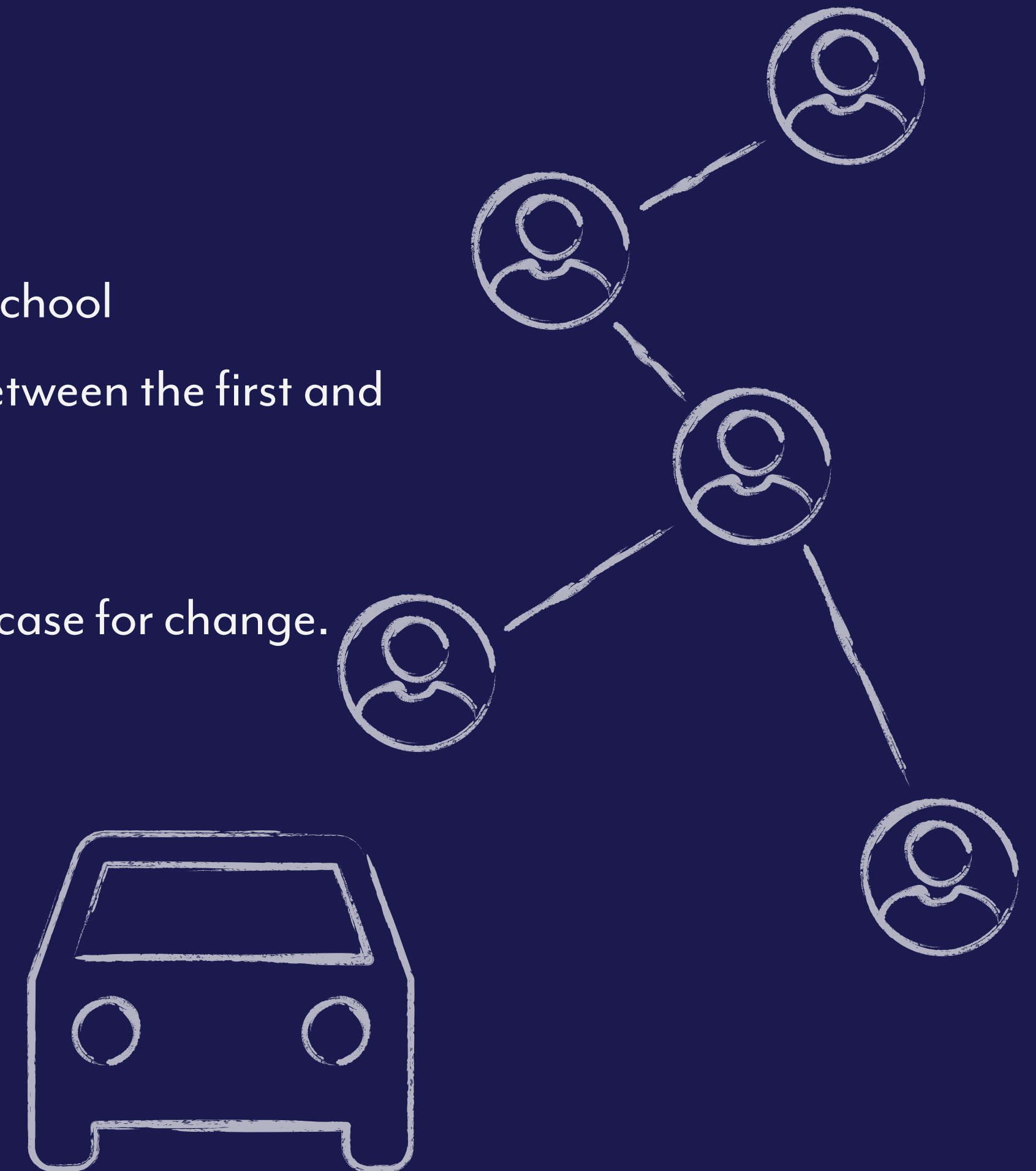
Quantifying the Impact

Once I understood the real problems, I could calculate what they were costing us:

\$4.7 Million

in projected lost productivity from communication breakdowns between teachers, school administration, district administration, and EverDriven personnel; and in revenue between the first and second weeks of school.

The research transformed a vague "users seem frustrated" into a concrete business case for change.



Early Solutions, 2023

Research-Driven Feature Recommendations

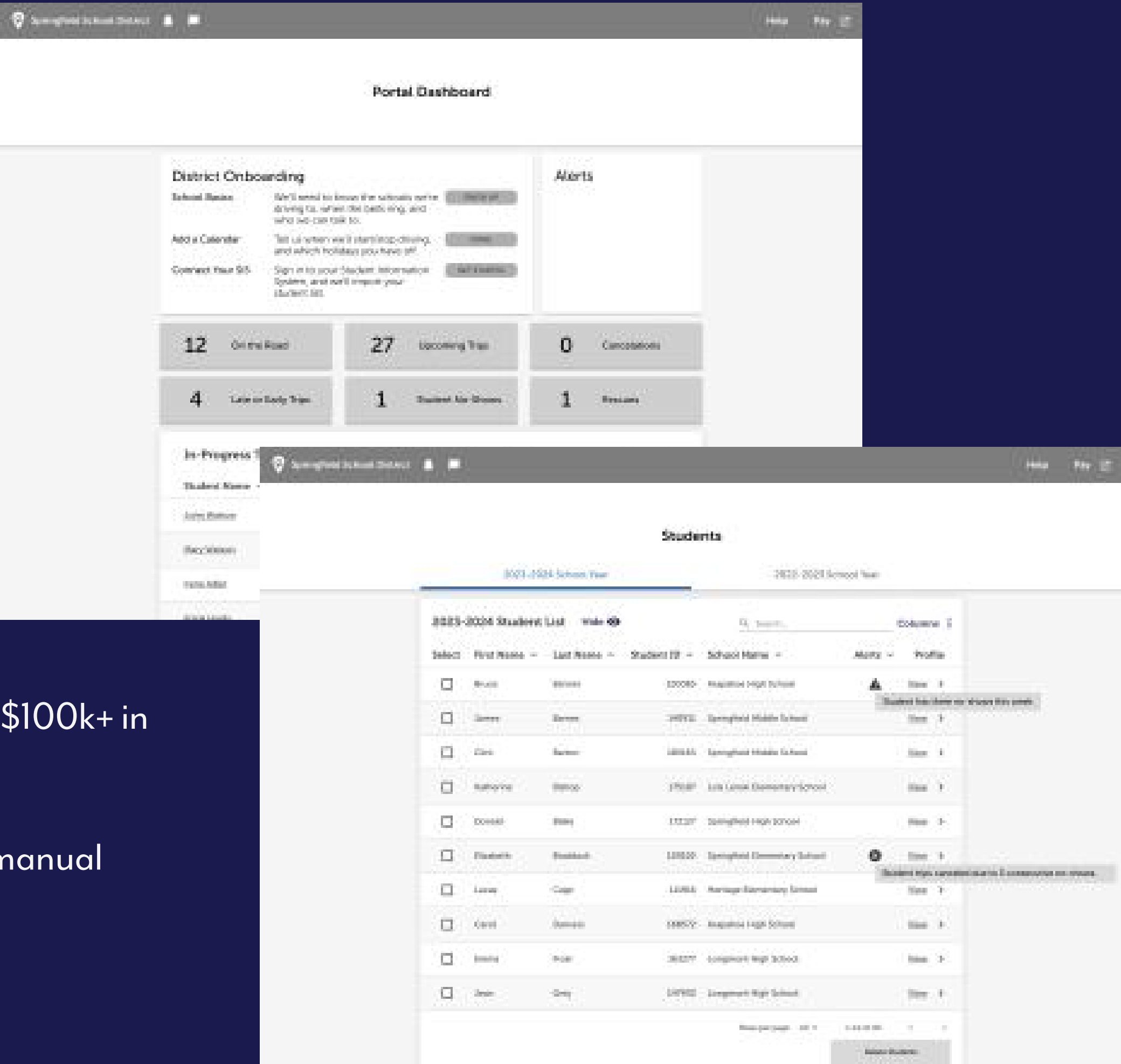
The research findings translated into specific feature proposals with quantified business impact:

Trip Tracker Dashboard - Requested by multiple districts to fix "confusing language" and provide at-a-glance view of district-wide tracking, onboarding progress, and alerts.

Dispatch Chat Function - Address wait times that were causing user frustration and forcing districts to hang up on concerned parents. Potential to save up to \$3 million/year in lost productivity.

Digital Run Sheets - Replace PDF system with centralized digital access, saving over \$100k+ in productivity annually by enabling self-service for parent complaints and driver issues.

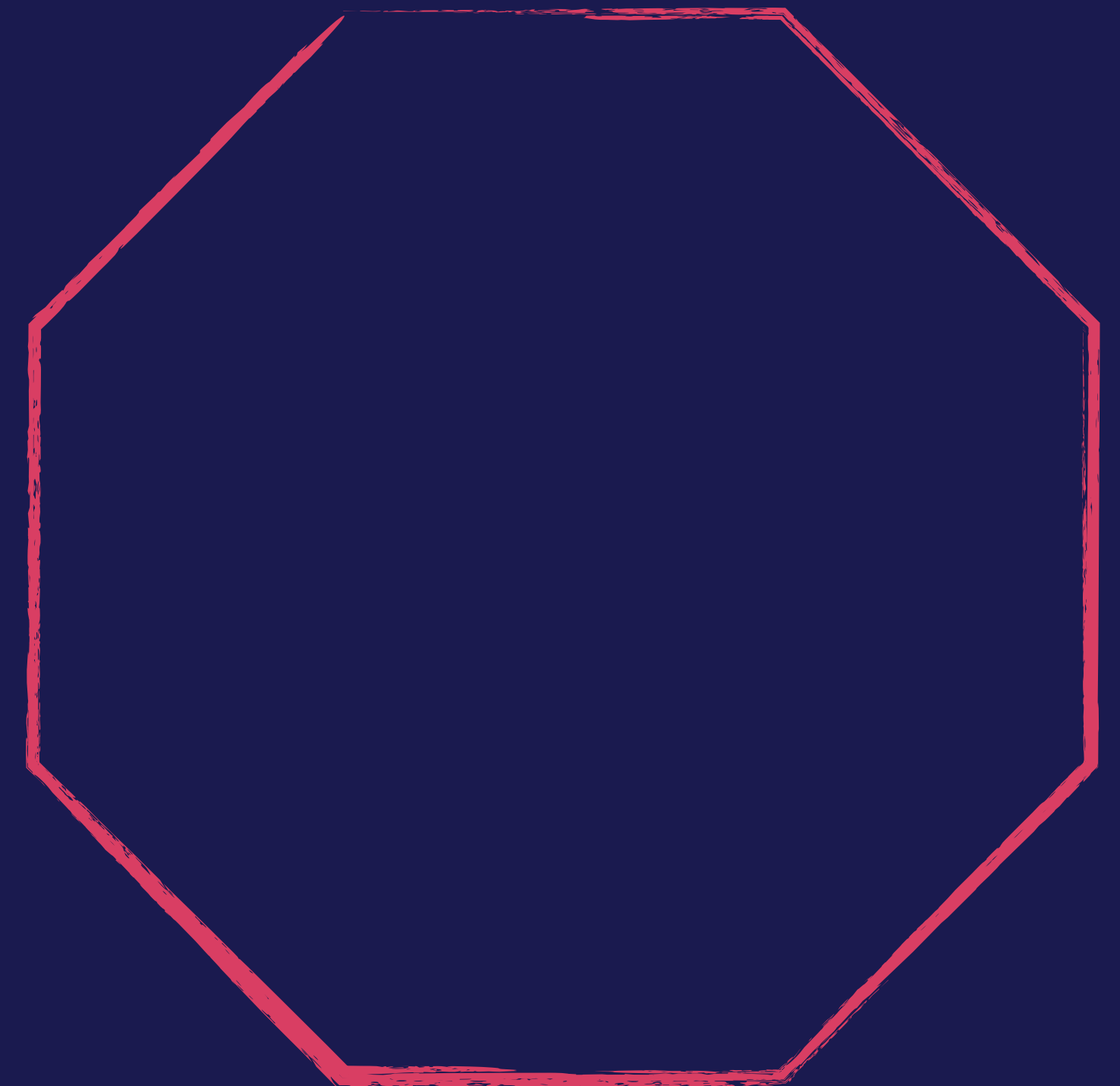
Dynamic Reporting - Enable districts to generate custom reports instead of the 3-4 manual requests per week that were being funneled through multiple internal teams.



Then, Everything Stopped

The project got paused for six months due to technical constraints. But here's what's interesting - the research findings were so solid that they kept driving decisions even when the project was on hold.

Leadership came back to the validated opportunity because the user needs we'd identified hadn't changed, and the solution path was still clear.



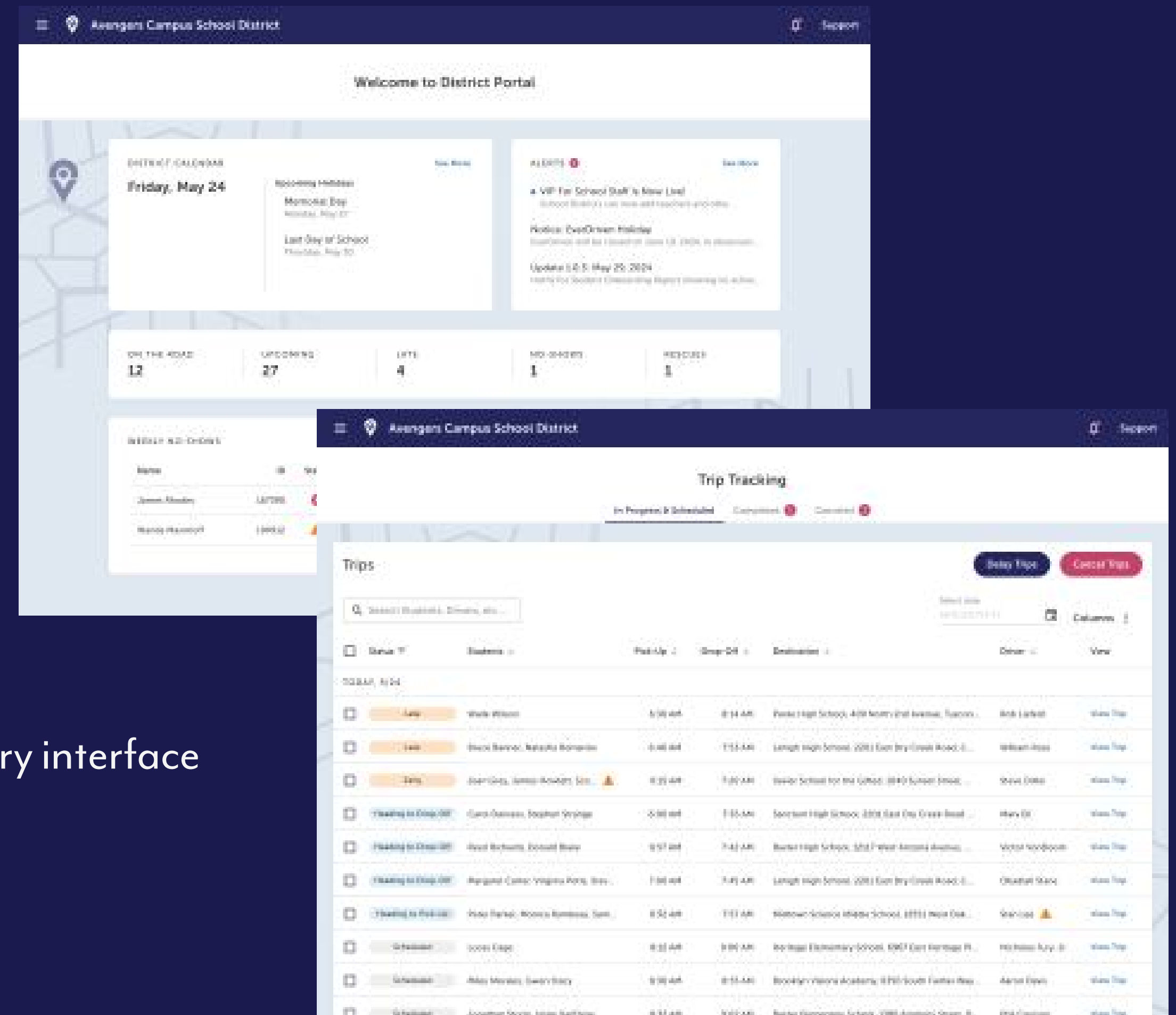
Coming Back Stronger, 2024

When we restarted, I focused on information architecture first. I completely restructured how the portal was organized around three core areas: Student Management, School Management, and Trip Management.

“North Star” Designs

These became our long-term vision - not just a visual refresh, but a fundamental shift from an internal tool to something that actually works for districts.

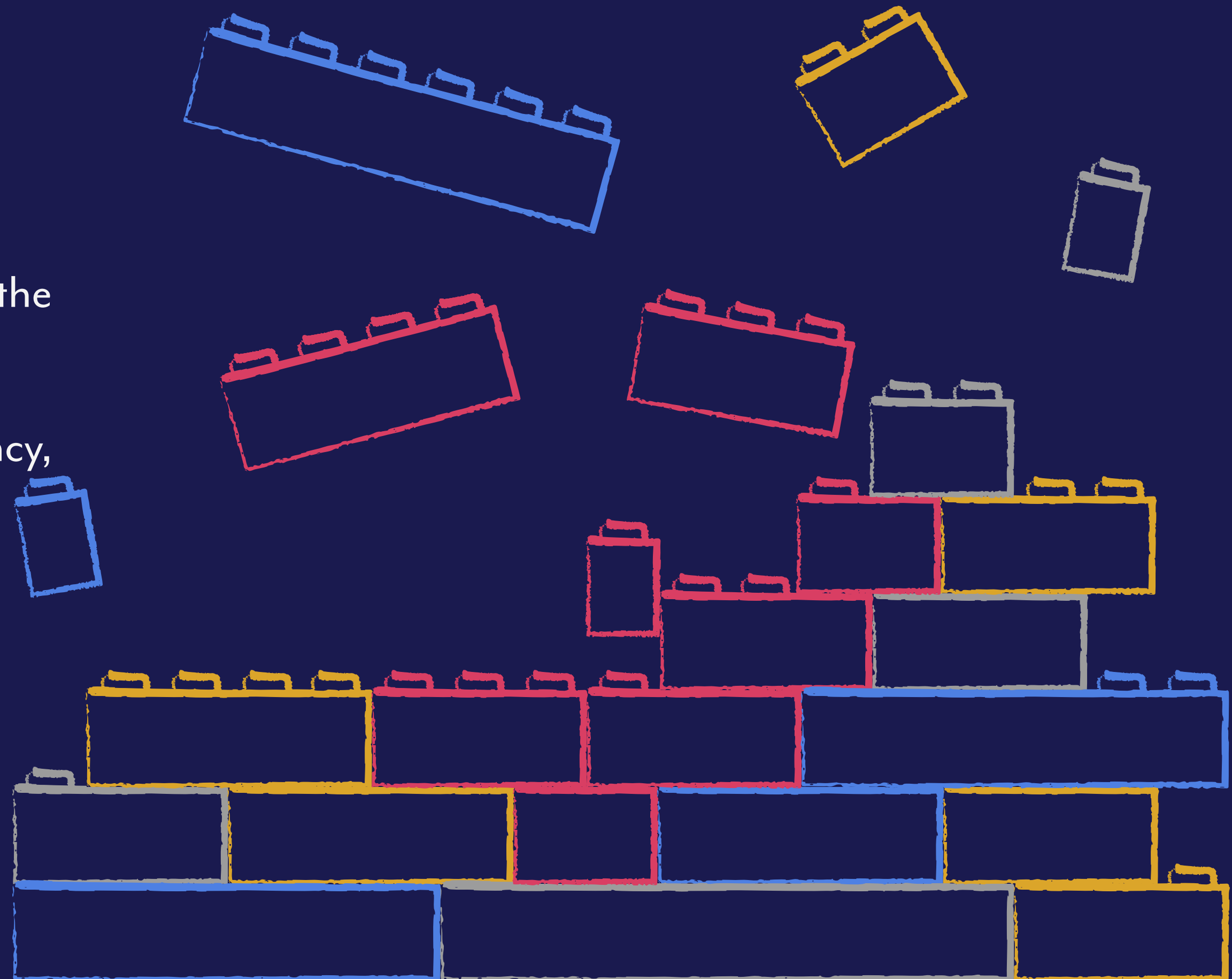
The new design system gave us consistency we'd never had, and every interface decision was backed by the research we'd done.



Current State & Future

What's Happening Now

- The District Portal is no longer supported (though still operational) and will be replaced by our new enterprise portal in FY 2027
- The comprehensive research findings continue to inform the development of the new enterprise portal
- User insights about information access, workflow efficiency, and district needs remain central to the new platform's design strategy



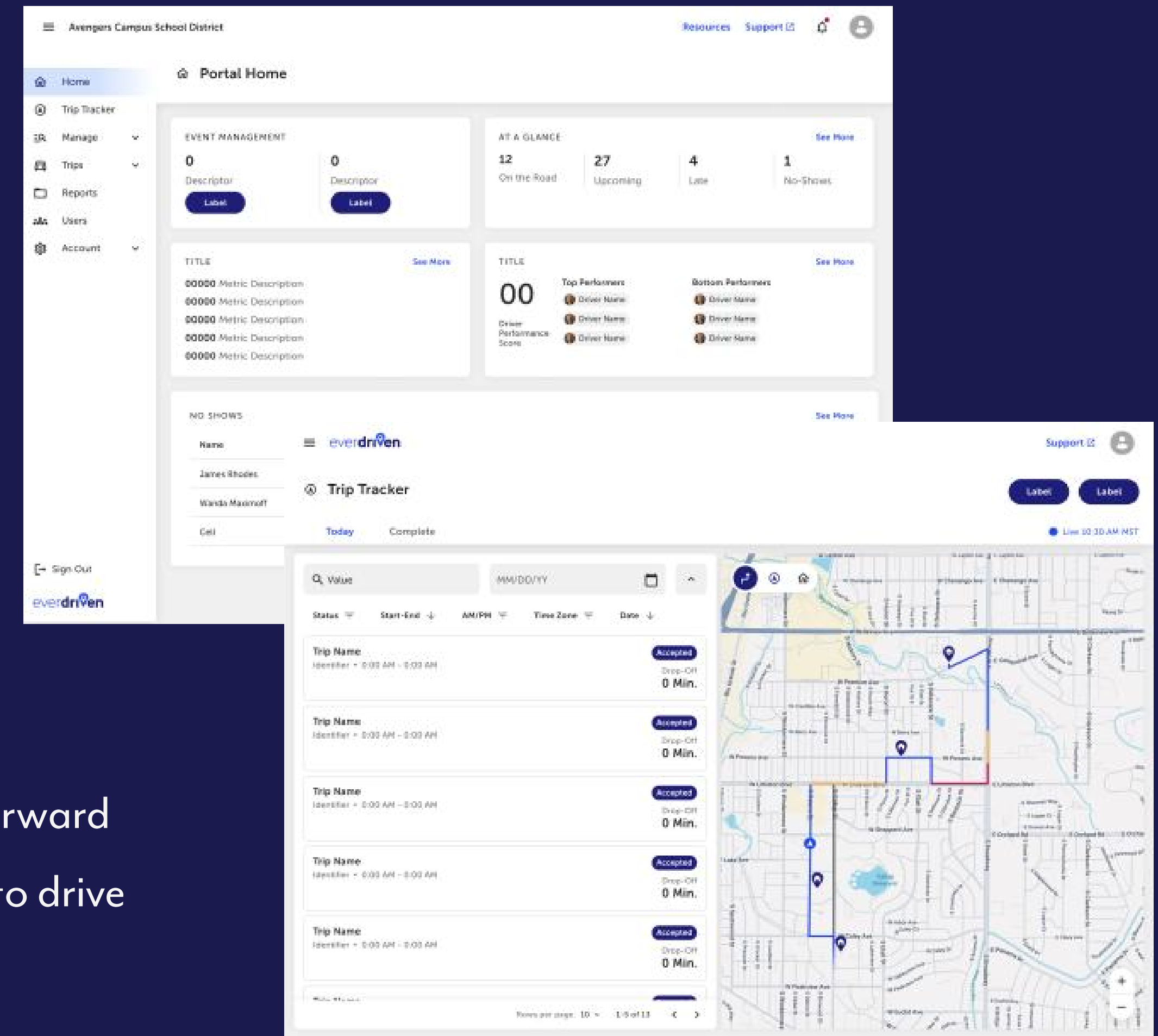
Future Ideal Designs — Second Iteration

Building on the "North Star" designs, these evolved concepts show how the portal research insights are influencing the design of our new enterprise portal scheduled for FY 2027.

Key Improvements

- Enhanced information hierarchy based on continued user feedback
- Integration with the EverDriven design system for consistency across products
- Refined interaction patterns that reduce cognitive load
- Streamlined workflows that address the core "information imprisonment" problem identified in research

These designs represent how the research insights are being carried forward into the enterprise portal, ensuring the validated user needs continue to drive product decisions.



What I Learned

This was my most comprehensive research project to date, combining multiple methodologies to get a complete picture of both user needs and business constraints.

Key Insight

Sometimes what looks like minor user friction is actually a massive business problem. What seemed like general user frustration was actually a \$4.6 million opportunity hiding in plain sight.

Research Durability

The District Portal itself is being retired, but the user insights remain valuable and are directly informing the new enterprise portal. Understanding district workflows and information access needs continues to guide product strategy.

Sometimes the best outcome isn't shipping your designs - it's generating insights that influence better solutions down the road.

Research Methodology Matters

The systematic approach - combining heuristic evaluation, stakeholder interviews, user research, and behavioral data analysis - revealed problems that any single method would have missed.

Validation Beats Assumptions, Everytime

This research prevented repeating the mistakes of previous solutions that failed because they weren't grounded in user needs.



Want to Learn More?

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