case study

Portage Township School District

Automating Student Records Gets an A

Portage Township School District digitized 2.9 million pages of student records, bringing the district in compliance with state and local record regulations, simplifying re-enrollment work processes and providing the schools with more square footage to rededicate to student services.

Located 40 miles east of Chicago on the tip of Lake Michigan, Portage Township Schools (PTS) are dedicated to educating the over 8,000 students in grades K–12 that reside in their district. With eight elementary schools, two middle schools and one high school, the district employs 450 educators and a support staff of 850.

Documents

PTS needed an easy, space-efficient way to store student records and meet local and state mandated record requirements. Other records the district wanted to digitize and secure were adult education records, and health records from the teen clinic.

Work Process

Each school in the PTS district maintained their own student records. If a first grade student left the district the record had to be maintained until the student's projected high school graduation date. If the student returned a few years later, to a different school within the district, the secretary would have to call the old school and have someone physically search for the record. Storage space at each school was at such a premium, that records were stored throughout the building wherever space was available. Retrieving student records could be complicated and time consuming, especially if the child and parent had different names or if the last attendance date was unknown. Many of their schools did not interfile their records, but instead had separate A-Z boxes for each year, further compli-cating retrieval. The district needed to streamline and standardize student record retention district-wide.

Solution Requirements

After running out of storage space, the district explored the idea of renting off-site storage or converting records to microfilm, but after the Director of Instructional Media Services attended a conference on electronic imaging the decision to go digital was made. PTS wanted to implement a document management system that could be accessed remotely over the Internet. The system needed to be easy to use with regards to scanning,

indexing and retrieval. Another requirement was that the digital images in the system need to have high resolution and print well.

Solution

Authorized DocuWare Partner, Infor-mation & Records Associates, Inc. implemented the district's DocuWare solution. During the transition phase, with so many records to archive, the district decided to focus on digitizing the backlog of older/inactive records stored at each school and maintain a paper file for each active student. Once an active student graduates or leaves the district, their files are then digitized. Once the district completes the backlog conversion, each individual school will scan and maintain their own records for students who have left the education system.

During the summer, when manpower and funding is available, old student records are moved to the district office. There, three full-time employees use three Fujitsu M4097D scanners, which offered them the speed, high resolution

scans, and document size options they required to scan and manually index each record by student number, student name, SSN and parent names. Once scanned, the paper and file folders are shredded. To date, all the records from the elementary and middle schools have been digitized, resulting in an archive of 2.9 million pages of documentation. Access to this database is limited to principals and secretaries in order to meet state, county and local records regulations. Next, all the student records from Portage High School dating from 1907 will be scanned, as well as a few student records as old as the late 1800s that are still in existence.

The Benefits in Detail

User Benefits
No more searching through dusty, dirty boxes in school basements to locate student records. Principals and secretaries can now quickly and securely access records over the Internet, regardless of which PTS elementary or middle school a student attended. Self-serve access to information has significantly reduced record retrieval time. Having this information at their finger tips, PTS administrators are better able to quickly resolve issues regarding course requirements, scheduling, and disciplinary actions. With no time wasted searching for missing files, the staff can better serve their students.

District Benefits
DocuWare has helped the district have immediate access to information which helped improve communications, and in turn, relationships between parents and schools. By having access to old records readily available, re-enrollment is now an easy efficient process, making sure students have the courses scheduled that they need to graduate. Building better relationships between parents and schools increases parental involvement and facilitates learning.

"Prior to implementing DocuWare, our re-enrollment process could be very frustrating to parents because of the difficulty we sometimes had pulling records. Our current re-enrollment process really lets us start off on the right foot with parents, giving them more confidence in the school district and fostering a higher level of parental involvement," said Lynn Duhamell, Director of Instructional Media Services.

Since implementing DocuWare, the district can now easily comply with state and local record retention regulations. With the move toward digital information, student records will be stored in one central records archive, where they can be backed up and record integrity will not be compromised by inadequate storage locations or loss due to a natural disaster. An additional benefit from digitizing records is that the district has lowered its fire risk by eliminating large paper-filled rooms.

The district is now positioned to create an archive of community-relevant information. They hope to scan old yearbooks and grade books providing the information over the Web to allow alumni and their kids the opportunity to pull up high school yearbook photos and other information.

In addition to eliminating off-site record storage fees, several schools have gained important office space by eliminating records rooms—space now used for guidance offices and book stores.

"Our principals were so excited to have the huge accumulations of old paper removed from their schools, which could have become a fire hazard to our students. The added benefits of removing all this paper has rippled down to effect our students now that our schools have more office space to dedicate to guidance offices, book stores and teachers," said Duhamell.

PTS is now in the enviable position of allowing its staff to focus on their core competencies. By automating key segments, administration of student records has been streamlined, freeing valuable assets to be better utilized for educating the children and meeting PTS' goal of assisting students with various abilities and learning needs to succeed.

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Portage Township School District