"When we look back now at where we are, there is not one person in our department that would ever want to go back to paper again."

– Lana Pasto, Human Resource Coordinator
Niagara Catholic School District Board

Need

The Niagara Catholic School District Board (NCSDB) oversees 53 elementary schools, eight secondary schools, six adult education sites and a central office. The NCSDB is a member of Canada's Eco-Schools Initiative, a project that aims to teach students how to be ecofriendly. To support this initiative, the board scrutinized the district's business practices to find ways to reduce its environmental impact. The board quickly realized that its paper-intensive processes were not just impeding productivity; they were also keeping the board from reaching its sustainability goals.

The school district is required by law to keep student files for 55 years, which amounts to a lot of paper. The district found itself running out of space to store all its documents, which continued to pile up each day. Moreover, reliance on paper had other drawbacks. For example, many of the forms used in the administrative offices required multiple approvals. Thus, courier trucks had to drive around the district for daily pickups and deliveries of forms, resulting in high transportation costs and a large carbon footprint. In addition to being environmentally unfriendly, the process often resulted in lost data and delays in approval processes.

Solution

The NCSDB was ready to implement an eco-friendly solution. Using Visioneer scanners, the board converted paper documents to electronic files. Using the Xerox® DocuShare® Platform, those digital files were stored in an electronic document depository. The board's existing eSchool Solutions SmartFindExpress application, which processes substitute teacher requests, was integrated with DocuShare and the district's Webernetic @Work for School Board Processes software. These combined systems gave the district that ability to automate leave-of-absence approvals, substitute teacher scheduling, HR documentation and payroll steps—without all the paper or wasted time. For example, processing a teacher leave-of-absence request once took threes pieces of paper and a lengthy approval process. It's now simply done online in about 30 seconds and approved in minutes.

The project started with the district's HR department, then was rolled out to all the schools. Now the system is accessible to more than 30,000 students, parents and teachers, thus reducing the amount of hardcopy documents that are printed and sent home.

Moreover, school administrators waste less time and fuel travelling between locations to collect documents and signatures.

Benefits

Using an electronic document repository, the NCSDB was able to reach its sustainability goals by drastically cutting the district's paper consumption while unlocking new efficiencies and cutting costs. For example, the district can now publish its monthly newsletter online rather than printing it and mailing it out, thus sparing the lives of many trees while saving the district $38,000 per year on printing and postage. Additionally, the board has eliminated one courier driver responsible for transporting hardcopies among locations, which reduces wear and tear on local roads, cuts down on fuel usage and saves money.

Additionally, now that the district's HR department has digitized some 800,000 documents, the NCSDB is no longer struggling with a shortage of storage space. Furthermore, 8,000 old hanging folders previously used to store paper documents were given to the district's elementary schools, "thus giving them money to spend on other things rather than stationery for the school," says Pasto.

"We [also] took the used binders and sent them to schools with students whose parents couldn't afford to buy them binders. Other binders were shipped to third-world countries. We're all about recycling," says Pasto.

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