

Atlanta Maximizes Collaboration for an Accelerated Implementation

Atlanta Public Schools (APS), an urban school district serving approximately 50,000 students, needed a scalable and flexible student information system to meet its complex student data needs. APS chose Infinite Campus in April 2008. APS Superintendent, Dr. Beverly L. Hall, recently named the 2009 National Superintendent of the Year, made a commitment to the school board that the system would be operational by the first day of school, August 11, 2008. With cooperation and effective communication among all involved, Infinite Campus was up and running in three months.

Meeting the Challenge

When APS Executive Director of Technology Ken Thompson was given the responsibility to honor the superintendent's commitment, he asked for and received the authority and resources to make it happen. His first task was to hire two internal project managers to work with the Campus Project Manager.

"I joined them at the hip and told them I wanted daily communication and I wanted them in the same room," said Thompson. "I brought the Infinite Campus person onsite more days than recommended, because I knew we only had three months to do this."

Thompson divided the internal project manager responsibilities into tactical and strategic tasks. The tactical project manager focused on day-to-day plans, including hardware and people. The strategic project manager looked at the global aspects of the system, working with school leaders and fielding operational questions. Infinite Campus and its channel partner, K12 Solutions, who would provide ongoing support and services to APS, were ready and willing to do what was necessary to bring the vision and functionality of Infinite Campus to APS to meet the deadline.

A Successful Team Approach

Thompson created a team of 50 people including 33 learning technology specialists (LTS) to provide necessary and immediate service to the teachers and administrative staff. Help desks were set up and staffed by personnel from APS, K12 Solutions, and Infinite Campus.

"My administrators supported this initiative from day one," Thompson says. "They knew what Infinite Campus was going to do for the district and they gave me the resources and the authority to do whatever I needed to get it done."

All the trained people, including program directors, LTS, and Infinite Campus representatives were constantly moving among the district staff. The key population of APS, including 5,000 teachers and nearly 2,000 central staff, principals, registrars, counselors, secretaries and front office staff completed training in less than 45 days.

The implementation team worked long and hard to ensure the LTS team was up to speed to support school staff. In fact, all first-tier trainers assisted with the effort by manning help desks, fielding questions from teachers and administrators and resolving any hardware problems that threatened the successful operation of the application.

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Personalized Support

All users were required to take Infinite Campus training and the APS team was there to help the LTS personnel respond to questions and keep confidence high.

Personal contact with all 95 schools helped build buy-in. The staff at each school saw an LTS or a K12 Solutions specialist on a regular basis. Questions and problems from the individual schools were brought back to Thompson, permitting a two-way communication link that kept things moving smoothly.

Thompson hired 20 additional technical people to ensure that the physical links, wireless terminals, and teachers' laptops were working. "If hardware is not functioning, it circumstantially became an Infinite Campus problem in the eyes of the staff," said Thompson. "We didn't want that perception to impede the implementation process nor curb the enthusiasm for Infinite Campus."

In addition, they had a solid plan for emergencies. "We have a one hour fail over," said Thompson. "If we go down, Infinite Campus has made the commitment that we will have access to the application within one hour. So regardless of the disaster, we will have access to our data. The multiple layer support structure and the multiple layer training strategy helped the project managers accomplish all of this within my window of time. It worked."

Getting the Word Out

The scope of the APS internal communication needs, coupled with an ambitious time frame for implementation, created unique challenges. A well-planned communication strategy was required. APS used multiple levels of communication to educate staff, parents and the public about the process of implementing Infinite Campus.

Marquees were created in the central building to inform staff. Emails were sent and pens announcing Infinite Campus were purchased. The APS newsletter featured the many advantages of Infinite Campus. Staff meetings and PTA meetings were used to set expectations for everyone in the district.

"The key is adoption, because this is one of the most used applications in the district today," according to Thompson. "On day one I wanted my teachers to be taking attendance and it happened. Day one I wanted my principals to be looking at their teachers - who was and was not taking attendance. Day one I wanted my central administration going in and looking at the students and pulling their own reports. And it happened."

An ambitious and well executed communication plan was a critical part of the implementation's success.

Rapid Implementation Success

On the first day of school, only three months after choosing Infinite Campus, APS was up and running on the system. Teachers, administrative staff, parents, and students are excited about using Infinite Campus, and as they continue to learn more of the system capabilities, they will find additional opportunities for improved data management, and classroom and reporting tools.

"With most application implementations, you have to make the people come to the table and want to eat," says Thompson. "Our district is finding new benefits with Infinite Campus every day."

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About Infinite Campus

For more than a decade, Infinite Campus has successfully implemented its solutions for customers of all sizes. Today, Infinite Campus applications manage more than 4 million students in 42 states. Infinite Campus customers range from districts with fewer than 100 students to those with more than 100,000 as well as regional consortia, state departments of education and the federal government.