

Jefferson County Improves Communications and Reduces Costs

Jefferson County Public Schools (JeffCo), with more than 87,000 students, is part of a ten-district consortium that worked together to search for a student information system. In addition to improved student administrative functionality, the consortium wanted a web-based system that employees could securely access and a system that would improve communications to district stakeholders including parents and guardians. JeffCo and the consortium selected Infinite Campus.

Life at JeffCo before Infinite Campus

The student information system (SIS) used at JeffCo prior to the Infinite Campus implementation was very complex. It required the district's infrastructure services team to manage transactions on individual database servers from 158 buildings across the district. The older system required the district to pull the data back and consolidate it into a district database for reporting and back up purposes. This process would take all night and occasionally would infringe on the availability for users to use the system during the day.

"The previous system wasn't meeting our needs and we weren't able to provide access to our users in the classroom due to the older client/server system," said Scott D. Bell, executive director of infrastructure services for Jefferson County Public Schools. "Management of the previous system was time consuming and my team spent a lot of time ensuring smooth data movement across the network."

At the time, 68 JeffCo schools had invested in a web-based portal. Information provided over the portal for parents was limited. Since the server was refreshed overnight, only day old student information could be provided rather than presenting it in real time.

With Infinite Campus, the infrastructure services team was able to change its support model due to the system's web-based design. JeffCo gives every building in the district, at no additional charge, a web-based portal for parents and students, an email communication tool leveraging their student data, and secure access for teachers and staff to their data from outside the classroom. In addition, it provides a proven student administrative system.

"The Infinite Campus system is a lot less complicated to manage due to its integration and web-based design," continued Bell. "It made it much easier for my team to give each school in our district a portal at no additional charge and administrating it is a simple district-level procedure."

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Diane Myskiw
Executive Director, Information Technology and Service Management
Golden, Colorado
86,700 Students

Campus Portal

The Campus Portal gives parents and guardians secure access to data managed within the Infinite Campus system. The data presented online comes directly from district and school-level staff and teachers in real time. Information can be posted on the Campus Portal includes school and district notices, assignments, grades, and report cards. For a complete listing of the possible information made available through the Campus Portal, see sidebar.

JeffCo decided approximately three months after going live on the Infinite Campus system to launch a pilot program for the Campus Portal. Six schools were identified to be included in the pilot. A few months after the success of the pilot, the district gave all buildings the opportunity to “turn on” the Campus Portal.

“We waited until fall to start a pilot program for the Campus Portal and had six schools volunteer,” said Bell. “The pilot program gave us an opportunity to try out the functionality and ensure we were comfortable with its capabilities before offering the Campus Portal to the rest of the district.”

One of the main benefits provided by the Campus Portal is its ability to leverage the information already being managed within the system and presenting it through a secure logon to parents and guardians in real time. For example, when a classroom teacher enters attendance at the start of the period, the attendance information is instantly available to parents and guardians. So if the parent or guardian is interested in knowing whether their high school student made it to class, all they need to do is logon to the Campus Portal, using their secure username and password, and view the information desired.

“When teachers enter attendance, grades, and assignments through the Campus Gradebook, this information is leveraged and presented in real time on the Campus Portal,” said Diane Myskiw, executive director, information technology service management of Jefferson County Public Schools. “This gives our teachers another way to communicate with parents without expecting them to re-enter data twice.”

JeffCo parents depend on the Campus Portal daily. With more than 8,000 unique logons each day, the Campus Portal is encouraging active participation by parents to monitor student progress and simplify communications.

“When we first began tracking portal usage, we noticed interesting peaks in the late afternoon between 3 and 4 p.m.,” said Bell. “It occurred to us that parents and guardians were logging into the system to see how their student’s day went - did they attend class, were there any new assignments posted, and were there any new notices posted?”

The Campus Portal has given JeffCo the ability to communicate with parents without requiring additional data entry or the tapping of additional IT resources to post data. The Campus Portal gives parents and guardians a tool to help them talk with their students about their day and stay informed throughout the year, not just during parent/teacher conference times.

“Parents think the Campus Portal is fantastic of course the students don’t like the fact that their information is so visible and traceable,” continued Myskiw. “We encourage our staff to be sensitive to families that might not have as much access to technology and try to inform parents that they can access the portal from anywhere, like a library for instance.”

Campus Portal

This is a listing of the Infinite Campus information that can be made available on the Campus Portal for Parents.

- Assessments Results
- Assignments
- Attendance
- Behavior
- Fees
- Food Service
- Grades
- Graduation Planning
- Immunizations
- Individual Education Plans
- Individual Learning Plans
- Household Information
- Registration including School Choice
- Report Cards
- Schedules
- School and District Calendars
- School and District Notices
- Transcripts
- Transportation

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Information Technology Service Management
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Campus Messenger

For JeffCo, the Campus Messenger has become a cost effective tool to communicate with external audiences. Campus Messenger with email is included with the Infinite Campus system and is used to deliver communications leveraging the data managed in it. JeffCo also invested in Campus Messenger with voice giving them the ability to send non-urgent voice messages to parents and guardians.

Campus Messenger has been set up to send email and/or voice messages when a student is absent or tardy. Parents and guardians identify their preferred method of receiving messages and the office staff can indicate that preference within Infinite Campus. This ability has saved JeffCo labor expenses associated with managing communications, since previous messages were prepared and distributed manually.

“For JeffCo staff, the Campus Messenger is just as important to them as the Campus Portal,” said Bell. “For example, if a student is absent and the parent requests it, the Infinite Campus system has been set up to automatically send a message to the parent. This frees our staff from manually writing and distributing emails - saving us time and money.”

Campus Messenger is also reducing the cost of ownership by allowing the district to distribute communications via email instead of through traditional mail. For example, in September 2006, JeffCo sent out 133,238 emails to parents and guardians averaging over 5,100 emails per day. During the month of September, JeffCo estimates Campus Messenger saved the district \$57,000 over traditional paper-based mailing.

“The ability to distribute email messages versus traditional mail has already made a positive financial impact on our district by reducing out-of-pocket expenses,” said Bell. “The time spent by our office staff to organize, print, stuff, and post traditional letters is now spent helping our students and staff in other more effective ways.”

In addition, JeffCo is using Campus Messenger with voice to distribute messages to parents and guardians who prefer voice messages to email and to communicate in multiple languages. The district also uses the tool to communicate with parents and guardians who may not have access to computers and the Internet so the district is able to reach all stakeholders.

Campus Messenger Savings at JeffCo September 2006 133,328 emails

Labor Costs

1. Estimate 30 seconds to print, fold and stuff envelope
2. Assume average employee cost with benefits at \$25 per hour
3. Campus Messenger saved the district 735 person hours or 92 person workdays or \$18,373.33

Printing and Material Costs

1. Cost of printing \$0.05 per piece
2. Add \$0.39 first class postage
3. Total of \$0.44 per letter or \$38,804.48

Assuming that every email sent by Campus Messenger would have been sent as a letter to a parent or guardian, then Campus Messenger saved the district approximately \$57,177.81.

Labor Costs = \$18,373.33
+ Printing and Material Costs = \$38,804.48
Total Savings for September = \$57,177.81

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The Future

When JeffCo invested in Infinite Campus, they knew they would be able to improve communications with parents, guardians and students through the tools provided by Infinite Campus. What they appreciated even more is the ability to save the district and their taxpayer's money by leveraging the Internet and email to deliver real-time communications.

"Two of the biggest selling points of the system for school-level buy in across our district were the communication tools - Campus Portal and Campus Messenger," said Bell. "The ability to provide a direct communication link to parents and reduce paper-based mailing expenses was a huge cost savings for our district."

The next step for the district will be to open up the Campus Messenger email tools for use by teachers. This will open a dialog from the classroom teacher to students and parents about a variety of topics, eliminating the need for backpack messages.

"Our teachers are going to enjoy the ability to use Campus Messenger to send emails to students," summarized Myskiw. "It will let our teachers send a friendly reminder to parents about an upcoming field trip or to open a dialogue with students regarding a particular topic - the communication possibilities for our teachers are endless."

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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 2.5 million students in 40 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.