McFarland Unified School District

MCFARLAND, CALIFORNIA / 3,000 STUDENTS

McFarland Unified School District has 3,000 students and is located near Bakersfield. When it came time to update their student information system (SIS), they required an effective, Web-based communication between the school and community, a highly functional product that was easy to use, and a vendor that could support the many challenges of California state reporting. McFarland selected Infinite Campus.

CHALLENGES

David Lopez, director of technology for McFarland, was hired in 2005 to develop a technology department for the district. Lopez needed to update the 5-year-old computers and refresh the software so it would accommodate the district's data management and state reporting requirements.

McFarland had used Quintessential School Systems (QSS) student information system hosted on a mainframe computer located at the county office of education. After a thorough evaluation of the goals and expectations for the district, it was clear a new system was necessary for the district to more effectively manage their student data and accurately adhere to state reporting requests.

"As McFarland engaged in long-term strategic planning, it was determined they didn't want to go with a system just because everyone else had it. The district was looking to the future and wanted something they could claim as their own," said Lopez.

Several well-known system vendors were reviewed and Infinite Campus rose to the top of the list.

"After careful consideration, we saw a lot of products that were functional, but not exceptional. They would do pretty much what we wanted, but they weren't forward thinking," said Lopez. "While many vendors claimed to have a Web-based product, basically it looked like their application had just been put onto the Web page as an after-thought. Infinite Campus was selected because they were truly Web-based, forward thinking and responsive."

SOLUTION

When the decision to change systems was made, the number one priority for McFarland was to improve communications between the district and the broader community.

The Campus Portal for parents was an important feature of Infinite Campus to McFarland. It gave parents access to student information in real time, as it was entered by teachers, counselors and staff. The Campus Portal encouraged parent participation in their student's educational activities, and that made a big difference.

Once the Campus Portal was launched, McFarland began receiving positive feedback. The district had faced a history of poor attendance at the middle and high schools.

"The middle school principal noticed a significant improvement in attendance shortly after the Campus Portal went live," said Lopez. "Parents became actively involved with the district to help alleviate the attendance problems."

In addition, Infinite Campus handles McFarland's state reporting with ease. "California has a very extensive state reporting structure compared to most states," said Lopez. "The state tracks a lot more information."

For example, McFarland has more than 20 ethnic categories, where districts in other states may have seven or less. Additionally, many states have five or six languages for state reporting, but California has close to 30. Also, the requirements keep changing as the state continues to request more data from the district.

"Infinite Campus is doing a very good job responding to the additional challenges of CSIS (California School Information Services) reporting," said Lopez. "Because many districts were having difficulty with their data and reporting structures, the state gave an extension for sending in the data. Still, many districts did not meet the new deadline. McFarland was one of the few districts who submitted their data to the state within the required timeline."

RESULTS

The selection of Infinite Campus for McFarland has proven to be both cost effective and responsive to the challenges of California state reporting. The implementation and training went smoothly and the service and support have been very good.

"The biggest selling point for McFarland was the ease of use and the functionality of Infinite Campus," continued Lopez. "It contains a lot of information that helps our district in multiple ways with attendance, discipline, reporting, etc. It just makes life a lot easier."

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David Lopez
Director of Technology
McFarland Unified School District