

The People-Ready Business

Case Study



Miami-Dade County Public Schools

School District Improves Education by Linking Teachers, Students, Parents Online

The fourth-largest public school district in the United States needed a consistent way to deliver information to more than 1 million students, parents, teachers, and administrators. Miami-Dade County Public Schools built a Web-based portal to give all these constituents a single point of access for relevant information, services, and applications. The district has improved learning potential for children, enhanced parents' ability to participate in the education of their children, and improved the effectiveness and productivity of teachers and school administrators.

OVERVIEW

Country or Region

United States

Industry

Education

Customer Profile

Florida's Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS) includes more than 400 schools, encompassing roughly 345,000 students and 50,000 employees.

Business Situation

M-DCPS needed to provide more than 1 million people (teachers, parents, staff, and students) with improved access to multiple information systems and applications used to educate Miami-Dade children.

Solution

The school district built an enterprise Web-based portal that provides students, parents, teachers, and administrators with a single point of access to district technology resources.

Benefits

- Improved access to information
- Enhanced productivity and decision-making
- Improved collaboration
- Rapid time-to-benefit, at reduced cost

“Teachers and administrators are more productive and effective; parents are participating more actively; and students are more empowered to help manage, influence, and direct their own educations.”

Deborah Karcher,
Chief Information Officer for
Information Technology Services,
Miami-Dade County Public Schools



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Situation

Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS) is the fourth-largest school district in the United States, with some 367 public schools and 40 charter schools. Serving an area of more than 2,400 square miles, M-DCPS has 345,000 students, 50,000 employees, and an annual budget of more than U.S.\$6 billion.

In late 2005, the M-DCPS published a Comprehensive IT Blueprint that provided a framework and plan of action for using technology to help provide the highest-quality education for students. The five-year plan included objectives to encourage student use of technology to manage their own learning, provide parents with the opportunity to participate in their children's education, and give teachers the tools and information needed to maximize their effectiveness. The plan also aimed to provide administrators and operations/support staff with the tools and information needed to make informed decisions, communicate effectively, and optimally deploy resources.

To realize those objectives, the school district needed a more consistent way to deliver the information in its many systems and applications to stakeholders. "In the past, people had to look in many different places to get information," says Deborah Karcher, Chief Information Officer for Information Technology Services at M-DCPS. "Teachers used one system to access e-mail messages and calendars, and another for teaching resources, and had to ask someone in the school office for data from our student information system that runs on the mainframe. Similarly, school principals had to use five or six different systems in a normal day's work. We have several very good systems and applications,

but we needed to give people a better way to take advantage of them."

Also, paper-based systems were a hindrance to teacher effectiveness. "All our student data and lesson plans were on paper, and we had papers all over the place. I had to manually input data, which presented a huge administrative burden," says Dr. Alice F. Quarles, Principal of Greynolds Park Elementary School.

Linda Eason, Fifth Grade Teacher at Greynolds Park Elementary School, says that paper systems hindered teachers and parents, too. "To communicate with parents, I would phone home or send a note home with the child. Occasionally the child failed to deliver the message, and it was two or three days before we could resolve the issue."

"We realized that to communicate effectively with parents and the community, we would need tools that permitted our stakeholders to move decisively in support of their children—our students," says Rudolph F. "Rudy" Crew, Ed.D., Superintendent of M-DCPS. "These tools had to work together in such a way as to convert a parent's need to know into the ability to act."

Solution

A Web-based portal was the obvious solution. "A Web portal would allow us to push relevant information to all users through one communication channel, rather than having users navigate a maze of stand-alone resources to find what they need," Karcher says. "We wanted to make all our applications and data sources available in a single place, and tailor that information to each user's role."



"I'm able to be more creative as a teacher, because I have more time to find resources that can supplement my instruction. I'm also better able to share ideas with other teachers."

Linda Eason,
Fifth Grade Teacher,
Greynolds Park Elementary School

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The district considered several options for implementing the portal but selected Microsoft® software, because of its cost advantages and its ability to fit with the district's existing IT infrastructure and skill set. The IT staff worked with teachers to refine the vision, then built a functional pilot in just eight weeks. The district continued to expand the portal over the next several months. Today, the M-DCPS districtwide portal provides a range of functionality to a range of constituents:

- **Students.** From any Internet connection, students can view their class list, grades, stored documents, school announcements and events, and a district calendar. The portal also links to the district's instructional content, an online student-advising system, and an online resource that reinforces reading and math skills.
- **Parents.** Parents can view their child's class list and grades, assignments, school bus information, state graduation requirements, immunization guidelines, and links to many other resources.
- **Teachers.** Teachers can view their personal information; e-mail messages and calendar; stored files; class lists; a roster of students in each class; detailed data from the Student Information System; and a graphical "student scorecard" that shows each child's current performance and whether that performance is improving, holding steady, or decreasing over time. Instructional content and lesson plans are on the portal, tailored to grade levels.
- **Principals.** Principals can see personal information and documents, calendars, weekly district briefings, reports from key district systems, and links to other relevant resources.

All these users can customize the appearance of their portal pages to display information of interest. For example, teachers can include links to video and text used in lessons, and students can add content for research and homework assignments.

Using extensive collaboration features such as online meeting spaces, team sites, discussion groups, instant messaging, and alerts (available in the 2007-2008 school year), staff, educators, parents, and students will be able to work together more closely. To alleviate information overload, users will be able to take advantage of extensive search capabilities to quickly and easily find the information that they need.

Benefits

With its new Web portal, Miami-Dade County Public Schools is helping all stakeholders in the district influence student achievement, by giving users the tools and information needed to collaborate more effectively, work more productively, and make more informed decisions. "Teachers and administrators are more productive and effective; parents are participating more actively; and students are more empowered to help manage, influence, and direct their own educations," Karcher says. "These capabilities have a strong, positive impact on student achievement."

Improved Access to Information

Students can now monitor their own grades and access a wealth of educational resources ranging from instructional content to the district library system. "Students can access instructional content to enrich their class experiences," Quarles says. "It's a way of engaging the class in more critical and creative thinking. We're empowering students to teach each other." Parents are



Executive Biography

Deborah Karcher is the Chief Information Officer at the Office of Information Technology for Miami-Dade County Public Schools. Karcher has also worked at Amadeus and Motorola in customer support, training, quality assurance, and program management. She earned a Bachelor of Business Administration and a Master of Public Administration from Florida International University.

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presented with similar information, so they can get more involved in the education of their children.

Teachers can use a single point of access to commonly used applications, and to information that was previously unavailable. “I’m able to be more creative as a teacher, because I have more time to find resources that can supplement my instruction,” Eason says. “I’m also better able to share ideas with other teachers.”

School administrators can easily access the forms, tools, and reports that they need to keep everything running smoothly, to optimize their use of resources, and quickly identify any issues that need their attention. “A couple of clicks, and I can get all the information I need on a child,” Quarles says. “I’m empowered with the information I need to make decisions about classrooms at all levels. I can also make decisions faster. The portal empowers teachers to make decisions for their children. They don’t have to come to me to get information. They can access it themselves.”

Enhanced Productivity and Decision Making

Consolidated access to information is improving productivity for the district’s teachers, helping them to more easily access and make use of student data. “I have everything that I need in one place, eliminating the need to switch between different systems as I work,” says Lauren Graper, First Grade Teacher at Miami Heights Elementary School. “I can read and answer e-mail from parents, prepare a lesson, enter grades, or get ready for a parent meeting without ever having to leave the portal. I have only a few hours in the early morning and late afternoon when students aren’t in class, so the half-hour or

so that the portal saves me each day is a huge benefit.”

“Principals now can easily access operational reports, monitor key performance indicators, and view attendance and suspension data—all things that they’re held accountable for,” adds Karcher. “In addition, they have access to weekly briefings, which are how the district communicates with administrators on issues of importance.”

Improved Collaboration

The district is improving student achievement by using the portal to facilitate collaboration among parents, students, and teachers, including both the provisioning of student assignments and the dissemination of performance data. “We’re encouraging parent involvement by making parents more aware of the resources that are available to them,” Karcher says. “Parent use of the portal is greatest in the early morning, when they would otherwise be unable to connect with teachers directly.”

“I’m able to remain very active in the school and in my daughter’s life. All the information I need is right there at my fingertips. Before, I had to hang out in the hallways to catch teachers,” says district parent Colette Satchell.

Teachers and students can use digital workspaces to share files, parents can view their children’s homework assignments, and district staff can share documents and prepare for meetings. People will soon be able to use the portal’s built-in workflow capabilities to work together more effectively by automating the routing and approval of forms and documents.



Executive Biography

Dr. Alice Quarles is a 23-year veteran of the Miami-Dade County Public Schools, having served as teacher, district administrator, and school site administrator. Dr. Quarles is currently the principal of Greynolds Park Elementary School. Her primary goals are to ensure ready access to the data and tools teachers need to maximize each child’s potential and to make sure each child has the skills needed to successfully compete in the future.

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“Collaboration is key to success in education,” Quarles says. “We need to share ideas. Our teachers use the portal to look at the variety of resources that they may never have thought of using—best practices from all around the country.”

Rapid Time-to-Benefit at Reduced Cost

“Everyone is very pleased with how fast things came together, and a lot of that is due to the extensive prebuilt functionality provided by Microsoft software,” Karcher says. The district’s decision to use Microsoft software also is providing significant cost benefits. “Not only are we delivering a solution that will serve more than a million potential users at a far lower cost than what many other districts have done, but we’re also doing it with minimal risk,” she continues. “Considering how many users the portal will serve and the many ways in which it’s helping improve the education of Miami-Dade children, we believe that we’re getting an excellent return on our investment.”

Customer Details:

Miami-Dade County Public Schools

Web site: www.dadeschools.net

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A people-ready business is one where people can apply their unique skills, insights, and experience to create new products and services, work responsively with customers and partners, and drive operational excellence in every aspect of the business. People-ready businesses support people with knowledge, practices, and tools so that they can add the extra value that helps differentiate successful organizations in a competitive, fast-moving global economy.

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