

Regionalizing Technology Support Services

Hancock Elementary School
and
Richmond Consolidated School

April 1, 2014



Shaker Mountain Union #70

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SHAKER MOUNTAIN SCHOOL UNION #70

Richmond, Hancock and New Ashford
Dr. Barbara J Ripa, SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

INTRODUCTORY LETTER

April 1, 2014

Dear Interested Readers:

Through a Community Innovation Challenge (CIC) grant award, Shaker Mountain Union #70 began the process of “Regionalizing Technology Support Services.” Through this effort, the Public Schools of Richmond and Hancock sought to improve the efficiencies of their technological applications for human resources, accounting and finance, communication, professional development and educational support. The districts sought to collaborate to reduce redundancies and to improve efficiency in the schools and at the Central Office level, as well as identify ways to work together to purchase services, share curricular information and provide programs, such as but not limited to professional development.

The superintendency union designed the program to:

- A. Regionalize data sharing through the implementation of Standard Interoperability Framework (SIF) between the two school districts for improved electronic information sharing related to student information, purchasing and accounts payable, other financial applications, assessment and communications with parents, students, staff, and community members;
- B. Explore and develop a regional presence and approach to developing a web site for the two districts to provide more information to the school community of staff, parents, administrators, and students. Transition from a fee-based to free educational email;
- C. Develop regional professional development opportunities and models for staff in both districts;
- D. Improve communication between school and home through the use of a common parent notification system;
- E. Improve and enhance parent involvement in their child’s education through the use of a common student information system that provides regular progress reporting and parent access to their child’s academic program; and
- F. Provide building administrators with technology to implement the observation and reporting aspects of the new teacher evaluation model in a time-efficient and effective manner.

Through the efforts of individuals in both districts and the funds provided through this grant, we were able to meet our goals and successfully completed the following activities:

1. Purchased and installed an updated infrastructure to improve electronic data sharing;
2. Improved two web-sites rather than a district website and transitioned to free email;
3. Developed a regional focus to professional development and shared costs to provide high quality teacher training and support in math instruction and using data to inform instruction;
4. Purchased and implemented Connect Ed as a common parent notification system;
5. Purchased and installed Power School as the student information system and began two year training process to expand use of the program from data collection and state reporting to developing electronic grade books and electronic grade reporting to providing parents with direct access to their child's academic program and progress; and
6. Purchased TeachPoint, an iPad software program designed to facilitate the teacher observation process using the new Massachusetts Teacher Evaluation protocols.

The work of the districts just began, and that with each coming new year, the districts will more fully utilize the many changes implemented as a result of this wonderful grant program.

Sincerely,

Barbara J Ripa
Superintendent

James Biancolo
School Committee Chair

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The overarching goals of the “Regionalizing Technology Support Services” were to decrease redundancies while improving efficiencies, thus reducing costs. Prior to the changes that have taken place as a result of receiving this grant, the districts experienced duplication of efforts with regard to human resources, financial management, state reporting and professional development. Preparing required state reports using two different information systems and budgetary programs contributed to reporting errors and much frustration.

The districts identified obstacles that stood in the way of our reducing redundancies and improving efficiencies and developed a number of steps we needed to take to reach our goals. District staff also researched and identified software programs that were consistent with the desired outcomes. These steps included:

1. Identification and purchase a new student information system (PowerSchool);
2. Identification and purchase a new software program to facilitate the teacher observation process (TeachPoint);
3. Identification and purchase a “reverse 911” or “robo call” system to keep families informed. We selected Connect Ed;
4. Upgrading of the infrastructure of both schools to support the new technologies;
5. Upgrading of websites to become more effective and migrate to free email; and
6. Coordination professional development to provide cost sharing, thus affording high quality teacher training and support.

SECTION 1: PARTNER COMMUNITIES

Shaker Mountain Union #70 is located in the rolling hills of the Berkshires and is comprised of the three districts of the Towns of Richmond, Hancock and New Ashford. A union, or supervisory union as it is also called, is comprised of two or more school districts that joined together to achieve economies of scale by sharing central office staff, such as a superintendent of schools. New Ashford is a non-operating district, which means it does not have a school. All New Ashford students are tuitioned into schools in another district. Hancock is a single school district with a student population of approximately forty-four students in Pre K through Grade 6; while Richmond, also a single school district, has a population of 150 students in Pre K through Grade 8. The districts currently do not participate in cooperative purchasing programs, partner with other districts nor utilize an educational collaborative for special education or professional development services. The Central Office is located in the Richmond school.

As a result of this project, there has been a positive shift in valuing collaboration, sharing of resources and communication between Central Office and the municipal governments. There is also an increased level of trust and confidence between and among the various municipal and school departments.

SECTION 2: GOALS

The districts sought to realize cost savings while increasing efficiencies and eliminating redundancies. The districts achieved these outcomes by:

1. Reducing the duplication of efforts, including: data entry, firewalls, content filtering, file storage, management of multiple devices, service contracts, and extended warranties;
2. Developing professional development delivery models across the two districts in a cost-effective manner;
3. Providing an up-to-date regionalized consistent website to provide information regarding the activities and operations of the schools to the community stakeholders and a free educational email;
4. Providing a common tool to facilitate the teacher observation and reporting process;
5. Providing common student information system and budgetary management system; and
6. Installing of a more robust network infrastructure to improve performance, increase reliability and security. The new infrastructure would enhance the collaboration of curricular information between schools and improve communication between school and home and school and the communities. The more robust network will support the accessibility of PowerSchool, SoftRight, ConnectEd and TeachPoint.

SECTION 3: IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Year 1:

- A. Regionalize data sharing through the implementation of Standard Interoperability Framework (SIF) between the two school districts for improved electronic information sharing related to student information, purchasing and accounts payable, other financial applications, special education services, curriculum, assessment, and communications with parents, students, staff, and community members;
- B. Research and develop a regionalized cost sharing, resource share model for serving technology systems between our two school districts. Currently, we have different personnel in the two districts addressing various segments of technology within our schools. Develop a plan to service the administrative, academic, professional development, and operations of technology between our districts in a cost effective equitable manner;
- C. Explore regionalized professional development, remote trouble shooting and network management;
- D. Transition from a fee-based email provider to free educational email;
- E. Explore and develop a regional presence and approach to developing a web site for the two districts to provide more information to the school community of staff, parents, administrators, and students. Provide information on the activities and operations of the Schools to the state and local government officials, and to the citizens of the towns;
- F. Develop regional professional development opportunities and models for staff in both districts;
- G. Improve communication between school and home through the use of a common parent notification system; and
- H. Provide building administrators with technology to implement the observation and reporting aspects of the new teacher evaluation model in a time-efficient and effective manner.

Year 2:

- A. Provide training and begin to use the new student information system to provide regular progress reporting and parent access to their child's academic program;
- B. Continue to improve efficiencies and reduce redundancies and errors through the use of common software programs and applications; and
- C. Collaborate with the Towns of Richmond and Hancock to see if there is further interest in developing collaborative systems to reduce redundancies and errors.

Project timeline:

- a. Acquire and install software/hardware – March-June 2013
- b. Provide staff training in the software – July –September 2013
- c. Update and manage email and website information – April-December 2013
- d. Transition to regionalized data sharing protocols – March-December 2013
- e. Training, consultation and Professional Development – March 2013-August 2014
- f. Begin project effectiveness evaluation – August 2013-April 2014

SECTION 4: BUDGET

<u>Item/Service</u>	<u>Cost</u>
PowerSchool(Student Information System) Installation plus two-year service agreement	\$21,900
PowerSchool Training	\$3,124
Connect Ed (Reverse 911 Call System) Installation and two-year service agreement	\$1,250
TeachPoint (Teacher Observation/Evaluation Software)	\$651
Hardware	\$6,450
Infrastructure Upgrade	\$18,510
TOTAL	\$51,885

Notes:

1. The original grant application was broader in scope to include purchasing budgetary software and training for the Hancock Town Treasurer and to purchase and train teachers in the use of a curriculum writing software program. These components of our plan were deleted when the grant was reduced as a result of mid-year state budget reductions.
2. Our budget request of \$73,000 was reduced to \$52,037.
3. We reviewed our project goals and determined we could still achieve much of what we sought to do with the reduced funds by deferring the two items that were cut until a future time. While the Hancock Town Treasurer has not been trained in how to use the budgetary software, she works with the Superintendent's Administrative Assistant to provide information that is then put into the program from Central Office. By working closely with Central Office, the Treasurer is gradually learning about the software program. We were not able to purchase a curriculum writing software program. However, nine of our teachers had the opportunity to participate in a county-wide curriculum writing project funded through the CIC Program. This served as a wonderful introduction into writing curriculum that is consistent with Common Core Teaching.
4. The funding proved to be fully adequate for us to achieve our remaining goals. Through personal testimony from the two school secretaries we learned that they are very pleased with the new student information software. It supports the state reporting that they must complete several times each year, allowing them to complete the reports in less time and with fewer errors. When we sent a questionnaire out to parents about the new Reverse 911 call system, they responded with praise for the school's use of the system to keep parents and other community members well informed of what is going on at school as well as alerting them to school schedule changes as a result of bad weather.

SECTION 5: CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

The availability of personnel, electronic training, and collective bargaining proved to be the three greatest challenges in the implementation of this project.

The greatest challenge was the availability of personnel to participate in the project in a timely manner. The Shaker Mountain Union #70 Central Office consists of a .6FTE Superintendent, a .3FTE Special Education Director and a .8FTE Administrative Assistant. Other than the SPED Director, we do not have any directors or coordinators who could assist in the implementation of the grant initiatives. Hancock and Richmond are small schools with several part time staff members. The technology person in Hancock is working at a .2FTE. The technology person at Richmond was hired in late summer and is working in a .8FTE position and is a first year teacher. Neither teacher has extensive training in technology and had limited time to devote to the installation of the new programs and learning how they work. The key person for understanding and using PowerSchool is the school administrative assistant. Hancock needed to hire this person and did not have her in place until late summer. Because of these situations, we were challenged to keep the installation and training schedule set by PowerSchool. We did complete the installation, but additional one-on-one training was needed after the technology teacher and new administrative assistant were in place.

The training provided by PowerSchool was on-line via conference call. This proved to be very challenging and much anxiety in those who were on the receiving end of the training. It became clear that face-to-face training was needed and an excellent trainer was hired to provide one-on-one training for the administrative assistants.

TeachPoint is a software program designed to facilitate the teacher observation process using the new Massachusetts Teacher Evaluation protocols. Adopting the new protocols was part of collective bargaining. Both Hancock and Richmond schools started the school year without new teacher contracts in place. The contracts were finally adopted in late November in Richmond and in February for Hancock. We could not use the new program until the contracts were ratified. The evaluators needed to proceed with the evaluation process using the old documentation until the new protocols were adopted. Therefore, TeachPoint has been highly underused this school year, but will be used as designed in school year 2014-2015.




SECTION 6: OUTCOMES

I am pleased to state that we met our major and minor goals and have experienced improved relations with our municipal boards as we built relationships based on collaboration, trust and the exchange of accurate data.

Listed below are some of the outcomes of our project:

1. PowerSchool, Connect Ed and TeachPoint were all successfully installed and put to use;
2. School Administrative Assistants report ease of using PowerSchool to produce mandated state reports on time and with renewed confidence that what they are reporting is accurate;
3. Parents report they like hearing the information and safety messages sent to them via Connect Ed. They stated they feel well-informed and more connected to their child's academic program;
4. We have an updated infrastructure to support the new technologies;
5. We have updated web sites that are easier to use and provide more information;
6. The fee-based email has been replaced with free education email;
7. We combined resources to provide high quality teacher training and support;
8. Information is exchanged more freely between the school department and town departments;
9. The acquisition of a limited number of laptops and iPads needed to access and use the new software programs has helped address some of the technology deficiencies we are experiencing in our two schools; and
10. TeachPoint has had limited use this year. This is a work in progress.

PROJECT GOAL	MEASURE	CURRENT PERIOD	PRIOR PERIOD	TREND	TARGET	STATUS
To develop a regional approach to education technology	% decrease of data errors/ corrections	50%	25%	Increasing	100%	Below 10% of goal
	# of consolidated	3	3	Stable	3	Goal completed

	service contracts will increase					
	# of aligned curriculum unities between the two school districts will increase	This goal was removed when the grant amount was reduced.				
	# of stakeholders (parents, municipal officials, school staff) who support the collaboration, as evidenced by survey results	7	6	Increasing	15	Within 10% of the goal
STATUS LEGEND	OFF TARGET:	 CLOSE TO TARGET		ON TARGET:		NOT APPLICABLE

CONTACT INFORMATION

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REFERENCES

PowerSchool

Attendance	Parent portal	Registration
State reporting	Scheduling	Report writing/grant data
Nursing log	Disciplinary log	
Grading	Transcripts	

ConnectEd

- Emergency communications
- Event announcements
- Parent outreach
- Staff communication

TeachPoint

- Mobile teacher evaluation software

Linda J. Porter Kabaniec, PowerSchool Trainer

72 Randall Road

Montague, MA 01351

lakeshore@yahoo.com

RESOURCES

Brainspiral Technologies, Inc.

P.O. Box 709

Williamstown, MA 01267

Installed updated infrastructure and provided hardware, technology consultation and access to free email

Hampshire Regional School District

Provided consultation services and guidance

Shaker Mountain Union #70

Former technology teacher provided assistance with program installation