

Houston Independent School District Matches SIS Solution to District Strategy

Houston Independent School District (HISD) is Texas' largest school system and one of Houston's largest employers. A leader in education reform, HISD is entrusted with the care and education of 203,000 children at 295 campuses.

With progress on the SATs exceeding the national average and record high scores on the standardized state exam, Houston students are excelling academically.

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Melinda Garrett
Chief Financial Officer
HISD

QUICK FACTS

- 203,000 students
- 295 campuses
- Largest School System in Texas

The public school district is exceptionally diverse with a student population that is 59 percent Hispanic, 30 percent African-American, 8 percent White, and 3 percent Asian-American. About 80 percent of HISD students come from economically disadvantaged homes.

HISD schools operate much like a corporate environment. They are held to rigorous accountability standards and administrators are given wide latitude to plan and allocate levels of educational resources and services based on the unique needs of their students. HISD's student-centered organizational structure is designed to align school goals and programs for sustained academic improvement, to run as efficiently as possible, and to provide oversight of data and compliance with state requirements. Effective technology solutions that can be easily integrated and that are readily accessible to thousands of district users play a significant role in ensuring best business practices.

As an early adopter of innovative technology, HISD has deployed various software systems to manage employee, student, financial, and other district information. Veteran HISD executive, Chief Financial Officer Melinda Garrett, has been charged with deploying various enterprise systems at the seventh-largest school district in the nation and is an authority on the critical factors that contribute to a successful adoption.

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HISD rolled out Pearson's Chancery SMS student information system (SIS) at all of its schools at the beginning of the 2006-2007 school year.

Before implementing Chancery SMS, HISD's student information system consisted of 300 independent databases. Specialized programmers were required to work through the night, aggregating vast amounts of individual school information for analysis by central office administrators. Since the district-wide reports were time-consuming to produce, the information available to officials was always dated.

“The reason we chose Chancery SMS is because every individual student record could be extracted immediately in any way we wanted. Principals need to know what's going on in their school. Teachers must know what's going on in their classroom. The benefit from Chancery SMS is in the detail of the data that can be requested,” said HISD Board President Manuel Rodriguez.

Launching a major, district-wide change in student information systems is not an easy task and both HISD and Pearson officials worked hard to manage issues during the implementation. HISD and Pearson quickly responded to issues throughout the deployment and adapted the system to run faster and better. The immediate action following these instances resulted in relatively few challenges and much happier educators, as they were able to more effectively access student data.

“With the exception of the initial difficulty transitioning to the system, Chancery SMS has helped us better meet the needs of our students,” said Adriana Castro, principal of HISD’s Moreno Elementary School. “Data drives instruction, and Chancery SMS helped us get “real-time” information in a user-friendly manner so we could regroup and assess student needs based on that data. The information is available at teachers’ fingertips and it has become second nature to them.”

With Chancery SMS’ web-based system, student schedules, grades, disciplinary records, school course offerings, and real-time attendance data are only a few of the important records readily available for schools and central office administrators.

Elisa Snow has been teaching at HISD for 15 years and is charged with the important job of providing specialized tutoring for the children of Moreno Elementary School who are most at risk of failing.

“With Chancery SMS, we’re able to get data much more quickly than before and we are able to better determine which children need the most help. We can intervene faster and customize education based on individual needs,” Snow said. “Chancery SMS also automates daily attendance, so we’re able to have a count of the children absent soon after school starts. We can then immediately get on the phones and call parents. Many times, the children had only overslept and we were able to get them to school within a short while. It has definitely improved attendance.”

But with Pearson’s customization services, enhancements to the technology solution will continue as education standards continue to rise and the needs of HISD schools continue to evolve. HISD officials are planning ahead.

“We’ve come a long way, but the system’s scalability has the promise to help us do much more...things we may not even be able to imagine right now,” said Garrett. “We have a group of visionary school leaders who are going to help us stay ahead of the game and think of what we may want the system to look like years from now.”

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