

CUSTOMER CONNECTIONS

RITENOUR SCHOOL DISTRICT, MO UPGRADES EFFICIENTLY WITH eSchoolPLUS STUDENT INFORMATION SYSTEM

SCHOOL DISTRICT PROFILE

- Located in St. Louis County, Missouri
- District began as Buck School, a one-room schoolhouse in 1846
- Today consists of 10 schools, one early childhood center and an adult education program
- Educates more than 6,100 students

"It helps parents become more involved in their child's education. We have a very active parent partner community, and this is a great additional tool to encourage and enable communication between parents, teachers and administrators."

RAY LOEHR
Manager of Information Systems, Ritenour School District

CHALLENGES

- Required a web-based system for its user-friendliness, centralized data and accessibility
- Wanted a reliable solution that would support staff and a transient student population
- Needed extensive reporting for the State of Missouri, the School District and federal mandates
- Sought a solution that was ready-to-go without much or any expensive, time-consuming customization



eSchoolPLUS SOLUTION

- Student Administration
- Performance Analysis
- Teacher Access
- Home Access

"I had been familiar with SunGard Public Sector before and knew they were reliable," said Ray Loehr, manager of information systems at Ritenour. And so when Ritenour School District needed a new Student Information System, SunGard was on the top three list.

BENEFITS

- Teachers have access to a wealth of student information using Teacher Access
- Parents are more involved and informed about their children because of Home Access
- SunGard's eSchoolPLUS solution did not need any customization
- Centralized system means data is consistent, accurate and up-to-date
- Using the solution's performance dashboard and performance analysis, administrators can generate reports as-needed, without running multiple programs

The district had no time to waste, wanting to move to a new system immediately, said Loehr. After all, Ritenour wanted the new solution to be operational in time for the next school year, and needed to ensure it had adequate time to verify and transfer data, train administrators and educate end-users about how to operate the new system, he noted.

Open for Business

"We were pushing the limit of our legacy system," said Loehr. "It was a great system but technology and our needs had advanced since we first acquired it."

Ritenour School District researched three contenders, including SunGard's eSchoolPLUS web-based Student Information Management system. Although time was at a premium, the district had several weeks to conduct a more extensive research plan. "We had a little more time for demos. We also were able to talk to the developers and do online demonstrations," said Loehr.

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The result of its research? Ritenour School District selected SunGard's solution based on its technological edge, the quality of customer service and support, and SunGard's extensive knowledge of both the K-12 market and Missouri's specific needs. "It made a lot of sense to us," said Loehr.

Although SunGard offers extensive customization services to meet all districts' individual requirements, Ritenour School District did not need any custom programming and was able to use the software immediately, he said. Of course, data had to be transferred from the legacy system, and the district needed the solution to be set up to meet Ritenour's configuration, said Loehr.

At the start of the school year, Ritenour School District was up-and-running, with access provided to all 450 teachers and 25 administrators, he said. The district — which has won many awards such as Blue Ribbon Schools of Excellence and the Missouri Outstanding School Superintendent — wanted its Student Information System to be equally outstanding and help teachers become even better at helping students learn and succeed, said Loehr.

Grade-A

Because **eSchoolPLUS** is web-based and uses a familiar, easy-to-use interface, teachers and other end-users such as counselors and administrators needed little training. In fact, **eSchoolPLUS** gave these users more freedom and flexibility, enabling them to do many tasks themselves, said Loehr.

"It looks like Internet Explorer," he said. "A lot of the teachers were able to do their own attendance for the first time. Many teachers also like the **eSchoolPLUS** grade book. Teachers also have access to a lot more information about students than they ever had before."

In addition to giving teachers more autonomy and insight into each student, this also decreased back-office support, speeding up the entire process and reducing the risk of errors, said Loehr. Ritenour also began using **eSchoolPLUS**' popular Home Access capability, which allows parents and guardians to interact more closely with the school and teachers, he said.

Of course, not all students' families take advantage of Home Access but those that do enjoy the additional peek into their children's world. Students, too, are leveraging Home Access, encouraging all teachers to use this valuable resource, said Loehr.

"The parents who we know use Home Access are looking at it pretty carefully," he said. "It helps parents become more involved in their child's education. We have a very active parent partner community, and this is a great additional tool to encourage and enable communication between parents, teachers and administrators."

Internally, Ritenour relies on **eSchoolPLUS** for the many reports it must publish for the state and federal government, a moving target that requires a flexible solution, said Loehr. "Lately the state of Missouri has changed the reporting requests, but **eSchoolPLUS** and SunGard continue to meet their changing requirements," he said. "Now we have to report every single student, not vague statistical information. This is a big task for all the school districts in Missouri. We want to just run these reports directly from the system, without having to do additional manual work."

To accomplish this, the district's **eSchoolPLUS** facilitator Sharon Ellis has been working closely with SunGard. While the challenges are immense, Ritenour feels it has a true partnership with SunGard, that it is not alone in surmounting this speed bump and will meet both the new requirements and the state's deadlines, she said.

"When we're working directly with the software they're a very useful group. They are open to our suggestions and they make suggestions based on their experiences with the software and other school districts," said Ellis. "The SunGard team is very helpful. They give us that human communication that's needed in this type of scenario."

This ongoing, open process is something Ritenour has enjoyed over the course of its relationship with SunGard Public Sector, said Loehr. "One thing I like about their approach is they constantly seek to improve the product and they listen to us," he said. "When we first started with **eSchoolPLUS**, for example, only teachers had access to their students' grade book information. Now all authorized users such as counselors and administrators can view student data, giving them a big picture view that can stop problems early."

After all, the number-crunching, data-sharing and report-generating ultimately are designed to help students become educated, contributing members of society. And, with the help of SunGard's **eSchoolPLUS**, Ritenour School District is accomplishing this goal, one child at a time.