



Changing the Face of Technology in Education: Funding Education—Not Technology

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Over the past 20 years technology has become prevalent in our schools both as an educational tool to support learning as well as in the “back office” to manage the financial, human resource and student information required to run the schools and districts.

The emergence of new technologies, growing competition, tightening budgets and changing student demographics are driving dramatic changes in the delivery of services by educational institutions. The personal computer, the Internet, networking capabilities and other technologies have enabled companies and educational institutions to implement applications that are very effective. But technology alone is not the answer. Properly utilizing new technologies requires a broad understanding, unique perspective and guided vision on how to get the most from the people and processes that it supports.

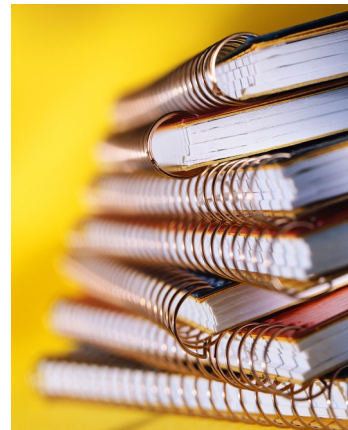
It’s time for school administrations and state agencies to take a step back and objectively analyze how and where technology budgets are being appropriated. This will provide a renewed clarity into the impact it has on students, parents, educators and the community.

History – How Did We Get to Where We Are?

Business computer applications have been in existence for over 50 years. The mainframe was the work horse for generating

information that the business community began to rely on, but was only affordable for the larger, more profitable companies. With the introduction of the personal computer (PC) smaller businesses were able to experience the benefits that computing provided. This launched a nascent era in computing that initially created the client server environment and spawned the Internet and wireless environments that are currently being used on a global basis.

An increasing number of technology development companies and plethora of products in the market place made the entry point more realistic for schools. Competition, availability and the demand for new technologies drove prices down to the point where personal computers became extremely affordable. These changes served transformed perceptions of technology from being an expensive line item to a necessary and effective business tool. Schools were able to acquire PCs and benefit from the power that they provided. Financial and Human Resource systems are now available for schools, along with Student Information Systems that assist administrators track key educational levers.

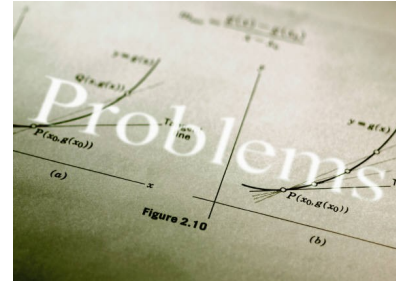


Recently, with the tight budgets and spending restrictions affecting education, there has been increased interest in utilizing another computing tool that has achieved significant success in the business world – Customer Relationship Management (CRM) for schools. CRM in higher education is planned and deployed using the same principles and methods used by a business. Only the audience is different. Instead of "customers", schools implement CRM to track students and other constituencies key to their success. Schools today can benefit tremendously from adopting a more corporate approach in trying to understand their students and how to better serve their needs. This approach involves taking a 'customer-centric' view that gathers student-driven information, which can be used to develop short and long-term strategic plans.

What's the Problem?

This all sounds good in theory. Schools are able to afford computers to run applications that support and streamline their back-office functions. But here's the rub: because these applications are affordable, many institutions have purchased and implemented them on an individual, school by school basis.

Duplicating hardware and software purchases, implementation costs and support costs is enormously inefficient. When added up on a state wide basis (or even a district basis) the cost is incredible - estimated in the millions of dollars. Even worse, this cost is recurring. Reinvestment is required every three to five years to keep pace with changing technologies.



These disparate systems are accompanied by multiple standards for conducting business within the schools. Different standards mean different information, different reports, different business processes. These differences contribute no value. Many back-office processes gain value from the efficiencies gained from conducting business in a common way, not from distinctness. The inability to transform a plethora of information into valuable and insightful data greatly reduces an institution's effectiveness and its ability to provide an overview of its activities and account of its success.

There Is a Solution

Fortunately, the landscape for technology has changed significantly in the last five years. We are no longer handcuffed with systems and applications that historically have required multiple, individual hardware and software platforms. The Internet is now a viable tool that has provided us with alternatives never available before. The key is to take advantage of these capabilities without creating additional "information technology" overhead. Our approach is to create **Shared Service Centers** to support education's back-office requirements.



A Shared Service Center offers an application, to multiple end users, by hosting the application in a single location. This Center maintains the hardware, software, and provides customer support. This is a concept that large businesses have adapted to operate more efficiently and reduce expenditures. We need to adopt these same concepts and disciplines in our educational institutions.

The minimum requirement for a school to benefit from some of the capabilities is only a PC with connectivity to the Internet.

We have the ability to minimize the investment on an individual school level and provide more robust applications to support our educational administrators and teachers.

Impart Solutions believes that Shared Service Centers will:

- Reduce many redundancies and administrative costs.
- Improve procedures.
- Increase productivity.
- Streamline operational processes.
- Improve the access and flow of information.
- Make educational institutions more efficient and competitive.
- Provide the same opportunities to all institutions regardless of size or economics.



Conclusion

Adopting Shared Service Centers provides services to smaller, less funded schools; services that were previously unavailable because of access, support needs, implementation costs. It is imperative to look at alternatives that create new operational efficiencies, reduce costs and strengthen bottom lines. Schools should focus on their core competency and primary goal of providing educational excellence. It’s time to begin funding education and not technology.



About the Institute for Value Creation

Delivering exceptional results requires exceptional knowledge—of industries, of solutions, of market conditions, and of business processes. Impart Solutions’s Institute for Value Creation (IVC), provides understanding and solutions to key management issues through IVC’s series of research, events and whitepapers.

Contact ivc@impartsolutions.com for questions or comments on this and other whitepapers and events produced by the Institute for Value Creation.

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