Customized Aspen SIS Saves Time, Money and Improves Student Outcomes for Large Tennessee School District

KNOX COUNTY SCHOOLS
KNOXVILLE | TENNESSEE

THE CHALLENGE

Knox County, a large district of 90 schools, 60,000 students and 8,000 staff members, includes both urban and rural schools, all with varying needs. After years of struggling with multiple databases and a frustrating, inflexible student information system, Beau Stanley, the district's IT team leader, became convinced they had to find a better way.

"While our users had become more and more dependent on needing access to their school's data, the district's solution did not give IT the ability to create additional data fields to collect information. We were forced to use what the software had – not what we needed," Stanley said. "Additionally, our users could not create their own reports, so they had to try to use what already existed or call my office for a raw data file. This became a burden for both the schools and my team as it became increasingly difficult to keep up."
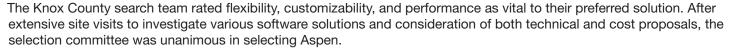
Stanley and a search committee began looking for a solution that would allow district schools to help themselves and make timely, data-driven decisions. "Our vision was to have a product that we could customize to meet our users' ever-changing demands – without starting from scratch," Stanley said. "We wanted to be able to customize our templates to not only assist our schools with their daily tasks, but also to provide for greater data integrity."

"Before we implemented Aspen SIS, our users were frustrated by the laborious process of logging in to multiple pieces of software for their daily tasks. With Aspen SIS, we have a one-stop shop for managing student information, including class schedules, conduct, student performance, academic and attendance interventions, individual health records, and much more. Our users are pleased with the system's performance, flexibility, and convenience – and with the ongoing support of the Follett team."

BEAU STANLEY
Aspen Team Lead,
Information Technology
Knox County Schools
Knoxville, TN

Gail Byard, Knox's Chief Technology Officer, was also part of the transition team. Byard knew firsthand how badly the district needed a more efficient, flexible way to manage all student data. "We were looking for a robust system that offered scheduling flexibility while still adhering to our detailed state reporting requirements," Byard said. "Our state reporting and funding is actually based on detailed student schedules. With such a large user base and small IT staff, it was imperative that our new system allow our users to perform at least basic data extracts on their own. This was an important capability that we'd never had in previous student information systems."

THE SOLUTION

The vision of a "better way" became reality when Knox County Schools found the Follett Aspen® Student Information System (SIS). As they researched the system's capabilities, they quickly discovered how Aspen offered a rare level of customization and scalability, which appealed to the district and its wide-ranging needs. They were also impressed with its proven track record with both large and small school districts.

The Knox County search team rated flexibility, customizability, and performance as vital to their preferred solution. After extensive site visits to investigate various software solutions and consideration of both technical and cost proposals, the selection committee was unanimous in selecting Aspen.

"We were excited that the system would allow us to customize things on our own," Stanley said. "Going forward, we would not be required to always go through the company to make changes. It gave us great freedom."

"With Aspen, we were able to implement a software system that allowed for autonomy and flexibility at all our schools, but still tracked detailed, minute-to-minute schedules for over 60,000 students," Byard added. "Considering students, staff, and families, we currently have over 150,000 users on Aspen and its Family Portal. This system is critical to our district in many ways and has held up to this level of demand very well."

Richard Baughman, Knox County's Special Education Consultant, was equally pleased with Aspen as the district's chosen solution. "Aspen allowed us to keep student data in one system that was previously spread out among several different systems," he said. "We have been able to consolidate student health data with RTI* and S-Team** information in one place, which has made gathering student information for special education evaluations much more efficient."

> "Aspen allows me to pull almost any information from any combination of tables, which has made creating special education evaluations much more efficient."
>
> **RICHARD BAUGHMAN**
> Special Education Consultant
> Knox County Schools

COLLABORATION BEYOND THE ORDINARY

The district's IT team, as well as faculty and administrative users, have been impressed with the level of service they have received from Follett from the moment they decided to implement Aspen through the subsequent years of successful use.

Because Aspen was new to Tennessee, the Knox County Schools solution was built from the ground up, and Follett consulted with their IT team at every stage to confirm the business rules were correct. Conference calls between Knox and Follett throughout the implementation process enabled meaningful discussion of preferences and concerns. And collaboration did not stop once the system was up and running.

"Even today, we can pick up the phone and call our state reporting representative whenever we have questions," Stanley said. "For instance, the state made a change in the way students were loaded for state assessments. We contacted our Follett representative about our concern, even though the issue was not anything that Follett created. She worked with Follett's state reporting development team and found a solution that allowed our schools to work much more efficiently and still comply with the demands of state reporting."

Paula Sarver, RTI Specialist, is equally pleased with the responsiveness of the Follett team. "When collaboration first began in creating an EdPlan for RTI, we knew very little about Aspen's capabilities," she said. "We presented a 'wish list' of what we would like to see and went over non-negotiables aligned with state RTI requirements. Our Follett representative showed us a few optional plans that had previously been created. From there, we were able to combine what was useful in other plans to create a unique plan for our district."

*Response to Intervention (RTI) **Student Support Team (S-Team)*

The entire team at Knox County is thrilled with the responsiveness and flexibility of their experience with Follett and Aspen. "Our team has experienced outstanding levels of support from the Follett staff," Byard said. "Having been a part of many large system implementations, both past and present, I can say that this cannot be taken for granted. Everything from conversion to state reporting to day-to-day support has been met with prompt and expert responses."

Baughman is impressed with the creative and responsive attention they receive whenever Knox County asks Follett to develop new reports to meet emerging needs. "Follett is currently developing a bullying response work flow for us," he said. "The staff I worked with are extremely knowledgeable and were able to develop workflows to meet our specific needs."

THE RESULTS

Today, staff at the Knox County school system have found improved efficiencies with many of their daily tasks, and the team is quick to point to the Aspen SIS as a primary reason. Aspen has transformed the process of reporting student data, creating instructional plans, and applying state-specific guidelines – all of which empower the district's users, save time and money, and improve student outcomes.

"Follett's collaboration with us to customize Aspen to streamline our day-to-day processes has exceeded our expectations," Stanley said. "For example, most of our 31 middle schools and high schools 'publish' report cards or progress reports to the family portal instead of printing them. Imagine the cost savings for our schools of not printing report cards every 4½ weeks!

"Another invaluable solution in Aspen is the electronic workflow process," Stanley said. "We no longer have the significant cost of printing forms. Administrators save the time they previously spent digging through a student's confidential record to collect information, and teachers no longer have to write their observations on paper. And, of course, a price cannot be placed on improved student success by having previous documentation more readily available."

As to the future? The district is confident that through ongoing collaboration with Follett, the Aspen SIS system will continue to evolve to meet new and emerging needs.

"As we grow in our capacity with Aspen, we see opportunities to improve the plan," Sarver said. "I feel confident that we can continue to dream about improving our documentation, and Follett will listen and work with us to get what we need accomplished."

The EdPlan, another key feature in Aspen that is popular with Knox County, allows schools to record a student's educational needs (including customized RTI EdPlans that document a student's interventions and progress) in a report that follows each student from school to school, enabling schools to view a more complete picture when students transfer within the district.

"The configurable nature of the Aspen software has been invaluable to our staff as we work to meet the varying needs of so many schools and users. Even more importantly, the ability to easily report and extract data has been a game changer for many of our school users."

GAIL BYARD
CTO, Knox County Schools

Follett Aspen® SIS
©2022 Follett School Solutions, LLC 12141 9/22

follettaspen.com
aspensalesteam@follettlearning.com

3