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Sheryl Hogan
Grosse Pointe
Parcells Middle School Secretary

Grosse Pointe Public School System

- ❖ Located in Grosse Point, MI
- ❖ 2 High Schools
- ❖ 3 Middle Schools
- ❖ 9 Elementary Schools
- ❖ 8,500 students
- ❖ <http://gpschools.schoolwires.net>

Grosse Pointe Public Schools recoup outstanding fees and fines with K-12 Online

A Problematic Solution

Year after year, thick packets encompassing forms from a variety of departments were sent home in August for families to fill out and return. That information then had to be hand-typed into the school's student information system, which sometimes took until March for the secretary to complete. An individual school could receive in upwards of 700 checks at the beginning of the year for gym uniforms, PTO donations, textbooks, etc., all of which had to be processed separately.

About 5% of received checks bounced for insufficient funds. In addition, fees assessed to students for lost text and library books were typically unable to be recouped. As a Grosse Pointe administrator put it, “Depositing checks doesn't take much time out of my daily work but chasing down parents that bounce checks does!”

“We really had to do something,” explained Grosse Pointe Public Schools' Network Administrator Mary Kilimas. “Not only did we want to keep up with technology, but we truly needed to address the insufficient fund issue.

The district implemented an online process using eCommerce software to tackle the problem. This required parents to set-up individual accounts to access online forms, it didn't integrate with their Student Information System (SIS), which meant PDFs still had to be printed and collected, and the information had to be manually updated.

Although more progressive than their previous method, they needed a more robust solution. They needed a system that would easily integrate with their current SIS, reduce paper, process funds, and streamline their overall procedure. After months of research and a lot of district discussions, Grosse Pointe found K-12 Online.

Six Weeks to Efficiency

Now the challenge was getting the entire system up and running six weeks before the start of school. Online forms had to be created, parents had to be notified, and systems had to be integrated. It was hectic, but K-12 Online pulled it off.

“K-12 Online's system was flexible, provided customization, and they even changed some programming to accommodate our needs,” said Kilimas.”

Great Communication Leads to 100% Implementation

After a feverish six-week implementation the first year, Grosse Pointe wanted to increase communication to parents about online registration in year two.

Throughout the school year, they encouraged parents to get an email address on file with the school. When report cards were mailed out, they included a letter advising parents there would be mandatory online pre-registration in August. They communicated through the schools' website and advised parents to be on the lookout for an email that outlined their new registration process.

After a year of ongoing communication with parents, Grosse Pointe was ready for its second run with online registration. For parents without access, they set up computer stations manned by parent volunteers, at each of their schools campuses and allotted specific dates and times for parents to come in and register, ensuring that all families had access to the system.

Extensive communication led to 100% of their families using K-12 Online's registration system. And the feedback from parents was all positive, receiving comments such as "It was a breeze" or "It didn't take me long to register, that was so easy."

Funds, Fees, and Ease

One of the biggest benefits for Grosse Pointe was the use of K-12 Online's integrated web store. According to Kilimas, parents loved having a shopping cart and being able to pay for everything at once.

Parents appreciated the multi-merchant, single checkout process allowing them to pay for textbooks, order spirit wear, purchase PTO memberships, or make donations using a credit card, all with just a few clicks. Administrators valued K-12 Online's ability to keep accounts separate and secure. With no co-mingling of funds, each merchant maintained its integrity and transparency.

"The South High School Mother's Club (PTO) president raved about the successful year including revenues from memberships, parents paying in advance for the senior 'All Night Party,'

happening in June, and the reports made organization much easier overall," said Kilimas.

Not only did the PTO benefit from using the web store but also the district was extremely surprised at the amount of "missing" textbooks that showed up and how much they were able to collect for those that didn't.

"This year we loaded in the fines for the past 3 years for lost or damaged books. In the past we mailed letters to the home at the end of the school year requesting the return of the book or to pay the fee and tried to collect at registration. We typically got a response from about 25% of the parents. This year we estimate that over 75% of parents responded with returned books or money because the fines were included in their online registration. The high school collected over \$1,000 in old fines due to us. This was an unprecedented amount of money for us to recoup! We will continue to add the uncollected fees in K-12 Online next year." Explained Sheryl Hogan, Parcels Middle School Secretary. "Using this feature to charge fines and recoup fees was one of our favorite things," said Kilimas.

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Forward Thinking

Grosse Pointe initially rolled out the K-12 Online system to its high and middle schools. Because of its success, they plan to implement online registration across its nine elementary schools next year.

The district plans to use K-12 Online's robust web store to process payments for other school related clubs and organizations, such as: boosters, athletics, after school child care, summer camp, and class pictures.

K-12 Online is so versatile that Grosse Pointe is planning to allow students to apply and register for summer school through the system. By simply creating another school in their district (summer school) and configuring the web store to list classes instead of items, students will be able to go online, choose their classes, add them to their shopping cart, and pay for summer school online. "We need a new Summer School process this year and adding it to K-12 Online will keep all of our online programs consistent," said Kilimas.