



Switching to an online student enrollment and registration system makes financial sense.

Paper-Based Enrollment: Problems and Solutions

By John Anderson

In the past couple of decades, computers and technology have revolutionized once-slow processes, saving industries time and money in ways not previously possible. With today's budget crisis, school districts are looking for ways to use computers and the Internet to streamline school business processes while substantially lowering their cost.

One of the most tedious and costly processes during the school year is student enrollment and registration.

One of the most tedious and costly processes during the school year is student enrollment and registration. For school districts that are still using a paper-based enrollment system, this process is a prime candidate for becoming a computerized process.

There are many benefits to switching to an online student enrollment system; some are obvious and some might surprise you.

Dollar Savings

One of the most obvious and important benefits of replacing paper-based processes with computerized systems is money.

With a traditional enrollment system, each family receives a packet of forms to complete. The cost of printing and mailing these forms can be in the hundreds of thousands of dollars. After the paper forms are returned to the school, it can take months to manually enter them into a student management system. Having several employees working tirelessly full time to transcribe these forms increases the cost by another large margin.

An online student enrollment and registration system eliminates the physical cost of paper forms and the need to manually

transcribe them. Consequently, schools can save hundreds of thousands to millions of dollars each year by switching to an online system—not to mention the fact that by doing so, they become more socially responsible and environmentally friendly.

Better Resource Management

A school district with an online student enrollment system can better manage its resources. Under a traditional paper-based method, the number of newly enrolled students and their respective grade levels are usually based on estimations. It's not until all the registration forms have been processed that the district can get an accurate head count, and this is not until well after the school year has been in session.

Not knowing the total number of students in each grade level means not knowing how many teachers need to be allocated to a location or grade, sometimes skewing the student-to-teacher ratio so much that it can affect the quality of education. Sometimes one location will reach its maximum capacity and another location in the same district will have space to enroll additional students.

Without knowing the number of students enrolled, districts can only guess when a school is getting full.

Schools can save hundreds of thousands to millions of dollars each year by switching to an online system.

With an online student enrollment and registration system, an administrator can get an accurate, real-time count of the number of students enrolled by simply logging into an administrative portal. School administrators can use this information to allocate teachers and other resources where

they are needed, resulting in an even and more controlled distribution of funds.

This not only reduces cost by eliminating over-estimation, it increases the quality of education provided to the students.

Availability of Critical Information

The information in student enrollment packets is invaluable for every-day school processes and for the safety of the students who are enrolled. Critical information in enrollment packets can include emergency contact information, allergy information, and pertinent medical information. If something were to happen to the student, it could take a long time to find his or her medical information and emergency contacts in a stack of paper.

School cafeterias might not know that the student has an allergy to a certain food and the school nurse may not know that a student has a certain medical condition. This adds an unnecessary degree of liability to schools.

When parents enroll their students online, the information is saved directly into the database or student management system. There is no processing delay and the information is instantly available to any administrator who has access to the system. Emergency contact information can be found in seconds, allergy notifications can be sent to the cafeteria, and the school nurse can have instant access to important medical information when it is needed.

Quality of Information

Transcribing paper forms is a tedious process, and school employees often find that enrollment packets are not completely filled out or some of the information is incomplete, illegible, or inaccurate. In these cases, a district employee must contact the family for clarification or send home the incomplete forms with the student. When the parents are hard to

reach or there is a language barrier, this process can be complicated even further.

Online forms are a great way to collect information from users, and there is no need to question whether a U is a V or an O is a D. Online student enrollment systems can require that fields be completed before saving or that the information entered into a field follow a certain format.

For example, a phone number field can require 10 numeric digits and reject anything with alphabetic characters. Zip codes, email addresses, social security numbers, and other fixed format data can also be validated. Some information like states or relation to child has a fixed set of possibilities. These can be presented as drop down lists, radio buttons, or checkboxes so the user can quickly select the appropriate choice and move on. This allows the system to associate similar answers together for reporting and keeps the parent from having to type every field.

An online system can be accessed from anywhere with Internet access.

Most online student enrollment systems take a save as you go approach. Parents can log in and complete forms as they find time with the ability to save and come back if necessary. An online system can be accessed from anywhere with Internet access, whether at home, work, or vacation.

Up-to-Date Information

After parents send completed enrollment packets to the school, they have no way of knowing how that packet was processed, when it was processed, or whether the transcriber entered their information correctly. Also, a parent has no direct way to change any information such as address or phone number without contacting the school. This can get even more complicated if the information

Overcrowding? Declining Enrollment? Boundary Changes? Opening or Closing Schools?

The DI System helps with:

- Easy to use, feature-rich, web-based DI System
- Reality-based 10 year district and school by grade enrollment projections
- Efficiency calculators instantly show the effects of enrollment on budgeting, staffing and facilities
- Boundary change / Closing school scenarios made easy
- Relevant community demographics to improve student support
- Integrated tools and strategies to increase enrollment
- MySchoolLocator™ with bus stops and schedules for parents to look up assigned schools
- Projections for Pre-Kindergarten programs optionally available

INCREASE EFFICIENCY

REDUCE COSTS

**MAKE THE RIGHT
DECISIONS**

**DECISION
INSITE**




Enrollment Impact Specialists

(877) 204-1392
www.decisioninsite.com

needs to change and the original enrollment packet has not yet been processed.

Most online student enrollment systems today give parents an online portal. This allows parents to log in and view or change the data entered for a child. If the family were to move, all the parent would have to do is log in and change the current home address. Some systems have the ability to notify a school about the change and allow the school to verify the change before saving it.

Seamless Integration

There is a slight disconnect in most school districts in that they often have an electronic student management system but a paper-based enrollment system. A computerized student management system is a great way to access information about enrolled students and manage that data; however, it is not as useful when enrollment packets haven't been processed.

Manually entering all of the data in an enrollment packet into a student management system can be a time-consuming chore, but an online student enrollment system can eliminate this need completely.

Most online student enrollment system vendors have partnerships with major student management systems and can interface directly with them. Therefore, when a parent enrolls a student using the online process, the information is saved to the student management system. A school district does not need to change the current student management system to adopt an online enrollment system.

E-Commerce

Often, schools charge specific fees during registration, such as lab fees, club dues, and other fees. Some student enrollment systems have a built in payment gateway that can accept payment for these items from credit cards, PayPal, or other payment methods. Parents no longer have to

get cash from an ATM or write a check and trust that their student will give the money to the appropriate person.

An online student enrollment system can even generate revenue. During the enrollment process, some schools add an online convenience fee or request for donations. Some schools even partner with local businesses and generate ad revenue.

Making a Difference

Switching to an online student enrollment and registration system is an obvious next step to bridge the gap between archaic registration methods and computerized student management systems. The amount of money that can be saved is enough to make a difference in our education system.

John Anderson is the CWO of School Office Pro and is lead developer and junior partner of Dallas-based Code Authority Enterprise Solutions. Email: janderson@codeauthority.com

Looking for Quality Professional Development? Press Play!

The Live Learning Center provides on-demand, unlimited access to more than 90 hours of audio recorded sessions at the AM&E synchronized with PowerPoint presentations and handouts*.

Whether you download a session to your smartphone, or provide your entire team with professional development, with ASBO's Live Learning Center it's as easy as clicking "play."

AM&E attendees receive unlimited access as part of their registration.

Didn't make the conference? You can purchase individual sessions or the entire conference at the Live Learning Center.

www.asbointl.org/LiveLearningCenter

*When provided by the presentation speaker.

