



The Value of Automation in K-12 School's Back-Office

Cost Savings, Simplifying Administrative Tasks and Beyond

Educators and students are becoming more reliant on technology than ever before. And with recent government funding, K-12 schools have the opportunity to update and modernize their school systems.

This includes the potential to improve and streamline operations for back-office and administrative functions. As K-12 school districts grapple with decreasing budgets and even adapt to a new normal, they are looking for opportunities to maximize scarce resources. Turning to tech can allow them to do more with less.

How Tech is Solving for Now

While making the jump from manual processes can seem daunting, school districts that leverage tech can realize immediate solutions to common challenges because it offers a holistic, real-time view of spend from start to finish.

“Manual processes offer little visibility into spending, expenses and cash flow,” Jim McClurkin, Senior Director of Public Sector at SAP Concur states.¹ “True spend visibility lets district and school leaders make better, more accurate, and timely decisions.”

1. Greatness Awaits: Dump the Paperwork, [Innovation in Education](#), 2020



Three Ways Technology Contributes to More Effective Back-Offices

1. Empower Staff to Operate More Efficiently and Productively, Wherever They Are

Aside from freeing staff from routine tasks and procedures, automated solutions can allow faculty and staff to concentrate on higher-value work, innovate internal workflow processes, and apply themselves to other areas where cognitive skills are needed most.

An ideal example of this is the mountain of paperwork submitted by hundreds of faculty and staff in a single school district. It's easy for accounts payable teams who process the invoices to get overwhelmed, especially if they're doing things by hand or working with an outdated infrastructure.

"Being able to provide a user experience that's accessible from any location on any device, in a secure format, with native applications offers a huge advantage over processes that need to be accomplished on premise," McClurkin states.

This automated approach not only slashes the time to process requests, it also eliminates piles of paper. With a centralized dashboard to manage spending, back-office teams have more visibility to reduce fraud and inadvertent waste – a problem that is only increasing as people become more desperate during this time of economic downturn.



2. Ensure Compliance

The recent government funding was designated for a specific purpose — getting students back in the classroom, and address other needs that arose during the pandemic. “A lot fits under that umbrella — cleaning supplies and HVAC gear, professional development for teachers, new curriculum, new hires in strategic roles, hardware, and hotspots, and the list goes on,” shares McClurkin. School districts are required to spend the government funds responsibly, which means finance teams will need to spend an inordinate amount of time ensuring compliance.

Having a paper process puts the burden on an auditor to cross-reference every line item, creating an arduous system. While some schools may be required to audit 100% of their expense reports as part of their visibility efforts, it ends up being a detailed and time-intensive process when you consider that schools may process 100 to 1,000 reports a month.

“The ability to provide audit trails is immediate and as granular or consolidated as the auditor needs,” McClurkin states.

This is where school districts can benefit from pairing optical character recognition (OCR) applications with artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) to extract critical information and electronically process their documents. In the end, introducing automation allows internal auditors to focus on resolving problems, rather than identifying them, helping drive compliance, and creating a more positive user experience.



3. Improve Cash Flow

It's never been more important to find savings than in today's environment where revenue streams are changing and often decreasing. Investing in automation today can help school districts improve and protect its cash flow to allow for smoother operations.

"Manual processes offer little visibility into spending, expenses, and cash flow," McClurkin states. "True spend visibility lets district and school leaders make better, more accurate and timely decisions...those in charge of the money gain a better sense of how the district stands financially, project by project or overall."

For example, a school could create a "rule" in the workflow to prompt faster payments to vendors that offer an early-bird discount, so that the school never misses the savings. In another scenario, if the district purchases supplies from two different office supply stores, the system can be oriented to remind staff members to prioritize orders from the contracted supplier.

It's this ability to customize and set controls within automation that can lead to smarter payments and improve cash flow. And if you discover you're doing substantial business with a certain vendor across school districts, it could make you eligible for improved terms.

That's the real value of automation – where the return on investment expands beyond just the immediate return on the cost of the technology itself! Through increased efficiencies, your staff can regain hours previously used for tedious tasks and spend it in more satisfying ways. While payment discounts and gaining control over previously hidden costs can help you put cash aside for rainy days or future investment plans.



Analyzing Real Results

- Reduced expense processing time from 30-90 days to an average of 11 days
- Saved \$18,000 by implementing an automated invoice system

Rochester City School District, [SAP Concur case study](#)

Finding the New Normal

What's ahead for back-office technology? McClurkin currently sees it as, helping with the change management required to digitize the spend management process.

"The use of SaaS offers more than basic online efficiencies. The right kind of application provides greater visibility, tighter security, and a much better user experience," shares McClurkin. "There's a lot going on in K-12 right now, and how people spend their days is important. It's time to replace paper-based processes with digital solutions so schools can continue experiencing amazing transformation — and be ready for whatever happens next."



[Learn more](#) about how SAP Concur solutions can help K-12 school districts save time and money by visiting us online.



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