



Wildflowers growing in Texas



# Quick and successful implementation is the standard with Skyward's Student Management Suite

## CASE STUDY

### **“THE IMPLEMENTATION WAS NOTHING SHORT OF EXTRAORDINARY.”**

#### CUSTOMER PROFILES

DISTRICT: Deer Park ISD  
STATE: Texas  
ENROLLMENT: 12,700  
SCHOOLS: 15  
IMPLEMENTED: 2011

DISTRICT: Fort Bend ISD  
STATE: Texas  
ENROLLMENT: 70,000  
SCHOOLS: 74  
IMPLEMENTED: 2010

DISTRICT: Lewisville ISD  
STATE: Texas  
ENROLLMENT: 51,465  
SCHOOLS: 69  
IMPLEMENTED: 2012

SOLUTION  
Skyward's Student Management Suite

BENEFIT  
Aggressive timelines did not stand in the way of a successful migration to Skyward

After days, weeks, even months of research, it is natural for a school district to feel a sense of relief when a decision is finally made as to which student information system to use. As if that decision was not difficult enough, the district then faces the daunting task of implementing the new solution. Quite often, it is this step in the process that causes the most anxiety, confusion, and budget overruns.

Skyward understands how challenging this process can be, especially when trying to complete it on a short timeline. Skyward's project managers are equipped with the expertise needed to help schools navigate through a smooth, quick implementation process that sets the stage for success.

The following examples profile three Texas school districts—each with its own complex needs and accelerated timeframe— and explain how Skyward was able to quickly and successfully migrate them to the Skyward Student Management Suite.

### **DEER PARK ISD, TX GIVES SKYWARD AN A+ FOR UNPRECEDENTED SIX-WEEK MID-YEAR CONVERSION**

Deer Park Independent School District, located approximately 20 miles outside of Houston, is a school system committed to innovation. With 15 schools, 12,700 students, and 1,700 employees, the district has been able to provide high-quality services by staying on the cutting edge of education technology.

#### **THE CHALLENGE**

Deer Park ISD faced a difficult decision when it found out its student information system would no longer be supported. The schools could either stay with the unsupported system they were comfortable and satisfied with or convert to something new. Sue Pike, director of information services, and her team decided to look to the future and find a new solution.

# WHEN THE DISTRICT WAS TOLD ITS STUDENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM WOULD NO LONGER BE SUPPORTED, IT FACED A TOUGH DECISION: STAY WITH THE OLD SYSTEM OR CONVERT TO A NEW SOLUTION.

Pike and her team initiated an extensive request for proposal (RFP) process and chose a student information system they thought would meet their needs. The decision proved to be disastrous. “We started talks in October 2009, we didn’t see any real data conversion until February of 2010, we went live in August, 2011 and by September, 2011 I threw up the white flag and said, ‘This is not going to work.’”

Throughout the lengthy implementation process, the vendor Deer Park ISD had chosen simply could not solve the persistent data migration issues. “We implemented 25 modules and of those, 23 implemented with problems,” Pike said. “As a result, information was inaccurate, reports were inaccurate. No one had any faith in the system or in the data. Teachers had difficulty using the program because it would work one day and then not work the next; it was impossible to train for that. After two months we realized how serious the problem had become. Some people had stopped using the program altogether and resorted to spreadsheets. It was like everyone had taken five huge steps backwards.”

Pike tried repeatedly to fix the issues. It soon became apparent, however, that the problems would not all be resolved. That’s when she made a new decision: Deer Park ISD would stop using the system it had invested so much time, effort and money into, and implement a brand new solution—in the middle of the school year. “We didn’t realize how much we had come to depend on the productivity and efficiency benefits of a quality student software system until we didn’t have one anymore,” she noted.

## THE SOLUTION

By this point, Pike and her team had done a lot of research into other systems. They were very familiar with the other vendors and decided to give Skyward a try. **“There were so many other school districts in the area using Skyward. They had a great reputation; they offered a web-based solution; and they were committed to meeting our tight deadline.”**

## THE RESULTS

The district purchased Skyward on December 10, 2011, under pressure to pull off a successful implementation. “We already had the negative experience with the last conversion to contend with, and then we faced the challenge of introducing a brand new system in the middle of the school year,” Pike said.

Nevertheless, Deer Park ISD plowed ahead. They sent their data to Skyward on December 11. Pike was impressed that by Christmas, Skyward already had some of the data ready to go. **“The implementation was fast and furious.** We had a call with our project manager and by the end of that hour we knew what we needed to do and what Skyward needed to do. She would send us updates with an updated project list and updated implementation calendar. We knew when trainings were coming up and what our tasks were. **There were no loose ends; it was just snapping your fingers and boom, boom, boom, things were done. No dates were missed; everything was right on schedule. Our assigned Skyward project manager and the programmers worked like crazy. They were wonderful.”**

# INEVITABLY, PIKE AND HER TEAM WERE UNDER ENORMOUS PRESSURE TO PULL-OFF A SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION.

Pike credits the successful implementation, in part, to Skyward's partnership approach. **"It wasn't just, 'All right, let's get you using Skyward and then we'll figure everything out later.' Instead it was, 'No, wait a minute. How does your district work? How do you do GPA? How do you calculate grades? What codes do you use? What is going to work best for your users?'"**

Deer Park ISD ended the semester on January 16, 2012. January 17 was an in-service day and on the 18th, when everyone returned for the start of the new semester, Skyward was up and running— in under two months.

**"In just six weeks Skyward pulled off an amazing implementation and, unbelievably, we also stayed within budget,"** says Pike. "Of course it took our users a day or two to acclimate – especially since this was the third system they had used in one year. But soon they just went hog wild; **they loved the system!** It gave them the accurate information they needed. They could run their own reports and do creative data mining. **They truly trust the system, and that is invaluable.**"

Pike gives Skyward an A+ for the implementation of the Student Management System. "If you don't have the leadership from your vendor, you can really flounder. But **with Skyward, I was just so impressed with the whole implementation process. They really made it painless.** In a very short amount of time they were able to implement a system that addressed the needs of the district. They were incredibly professional, organized and met all of the deadlines. Skyward does cost a little bit more, but, when you get a chance to compare (and that's not always a good thing such as in our case), you clearly see the level of difference. **Skyward is truly a step above the competition.**"

## FORT BEND ISD, TX COMPLETES LARGE-SCALE, COMPLEX IMPLEMENTATION IN JUST 3 1/2 MONTHS

With 74 campuses, over 8,500 employees, and close to 70,000 students, the Fort Bend Independent School District, located 35 miles southwest of Houston, is the seventh largest school district in Texas and the largest employer in Fort Bend County.

### THE CHALLENGE

In 2009, Fort Bend ISD faced a major dilemma. The district learned that its existing student information system would no longer be supported by the application provider. Because Fort Bend was 100 percent reliant on its vendor for support, they had no choice but to find a new system. Perhaps the most difficult aspect was that the district had just over three months to get the new system in place before the new school year would begin.

### THE SOLUTION

After a thorough RFP process, the district decided to switch to the Skyward Student Management Suite. "Soon after our decision, I was also told by a respected counterpart at another school district that Skyward

# **WITH 74 CAMPUSES AND CLOSE TO 70,000 STUDENTS, FORT BEND ISD IS THE 7<sup>TH</sup> LARGEST DISTRICT IN TEXAS.**

was a good choice,” said Robert Calvert, Chief Information Officer for Fort Bend ISD. “He told me, ‘They just do what they say they are going to do. You can trust them. I don’t have anything bad to say about them.’ And he was right. They did what they said they would do, and they did it when they said they would.”

Skyward and Fort Bend worked diligently together to meet the aggressive deadline. Skyward managed the data conversion and project management while Fort Bend worked on the data mapping and used internal resources for all the training. The two organizations had their first consulting arrangement in April of 2010. The systems conversion was completed by July and the system was up and running in time for the start of school on August 20. Not only was the project completed on time, but it also came in just shy of the projected budget.

## **THE RESULTS**

When Fort Bend ISD decided to implement Skyward, one of its goals was to standardize operational processes in accordance to district policies, something it had not been able to do with its previous system. “In the old system there were a lot of actions that any user could accomplish – i.e. moving a child in or out of a class, etc.,” said Calvert. “We wanted to limit user activity to conform to district rules. So as we implemented Skyward we made sure to confine each business process to match our policy.”

Additionally, Skyward’s system allowed Fort Bend to ensure that teachers and administrators only had access to the information and processes appropriate for their position and location. “Our ability to do this up front eliminated the need to implement the campus-wide security management and other security management that we were doing prior to Skyward,” Calvert said.

Fort Bend also implemented integrated master schedules that automatically updated its assessment and curriculum system, without any manual intervention.

As a result of implementing Skyward, Calvert says Fort Bend has seen an increase in operational consistency as well as the efficiency and productivity levels of its administrators. “This year, we were able to submit our state reporting a full week ahead of our normal deadline. I think that is pretty amazing.”

Calvert says he had faith in the Skyward implementation process, but his expectations were very high. “And I am happy to say that Skyward has met my expectations. The implementation was nothing short of extraordinary. In three and a half months, really two and a half months since many people were out on vacation, we were able to integrate the Skyward system with other critical business systems, change our overall business processes dramatically, and train our employees on the new system and processes—right before the start of school. I think that is a phenomenal accomplishment. They have been a really good partner. They have helped, listened and brought resources to bear when we needed them.”

# **“WE HAD TO INSTALL AND LEARN A NEW PRODUCT AND SUPPORT THE OLD PRODUCT IN PARALLEL. THERE WAS ZERO ROOM FOR ERROR, EVERYTHING HAD TO BE CORRECT.”**

*Debbie Largent, Manager Information Services, Lewisville ISD*

## **LEWISVILLE ISD, TX ACHIEVES RAPID, MID-YEAR CONVERSION TO SKYWARD'S UPGRADED STUDENT MANAGEMENT SUITE**

Lewisville Independent School District prides itself on a long-standing tradition of educational excellence. Located about 25 miles north of Dallas, it is one of the largest districts in Texas, with over 50,000 students enrolled.

### **THE CHALLENGE**

Upon learning that its student information system provider had filed for bankruptcy, the team at Lewisville realized that they needed to find a new system—and fast. The district issued a RFP with over 1,000 detailed functional requirements.

### **THE SOLUTION**

*Everything's bigger in Texas:* One of Lewisville ISD's key criteria for a vendor was a strong presence in Texas—and Skyward fit the bill. Skyward had an extensive track record of successful implementations in Texas. Plus, Skyward had been selected by the Texas Education Agency as a preferred provider for the state-sponsored student information system, which gave Texas districts like Lewisville access to reduced pricing, disaster recovery services, a five-year pricing guarantee, and hosting services that include automatic software updates and assistance with data security and privacy.

### **THE RESULTS**

**Lewisville ISD selected Skyward in August 2011 with a goal of using the system in January 2012.** “We were, of course, concerned about implementing in the middle of the year,” explained Debbie Largent, Manager Information Services, Lewisville ISD. “We had to install and learn a new product and support the old product in parallel. Our high schools are on accelerated block which means we complete two years of schooling in just one, so that raises an additional level of complexity. Six weeks after our go-live date, report cards were due for our elementary and middle schools, then three weeks after that we had high school report cards due. On top of that, we had to calculate the GPA and rank, produce transcripts, identify the valedictorians and salutatorians, the top ten, and so forth. There was zero room for error; everything had to be correct.”

At the same time that Lewisville was switching to Skyward, Skyward was preparing to launch its new Web 2.0 version of its Student Management Suite. Not wanting to have to retrain its staff, Lewisville ISD opted to be a pre-beta site for the new version. Skyward and Lewisville collaborated on the project, with Skyward doing the majority of the data conversion and training.

By the time Lewisville's go-live date rolled around, the switch to Skyward was complete—and had stayed within the budget. According to Largent, the reaction to the new system was very positive. “We had done

a good job of preparing them so they knew it was coming and what to expect. They love the flexibility and convenience of the web-based functionality.”

Largent said one of the biggest benefits of implementing Skyward is that Skyward has been an excellent partner. **“They are extremely hard working and responsive to our needs.** All districts do business differently, and I think it is very hard to compare from one district to the next. But Skyward will work with you to identify your specific needs and ensure the implementation is done successfully. **I am confident that we will continue to work with Skyward to make this system as efficient as we possibly can for our users. A combination of good technology, a flexible system, and a partner that’s invested in your own interest is absolutely vital to ongoing success. And that is what we have with Skyward.”**

## ABOUT SKYWARD

Skyward is a leader in K-12 thought leadership, best practices, and school administrative technologies, surpassing districts’ state reporting needs, improving operational capabilities, and facilitating communication between schools and families. Today, you can find Skyward’s Student Management and School Business Suites in more than 1,800 school districts worldwide, ranging from districts with as few as 50 students to state configurations supporting more than 800,000 students. Founded in 1980, Skyward serves school districts with its integrated student, finance, and human resources suite of products and is proudly made and supported in the U.S.A. Visit online at [www.skyward.com](http://www.skyward.com)

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