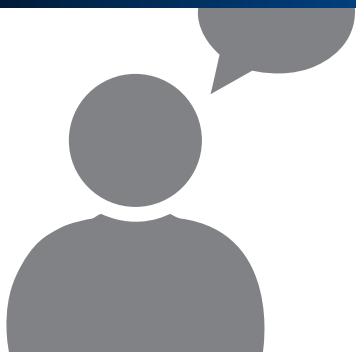




Better than free: Choosing Skyward over a state-sponsored system



Rapid City Area Schools | Rapid City, South Dakota

Enrollment: 13,369 | Schools: 24 | Implemented: 1985

Between Badlands National Park and Black Hills National Forest, home to Mount Rushmore, sits Rapid City, a town of 70,000 people. The city's school district, Rapid City Area Schools (RCAS), comprises 23 schools and serves 13,200 students.

The Offer and Decision

When the state of South Dakota offered RCAS and other districts a free state-sponsored student management system, RCAS decided to pass on the offer and stick with Skyward. RCAS has relied on Skyward's School Business Suite since 1985 and Skyward's Student Management Suite since 2000 to manage virtually all of the district's student and business operations.

The Results

"This is my first year with RCAS," said Dr. Timothy M. Mitchell, the district's superintendent. "At my previous district I was a very active user of the state-sponsored student management system. I know firsthand the difference

between the two products, and I am very excited that we are with Skyward. Skyward provides us with a comprehensive, multifaceted solution that truly serves as a one-stop-shop for our district. Unlike the state sponsored system that essentially manages only the student portion of a district's needs, our Skyward system supports every aspect of our business, from the student side—such as grades and attendance, to the business side—including human resources and accounting, to other areas such as food services."

A unified database

Together, the Skyward School Business Suite and the Skyward Student Management Suite provide an integrated solution housed in one database. RCAS administrators benefit from only having to input data into the system once. Not only does the streamlined process ensure more consistent and accurate data, it also increases efficiency and productivity at all levels.

"We are able to operate with fewer administrative employees than other districts," said Rick Bates, RCAS's director of technology.

"Most require approximately five to six systems to accomplish what we do with just one. And each of those systems has at least one person dedicated to its management. We have three people supporting Skyward; that's it. So there is an obvious difference in efficiency and cost; one free system doesn't ensure a low total cost of ownership."

Industry expertise and state-of-the-art technology

RCAS recognizes the benefits of working with an expert vendor. "The maturity of Skyward and its technology is a significant advantage," said Mitchell. "Because Skyward is known as a leader in its space with state-of-the-art solutions, other organizations are eager to partner with them to provide value added services."

One added service RCAS is using is CRS Advanced Technology's SubFinder system. The district also plans to use Total Recall's network user management

software which enables the district to make one entry into Skyward that propagates user authentication information across all of the district's IT systems.

A back-up plan

Skyward's cloud-based system backs up district data so it can be accessed in the event of a disaster. "There are times when we have network issues on our end and are unable to access any other systems except for Skyward," said Mitchell.

Beyond the state's system

Skyward enables RCAS to manage data in ways it could not accomplish with the state-sponsored solution. "For example, let's say you want to analyze your budget to understand how much it would cost to add a class to a particular school," suggested Mitchell. "Without Skyward, you would have to cull together various spreadsheets of information and then draw some assumptions and conclusions... [With Skyward] we can report down to a very granular

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SKYWARD®

Success Story

level of information and have concrete information at our finger tips to make truly informed decisions... with the click of a button.”

An evolving solution

RCAS has seen decades of progress in Skyward firsthand and knows the provider will never stop striving to improve. “We first implemented Skyward back in 1985 and you can imagine that it looked significantly different than it does today,” said Bates. “But Skyward is constantly able to leap-frog requirements with new enhancements... Skyward has made significant investments over time to keep up with technology.”

Because Skyward is so flexible, individual schools within districts have the freedom to operate the way they see fit. For example, schools can choose to use arena or traditional scheduling, operate on semesters or trimesters, and customize school-specific report cards. “That is a degree of flexibility we haven’t found in other solutions,” said Bates.

Valerie Thompson, IT program manager, is also pleased with the way Skyward has tailored its system for RCAS. “As our district’s needs evolve and as regulations change, we can always turn to Skyward. We know they will work with us closely to understand our business requirements and make appropriate changes to the product.”

Automatic updates

Districts that use Skyward no longer have to deal with updating hardware and software. “When a new release of Skyward is available, we have almost immediate access to that new functionality,” noted Mitchell. “Skyward is responsible for the migration at their site, and we reap the benefits of the new enhancements with very little work required on our end. Also, when a new state or federal regulation is established, Skyward will make the necessary adjustments and quickly provide us with the update.”

Customer service districts can count on

Skyward regularly collaborates with its customers through its user-led enhancement process. RCAS, like all Skyward districts, has the opportunity to request changes through the system. The request for enhancement process results in dozens of impactful updates every year.

Bates has been pleased with the service the district receives from Skyward. “What is important to me is that I can call the president or vice president of the company directly and get action. I always feel that they are interested and engaged with our needs, and we know that they will provide a quick and effective resolution.”

Beyond the district—benefits for students, parents and teachers

Mitchell believes the true value of Skyward surpasses business and process optimization; it directly impacts students, parents, and teachers. “Skyward’s Family Access portal has provided parents more visibility into what is going on with their child. There is nothing but good news when parents are fully engaged in their child’s education.

In fact, one teacher told me that attendance for parent/teacher conferences has dropped dramatically because there are no more surprises. Parents are empowered through the portal to make sure

their kids are going to school, doing their homework and keeping up their grades.”

Skyward’s online Gradebook has also been of tremendous value for RCAS’ teachers by providing greater transparency

and enabling teachers to share ideas and best practices regarding how grades are assigned and managed.

A strong partnership

“Our district has played an important role in the evolution of the Skyward solution,” said Mitchell. “Over the years, Skyward and RCAS have formed a collaborative relationship. In fact, we were one of Skyward’s first customers to move to the Web. Together, we have developed new and innovative ideas, identifying requirements and enhancements that are a core part of the product today. We are proud of the role we have played in helping to make Skyward such a comprehensive and robust solution.”

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To learn more about how Skyward can help you and your staff be the driving force behind a more productive, collaborative, and successful environment, visit www.skyward.com or contact an industry specialist today at 800-236-7274.