

RE-ENGINEERING PROCESSES AND ENABLING TECHNOLOGY TO KEEP PACE WITH RAPID GROWTH

Frisco Independent School District

An APQC Education Case Study
Member of APQC's North Star Community since 2012

Frisco, Texas
www.friscoisd.org

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- ◆ 53,300+ students, with enrollment growing by 3,000 annually
 - ◆ 64 campuses: 8 high schools, 15 middle schools, 38 elementary schools, 3 special programs centers
 - ◆ 75 square-mile area in Collin and Denton counties
 - ◆ 6,556 employees with 3,541 teaching staff

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— Bob Allen, Director of Business Applications and Process, FISD

A booming suburb north of Dallas, Frisco has experienced explosive growth over the last two decades. To keep pace with the enrollment of 3,000 new students every year, Frisco ISD needed to effectively manage its limited resources and build a sustainable plan for future growth.

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The district needed more teachers, but also wanted to reduce its increasingly heavy administrative burden, redirect efforts toward value-added activities benefiting students, and slow down the trend toward adding more operational support staff. Seeking creative, sustainable ways to improve operational practices, reduce waste, increase efficiency, and solve problems, FISD set out to re-engineer its operations through both process and performance management (PPM) and technology.

Helping the district achieve these goals was Bob Allen, FISD's Director of Business Applications and Process, and a 30-year process management and technology career veteran. When he and a colleague, Lori Wassam, attended a one-day APQC Education PPM seminar in 2011, hosted by the Texas Association of School Business Officials, he knew he had found the right partner and approach to spark change at FISD.

"As I sat in class that day, flipping through the workbook, I was becoming very excited," Allen recalls. "Everything I was seeing told me that APQC Education was spot-on with where we wanted to be." The district soon enlisted APQC Education to lead the charge toward becoming a process-centered organization focused on performance excellence. The goal: To promote effectiveness and efficiency by linking process performance to outcomes through PPM.

As an APQC Education partner, FISD joined APQC Education's North Star Community, a collection of school districts, education service centers and state departments of education implementing PPM methodologies. Through this network, as well as APQC PPM conferences and webinars, FISD gains in-person and online learning opportunities and process knowledge repositories.

"School districts are so collaborative, and North Star is a great example of that," Allen says. "It is a way to share and collaborate within the K-12 space, which allows us to fulfill the obligation of public education to collaborate and help each other. North Star gives us an opportunity to start where others have left off, which saves time and also gives us exposure to what other districts are doing."

TRAINING AND SUPPORT

The initiative kicked off with an APQC-led PPM overview and project-selection workshop. Twenty-five district employees – including the executive leadership team – completed a full-day strategic overview of PPM, reviewed documented North Star projects and savings opportunities, and learned about powerful process improvement tools including APQC's DMAIC methodology (Define, Measure, Analyze, Improve, and Control) and SIPOC (Supplier, Input, Process, Output, and Customer).

“The superintendent and his leadership team dedicated an entire day to that first session, and the superintendent told everyone that PPM was something we were going to be committed to,” Allen says. “With the growth and challenges ahead, we couldn’t keep doing things the way we always had. Our leadership’s commitment was extremely helpful to getting the team on board.”

The attendees formally launched the improvement initiative with a broad-range discussion of potential projects, and engaged staff members in five action teams. The group also selected and ranked the projects they wished to undertake, prioritizing five for immediate action.

Next, 30 FISD employees – again including the superintendent – attended four days of process and performance management training, led by APQC. Through APQC-led work sessions, action team members learned how to apply process management tools to their specific projects, including the DMAIC methodology; SIPOC process mapping; and change management, measurement, root cause analysis, improvement, and control techniques.

Armed with new tools and knowledge, the action teams got to work on their first six projects:

- ◆ **Hiring and onboarding.** The manual hiring process required staff to spend 1.4 hours a day on folder searches, inconsistent IT systems, and wasted effort. Bringing together people involved in hiring, background checks, certification, professional development, benefits, payroll, security, and technology, the team streamlined the hiring process; reduced the average time of teacher processing from 25 days to 10 days; and improved timeliness, accuracy and communication of new-hire information. This effort paved the way for technology that enabled a relatively static HR staffing level, despite a 20 percent increase in campuses and the annual hiring of 600 new teachers.
- ◆ **Position control and position inventory.** A lack of alignment between finance, HR, and curriculum and instruction was creating rework and extra paperwork, frustrating employees, and negatively affecting student achievement. A cross-functional team including finance, C&I, principals, various campuses, and HR aimed to streamline the position control process, providing only accurate, essential information to the appropriate personnel. This project was the first step toward an internal position inventory platform that provides accurate information about the number of new hires, transfers, substitutes and FTEs, ensuring that the district never hires too many or too few people.
- ◆ **Payroll processing.** Inefficient processes were contributing to payroll challenges, leading to 2,600 overtime hours and \$73,000 in overtime pay in one school year. This team set goals to process supplemental pay 30 days sooner and reduce labor and overtime expenses by 10 percent. The team included district employees, administrators, secretaries, and accounting and HR staff. The result: greater individual employee accountability; faster payment and better retention of subs; better morale; and less time spent answering questions, policing employees, fixing errors, and hunting for information.
- ◆ **Professional contracted services.** Sixty-one percent of service contractors were on campus before completing a full background check, creating a potential liability for the district. The cross-functional team aimed to create a simplified, foolproof process for service contracts

and approvals, eliminating the risk of unapproved contractors. Form initiators, HR, service providers, and procurement worked together to make immediate changes to ensure compliance, then mandated them into a revised process, significantly reducing liability.

- ◆ **Professional development facility logistics.** The existing process required multiple resources to collect, review, validate, and communicate information on training and class schedules, room reservations and setup requirements. The team set out to redesign the organization and sharing of facility use information, aiming for 100 percent process invisibility and zero complaints of rooms not ready, reworks, or technology issues. The team of content providers, tech specialists and coordinators, principals, facility managers and HVAC, presenters, and course facilitators integrated multiple tracking and reporting systems, combining all data into a single reporting structure.
- ◆ **Vertical collaboration of student information.** The district needed a consistent, formal process to confidentially gather, disseminate, and use information as students advance from one campus to the next. This cross-functional team of students, parents, counselors, administrators, and teachers created a new process for information transfer, implementing best practices that provided a more effective and consistent process for sharing incoming students' information with administrators. Student data reports are now delivered from the district, providing comprehensive, accurate data; saving staff time; and creating a contiguous plan for student success.

FOCUS ON HUMAN RESOURCES

The district has since applied PPM techniques to many other improvement initiatives, including a large-scale effort to revolutionize HR with best-process solutions supported by enabling technologies.

While coping with the district's rapid growth, the HR department had become overwhelmed by disparate, unintegrated systems; poorly managed forms processing; and disjointed business processes. APQC led the HR team through discussions about each HR process, pinpointing gaps and bottlenecks, roles and responsibilities, measurement metrics, and ideas for streamlining work.

Using APQC training and PPM tools, the team established a governance structure for HR process management, re-engineered the district's HR processes, and documented them using the APQC Process Classification Framework. The newly established HR business processes were the first step toward significant improvement through technology automation and data integration, which has had an immediate positive impact on HR operations as well as every other department within FISD.

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A CULTURE SHIFT

This cross-functional problem solving has had a dramatic impact on the district's internal culture.

"Suddenly, we developed a group of apostles who started to look at things differently, and took the skills they had learned and applied them to new projects," Allen says. "People in public education tend to be collaborative, lifelong learners. When they see something that works, they really embrace it."

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The cross-discipline teams have broken down barriers to solve complex problems. "People didn't always understand that saving a dime in one group might cause someone to spend a dollar to fix something three layers downstream," Allen says. "These groups are learning to communicate and understand that small decisions can have large repercussions. They now know they need participation from groups they previously might not have thought would have valuable input into a process."

Allen and others from FISD have amplified the benefits of the PPM approach by sharing their experiences with other K-12 districts at APQC and other education conferences and events.

COST AVOIDANCE

The district doesn't look at results in terms of "savings" or "expense reduction," instead noting that collectively, its PPM projects have brought about significant cost avoidance. By increasing the efficiency of its organizational processes, FISD has kept pace with the district's astonishing growth and freed up time to focus on "value-added" activities, without a linear increase in administrative support staff.

"Our focus is not on cutting employees; it's on not needing to hire as many," Allen explains. "For example, the HR department today is operating with 12 more campuses than they had three years ago, yet HR still has the same basic staffing level. It's not about savings; it's about how we continue to grow our business administrative functions without having to add staff, so we can focus our resources on putting teachers in classrooms or building buildings."

The district is now using PPM principles to re-engineer processes on the curriculum side, including an innovative process and technology project related to GT testing that is expected to reallocate up 3,000 hours a year for teachers to focus on other student-focused priorities.

ABOUT APQC EDUCATION

APQC helps organizations work smarter, faster, and with greater confidence. It is the world's foremost authority in benchmarking, best practices, process and performance improvement, and knowledge management. Since 1996, APQC has been helping education leaders capture, scale, and sustain transformation to improve student outcomes through the implementation of Process and Performance Management methodologies and the identification of best practices. Among other things, we help educators redesign outdated or inefficient processes and break down functional silos to save time, money, and empower people. Learn more at www.apqc.org.