

## Ready for Class

Visions In Education learns to make procurement more efficient and less costly.



### CHALLENGE

Visions In Education's ordering system had too many manual steps, delaying delivery of needed supplies to students and their families.

### SOLUTION

Worked with Staples Business Advantage to develop a purchasing hub that streamlined the process for vendor orders and payments.

### RESULT

Significant savings in time for both students' families and money for Visions In Education's operations team.

The back-to-school season is time for families to pick up all the supplies their students need for a good start to the academic year.

For Visions In Education, a K-12 public charter school in Northern California, that task takes on a heightened importance. Because Visions In Education educates pupils who are either home schooled or taking independent study, families need delivery on everything from the right textbooks to pencils. There are no supply closets for teachers to access for an extra book or pen.

The task of coordinating those purchases for 5,300 students in kindergarten through high school falls to Tom Tafoya's team.

#### The Challenge

When Tafoya, Director of Business and Technology at Visions In Education, thinks back to the start of the school year in 2014, he remembers the challenge of matching higher order volumes with the school's rapid growth.

Like many organizations that encounter procurement bottlenecks, Tafoya's team found itself facing seasonal crunches. The five-member team had to work overtime and hire temporary workers to handle peaks prior to the fall and spring semesters.

Tafoya sought to make improvements by moving some of the purchasing process online so that families could fill out their lists of items to purchase, but school staff needed to review each student's list, ensuring they met budget guidelines. Tafoya's team then had to enter purchase orders at each vendor's website, including Staples Business Advantage, as well as textbook publishers and hundreds of other suppliers. After each purchase went through, the team had to process thousands of invoices as each student might have supplies from several vendors.

On average, it took 10 days to process student orders for curriculum, supplies and services. As a result, not everyone received their materials by the first day of school. "Families would be upset with us because we could not get orders processed in a timely manner," Tafoya says.

#### The Solution

Tafoya and his team were familiar with Staples Business Advantage as an office supplies vendor, but it wasn't until Tafoya attended a charter school conference that he learned about

the company's work with a seat-based school district to set up an online portal with direct links between the school and vendors' systems.

Tafoya says he sought meetings with other companies in the past looking for answers. Some offered a partial solution and others were not enthusiastic about working with a nonprofit organization's budget limitations. In Matthew Taylor, a Staples Business Advantage representative, Tafoya says Visions In Education found a receptive ear.

Their conversations led to Visions In Education's IT team working with Staples Business Advantage for several months starting in April 2015. Together, they worked to add a new purchasing hub tool to the Visions In Education online system that families could use to order supplies. Behind the scenes, school and vendor procurement systems took advantage of a technology communications protocol called commercial extensible markup language (cXML) to connect seamlessly.

Tafoya says he had to overcome some initial doubts from his programming team that Staples Business Advantage, a brand they knew as an office supplies vendor, could handle this type of IT-heavy integration project. "There was some skepticism on their part because it was cutting edge technology," Tafoya says. "I said, 'That's fine. You guys can figure it out. They're going to help us.'"

Indeed, the procurement hub was up and running in time for the spring ordering crunch. The ordering section of the school's student information system was updated to promote the use of procurement partners including Staples Business Advantage and other brands. Clicking on a vendor takes the user directly to a special web page where a family can enter their order. The system transmits each student's purchase list to Visions In Education for review and approval. After an order is approved, the system deducts the proper amount from the student's supplies budget and the delivery is on its way. And Tafoya's team has only one invoice to pay for each of its main vendors each month.

### The Benefits

Tafoya says the payoff from the procurement hub has been dramatic. The new cXML technology has greatly simplified the ordering process for families. Previously, families had to go to vendor sites and manually copy product numbers, descriptions, and prices. They then had to go back to the Visions In Education ordering site and enter this information directly into the online ordering system. Now, it is a one click process for families. They can create a shopping cart from Staples Business Advantage and submit it directly.

Orders that once took up to 10 days on average to be processed now take four. The new system is less costly to run, too. As a result of this new technology integration, the school was able to reduce the order processing staff from five to four and get through the fall enrollment season with far less overtime and fewer temporary workers to handle the rush periods.

There are also hundreds of fewer invoices for the accounting team to process. Electronic invoices mean major vendors like Staples Business Advantage process one invoice for the school each month. That means the accounting team is doing less accounts payable processing and can focus on more meaningful tasks.

Since the procurement project, Visions In Education has found itself doing business with Staples Business Advantage in other areas. They now provide the school with everything from laptops and flat panel monitors to custodial supplies.

Tafoya credits the team at Staples Business Advantage with getting his organization on a better trajectory. After the IT group began working on the procurement integration project, things took off. "They recognized what we were trying to do and they were able to make it work," says Tafoya.

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Days on average removed from delivery times of school supplies to students (reduction from 10 to 4)

50%

Reduction in staff overtime and temporary workers to manage peak times for orders

5,300

Students served by Visions in Education

### Company at a Glance

## Visions In Education

### Overview:

Accredited California public charter school that serves home-schooled students in elementary through secondary school, as well as high school students pursuing independent study and college preparatory programs.

### Key Facts:

- Based in Carmichael, Calif.
- Founded in 1999
- Serves students in kindergarten through grade 12 in nine Northern California counties