



Florida District Moves Beyond “The Way We’ve Always Done It” to Combat Student Tardiness



Marion County School District
Ocala, FL | Enrollment: 43,000 | Schools: 54 | Implemented: 2012

As any teacher will attest, the most chaotic time of every class is the beginning. Monotone responses of ‘here’ and ‘present’ are heard throughout the room while students are settling in. Combine that with any students who arrive late, and teachers lose even more instructional time by stopping class to check in students. According to one study which examined one million tardies over a three-year period, that can add up to [166,667](#) hours of lost instructional time.

Like many districts, Marion County Public Schools (MCPS) in Ocala, Florida was looking for a way to maximize instructional time. With more than 43,000 students spread across 54 locations, having an efficient way of taking attendance is imperative to MCPS’s operations. Unfortunately, with such high enrollment numbers, many students were arriving late and disrupting class. “Tardy students were a constant issue,” explained Kristi Miller, MCPS’s applications specialist. “Staff lost a lot of instructional time checking students in.”

Students who were tardy had to manually enter their information into a log at the main office and have a staff member issue a pass before they could go to class. Making matters worse, teachers were limited to a paper-and-pencil process to check in all late students.

Looking to improve productivity, MCPS reached out to their student information system partner for help. After researching possible solutions to the district’s attendance challenges, MCPS selected a tardy kiosk solution created by [School Technology Associates](#), a business partner that integrates with the district’s SIS, Skyward.

Now, two years later, MCPS students are getting to class quicker, teachers are maximizing instructional time, and parents have a better picture of their children’s attendance.

Elimination of Manual Entry

According to The National Education for Statistics, student tardiness occurs at a rate of [3.3% to 9.5%](#) each day for students in kindergarten through grade twelve. At a district the size of MCPS, those numbers can add up.

“District staff spent a good deal of time, every day, manually updating each tardy student’s attendance record in Skyward,” explained Kristi Miller. “Oftentimes, this meant hundreds of students.”

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With the implementation of tardy kiosks, MCPS changed that narrative. Now when students arrive late, they log in to any kiosk located in the attendance office. Within seconds, the device prints out a tardy pass which includes the teacher’s name

and time the student logged in. From there, the student heads to class. Since Skyward is connected to the kiosks, all attendance and tardy information is immediately available in real time. As a result, district staff members are spending more time focusing on students and less time concerning themselves with inefficient attendance procedures.

“From the front desk’s perspective, the kiosks are irreplaceable,” explained Nancy Miller, a district receptionist at West Port High School. “On a typical school day, the kiosks save us approximately three hours of manual documentation and data entry.”

Student Accountability

While tardy kiosks assist teachers, receptionists, and clerks with their jobs, students also reap many benefits.

Students are now responsible for checking themselves in using the tardy kiosks. By holding students more accountable, they are arriving to class earlier and losing less learning time. That process may seem minor, but in a district the size of MCPS, it was easier for students to take less responsibility.

“Tardy kiosks make students accountable for being late when they have to check in themselves,” explained Julie Miller, an information processing clerk at Ocala Springs Elementary School. “Being independent, empowered and accountable are important life skills that will benefit them throughout their lives.”

Additionally, through Skyward, teachers know precisely when a student checks into the kiosk. As a result, teachers can identify whether a student is spending more time in the hallway than they should.

“We still have those that are going to be tardy, but for the most part, we’ve found that students are on time to school much more since implementing the tardy kiosks,” explained Dawn Mobley, North Marion Middle School’s principal.

Improved Parent Visibility

Student accountability is often tied to parent engagement. Yet, for parents to stay involved, they need access to their children’s information. With the combination of tardy kiosks and Skyward’s Family Access portal, this is finally possible.

“The tardy kiosks have definitely improved communication and awareness,” explained Kristi Miller. “Because the tardy kiosk marks the student late directly in Skyward, parents are able to log in to Family Access and see when their child checked in.”

Even better, tardy kiosks are helping strengthen the relationship between parents and teachers.

By having attendance information available the second a student signs in, parents and teachers can coordinate efforts to reduce tardiness. Additionally, parents can notify teachers ahead of time about planned absences or late arrivals.

“Teachers and parents are communicating much more thanks to Family Access and tardy kiosks,” stated Dawn Mobley. “Having that type of relationship is important to student success.”

Goals for the Future

Just as the district handled the transition from traditional attendance methods to tardy kiosks, MCPS hopes to maintain its goal of improving the overall experience for every stakeholder.

“As we continue to determine things that can or should be done more efficiently, we will look at the various tools and components within Skyward to help assist us in that process,” said Kristi Miller.

In fact, some district staff members are hoping to extend the power of the tardy kiosk to early checkouts. “If we start using the kiosk for early checkouts, we won’t be wasting paper by using the log we currently have,” explained Julie Miller. “Plus, we could use the kiosk to run an early checkout report at the end of the school year, instead of the countless copies of early checkout pages we have currently.”

While districts might feel unprepared to implement tardy kiosks, the key to any successful technology implementation is a strong district culture. Randy Taylor, MCPS’s supervisor of information services and software development, has simple advice for those districts looking to improve their attendance procedures. “Be flexible and willing to make changes to existing processes that fall under the ‘it’s the way we’ve always done it’ category. Your district will be glad you did.”

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