The Differences Between Managing Paper and Digital Records in K-12 Schools

As technology advances within the K-12 space, so too do the tools available to school districts across the country. Many school districts have already begun the process of transitioning from keeping and managing paper records to storing everything electronically in the cloud. There are many reasons for making the move to a digital records format, but the core benefits of leaving traditional record keeping and management behind include cost and time savings, as well as enhanced security, FERPA and HIPAA compliance, and general ease of use.

The paper records problem is a real one, as schools don't have much choice but to store their records all over the place. Some schools store bulk records in gyms, classrooms, offices, storage rooms and other areas that aren't very secure. Not only does storing records this way create issues with maintaining FERPA and HIPAA compliance, but records are more likely to be lost, stolen, or damaged and take much longer to search through and find specific records when needed.

When considering transferring your physical records to digital format, several considerations must be made regarding cost, time required for management, and security.

Food for thought, fires and **floods** are two of the most common reasons why school records get destroyed or lost – and flash floods, for example, are capable of moving items well over 100 lbs., like heavy filing cabinets. The most common reason, however, education records and documents go missing, get destroyed by mistake, or are tampered with has to do with human error and ill-intent.

Cost and Time

We've all learned "there is no such thing as a free lunch." Likewise, there is a cost to digital storage, but because it is an easily visible amount you think it is cheaper to keep paper. Studies have shown that **paper storage can be 10 times more expensive than digital record management**. That's because some of **these 'paper management' costs** include copying, delivery, handling, storage, and retrieval of that paper, with copying costs at 33% and distribution costs at 56%.

Materials, such as folders, clips, storage boxes, filing cabinets, and transportation are just some of the hidden costs associated with managing paper records in schools. If you looked you'd probably realize your school district is spending thousands a year on just storing and maintaining student and staff records.

Did you know it costs over $2.50 in supplies to create one record?

Additionally, districts often, and unknowingly, dedicate enormous static resources to the paper filing process. A typical worker spends, on average, 51 minutes per day looking for paper documents, files, and emails. Over 4 hours a week, or over 10% of the typical work week is lost looking for documents. It takes 8 times longer to file and locate paper copies compared to digital storage and the average organization spends about $20 in labor to create and file each paper record. That amounts to approximately $120 in labor **searching for each misfiled document**. In addition to the cost allocated to paper files, you are also allocating space, **dedicating up to 20 sq. ft. of space for each file cabinet**. This is time and space that could be repurposed and reallocated for the students.

Did you know **that each four-drawer file cabinet** holds an average of 10,000 to 12,000 documents, takes up to 9 square feet of floor space and costs $1,500 per year?

What could you do with the space that you see immediately when digitalizing student records?

The Hidden Costs of Maintaining each Student Record

Have you ever wondered how much it costs to maintain each student record in your school district? YellowFolder did the research. The hidden cost of creating and maintaining each paper copy is eye opening.

(Assumes 75 pages per Record)

	Traditional	YellowFolder	Assumptions
Creating the File			
Supplies	$ 5.25		$0.07/per page[1]
Labor	$ 20.00	$ 5.00	$20.00 per Record / 75% less Digital[2]
Total	**$ 25.25**	**$ 5.00**	
Storing the File			
Real Estate	$ 1.84		16,000 pages/cabinet, 15.7sq. Ft/cabinet, $25sq.Ft.[3]
Hardware (File Cabinets)	$ 0.23		$500/File Cabinet, ammortized over 10 years[4]
On-Line Fees		$ 3.00	On-Line Access Fee, per record (annualized)
Total	**$ 2.07**	**$ 3.00**	
Accessing the File			
Labor	$ 7.40	$ 1.23	3.7 Accesses per year[4], 3 min Traditional v. 0.5 min
Supplies	$ 13.13	$ -	2.5 Copies per year[4], $0.071/per page[1]
Total	**$ 20.53**	**$ 1.23**	
Transporting the File			
Labor	$ 10.00	$ -	$40,000 avg. ann. salary[5], one trip - 10 miles each way
Mileage	$ 11.20	$ -	$0.56 per mile[5], one trip - 10 miles each way
Total	**$ 21.20**	**$ -**	
Total Costs - Year 1	**$ 69.05**	**$ 9.23**	
Savings		*$ 59.82*	
Savings %		87%	
	7.5	X more	
Total Costs - Year 2	**$ 43.80**	**$ 4.23**	
Savings		*$ 39.57*	
Savings %		90%	
	10.3	X more	

Recoverable Costs			
Accessing the File - Supplies	$ 13.13	$ -	
Transporting the File - Mileage	$ 11.20	$ -	
On-Line Fees	$ -	$ 3.00	
Total Recoverable Costs	**$ 24.33**	**$ 3.00**	
Savings		*$ 21.33*	
Savings %		88%	
	8.1	X more	

[1] The True Costs of Paper, The Wharton Journal, The Wharton Business Sch
[2] Administrative Productivity Survey, Price Waterhouse Coopers
[3] 2012 Commercial Real Estate Review, The Trammel Crow Company
[4] Student Records Study, New York State Education Department
[5] U.S. Department of Labor

Legal Compliance and Security

It's a common misconception in the industry that maintaining paper files is more secure than maintaining digital ones. Think about how paper files are traditionally kept at schools – unlocked filing cabinets, storage rooms that aren't monitored or secured, in boxes under the bleachers in the gym, and so forth. Storing education records in any of the ways mentioned above leaves those records exposed to theft, loss, tampering, and destruction due to man-made or natural disasters.

Not to mention the very serious concerns of legal compliance due to FERPA and HIPAA regulations.

When making the transition to an electronic record keeping system, be certain effective cyber security measures are put in place. Effective security of electronic records boils down to the "7 Pillars of Protection":

- Industry standard firewalls

- Next-generation anti-virus

- Network packet monitoring

- Server and infrastructure log monitoring

- Advanced web application attack protection

- Cloud-powered threat detection engines utilizing: signature matching, behavioral analytics, and machine learning

- 24x7 Security Operations Center (SOC) with trained analysts monitoring around the clock

Having a digital records management partner that values security like this means you get to focus on doing what you do best – educating, and not having to worry about managing your districts records.

Conclusion

It's quite obvious to education leaders in every school district and at every school the most valuable asset in your district are your kids. The second most valuable asset are your records and personnel files. These are the community's records, documenting the educational history of its citizens. Loss, improper exposure or uncontrolled destruction, would be catastrophic and something you couldn't recover.

School districts have a paper accumulation problem and that contributes to the potential of losing important records. Boxes and filing cabinets simply pile up over time for schools, and so too do the costs. Often, districts don't realize the hidden costs associated with maintaining each student and staff record. The assumption made by districts, typically, is that storing physical records in filing cabinets, boxes, shelves, and so forth seems to be the easiest and most effective way to manage records. However, it's clear that assumption regarding physical records management is way off from reality.

When districts are approached about making the transition from physical records management to electronic records management, the common refrain is they'd love to go paperless but don't have the budget. Thought many school districts across the United States are in a constant state of constrained budgets, transitioning to digital records management would actually save each district nearly 90% in costs and time by making such a switch short- and long-term.

To speak with digital records management experts that focus solely on K-12, **YellowFolder** is the most trusted and widely used digital records management solution in the industry. Don't wait any longer, find out exactly what you need to go paperless and start saving.