



"Our project was slated to take approximately 1 yr. to a 1 ½ yrs. However, I am pleased to say that in 8 months [we] completed the conversion and are up and running."

Sandi Dainty, Technology Coordinator, The Glen Mills Schools

Longtime National Educator Gives High Marks to New Single Source for Student Data

Founded in 1826, The Glen Mills Schools is the oldest residential school for court-referred young men in the country. Located on a 756-acre campus, 20 miles southwest of Philadelphia, PA, Glen Mills Schools accepts young men 15 to 18 years old from all over the United States. With an enrollment of about 1,000 students, the environment is a hub of constant activity, as students, teachers, and administrators stay busy with classes, sports, and various activities.

Since 2001, IT Solutions has been providing application development services to the Glen Mills Education department on a regular basis. ITS originally built a system in FileMaker Pro to track students, classes and test scores. With the flexibility and rapid development capabilities of FileMaker, significant enhancements and add-on modules were easy to integrate.

The Challenge

While the Education department was tracking critical information in FileMaker, since the early 1990's the Glen Mills Admissions department had been separately managing all student intake, medical records, travel and progress report data in an Oracle-based solution. In addition to other administrative responsibilities for the Admissions Department, Technology Coordinator Sandi Dainty was responsible for the management and maintenance of the Oracle solution.

Glen Mills was faced with the challenge of continuing to maintain student data in two separate systems, which was becoming increasingly complex and problematic, along with very high licensing costs that would be required to upgrade the Oracle software to the latest version. With the Education department planning to upgrade its FileMaker solution to the latest version, Glen Mills decided that standardizing both Education and Admissions data on FileMaker was the best course of action for long-term growth and efficiency.

The Solution

The overall ease-of-use of the FileMaker Education solution, as well as the lower costs to maintain FileMaker licenses relative to Oracle, were significant factors in the decision to replace the Admissions solution with a FileMaker-based system. Education staff members had been able to maintain and enhance several features independently over the years, so similar advantages for Admissions were anticipated. Dainty would be the primary administrative user and be deeply involved in the development of the solution with the plan to transition much of the regular maintenance and upkeep of the system to her following rollout by ITS. Built-in features of the FileMaker 8 platform, such as user security control, greatly enhanced file and data capacity, and the ability to make changes to a system on the fly without affecting users' access contributed greatly to overall success.

In addition to the advantages inherent in the software, the most significant factor in the project's outcome was the close working relationship between Glen Mills and ITS. An Agile project management approach was established and the results exceeded all expectations. Following FileMaker classroom training provided by ITS, Dainty quickly became comfortable with hands-on development and testing. Over the course of the project Dainty and lead developer, Jason Mundok, worked side-by-side designing and creating every aspect of the system. As a result, the transition from system development by ITS to rollout and internal maintenance by Glen Mills was fast and easy. Having a knowledgeable internal resource also helped the project stay ahead of schedule and under budget from start to finish.

The Return

The completed Admissions tracking solution provides a solid foundation for integration of the upgraded Education system. One of its functions, long-term residential census tracking, replaces a former manual process that is saving the staff hours per day over the previous method. Once the Education redesign is complete, all student demographic data will be accessible from a single source from anywhere on campus, greatly improving efficiencies and accuracy for faculty and staff who input and track the data on a daily basis. The user-friendly and easy-to-update FileMaker platform will give administrators like Dainty the ability to maintain the system over the long term with limited outside support.

“Jason made the whole conversion from Oracle to FileMaker seamless,” Dainty commented. “His programming ability, forethought and attention to detail allowed us to move forward with the changes painlessly (and we all know how hard change is!)” she added. “The process went so smoothly that we only needed to make minor adjustments to the system. After rolling out the system we were able to save an hour or two of administrative time per day and this is just one small portion of the system developed. Feedback from the users has been very positive.”