

Facility Management

Problem: Rochester Community Schools, located in southeastern Michigan, only a few miles from the Detroit Piston stadium and near two colleges, was facing the challenge of how to maximize its income from renting its facilities without overtaxing its staff. Amid spending cuts and a growing population, the demand for the facilities was significant. But the district was having trouble organizing and managing the rentals through its decentralized booking procedures and adequately collecting the fees.

Individual facility managers would assign rental fees based on their interpretation of a complex pricing structure. The district sometimes lost revenue due to paperwork that wasn't submitted and was embarrassed when a room was double booked.

When the state changed its funding of schools from property tax revenue to sales tax revenue, the district was forced to look at ways it could increase its revenues so it took a second look at facility rentals.

Solution: The district formed a committee made up of representatives from each major operational area, including athletics, accounting, clerical and administrative staff. The committee identified the problems with the rental procedures and sent requests for proposals for a facility management system. The committee received three proposals and decided on EMS Enterprise. The company's system allowed for desktop scheduling and Web reservations. Then the committee had to get approval from the school board.

"I was one of the ones who wasn't for this because of cost," says Deb Walter, director of operations. "But I had IT folks and folks from accounting who were saying EMS really has the pieces we need and they convinced me and the Board of Education. Sometimes you have to spend a little money in order to make a whole lot more."

The system cost \$35,000 and within 60 days district staff was trained and the program was up and running. The system, which costs about \$4,000

to maintain, allows organizations to use the Web to send requests to reserve a particular room for an event.

The district's phone operator is the gatekeeper for a majority of the requests. She can book the phone or Web request if the group reserving the room is on the list of organizations the school board has approved, such as the Girl Scouts, and is of a routine nature. If a request is more complicated and may demand staff help, the request is sent to one of several facility managers. Each high school has a facilities manager the request can be sent to or it can go to the pool manager, gymnasium director or cafeteria manager at the school where the event is to be held. Sometimes the requests will go to Walter or facilities operations manager Wendy Andridge.

The prices for the use of the facility are available to organizations through the Web and Andridge says the district has been able to streamline and centralize the process so it is much less taxing on staff members.



Facility Rental Fees

Classrooms	\$20
Gym	\$75
Cafeteria	\$75
Media Center	\$50
Music, Band or Choir Room	\$50
Kitchen	\$60
Hallway Events (craft show)	\$50
Athletic Fields	\$20
Stadium	\$125

Fees are per hour for high school facilities

"For the first time, we took back the work from our secretaries instead of adding to their work," Walter says.

Since the system was installed, revenues for facility rentals increased from \$86,000 in 2001-2002 to \$737,000 in 2004-2005. The revenues are being used to help compensate for decreasing state funding to districts.

"If we didn't have that money, we'd have to cut \$400,000 and because we've done so many reductions we would be talking about cutting people's jobs," says Walter. **DA**

Fran Silverman is a contributing editor.

Rochester Community Schools is home to 14,400 students, 13 elementary schools, four middle schools, three high schools and three small-use facilities.