



HIGHLAND PARK INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT, TEXAS

Dedication to Customer Service and Product Evolution

More than 20 years ago, Highland Park Independent School District (HPISD) upgraded its software and hasn't looked back. School administrators needed to change the finance, payroll and human resource management software after outgrowing its system which had become limiting. In education, this is a typical event that districts face every seven to 10 years. "alio® has managed to meet - and grow - with our needs year after year," said Kris Ingersoll, director of Business Services, Highland Park Independent School District, Dallas, Texas.

After a careful Request For Proposal (RFP) process, HPISD selected SAGE software, which would later become re-engineered and rebranded into alio once it was purchased by Weidenhammer.

In fact, HPISD was the first school district in Texas that chose alio even though the software provider was out-of-state. "While the company was not based in Texas, they showed a true commitment to Highland Park. They kept up with Texas Education Agency requirements," said Ingersoll. Big changes like this can make or break a relationship. HPISD evaluated everything that was important to maintaining its financial, payroll and human resource systems. "It was the same faces and trained experts we

had personal relationships with. The only thing that really changed for us was the breadth of services that we now had access to," said Ingersoll.

Like most districts, HPISD relied on having a quality software product with efficiencies that make every work day easier, backed by attentive customer service from a team of trained professionals.

"We didn't really have any major problems, yet the few times we had something immediate to solve, the Weidenhammer team came through—even one Sunday. My emergency became their priority and I had what I needed for my Monday morning meeting."

The administration needed to update the annual payroll data, import existing information, and export the updated budgets. "(Weidenhammer) showed me a trick and now the report that used to take one week's time, now only takes two hours."

"It's customer service that'll keep me here. It's customer service that'll drive me away," said Ingersoll.

Standing the Test of Time

Migrating to new software can be quite a process, which likely contributes to the infrequency that school districts shop for it. On average, school districts change software every seven to 10 years.

"For us, the transition to alio was pretty smooth because they seem to look ahead to predict what we'll need," said Ingersoll. "alio's features evolve with the changes of the district and state requirements. Weidenhammer is always stretching and building on their software."

To really stand the test of time, the software users need a program that is easy to understand and customizable to the reports and screens they use often. And for those reports you don't do often enough to commit to memory, the users need the system to be intuitive enough that it isn't rocket science to figure out when the moment arrives.

"The screens walk you through the cues, and you just click the buttons," said Ingersoll. The characteristics of the screens in alio are consistent—whether you're in HR, purchasing, accounting, or any other function. The menus are always the same so it is easy for new or seasoned users and it doesn't require much training to understand the every day functions.

With an automated financial and HR management system that runs on client servers and the Web for PC and MAC platforms simultaneously, all of the administrators can work from one database for instant access to real time information. Of course, the level of secure information they can access is dictated by their logon. They have the tools to manage

budgets, produce accurate reports and control the finances.

Some of the more popular functions that help administrators are alio's accounts payable with built-in security features for loss prevention, accounts reconciliation with positive pay, and ad hoc report writers that allow administrators to customize reports.

Accounts payable sends electronic flat files to the bank that in turn creates a database of checks that have been written. alio's positive pay feature on account reconciliation has built-in security confirms that a check presented at the bank is not fraudulent.

"The bank confirms any amount I issue so I can verify the payment before money is drawn from our account," said Ingersoll. "Once the check is cashed, alio flags the check as paid so the bank can see if the check is fraudulent or presented more than once and notify the school district. It's a tight process." The transactions are electronically sent so the district saves on postage, printing and staff time. Most importantly, the district can save thousands of dollars by protection from fraud.

Because reports are customizable, administrators can customize parts of the program to meet the individual district's needs, which frequently change with the reporting requirements of the individual school districts and their state. alio's multi-level reporting allows administrators to retrieve a simple query of complex information in minutes, saving time and office supplies need to print the reports.

Evolving for the Future

Whether it's working toward a paperless office or finding new features and efficiencies, Weidenhammer and its business partners work hard to keep alio relevant and constantly evolving with its ever-changing users' needs.

There is an active alio customer advisory board that offers ideas and recommendations for best practices and progressing with school districts' needs and the unique requirements of each state.

While extensive training is not required, Weidenhammer offers a series of training tools to help maximize the investment that each district makes. These tools include Web or personal training sessions, webinars, a customer service help line and an annual user's conference to learn directly from the software engineers and network with other users.

Ingersoll said he served as a resource for two other school administrators who flew in from other states to see an "actual alio user" demonstrate the software before making the leap to invest in

the program. Major purchases that affect thousands of students, staff and taxpayers require homework. "They require time, money, board approvals and the like. I think it's important to talk to other people that use the systems first, get 'real' feedback and experience live demos. I'd always recommend involving the staff who will need to use the system in the evaluation process," said Ingersoll.

HPISD has had more than one opportunity to change software but in that district, alio isn't going anywhere. Ingersoll says the district is happy with this software, and has no need to take on the arduous task of changing software. The administration is pleased with alio's abilities, evolutions and upgrades, and Weidenhammer's people who make it all possible.

"Weidenhammer has put into place a system that gives confidence, and the company has proven to me that it can take care of its Texas users. We are a priority," said Ingersoll. "I'm as committed as a user as Weidenhammer is committed as a provider."

School Snapshot

Highland Park Independent School District is:

- Located in the center of Dallas, Texas
- One of 1,040 public school districts in Texas; it has 6,300 students on seven campuses
- Recognized as a Lighthouse school district in the United States—always in the top 20 and the only school district in Texas with the AAA Rating merit
- Ranked among U.S. News and World Report's Gold Medal List of top high schools for the 2008-2009 school year
- Consistently receives exemplary ratings from the Texas Education Agency for its individual campuses and district as a whole

About Weidenhammer

Founded in 1978, Weidenhammer is an education management software leader serving the business intelligence and information technology needs of more than 1,000 school districts in 40 states. The company specializes in using information technology as a strategic tool for education administration. With nearly 200 IT professionals in seven locations, Weidenhammer is structured to align the requirements of any school district with the appropriate application of information technology. To learn more, please visit www.hammer.net.

John Weidenhammer, Chief Executive Officer, Weidenhammer

John P. Weidenhammer is president and founder of Weidenhammer, a diversified information solutions firm headquartered in Wyomissing, PA. An advocate of the strategic alignment of business goals and technology, John has consulted numerous high profile national and international organizations and is a frequent speaker at industry events and conferences. He has been involved with the design and development of application software for nearly 40 years. John has been working with schools since 1979.

John Green, Chief Software Architect, Weidenhammer

John Green has more than 25 years of experience in the software development industry and is chief software architect at Weidenhammer. Actively involved with the K-12 market for the past 23 years, he has written one financial management system and designed two other finance and payroll systems to evolve with technology. Green also designed alio™ Intelligence, a new component of Weidenhammer's alio financial and human resource management software suite. Prior to joining Weidenhammer, he was CEO of Information Design, Inc., Denver, CO. Green is a member of the finance, auditing and budget committee of the Association of School Business Officials (ASBO). For more information, visit www.hammer.net or e-mail jgreen@hammer.net.