

Laredo Independent School District

Phased output strategy and cost savings put Laredo Independent School District at the head of the class

Organization

The Laredo Independent School District (ISD) has come a long way from its inception as a single-room schoolhouse more than a century ago. With a population that grew by 41% between 1990 and 2000, this major urban border community has more than 214,000 residents today. Laredo ISD manages annual expenditures of nearly \$170 million and operates 30 schools serving more than 24,500 students.

Challenge

Laredo ISD strives to provide a comprehensive educational experience while cutting expenses and improving productivity. In its hunt for cost savings, the district cited its output fleet as a key point of focus.

About a decade ago, Laredo ISD had more than 1,000 inkjet printers installed in its classrooms and offices. Although appropriate in specific circumstances, these inkjets quickly proved a disappointment, despite their low acquisition cost.

“These inkjets cost very little to buy, but their appetite for expensive ink cartridges was off the charts and they broke down frequently,” said Roy Lanier, the district’s chief technology officer. “These printers were enormously expensive to run, and they weren’t designed to stand up to the heavy demand of constant classroom use.” The result was frequent breakdowns, often leading to replacement rather than repair.

Under pressure to cut costs and extricate itself from the day-to-day monitoring and maintenance of its output devices, Laredo ISD concluded that replacing its aging hardware would solve its immediate needs, but not provide a foundation for other productivity-enhancing applications. Laredo ISD instead sought a partnership with a vendor to create a district-wide output strategy that could be phased into the school system in stages. That partner was, and still is, Lexmark.

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Roy Lanier
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Solution

“Our original plan was to replace all of the inkjets and standardize on a single inkjet model,” said Lanier. “At the time, the thinking was that going to laser printers would simply be too expensive for us to consider.”



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Though inkjet printers are inexpensive to purchase, their lifetime total cost of ownership is extraordinarily high, due almost entirely to the high price of ink cartridges. Education industry analysts from Lexmark met with Lanier and built a cost-comparison model showing that lasers, which use toner cartridges lasting thousands of pages, are considerably more economical over their lifetime. Lanier scrapped the inkjet replacement plan, presenting instead a laser-based proposal to the Laredo ISD School Board, which granted its approval.

The result was a phased deployment of 1,848 Lexmark devices: 141 color lasers strategically located in school offices and labs, 82 multifunction products (MFPs) in schools and district administrative offices, and 1,625 monochrome laser printers in the district’s classrooms and other administrative sites.

“We located a color laser in selected classrooms in addition to teachers’ workrooms, student labs and libraries,” said Lanier. “Every classroom in the district has at least a monochrome printer.” Next, Lexmark MFPs were installed in all administrative offices. Immediately, the district saw a dramatic decrease in faxing and a sizable decrease in printed page volumes. Employees even taught themselves how to use the scan to email feature.

As Laredo’s IT department became stretched thin, outsourcing the output function and the promise of additional savings became appealing. With the technology decision made, the district sought a total partnership with an output vendor that could create a districtwide strategy, supply product, take over complete fleet management, provide maintenance services, analyze ongoing usage patterns and volumes, and perform demand-matching by redeploying devices as needed. To assure uninterrupted performance, Laredo ISD chose to support its entire fleet of Lexmark

devices with a blanket managed print services (MPS) agreement with Lexmark. Lexmark was chosen over several other manufacturers.

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Lexmark now has two, full-time employees on staff at Laredo ISD. The help desk also uses Lexmark’s web portal for break fix and for ordering genuine Lexmark supplies.

With Lexmark lasers and MFPs as the standard throughout the district and an MPS contract in place, Laredo took the next logical step and began leveraging the power of its MFPs for workflow improvements. Workflow, in this case, refers to handling the volume of paper required to administer student tests as part of the No Child Left Behind Act and as a gauge of student proficiency.

Lexmark designed a unique testing application to print bubble-sheet standardized tests on the Lexmark MFPs, eliminating costly preprinted test forms. The solution allows teachers to print student personalized tests and see results on demand. The Lexmark solution reduces costs, simplifies the testing process and gives teachers immediate access to scores.

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Leveraging the power of the Lexmark Document Solutions Suite, Lexmark developed bubble-sheet templates specifically for Laredo ISD for predefined tests. The software’s flexibility allowed the precise positioning of the form’s text and dozens of bubbles, critical to assuring complete compatibility with



the district’s student information system. The software automatically prepopulates the tests with variable information such as the student’s name, ID number, class name and teacher’s name.

Now, teachers electronically log into a password-protected site within the Lexmark application and select the specific test they want to print and the specific group or class of students being tested. The bubble sheets can be printed automatically or emailed to the teacher in PDF format to be printed later. Next, the tests are administered and the completed forms are scanned on the MFPs at the school.

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The Lexmark software reads the bubbles and stores the answers in a file that aggregates the answers and scores the tests. Now teachers can view the test results by class, by student and even down to the question level and use this information to plan the curriculum for the next day—or the next semester.

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Results

Laredo ISD’s transition to a comprehensive, systemwide Lexmark output infrastructure is saving money and supporting student achievement in several ways.

Replacing its classroom-based, ink-gulping inkjet printers with monochrome and color lasers and MFPs drastically cut consumables costs while simultaneously boosting reliability. The new testing and grading solution has allowed the district to do away with pricey third-party preprinted bubble-sheet forms. An unexpected side benefit of the cost savings and simple creation of test forms is the ability for teachers to administer tests or pop-quizzes more frequently, providing additional metrics to gauge and support students’ academic progress.

As part of the MPS agreement, two Lexmark field engineers are on-site full-time in the district, assuring top-quality service and immediate response to any outage, completely freeing the Laredo IT staff from day-to-day printer maintenance.

“This is a complete partnership,” said Lanier. “We consider Lexmark a part of our organization. In fact, the on-site Lexmark engineers wear Laredo ISD shirts every day.”

For the Laredo ISD, moving ahead with a phased plan has reduced costs, supported student achievement and helped offset a busy IT staff, making a difference that goes well beyond printer hardware.

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Comprehensive Lexmark solutions that encompass hardware, document workflow and maintenance, along with an active partnership that continues long after the sale, are moving Laredo ISD to the head of the class.

But more than the hardware, solutions, services and supplies, it’s the relationship that keeps Laredo ISD turning to Lexmark year after year.