

Making AP Processing Less of a Process

Waco, TX, ISD's Accounting and Payroll Departments look to Laserfiche to streamline and save time

The Waco, TX, Independent School District (WISD) serves over 15,000 students across 32 campuses. For WISD's Accounting Department, that means cutting 300-400 checks a week to vendors and agencies serving the district, as well as handling the information management needs that come along with AP processing for a mid-size ISD like Waco:

- Copying and filing checks, purchase orders and invoices.
- Filing bank and vendor reconciliations and journal entries.
- Answering daily open records requests from vendors and departments district-wide.
- Making records available for auditors from internal, local and state agencies.

By 2008, file cabinets were taking up more and more space—and staff trips to look up records were taking up more and more staff time. Sheryl Davis, Superintendent for Business and Support Services, decided to do something about it. Davis had seen how different document types could be scanned, sorted, indexed and filed according to a customizable set of template fields using Laserfiche at a workshop held at the Region 12 Education service center.

Davis was encouraged by the fact that the Region 12 Education Service Center (which serves WISD) was already successfully utilizing Laserfiche, and contacted Region 12's Laserfiche reseller, Bryan-College Station-based SMARTfiles, about acquiring a similar system in the WISD Accounting Department.

A scan in time saves nine

Initial implementation focused on automating how AP staff captured vendor information, and key to that was integrating Laserfiche with the District's SunGard e-Finance software (formerly Pentamation). Utilizing Laserfiche

Quick Fields advanced capture software, staff could now schedule regular processing sessions to automatically create Laserfiche files using the purchase order (PO) numbers, which then automatically fill-in vendor information from the SunGard system. The efficiency, says Cindy Shaver, Accounting and Payroll Coordinator, was immediate. "It saves us time because we don't have to scan in the POs and create a file," she says. Then, after paying the invoice, the scanned check and other supporting documentation are likewise added to the file—which is all accessible from a desktop.

WISD found that user adoption is not without its hiccups—or its remedies. "We had an employee that did not want to scan at first, as she thought it would consume her time," Shaver recalls. "Once she saw the value in retrieving documents at her desktop and not having to retrieve them from a file cabinet and/or boxes from off-site, she became more willing to scan."

Shaver admits she herself took a little time acclimating to the idea of paperless information automation. "When I first came on two years ago, I thought we'd need to create a full-time position to scan in all these documents, but that hasn't been the case," she says. After every check-run, the Accounts Payable Specialist scans in the checks and supporting documentation by PO, adding them to the file already created in Laserfiche. "It takes some time and monitoring to ensure that items are being scanned in weekly, but the result is this overall efficiency," she says. "It's absolutely wonderful to have this information on our computers versus going to a file cabinet, or a person's office, or finding a missing document."

The scanning process itself benefitted from some refinements. Initially, Shaver says, staff scanned in by invoice. "But one check could pay 30 invoices, which took time. So we reevaluated the process and started scanning by POs." Now, almost three years later, the department has

seen consistent long-term benefits. “We are able to retrieve documents quickly and are able to move files off-site sooner, which has freed up space in our department.”

As a principal end-user, AP Lead Gloriana Murry credits a short but optimistic learning curve with contributing to both the success of initial adoption, and leading to a broader scope of Laserfiche use. “It’s a very easy-to-use system,” she says. “It didn’t take much to open my eyes to what else we could use the system for.”

Shaver credits the flexibility of Laserfiche to add and customize template fields with expanding its use for more detailed audit information and accounting functions, including journal entries, bank reconciliations and documents/reports for outside auditors. “I created a template for journal entries very easily. I simplified the template to include ‘Journal Entry Number,’ ‘Description,’ ‘Period’ and ‘Year,’” she says. “Since I’m scanning them in, I no longer have to keep an actual file folder for them.”

Paper-free means headache-free audits, records requests and reconciliation

The comprehensiveness and convenience of having vendor and other financial information in single, searchable repository has significantly impacted two major processes—answering open records requests and making information available to auditors. “Every day you’re bombarded with phone calls from people needing information from you,” says Murry. “In the past you had to get up and go to a file cabinet to look it up—if it was misfiled, you were on your own. Now I just save a copy to PDF and e-mail it off. It went from taking 15 minutes to less than two minutes. I’ll have campuses call and I’ll have them on the phone and say ‘Okay, it’s in your e-mail right now.’”

Shaver shares this story: “I had an open records request for all invoices that were paid to this one vendor for the last five years. For the first 2 ½ years—from before we implemented Laserfiche—for those, we had to track them down in off-site storage and then pay to have those files delivered. We then had to un-staple them and stand by the copier machine to make copies,” she says. “For the invoices from the 2 ½ years since Laserfiche was implemented, I searched by vendor, highlighted and saved it to a file and sent the file electronically, which saved paper, toner and valuable time.”

Between internal, local and state agencies, WISD’s financial records are subject to regular audits—at least 12 times a year—often without more than a few days lead time. “Our auditors usually provide us a list of maybe 200 invoices they wanted to review for testing purposes,” Shaver says. “We used to either pull the items for them or they would go through our files to pull it themselves. Now, I set them up with viewing-only access in Laserfiche, so they can review their selections in Laserfiche.”

“They can also save paper by saving their selections to file versus printing as they, too, are trying to go paperless,” she adds. “I had one auditor comment how simple the process was for him to review and how much it sped up the process. Some of the auditors were fighting over the computer as we had stored all information for them in a special “Audit folder”—perhaps next year I will need to ensure they have another computer with Laserfiche so they don’t have to wait until the other auditor is finished with their testing.”

Another process that Shaver says significantly improved is reconciling the WISD fixed assets system with its SunGard system. “If there’s anything missing in our fixed asset program or SunGard, I just use Laserfiche to research the asset in question and make any corrections,” Shaver says. “It’s so easy, and I’m doing it from my desk.”

Now, she says, she can’t imagine life without Laserfiche. “If you take it away, it’s like you’re taking away my computer. It’s like going back to the Stone Age.”

Hello Payroll, goodbye nine filing cabinets

More recently, Shaver’s departmental duties have expanded to include the WISD Payroll Department—and all nine file cabinets worth of its personnel files. “One of the Account Payable Specialists was promoted to Payroll Specialist II position—she’s a strong advocate for Laserfiche and is looking forward to utilizing it for Payroll,” Shaver says. The department, she adds, is preparing to input personnel files into Laserfiche, including:

- Action sheets.
- Direct deposit forms.
- Payroll deduction forms.
- W-4 forms.

For her expanded duties, however, Shaver is already using Laserfiche. “Currently, I am scanning in all the payroll redistributions that I have prepared, because it enables me to keep track of the redistributions as well as to retrieve the documentation for the redistribution,” she says.

She says what has made Laserfiche so versatile for WISD has been its ease-of-use. “I’ve seen similar programs to Laserfiche, but nothing as simple to use,” Shaver offers. “We can set it up similarly to how we’re used to keeping out documents on our desktops.”

“It’s so easy to use that when I joined the department as the system administrator, I picked it up right away. I think it says a lot about our success using Laserfiche that it is so easy and intuitive, because you can set it up however works best for you.”

The Next Step: Please call (800) 985-8533 or e-mail info@laserfiche.com for more information.

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