



THE MAGAZINE OF QUEST INTERNATIONAL USERS GROUP  
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# UNLOCKING Page 6 THE BUSINESS OF EDUCATION

USING PEOPLE, PROCESSES AND TECHNOLOGY  
FOR GRADE-A TRANSFORMATION



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# UNLOCKING

## USING PEOPLE, PROCESSES

By Tom Colbert, Change Management Director  
Keith Jones, Director, CSS International, Inc.

### Not Your Grandfather's School

Effectively managing a large urban school district is as complicated as running a Fortune 100 company. In fact, it may be even harder to foster processes that deliver excellence in education than in a commercial environment.

Like large businesses, school districts have lots of moving parts. Metro Nashville Public Schools (MNPS) is no exception. With an operating budget exceeding \$630 million, 145+ schools and facilities, 10,000+ employees and 78,000 students from 120 nations, the business of education in Nashville – and around the country – has evolved tremendously. With oversight from the US Department of Education to encourage better business processes, school districts are now demanding the same things that private sector organizations need to stay on top: sound business practices, enterprise systems, and the ability for stakeholders to execute those processes across the organization.

In 2008, the US Department of Education designated MNPS as “high risk” related to business operations in place at the time. In response, the Tennessee Department of Education entered into a Compliance Action Plan (CAP) with MNPS that mandated improvement in business performance, stronger organizational functions

and streamlined operations. Under the focused direction of the School Board and executive leadership, MNPS is now moving rapidly from “high risk” to “role model” for large urban school districts.

MNPS was challenged with maintaining critical federal funding for education programs and services. Some of the areas where MNPS was cited for failure to perform included:

- Purchasing
- Inventory Management
- Warehouse Management
- Shipping
- Accounts Payable
- Organizational Operations
- Standard Operating Procedure
- Staff Training
- Overall Process Efficiency

# CHANGING THE BUSINESS OF EDUCATION

## AND TECHNOLOGY FOR GRADE-A TRANSFORMATION

Director, CSS International, Inc.  
Inc.

### The Power of Partnership in Education

To rapidly turn things around and make improvements, MNPS realized they couldn't do it alone. Under the leadership of newly hired Superintendent, Dr. Jesse Register, MNPS sought guidance from CSS International (CSS). As an Oracle partner, CSS provides consulting services to improve business process, leverage technology and manage human capital change. This partnership provided a winning combination of best practices and industry perspectives that has helped MNPS begin to embrace change at a rapid pace.

When selecting a partner, MNPS leadership looked for a firm that could rapidly assess current processes and organizational dynamics, maximize Oracle solutions, mitigate risks, and lead MNPS to true business transformation.

"We selected CSS as our partner in this journey because they had solid references; they listened intently and studied our environment. There's a level of trust between our organizations that made the process easier, even though we all recognized that the challenges ahead were significant," says Dr. Register.

CSS and MNPS jointly launched a procure-to-pay process improvement project entitled "Magellan"; thus began a transformational journey to fundamentally change the people, processes and technology of MNPS.



As with any major project, collaboration is paramount to success. The first step was a joint discovery mission which included a thorough review of current policies, procedures, technology systems, organizational dynamics and culture. This led to a comprehensive report detailing recommendations in three key areas:

1. Technology Systems
2. Business Process Improvement
3. Organizational Behavior

This holistic approach would drive the design and adoption of best practices and Oracle-based technology across MNPS.

### Nobody Said School Was Going To Be Easy

New business and technology processes can go over like having to go to Summer school, regardless of the type of organization. Getting past the natural resistance to change is essential for achieving business process improvement. To succeed, it was imperative for CSS and MNPS to understand and respect the organization's human constraints and growth parameters. This would make it possible to ultimately redesign business processes and technologies to improve overall operations and ensure compliance with Federal and State requirements.

### Next Lesson: Pull vs. Push for Process Change

Long-lasting institutional change is most often realized when it is pulled from the bottom up—rather than pushed from the top down. "The probability of success will dramatically rise if business and organizational requirements "pull" the enterprise through the change. Risk increases if change is pushed through the organization unattached to tangible business drivers," says Tom Colbert, Director of Organizational Change Management at CSS International.

MNPS pulled their District to change processes that weren't making the grade, and were having dramatic and negative impact on students, teachers, administration and vendors, including:

- Curriculum materials and textbooks arriving late to schools
- Purchase order times of 4-7 months for products and services
- Lost purchase orders due to manual paperwork
- Lack of professional development programs due to complicated processes, multiple levels of approval and no means to set up and/or pay for travel, conference fees, or other development opportunities
- Damaged vendor relationships and loss of credit due to late payments

Change agents can't assume that the message will trickle down to all stakeholders. There are three key rules for ensuring change reaches everyone in the enterprise:

1. **Regularity and Consistency** – Set up the process and stick to it (e.g., don't stray from processes that are agreed upon).
2. **Routine Automation** – Make efficient automation the "norm" for business processes.
3. **Recognize the Importance of and Review Training** – Provide technical training for solutions and change management services to address cultural resistance.

"These solutions were critical to our success. Moreover, we needed the commitment from our faculty and staff to have lasting impact on the way we run our District. That's what will take us to the next level," said Dr. Register.

### **Report Card: How MNPS is Using Oracle JD Edwards to Accomplish Change**

MNPS implemented Oracle JD Edwards EnterpriseOne to foster needed change across the District. The

solutions, coupled with the cultural shift, resulted in a Grade-A transformation and gold star results:

- Automated, online Procure-to-Pay implemented, reducing purchase times from months to weeks.
- Visibility by users to the requisition and purchase order throughout its lifecycle.
- Implementation of budget-checking at the point of requisition to validate sufficient funds and eliminate overspending.
- Automated approval processes for use of Federal funds implemented
- Reorganization and staffing of Purchasing department.
- Reorganization and staffing of Accounting department.
- IT Help Desk improvements including initial Power User Group for support and training.

#### **Summary of Solutions at MNPS:**

ERP: JD Edwards EnterpriseOne 8.12

- Accounts Receivables
- Accounts Payables
- General Ledger
- Purchasing

Inventory Management

Implementation Partner: CSS International, Inc.

Hardware Platform: AS/400

Host Environment: Outsourced – WTS

## Pull, Don't Push

Before the new system, Metropolitan Nashville schools felt very bureaucratic, with all organization coming from the central office, according to Director Dr. Jesse Register. "Concerns came from the school level that there was a disconnect between the schools and the central office level," he said. "Across the board we were hearing that business practices were not effective." So rather than pushing change down from the central office, MNPS decided to pull the changes up through the organization by implementing new policies and practices at the school level. This is not only a more effective way to bring about change, but it increased the communication between schools and the central office. CSS proved to be the perfect partner in making this happen. "They brought a combination of organizational psychology and technical expertise," said Dr. Register.



## MNPS Pledge of Allegiance

With new systems in place, a well-trained staff, and no high-risk baggage to threaten their programs, MNPS is committed and positioned to continue on their journey of process improvement. Further enhancements to Web requisitions and purchase order tracking are planned, as are plans to improve other departments such as Federal Programs, Exceptional Education and English Learners departments of Instructional Support.

CSS will continue to provide guidance to MNPS as they look for ways to use Oracle solutions to better support their employees with training, performance metrics, standardized appraisal processes and accountability standards by role.

"We're going to keep digging in and doing the work to make MNPS the best District it can be," says Dr. Register. Magellan has been a long journey but MNPS has made a pledge of allegiance to maintain both effective and efficient business processes that keep them on top.

Class dismissed.

For more information on Metro Nashville Public Schools use of Oracle solutions, visit CSS at [www.cssus.com](http://www.cssus.com).