



Using Technology to Unify Library and Textbook Management



By Oswaldo Galarza



and Peter Hutcher

Centers for Information Literacy

One of the strategic goals of the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) is transforming district libraries into Centers for Information Literacy — not just repositories of books, but places for students to develop the ability to find, evaluate, and use information — the skills they need to be life-long learners. As part of this transformation, we identified the need to replace a hodgepodge of localized library management schemes with a single, centralized system that was easy to use and easy to train on.

At the same time, we wanted the system to include the ability to manage and track textbooks throughout the district. Not only would this reduce the number of different discrete systems the district maintained, but we knew that many schools might utilize the same staff for library and textbook management and needed a uniform interface to simplify training.

At the outset of this initiative, approximately 25 percent of OUSD schools used

legacy systems from multiple vendors for library management. More than half of our schools were using card catalogs or had no library management at all. Needless to say, this chaotic state of affairs posed a challenge to technical staff, which had to keep all these site-based systems running and updated. More importantly, it made it impossible to get a system-wide





view of district libraries and their needs. In most schools, searching for books and instructional media couldn't be done outside of the library itself, making it inconvenient for students and teachers to make full use of the collection.

A few schools managed textbooks with a 15-year-old, DOS-based, stand-alone system. All other OUSD schools managed textbooks with a variety of home-grown solutions, many of them paper-based. Distribution of textbooks at the beginning of each school year was so massively time consuming that some students didn't receive their textbooks until weeks after class had started. Recovering lost textbooks, charging fines and identifying damaged books that needed replacement were difficult tasks for most schools.

Even more importantly, the information required for accurate textbook ordering was extremely difficult to obtain. The need to do a better, more unified job of tracking textbook and library assets for ordering, inventory purposes and training were all reasons that led OUSD to pursue the upgrade of its library and textbook systems.

The district identified two other prerequisites for the system it was seeking. The first was that the system be Web distributed. A completely Web-based system that would manage both library and textbook materials through the same interface would not require client software on each workstation. With limited tech support staff, we wanted to select an application that did not require a site server or client software. Lastly, we wanted a system that would be easy to integrate with the AERIES student information system, so that textbook and library data could be examined in light of attendance, scheduling, and district and state student achievement scores.



A Web-Based System

In 2006, after considering a number of alternatives, the district decided on Destiny Library Manager™ and Destiny Textbook Manager™, from Follett Software Company. The system had the benefit of being completely browser based, requiring no on-site installation of Des-

tiny or Java clients. Library and textbook applications would run on a centrally controlled server at the district. The systems are then accessed by any workstation with Internet access and an appropriate Web browser, making it a cross-platform solution that can run on most legacy hardware. We anticipated this solution would



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minimize additional hardware investment and free up most of the staff time previously used for on-site maintenance and upgrades.

The Destiny library and textbook applications use the same web interface and share the same server, providing the integration we were looking for. As a SIF-certified system, it would also be relatively straightforward to interface with our student information system.

Like Library Manager, Textbook Manager can be accessed through any browser equipped workstation. Basic data entry for check-in and check-out is done via barcode scanner. It was anticipated that library scanners would be used for this task by most schools, but the system has the capability of supporting check-in and check-out in classrooms, the cafeteria, gym, or any facility in the school.

In the summer and fall of 2005, we worked with Follett staff on a daily basis in configuring the central server and in developing extract procedures to move data from our SIS and HR systems into Destiny. Initially, we loaded the library and textbook data for a particular site into the system just before training the staff at that site. Later we decided to load all OUSD sites into the system and populate them with the available data before

training. We were able to load data from the six schools that still actively utilized our 15-year-old, stand-alone textbook management system. We also were able to load data from the centralized Dynix system used at 20-plus sites and the six or so other, stand-alone library systems used at another 10 or so sites. Finally, we were able to load data for all sites from books purchased over the last five years with state library funds.

Implementation began with a test group of schools, at all grade levels, which we identified as having highly skilled and/or motivated staff. This group, along with a core district group (including help desk personnel), received more in-depth training and helped us clarify issues around access levels and other policies and procedures. We've followed up with a series of trainings and have been able to use the same Follett trainer for all sessions.

The implementation was not without some hurdles, however. While previously automated schools were generally able to begin using Destiny immediately, the non-automated sites needed to add their materials to the Destiny catalog. Bringing these libraries into the era of automation has proven to be a time-consuming process that we are still working on. The lack of dedicated library and textbook staff at some sites has also slowed implementation.

Results and Next Steps

Nevertheless, the new, unified library/textbook management system is working exceptionally well at sites that have implemented it. Currently, about 80 sites are using or have been trained in the library system and about 65 are using or have been trained in the textbook system. The number of library books circulated within Destiny has grown by about 25 percent a month. Campus level staffs are very pleased with the system. Library searches may now be done by teachers in the classroom, and parents at home can help their children find the resources they need.

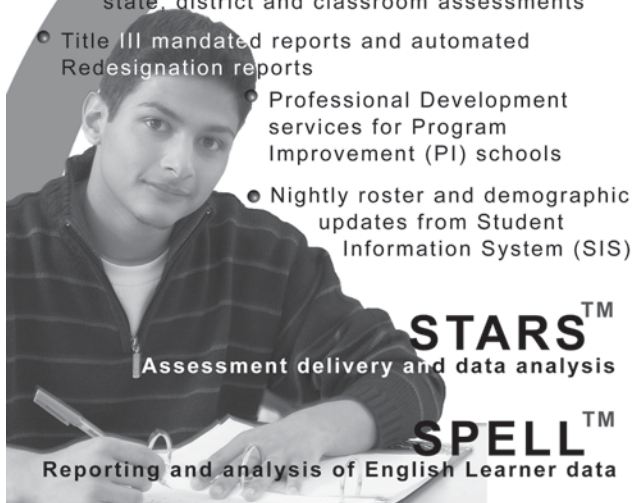
How much time and money has the system saved us? At this stage, it's difficult to provide hard figures, primarily because our previous lack of automation left us with little baseline data with which to compare. But, results from individual schools have been very encouraging. For instance, at Oakland High School, the time it takes to distribute textbooks has dropped from several weeks to less than one, now that Destiny is in place. If these results are mirrored by other schools as they come on-line, the results in terms of recovered time and saved budget funds may be considerable.

Our early successes with the system have encouraged us to continue training staff at sites not yet trained and to deepen staff knowledge at sites using the system and at site and central administrative levels. We also continue to evaluate reporting and inventory procedures in light of the new capability the system provides. All in all, we have only begun to scratch the surface of the benefits we can receive from effective use of the reporting capabilities within this unified, web-based system.

Oswaldo Galarza is Information Technology Officer with the Oakland Unified School District and Peter Hatcher is instructional technologist with the Oakland Unified School District. They can be reached at oswald.galarza@ousd.k12.ca.us and peter.hatcher@ousd.k12.ca.us.



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