Cleaner Data, Revamped Processes, Better Asset Management

The Technology Department at Newton County Schools provides service and support for 20,000 students and close to 2,500 staff. Here's how they manage their 1:1 device program.

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A 1:1 device initiative at a school district with 20,000 students might not seem out of the ordinary, but in March 2020, it was a big deal for Newton County Schools. While the district was already moving toward a 1:1 model, remote learning at the beginning of the pandemic accelerated their plans.

Mark Watson and Danita Copeland, Lead Technology Specialists at the district in suburban Atlanta, described some of challenges: a shortage of devices to send home with every student, inefficient processes for device distribution and collection, and an asset tracking system that didn't meet their district needs.

Federal funding eventually became available to help purchase additional Chromebooks for students, but the Technology Department still needed to update both their processes and their software system. As it turns out, those two things are closely linked.

Life Before

The data you can pull from a system is only as good as the data that goes into it, and in Newton County's old asset management database, similar devices might be listed in multiple ways: 'Chromebook,' 'Google Chromebook,' 'Samsung Chromebook,' 'Gray Chromebook,' 'Chromebook Laptop,' etc. This made it impossible to get accurate counts of how many devices the district had.

"There was not as much attention to making sure that the database was right or that things were entered correctly. It was left up to individual techs at schools and there was no process involved," Mark said.

Reporting was a challenge, and filtering was difficult. *"You had to reinvent the wheel whenever you wanted to get a report…. Sometimes you would get a report and you would not have the steps recorded, but then you'd go back to generate the same report, or what you thought was the same report, and it might give you different data. It was not consistent."*

Danita agreed. *"Whenever [my boss] would ask for certain reports, I could easily put eight hours into building reports just to find out total numbers of things."*

During inventory counts to ensure devices were being used in compliance with federal funding requirements, the district had to verify each item individually. If they located a device that wasn't listed on the spreadsheet they were using, the techs might just choose to add an extra line to the sheet — but that data rarely made it back into their asset management system.

Newton County Schools at a Glance:

LOCATION: Covington, Georgia

K-12 ENROLLMENT: ~20,000
- 34 public schools,
- 5 public charter schools,
- 4 non-public districts

TEACHERS & STAFF: 2,951

FACILITIES: 23

Frontline Solutions Used in this Case Study:
- Asset Management
- Help Desk Management

Learn more about Frontline's solutions for asset management

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Choosing Frontline

Newton County Schools switched to Frontline's Asset Management and Help Desk Management solutions to help them manage each device throughout its lifecycle. As part of the transition, they set out to make sure the data they added to the system was clean and accurate — a big job! But switching systems gave them the opportunity to do the necessary work and implement better processes to ensure the data *stayed* clean.

Codifying policies around how assets and devices are added to the system — and by whom — has helped to reduce the number of people involved. *"One of the things that we learned was to limit the amount of hands in the data through this whole conversion process, and that keeps our data cleaner as we go. That was really meaningful to us,"* Danita said. *"Creating the policy to keep the hands out of the pot has helped tremendously."*

Reporting

Limiting the people who enter data does not mean limiting who has access to it. In fact, with the reporting that is now possible for them with Frontline's Asset Management, users have greater access than before. If the Technology Director needs to know how many Chromebooks are in a specific room at a certain school, for example, rather than relying on a small group of people with the know-how to build reports, with Asset Management he can easily build one himself. *"That's the feature that has really helped us. The average user can go in and filter out something or run a report. That was not an option before."*

Title I reporting is much easier, too. With their old system, Danita said, *"Every tech would have to run these pre-made reports that one of the techs had come up with, and they would take that data and dump it into an Excel template. And then we would go through and make sure we had all that inventory in, and we would hand that over to our Title I department. They would set up a meeting with each individual school tech and come out to the school and verify those items. They actually went through and laid eyes on the device and called out serial numbers off of the device and checked them off."*

Now, with clean data in Asset Management, when those reports are exported to Excel and shared with the school techs, they're filterable in a way they weren't before. *"If they want to just see the Chromebooks that are Title I, they can see that. If they want to see each school individually, they can see that."*

Because of the processes for entering data and the permissions that Danita and Mark can set in Asset Management, it's far easier to ensure the information is accurate.

Reducing Device Loss

Mark said that the national average for device loss in school districts is between 7 and 8 percent. Because of the tracking capabilities in Asset Management and the policies they have put into place for when a device is marked as lost or unaccounted for, since switching to Frontline Newton County Schools comes in well below that number with approximately a 4 percent rate of device loss. *"So I think we're doing a little bit better than other districts."*

Part of that is due to the increased accountability that the system allows them to enforce. Before switching to Frontline and enacting new policies, schools might have shared devices with one another, and devices could be checked in at any location. *"Now, the techs do not have the ability to do that, which makes them more accountable in getting devices back to their original schools,"* said Danita. *"I think that's been a game changer for us in keeping the devices where they should be and knowing where they are."*

Mark agreed. *"I think it's increased our accountability because with the Frontline system, it actually records who made the change, and a lot of times there's a breadcrumb associated with each action."*

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>
> *– Danita Copeland*

That helps the Technology Department fulfill its purpose: equipping students for learning in the 21st century. Because they can track where every device is, Mark said, *"We can make sure that every student has a device."*

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Help Desk

Newton County Schools also uses Frontline Help Desk Management, a ticketing system that connects directly with Asset Management. With easier reporting than the makeshift system they had before, the ability to track time spent servicing each ticket, and the ability to assign tickets to specific techs in each school, IT service requests are far more organized. *"We each have a person in the school that is a School Technology Assistant who can help us, so we can assign tickets to them, we can escalate tickets to our network team if it's something that's beyond our scope of being able to resolve."*

But the real advantage comes from Help Desk's integration with Asset Management. If a ticket is submitted for a device in Help Desk, the system will automatically mark the device as "In Repair" in Asset Management. Similarly, *"If you're looking at a device and you say, 'This screen is broken,' and you mark it as 'In Repair,' then it will automatically do the reverse and generate a Help Desk ticket,"* said Mark. The district has not yet trained their techs on that process, but they see it will be a big help in tracking the status of each device.

> ## "If a device has a problem, then they report that on a Help Desk ticket and then that's in a database so we can ensure that it's getting the attention it needs."
>
> *– Mark Watson*

Physical Inventory Counts

Asset Management enables Mark and Danita and the other Technology Specialists to confirm that the devices on hand match what is recorded in the system. It's easy to reconcile devices with the records in the system, and if an item needs to be added, simply creating a help desk ticket with the asset number, serial number, funding source, and other information keeps all of the data neatly together and traceable. Or, if a device is found at the wrong location, Asset Management helps the techs know which school it should be at.

Device Distribution and Collection

Checking devices in and out has never been easier. When distributing devices, *"We have to check our system, make sure they don't have anything checked out to them already,"* Danita said. *"We also have a form inside of the Asset Management system that allows them to sign with their finger and acknowledge that they did receive a device. We didn't have that before — that's a great feature. The time spent with a student is minimal."* That user agreement helps keep students accountable. *"Just signing with their finger, it reinforces in their mind that, 'Hey, I've been issued this device, I'm agreeing to this.'"*

Collecting devices at the end of the year is quick as well. *"We check the devices in, make sure that they're all good, and they're on their way. It's a bam-bam process. They're there 60 seconds, 90 seconds at most."* The techs inspect the devices and determine whether to assess for damage or missing components like chargers, cases, and accessories, which the system also tracks. Techs at different schools engage in friendly competition, seeing who can check in the most devices in a day.

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At the end of the day, Asset Management can automatically send emails to the parent or student, confirming that the device has been returned. Documentation is better than with Newton County's previous system as well, making it easy to see how many devices were checked in or out.

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Financial Decisions

Asset Management also offers a window into where funds can be best used. *"Our director can run reports,"* said Mark. If the department has funds available, it makes spending decisions easier. *"He can say, 'Oh, we've got plenty of Chromebooks. Maybe we need printers in a classroom, or maybe we need interactive panels.' He can look at the database and figure out where we may be lacking on certain types of equipment to support instruction."*

More Intuitive and Efficient

As Mark and Danita and the other school techs support students and teachers with technology, teamwork is essential. That's another area where Asset Management helps. *"It seems like it's a lot more intuitive,"* Mark said, making it easier for techs to learn the process.

That has made the department more efficient, Danita noted, *"I feel like the biggest perk to us is the fact that there are so many different features that have simplified our roles, and keeping our data clean, too."*

About Frontline Education

Frontline Education is a leading provider of school administration software, connecting solutions for student and special programs, business operations and human capital management with powerful analytics to empower educators. Frontline partners with school systems to deliver tools, data and insights that support greater efficiency and productivity, enabling school leaders to spend more time and resources executing strategies that drive educator effectiveness, student success and district excellence.

Frontline's broad portfolio includes solutions for proactive recruiting and hiring, absence and time management, professional growth, student information systems, special education, special programs, Medicaid reimbursement, school health management, inventory control and asset management, payroll, benefits and financial management, and analytics solutions that help district leaders tap into their data to make more informed decisions for the benefit of their students and communities. Over 10,000 clients representing millions of educators, administrators and support personnel have partnered with Frontline Education in their efforts to develop the next generation of learners.

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