



# Simcoe County District School Board

With no online payment solution and limited internal controls, Simcoe County District School Board realized it needed to reinvent its approach to activity fund management.

The board collected over \$16.5 million in school generated funds annually, which were received entirely in the form of cash and cheques. This burdened the schools' senior administrative support staff with having to manually count and process all payments, which distracted staff from other responsibilities.

The problem was further compounded by poor cash handling practices at the school-level.

Jaclyn Kane, Coordinator of Accounting at Simcoe County District School Board, took some time to sit down with us to further discuss the challenges that ultimately lead them to source an integrated activity fund management solution that ultimately improved their overall operation.

## What challenges was your board experiencing that led to the adoption of a school cash management system and online payments?

Before introducing SchoolCash, we weren't offering anything online. Parents were only able to pay with cash or cheque and every school was maintaining their own activity fund management solution. This meant that we had to pull reports for every single school. Ministry reports took days to prepare, and we were never able to submit those reports with very much confidence. We wanted to move away from that and have a solution that would give us confidence in our reporting, and wanted to streamline our approach across schools.

With so many schools, spanning such a vast geographic area, finding an all-encompassing solution was key. We were looking for a single solution to eliminate inaccuracies, take away the manually processes, and remove paper. We were keen to get things moving electronically. A lot of schools had teachers handling cash, and no one knew where it was, or you'd find cash in a vault at any given time with no indication of what it was for or where it was collected from. All the added workload on our senior administrative staff took their time and focus away from other responsibilities – as they were spending all their time counting cash and preparing deposits.

### By the Numbers



Number of Schools

**102**



Number of Students

**52,400**

### SchoolCash Solutions

- SchoolCash Management
- SchoolCash Online
- SchoolCash Access
- SchoolCash Forms
- Lunchbox by SchoolCash Online

## How did you go about successfully implementing such a massive change in processes?

Our implementation was slow, with some staff reluctant to change. We wanted to make sure the program was a success, so we held their hand as much as needed.

We started with the schools that would have an easier time adopting, just from a geographic standpoint. Some of our areas have better, more consistent access to the internet than others. We left the areas that are more rural with spotty internet connections for last, knowing they would require a little more 'TLC' to onboard them. Giving each school the attention they needed, a lot of communication materials, and one-on-one training were the keys to our success.

## How did you engage your schools and get them excited?

We did a lot of friendly competitions between principals in geographic areas to boost our adoption rate. It allowed transparency for people who didn't think the program would work – to see other people in their area succeed.

We were always clear in communicating that we were doing this to make their lives easier. The addition of SchoolCash Forms drastically changed the outlook of those who were hesitant. They realize things are just easier online. We took a form that used to be in paper that would go to every single student every year to be completed and returned. Secretaries had to manually enter the information from every form each year. We've now made that an electronic process with an incentive that if they have all their data collected by a certain date, we can automatically import the data into their SIS (Student Information System) – which saves them days at the beginning of the school year.

## How did you engage with your parents/guardians?

On our district website, we speak directly about SchoolCash Online. It talks about how online payments are our preferred method and includes an FAQ document on some of the things we get questions about most often. We've also pushed the same information out to the schools to include on their websites and in their newsletters.

One of the other things we did was to allow the schools to use some of their parent engagement funding to buy laptops to have available in the office for parents to register. This resource was great for onboarding parents in more rural areas and helped them become engaged with SchoolCash.

We have also noticed a correlation between the number of items that are available online and adoption rates. By consistently putting items online, it's sending a clear message that this is the way our board operates, and allows parents to become comfortable and familiar with the platform.

## What positive impact has SchoolCash platform had on your operations?

Our board has significantly reduced the need for cash handling in schools, collecting \$6.5M in online transactions that no longer must pass through the hands of our administrative staff. This has streamlined the activity fund management processes and alleviated the administrative burden on school-level staff.

With the move to the SchoolCash platform, the board has considerably more control over school-level finances and has significantly improved the reporting process. This allowed our central office staff to gain complete visibility into and real-time control over all schools' accounts. The comprehensive reporting capabilities allows us to quickly generate detailed school-level financial reports and easily consolidate reports.

## What feedback have you received from parents/guardians?

They are pleased with how easy it is. They don't want to have to fill out a form, go to the bank and send cash with their child to school. They also don't want to be paying cash one day and online the next, so consistently putting items online has had a positive impact on parent/guardian reception of the platform.

## With an impressive 89% adoption rate across 102 schools, what initiatives did you use to boost those rates?

One factor we found is tied significantly to adoption rates is the number of items placed online. The more items you can get parents/guardians to buy online, the clearer that expectation becomes and the more comfortable they are with the process. We have set a clear guideline for our schools that anything over \$5 must be set up as an item in SchoolCash Online.

Another initiative we found that has had an impact is having teachers engaged with SchoolCash Access. This has resulted in more items being put online, which again, boosts adoption rates. Giving teachers that access gives them the control they desire, with the proper office approval still in place. Lastly, by adding Lunchbox by SchoolCash Online we were able to boost adoption rates by a further 6%, and particularly in schools where adoption had previously been low.

## What other benefits have you seen in adding Lunchbox to your schools?

The program freed up 6+ hours a week for the school staff in a time when volunteers were not able to be in schools during the pandemic. Through such an unpredictable time of school closures and elevated health and safety measures we were still able to offer a safe lunch program and continue our fundraising efforts, while being able to seamlessly alter lunch availability when COVID school closures did arise.

As a parent in this board, this is a program I love. It allows me to go in and purchase a month or two of lunches at a time and I don't have to sit and wonder whether I bought my kids lunches for that week.



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