FUJITSU

Creating a platform for educational excellence

With support costs mounting and a shortage of COBOL programmers, Minnesota Department of Education (MDE), in partnership with Minnesota IT Services (MNIT), recognized it could no longer delay its mainframe modernization project. Working alongside Fujitsu, using Fujitsu's proprietary PROGRESSION tool suite, MDE has successfully brought its 40-year-old, mission-critical school finance system into the modern age. The result is lower costs, reduced risk and greater flexibility.

About the customer

The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) serves a broad range of stakeholders. It manages the education of almost 900,000 K-12 students; ~18,000 young children participating in a variety of early learning programs including Head Start and ECFE; 82,000 adult learners participating in adult education programs including GED and citizenship programs. Minnesota has almost 500 school districts and more than 57,000 licensed teachers.

Industry: Education   Location: USA   People: 400 employees   Web: education.mn.gov/MDE

"Modernizing a mainframe is a niche activity. Now we have a modern platform that opens up many new options to solve problems more efficiently."

David Reeg, MNIT Software Development Supervisor, MDE

350

dynamically generated screens with multi-browser web-based interface

500

batch jobs to PowerShell producing 1,200 reports to PDF

Overhauling mission-critical finance systems

Delivering educational services is a complex and expensive undertaking. The state of Minnesota oversees the education of almost 900,000 of its young citizens, working with more than 57,000 licensed teachers. To ensure students are well-prepared for college, their career and life, it distributes $8 billion dollars of state aid and more than $400 million dollars in federal aid to school districts and other entities yearly.

The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) recognized it needed to modernize many of its applications. Modernization would help move MDE's systems to a standard Windows virtualized platform allowing the possibility of reduced operational costs, simplified management, and improved reporting.

Deployed in 1970 on a Unisys ClearPath mainframe platform, MDE's school finance system (MSFS) was proving expensive to run, and difficult to find COBOL resources in supporting it. By migrating to a new platform, MDE and Minnesota IT Services (MNIT) would have a greater opportunity to implement future enhancements of the systems that support schools, and to focus on improving students' educational needs.

"Modernizing a Unisys mainframe is a niche activity. Every example is unique," says David Reeg, MNIT Software Development Supervisor at MDE. "But COBOL computer programmers are a dwindling resource. This had to happen."

A trusted partner to deliver an integrated solution

This project was too important to fail and MDE wanted a proven modernization solution partner. It selected Fujitsu based on its expertise and a compelling, integrated solution. "Fujitsu clearly understood our concerns. We went through a feasibility study for code conversion, and Fujitsu produced clean code," says Reeg.

The migration and modernization of the client's mainframe applications was managed using Fujitsu's proprietary PROGRESSION tool suite. This migrated all school finance mainframe system applications and databases to a new, modern language and platform automatically.

"Fujitsu brought tremendous detail to the project," says Laura Wakefield, MNIT Project Manager. "We worked alongside a highly skilled project team provided by Fujitsu, led by a strong project manager, and a lead architect. The team was very collaborative and completely transparent in communication, giving us peace of mind."

Creating a platform for continued development

This modernization was delivered on time, on budget and there was no disruption after the launch. The move saves hundreds of thousands of dollars in annual support costs, says Reeg. It also supports business continuity, simplifying the task of replacing scarce COBOL programmers.

"Now we have a platform with a compatible language and a web-based interface. This gives us a wealth of options around how we develop different aspects of the MSFS," adds Wakefield.

"Fujitsu did a great job of including stakeholders, letting them have a say and putting them at ease. We have 11 different program areas, and the success of this project has given the business confidence that MNIT can manage big changes in the future."

The preceding is a factual summary of the events that took place for MDE's modernization project. The state of Minnesota does not endorse any products or companies.

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