



## CASE STUDY: Northern Lebanon School District, PA

I would encourage others to implement SIF if you haven't already done it. We are a small district and for us, the money spent is worth it. It has created improvements throughout the entire district and made it easy for all involved in managing and analyzing data and information.

- Sally Bair

Technology Facilitator

Northern Lebanon School

District

### Overview of Problem

The Northern Lebanon School District is a small rural district. Limited staff exists and many job responsibilities are spread among the staff.

A need existed to reduce the management of routine tasks. Data jobs were distributed across many people with information being entered multiple times in multiple systems. The district wanted to speed up and streamline the data entry processes and improve efficiencies to meet the goal of establishing services and student accounts more quickly.

Further, as Northern Lebanon observed the State Department of Education's commitment to SIF for data interoperability, the district saw the opportunity to be proactive and positioned itself to implement SIF Vertical Reporting.

### Demographic Information of Implementation

The Northern Lebanon School District is located in rural, Central Pennsylvania. The district encompasses:

- 144 square miles
- 5 buildings
- 2,500 students
- Student Population: 96% White, 4% Hispanic
- 18% economically disadvantaged

### Technical Solution and Applications

Sally Bair, Technology Facilitator, had been following SIF since it emerged in the late 1990's. When purchasing software, the school district ensured the software applications were SIF Certified, even prior to their SIF Implementation. If a SIF Agent isn't available for a product, Northern Lebanon actively works with the vendor to develop one.

When the State Department of Education committed to SIF, Northern Lebanon knew that it was time to be ready to report vertically by implementing SIF horizontally locally. The SIF Implementation began in Summer 2007 and was formally launched in Summer 2008 after Microsoft Active Directory was enhanced to meet the district's needs. Each agent/application pairing had been tested and was production ready when the implementation was started during Summer 2008 so each agent/application pairing was implemented one right after the other.

The SIF Implementation is currently maintained and supported by the Central Susquehanna Intermediate Unit (CSIU). CSIU provides the integration services. An integrator was selected because of the small staff and the need to support multiple applications.

One ZIS and one zone support the SIF Implementation. Each of the schools utilizes all of the applications. One aspect saving Northern Lebanon time involves automated account creation via the Edustructures SIFWorks Directory Manager agent for Microsoft Active Directory. Upon entering a student name into the student information system, a network account is automatically generated and propagated throughout the SIF zone, supporting the districts' goal of more quickly establishing services for new students.

Northern Lebanon's SIF Implementation includes Edustructures SIFWorks® Zone Integration Server (ZIS), SIFWorks Directory Manager Agent for Microsoft Active Directory, eTritionWare Meal Tracker, Pearson Power School, Follett Destiny and Schedule Star Athletic Director.



Spend time up front learning about SIF and the vendors you work with. Study the SIFA University curriculum and how SIF works.

## Benefits Achieved and Results

With a small staff, Northern Lebanon has realized several benefits with their SIF Implementation. Each staff member has multiple job responsibilities outside of their core. Since SIF has been implemented, staff has gained time that can then be focused on other responsibilities. For example, the network administrator, instead of generating and updating network accounts, can utilize this time to address network responsibilities more quickly.

Another benefit of implementing SIF is that the data moves more easily into other applications. Manual processes for extracting, uploading, updating and modifying data have been replaced with secure, standards-based automation. Finally, streamlining the entire process of data management is invaluable; data in all systems is cleaner as a result of SIF and time and money have been saved based on the ROI tool.

## Lessons Learned

As with any implementation, many things were learned along the way. One important lesson learned by Northern Lebanon staff is the need to spend adequate time up-front to learn about SIF and a potential vendor. NL spent a fairly significant amount of time on this piece of the project but being inexperienced with SIF made it difficult to make savvy decisions at first. Northern Lebanon staff found value studying the SIFA University curriculum to learn how SIF works. For example, by learning the terminology of SIF—especially the importance of the SIF\_Ack--enabled staff to fully become familiar with the way SIF works.

When staff first initiated conversations with vendors, there were assumptions made and some things had to be changed as the project was rolled out. Had the district spent their initial investigation time asking deeper questions of the vendors—and vice versa—the Northern Lebanon SIF project would have brought into production sooner.

Northern Lebanon also learned to dedicate some extra project time to the SIF Implementation, like any other project. In doing so, they were able to implement large pieces at a time.

Strong leadership at Northern Lebanon added to the success of their SIF Implementation. The administrators, technology staff and integrator positioned applications to bring them online, one right after the other.

## Next Steps

Northern Lebanon plans to continue adding agent/application pairings to their SIF Implementation. Current expansion includes building a data warehouse for longitudinal data. The staff is also working with some of their vendors that do not have SIF Agents for their applications to get those applications SIF-enabled. Two applications are planned to be added to the SIF Implementation – VersaTrans RP and Renaissance Learning Renaissance Place.

## About the SIF Association

The SIF Association is a unique, non-profit collaboration composed of over 2,200 schools, districts, states, U.S. Department of Education, International Ministries of Education, software vendors and consultants who collectively define the rules and regulations for educational software data interoperability. The SIF Implementation Specification enables diverse applications to interact and share data and information efficiently, reliably, and securely regardless of the platform hosting those applications. The SIF Association has united these education technology end users and providers in an unprecedented effort to give teachers more time to do what they do best: teach. For further information, visit <http://www.sifassociation.org>.



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