



How Warwick Valley Central School District embraced digital solutions to respond to the Pandemic

About Warwick Valley Central School District

Located in the picturesque town of Warwick in New York State, Warwick Valley Central School District (WVCSD) serves more than 3,500 students, from grades K - 12, across five buildings: Pine Island Elementary, Park Avenue Elementary, Sanfordville Elementary, Warwick Valley Middle School and Warwick Valley High School. While set against a backdrop of natural beauty, WVCSD maintains a strong focus on “providing students with the necessary skills to thrive in the 21st century”. The same is true for its operations: The WVCSD team is always looking for new ways to modernize and improve the way the District operates. WVCSD has always believed heavily in interoperability. They adopted OneRoster several years ago and utilize many other XML exchanges to automate several processes. With the pandemic, Warwick Valley saw a need to automate the registration process for its families.

Summary of Results

16% INTAKE INCREASE

Despite the pandemic, WVCSD saw an increase in kindergarten registration numbers for 2021 / 2022.

100S OF HOURS SAVED

Automated workflows saved hundreds of staff hours once spent on emails, calls and data entry.

FULLY INTEGRATED

“Operoo’s integration with eSchoolData made our partnership both viable and valuable.”

100% ADOPTION

“All parents of our incoming kindergarten cohort are using the Operoo platform. Feedback from parents has been fantastic.”

REAL-TIME VISIBILITY

For the first time, WVCSD has full real-time visibility of where each applicant sits within the registration process.

100% MOBILE

Parents can complete the registration process from any web-enabled device.



The Challenge

COVID-19: Responding to the needs of the community

Before the pandemic, WWCSD already worked with Illuminate Education and its student information system, eSchoolData (eSD), to manage its student registration process. When WWCSD saw an opportunity to fully-digitize and automate the entire end-to-end registration journey and experience for incoming families, Operoo seemed like a logical partner.

Automating the remaining manual components of the registration process

Prior to implementation, many aspects of the kindergarten registration process still relied on face-to-face steps, manual intervention, and paper-based forms; so there was a lot that needed to change.

Some examples include:

- WWCSD staff calling parents with further instructions after they submitted the initial registration form via eSD
- WWCSD staff then manually sent parents an email with attached PDF forms for them to complete and sign (such as New York's Home Language Survey, Proof of Immunization and Medical History Form, etc)
- Incoming parents would need to print those documents, complete and sign them, then send them back (they could do this by either scanning the completed documents and attaching them in an email to our Registrar's office, or submit them in-person)
- Managing and tracking this process, through hundreds of threads in Gmail and face-to-face enquiries, was difficult and time-consuming
- Parents also had to make appointments with the district office to provide and verify certain documents, such as drivers licenses and birth certificates

"Before Operoo and COVID, parents would stop by, often after initially forgetting certain documents," said the District. "Despite everyone's best efforts, it was a really involved process for parents, which also generated a huge amount of repetitive work and data entry for office staff."

"From desirable to mission-critical"

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic meant the digital transformation of WWCSD's student registration practices moved from desirable to mission-critical. The District wanted to reduce the day-to-day administrative workload on staff, while enabling new parents to safely go from pre-registration, submission, then acceptance and onboarding in one integrated digital workflow.

"When COVID hit, that delivered the stark prompt we needed to get 100 percent of the kindergarten registration process online,"

said the District. "For this year's intake of new students, we started our mission to go fully digital with Operoo by using our incoming kindergarteners as an initial pilot group."

When the pandemic ramped-up — in addition to those typical face-to-face interactions being inefficient and unsafe, new families attempted to find their own workarounds, which created additional chaos.

"When the COVID situation escalated, the families of incoming kindergarteners tried to submit completed documents anyway they could," said the District. "In 2021, most families have access to smartphones, but many don't own a home computer. Lots of parents attempted to submit scanned forms and other information via cell phones in order to register their children. But, our systems simply weren't built to receive and process information in that format. It was then that we knew things had to change if we were going to meet this challenge head on."



The Solution

Interoperable, flexible and intuitive

When assessing technology options to underpin the transformation of WVCSD's kindergarten registration process, there were some important functional considerations. The onset of COVID also meant the District had to have confidence its new solution would become fully-operational fast and be embraced by users with minimal training.

An integrated approach

Operoo's integration with eSchoolData was one of the major technical capabilities that made the project viable and valuable.

The exchange of data between the two systems facilitated the reliable outcomes and levels of automation WVCSD required. Benefits include:

- Enhanced efficiency and reduced manpower required to complete student registration
- A single source of truth for all kindergarten registration data
- Real-time visibility at every step of the process — for the first time, WVCSD can see the number of completed applications at any given time, demand for certain aspects of its kindergarten program, and the stage at which each pending application sits

"Today, everybody is using the fully-digital online registration process for incoming Kindergarteners," said the District. "The process starts in eSD then goes through Operoo, to distribute and collect all subsequent documents and forms, and is completed in one digital workflow.

"The Operoo - eSD integration is really important to WVCSD. Administrative users can also trigger a sync between the two systems, with a touch of a button, to independently validate the data captured whenever required."

A flexible platform and partnership

Aside from enabling seamless data flow between Operoo and WVCSD's student information system, flexibility was important to the district.

"At a platform level, you want to know you're teaming-up with a technology provider that is willing to treat your engagement like a true partnership and actually take your feedback onboard," said the District. "The Operoo team was keen to absorb our real-world experiences and adapt its platform to better meet our needs."

Ease-of-use to facilitate fast adoption

From an end-user perspective, ease-of-use and customization were both key considerations.

"Oftentimes, adoption periods for new technologies are lengthy and difficult," said the District. "Because of our need to implement an automated solution for kindergarten registration in an extremely short amount of time, combined with the additional challenges already at play due to the pandemic, we required a solution that was quick to deploy and easy for parents and staff to use straight out-of-the-box. Operoo's ability to help us meet these two criteria meant we experienced rapid adoption and almost none of the anxiety people normally have about using new software.

"The other aspect that allowed us to get up-and-running quickly was the customizability. Not only do we have the convenience of standard school, district and DOE forms being pre-built within the Operoo platform, we can easily tailor forms and approval workflows within the system to meet Warwick's existing processes and specific needs."



Mobile accessibility and multi-language translations

In terms of features, mobile device compatibility was chief among WCSD's functional needs.

"Today, people utilize their phone as their primary connection to the Web — including the parents of incoming students," said the District. "So the ability to allow incoming families to access and submit all registration and onboarding forms from their device of choice played a key role in driving strong system uptake and fast response rates."

The District also cited multi-language translations, automated Trigger Actions and dynamic Smart Groups among the most important features.

"Enabling parents to select their preferred language in Operoo, and then have all subsequent forms received in that language of choice, helps drive stronger and faster contact-free response rates too," said the District. "Not only does this benefit the significant Spanish speaking population within the communities Warwick Valley serves, the New York Home Language Survey also needs to be distributed to recipients in their first language. Operoo helps streamline these aspects of the registration process."

Automated actions

When it comes to automating the flow of information and subsequent actions, based on data requested and received from incoming families, Warwick Valley CSD highlighted Operoo Smart Groups as a central tool.

"Smart Groups allow staff to dynamically move prospective students into, or out of, certain groups based on the answers they give to certain eForm questions," said the District. "This means it's both easy to separate pre-registered and registered students within Warwick's systems of record, while ensuring the right forms are always delivered to the right people throughout the registration process."

Trigger Actions enable staff users of the Operoo system to build-on automation enabled through Smart Groups and eForms, setting-up entire chains of automated actions based on the way recipients do — or don't — respond to requests for information. Examples include automatically sending push notifications or text messages, distributing reminders for missing or incomplete information, placing prospective students in new peer groups, or issuing additional eForms.

“ Trigger Actions help Warwick Valley reduce required manpower and human error from its kindergarten registration and onboarding processes, ”

said the District. Once new student applications have been accepted, Operoo also automatically links all validated form submissions to each newly created student profile, programmatically triggering student onboarding requests upon enrollment.



The Results

“We’re never going back to how things were”

By creating a 100 percent digital, fully-automated registration workflow for Warwick Valley staff, and the parents of incoming kindergarteners, the district was able to:

- Keep all stakeholders safe by providing a completely contactless student registration experience
- Help drive and manage a larger-than-normal Kindergarten intake (250 students compared to the usual 215)
- Facilitate better, faster response rates from prospective families
- Save hundreds of staff hours, by reducing the amount of time spent on each registration application, which can now be repurposed to more value-generating district initiatives
- Provide superior data-based insights as well as overall process dependability and repeatability

“All the parents of Warwick’s incoming kindergarten cohort are using the Operoo platform,” said the District. “Feedback from parents has been fantastic. It’s been all smooth sailing with no issues.

“For staff, not having to print, collate and manually re-enter data from paper forms has saved a large amount of time. Additionally, the Automated Reminders mean manually chasing parents over incomplete forms and missing information is a real rarity. More broadly, authorized staff can easily access all submitted data and documents in real-time, which are centrally stored and visually displayed for easy analysis, via any device at any time.

“ *In terms of intake numbers, Warwick Valley has a large kindergarten class coming through for the 21 - 22 academic year. We normally receive approximately 215 new kindergarteners each year. This September we’ll have over 250. That’s a strong result in the middle of a pandemic.* ”

The District was quick to point out that those figures formed only part of the outcomes that made the Warwick Valley team proud.

“Automating kindergarten registration helped staff avoid distributing hundreds of physical packets, making hundreds of phone calls and participating in dangerous face-to-face meetings. Without Operoo, we’d have been organizing physical mail drops, wrangling parent applications and queries one-by-one through Gmail, and using multiple technologies to manually manage our 21 - 22 kindergarten intake.”

The digital transformation and process automation journey Warwick Valley has undertaken with Operoo has also added robustness and visibility to the District’s kindergarten registration process.

“Digitizing the entire process, from start to finish, has delivered a much more accurate and fulfilled picture of incoming kindergarten students, which builds and evolves in real-time,” said the District. “Automating those steps, which once relied on people, has added dependability to the whole process. We can now be confident that nobody, and no information, is falling through the cracks.

“From an analytics perspective, all authorized users — staff and parents — can see where every application sits within the registration process at any given time. And, user identification and verification mechanisms mean that data submitted is validated and trustworthy.”

While acknowledging that the pandemic has been very hard on many people, the District also added that necessity can breed inventiveness.

“COVID has been destructive and difficult, but there are also some good things to come from this pandemic, particularly with regards to technology — and this is one of them,” said the District.

“ *Between Warwick Valley and Operoo, we’ve made the best of a bad scenario. And, now that we’ve seen what’s possible, there’s no way we’re ever going back to how we managed student registration and onboarding beforehand. This is the new normal.* ”



The Future

District-wide registration, any workflow process, any form type

Far from returning to manual methods of managing student registration as the pandemic subsides, the team at Warwick Valley CSD are looking to automate more operational processes with Operoo's digital workflow management platform.

Upcoming projects include:

- Automating all student registration throughout the district
- Conducting Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK) registration through Operoo
- Opening-up the platform to all parents throughout the district in September - October 2021

“ During COVID, we reimagined our kindergarten registration process,” said the District. “For our next round of student intakes, we’ll be automating all registration — across our five school buildings. ”

In terms of additional future use cases, Warwick Valley said that the possibilities were broad.

“Digital registration is a great use case, but the openness and malleability of the Operoo platform is what’s really exciting,” said the District. “This is particularly important because it will allow us to start automating any type of operational process, involving any type of form — from technology usage agreements, to field trip consents.

“ The District is looking forward to strengthening the Warwick Valley - Operoo partnership and expanding the number of use cases to which it can apply automation. ”



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