

CaseStudy

Denver Public Schools



“STARS is much more than a risk management system for us. It is a complete event management tool which allows us to capture, track, measure, and report incidents across all of our departments.”

Stephen Finley, ARM, CSRM
Director, Risk Management

Challenge

Colorado’s second largest school district needs a system that enables them to capture, monitor and report on the wide variety of risk-related incidents and costs in order to ensure the safety of both staff and students.

Solution

Denver Public Schools (DPS) implemented the STARS risk management system to track, monitor and analyze risk events that occur within the district’s 150 schools. STARS also integrates with key internal systems to facilitate comprehensive event management.

Results

STARS has allowed Denver Public Schools to identify and understand all the events that impact the district’s safety and cost of risk. As a result, DPS has developed targeted loss prevention activities which have helped reduce risk and associated costs. DPS has lowered its experience modifier by more than 25% over the last three years.

Background

Widely recognized today as one of the best urban school systems in the country, Denver Public Schools (DPS) serves more than 73,300 students of the City and County of Denver, Colorado. The school district’s staff include 4,500 teachers and 6,500 full-time employees who work out of 150 schools and administration buildings. Each day, DPS operations include the following activities:

- 408 buses transport more than 24,000 students, including 7,000 students with special needs
- 550 food service professionals deliver and serve more than 10,700 breakfasts and 35,600 lunches in 142 schools
- 328 utility vehicles and trailers and 62 other pieces of equipment support staff and student activities

This diverse environment and a commitment to “A safe place to work and learn” led the school district to implement the STARS Risk Management System more than 10 years ago. While providing a solid foundation for DPS risk management efforts, over time STARS evolved to meet the demand for a comprehensive event management solution for capturing, tracking and reporting all the risk-related incidents

DPS’ risk management efforts have been nationally recognized by both the Public Risk Management Association (PRIMA) and the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA). Highlights include PRIMA’s 2006 Achievement Award for their outstanding website, and 2005 Achievement Awards for their Secretary Orientation CD and annual Safety and Health Calendar. The NSPRA also provided 2005 Awards of Honorable Mention for the Safety and Health Calendar and Playground Safety publication. Most recently, Stephen Finley has been recognized as a 2009 Risk Innovator by Risk & Insurance magazine.

CHALLENGE

Throughout the Denver Public School District, individual departments are expected to track, monitor and report on risk-related events that occur within their sector. Often, these events must be tracked and reported in order to comply with state and federal regulations governing school-related activities.

Initially, some of DPS' departments developed ad-hoc approaches to capturing such incident information. Many simply tracked them via paper forms, while others used Excel spreadsheets to track events and prepare necessary reports. Most of this event information was either inaccessible on a district-wide basis, or it existed in a format that made it difficult to identify the cause of an incident and impossible to track incidents across schools in the district.

SOLUTION

Recognizing the limitations of their decentralized approach, DPS' risk management department implemented STARS event capture and management tools. On-demand incident reporting tools allow DPS colleagues throughout the district to enter specific types of events directly into the STARS as they occur. Data from the district's HR and payroll systems is also integrated into STARS. For DPS, linking event and loss information resulted in a comprehensive, real-time view of losses by type and by location.

Here are some key workflows in place within Denver Public Schools to facilitate risk event management:

Workers' Compensation Management

Stephen Finley, DPS Director of Risk Management expressed the importance of return-to-work case management, "We are committed to removing the barriers that limit an employee's recovery from a workplace injury." To support this approach, all injuries are reported to DPS workers' compensation in-house staff who enter them into STARS. The DPS workers' compensation staff is the primary facilitator in an employee's recovery; DPS relies on their TPA to manage only the financial aspects of a claim. Case management notes, diaries, key dates and financial data are consolidated within STARS.

Absence Management

All extended absences, such as FMLA or short-term disability claims are tracked within STARS. Employees who expect to be out on an extended absence must complete required paperwork, including a physicians certification form, which is validated by the HR department and entered into STARS. The system is also used to notify managers of extended absences so they can effectively manage staffing.

High Risk Events Involving Threats of Violence

When a threat of violence or suicide occurs at any of the district's 150 schools, a psychologist performs an assessment. The incident and assessment data are entered into a standardized STARS form to ensure consistency of process and content. This data is used to identify and monitor incidents within schools and to analyze trends across the entire district..

Bus Dispatch Interruption

Understanding the risks associated with transporting 24,000 student each day is critical to ensuring student and staff safety. To better track risk-related events, all interruptions to normal bus service are entered into STARS using a unique coverage code. Supervisors use this data to identify any equipment, operator, or student issues that need to be addressed.

Facility Damage

Facility-related events such as snow emergencies or damage can potentially result in student and staff safety issues. To manage these events, facility work orders are downloaded monthly into STARS. These work orders convert to claims to support loss prevention and trend analysis and improve the accuracy of DPS' measurement of their total cost of risk.

Student Accidents, Child Restraint and Medication

DPS uses STARS to track accidental student injuries, as well as child restraint occurrences and instances of medication being dispensed to students. To help ensure compliance with the regulatory requirements associated with some of these events, school nurses and staff complete forms which are then uploaded into STARS.

RESULTS

STARS has helped the Denver Public School District achieve a clear understanding of the potential risks that affect their schools. Using STARS analytics, DPS has been able develop targeted and effective loss prevention programs. Over the past three years, DPS has lowered its WC experience modification factor by more than 25%. In 2006/2007, DPS had an experience mod of 1. In 2008 it was reduced to .77 and DPS' experience mod now stands at .72.

DPS' innovative risk management strategies have been recognized and awarded by both the Public Risk Management Association and National School Public Relations Association. Stephen Finley, Director of Risk Management for Denver Public Schools, is a designated Risk & Insurance Risk Innovator for 2009 based on risk management programs within the district many of which are powered by STARS.