Embracing Digital Transformation in K-12 Facilities Management

Technology is transforming facilities management in K-12 schools by automating workflows and providing employees and decision-makers with actionable insights. However, these advancements also create new challenges. Facilities managers must understand the value of technology in their roles, select the right tools, implement them effectively, and drive stakeholder adoption.

Christopher Burns, Senior Product Manager at Incident IQ, recently discussed these challenges with *Spaces4Learning*. During the interview, Burns shared his advice on how school facilities managers can successfully lead a digital transformation within their department.

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How Technology Advances Facilities Management

Technological advancements in facilities management often center on hardware improvements, which can have a significant impact. Smart buildings and equipment provide tools for remote action and access to critical information at the facilities team's fingertips. However, the full story of how technology is benefiting facilities teams goes beyond just these improvements. Organizing and surfacing that information intelligently helps give technicians instant insights in the field — connecting them with "the right information at the right time," Burns said.

For example, a technician responding to a call about a malfunctioning HVAC system can avoid a lengthy troubleshooting process if they have contextual information on the work required. With immediate access to details like warranty status or equipment manuals on their mobile device, the technician can solve the issue more efficiently.

"It can be immensely helpful if you're able to pull up information on that unit and understand when it was last serviced or what it might need," he said. "Having all that

information at your fingertips can help you complete the job faster. If you've already repaired that HVAC system multiple times in the last few years, maybe you should consider replacing it. Having that awareness helps school facility managers make better long-term decisions which enable them to be better stewards of limited resources." Capturing this information requires a modern software system with modern capabilities to scale and adapt to all this data.

In addition, broader but equally exciting technology advancements such as artificial intelligence and machine learning are showing promise in automating routine tasks, saving employees valuable time. Those technologies can autofill routine forms, instantly summarize key information, and help leaders uncover valuable insights more easily.

What to Look for in Facilities Technologies

"School districts are at different levels of maturity when it comes to using technology, and many are still using legacy information systems that don't communicate well with one another" Burns explained. "Consolidating these various systems within a single computerized maintenance management system (CMMS) can help facilities employees

perform their jobs more efficiently and enable leaders to make more informed decisions."

CMMS platforms have been around for some time, and most facilities teams are familiar with the typical features they offer. They include features such as work order management, asset and inventory management, resource scheduling, and parts and labor tracking.

However, a modern CMMS, one specifically built specifically for K-12, should do much more. It should integrate seamlessly with other K-12 software platforms to ensure open communication and efficient workflows between various departments.

As Burns explained, facilities requests often involve employees across multiple departments; for example, a project to renovate a gym might require the IT department to set up some new audiovisual equipment. But what if the facilities team hasn't finished painting? "Having smooth communication between departments ensures that everyone is on the same page and no tasks are missed or delayed," he said.

When looking for an effective CMMS, facilities managers

should choose a platform designed specifically for education. "Find a system that's highly adaptable," Burns advised. "Lots of systems are powerful, but is it flexible to the needs of your particular institution and how you do things?"

Keys to Success

To realize a return on their technology investment, K-12 facilities managers must ensure their teams use these tools effectively. Change can be hard, and some employees might struggle to adapt to new ways of doing things. To overcome this problem, facilities managers must champion the adoption of these tools and ensure staff receive proper training.

"Setting a good example, and showing the value that adopting a system like this can have, is crucial," Burns said. "If you don't use the system regularly, your teams won't either. Having a system built with end users in mind makes adoption simpler as well."

Burns sees building systems becoming even smarter in the future. "AI will recommend the optimum settings and the right way to operate systems," he predicted. "Data will continue to be a precious resource, and extracting that data and pulling insights from it is going to be an expectation of school facilities teams and their leaders."

A CMMS BUILT FOR EDUCATION

iiQ Facilities from Incident IQ is a CMMS platform built specifically for the K-12 market. By focusing its solution on education, the company has created a system that meets the unique needs of schools and districts.

For example, iiQ Facilities integrates seamlessly with any student information system and schedule-building software, so school facilities employees have instant information to help them respond to work orders efficiently.

"When a faculty member reports an issue in their classroom, no one has to do any extra labor to identify key pieces of information, such as where the room is located or when a maintenance worker can stop by," said Senior Product Manager Christopher Burns. "This information is extracted from SIS and scheduling software and automatically appears in the work order."

Another key differentiator is the software's flexibility. Its rules-based architecture allows facilities managers to create customized workflows to automate specific tasks, while attribute-based permissions create a highly contextualized experience for each user, depending on their role. A contractor can log in and see information that pertains only to them, and the same is true for a technician or a building principal.

"This creates an easier and more secure user experience for everyone," Burns noted.