



eSCHOOL NEWS
eBOOK



Adobe Acrobat Sign

The Payoff of Going Paperless in K–12 Schools

How schools can use digital workflows to save time and money while enhancing student and staff experiences.

The Emerging Need for Digital Workflows

COVID-19 has had a dramatic effect not only on teaching and learning, but also on back-office functionality. One positive outcome to emerge from the pandemic has been the use of [digital workflows](#) and secure electronic signatures for completing required paperwork while school buildings were closed.

“There are many administrative processes that we have just taken for granted in K–12 education,” says Chitra Mittha, director of marketing to educational Institutions for Adobe. “The silver lining in the pandemic was that it gave us an opportunity to think about how we could do things differently.”

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Adobe Acrobat Sign Webinar Series Recap

Recently, eSchool News and Adobe hosted a series of webinars on this topic.

This interactive eBook summarizes the content from these webinars and includes video highlights. It outlines the benefits of moving to [digital forms](#) and processes in more detail, describes a number of use cases for doing so within K–12 education, and examines how schools can transition successfully to a digital office environment.

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Webinar Series Speakers



Dan Armstrong
Solutions Consultant, Adobe



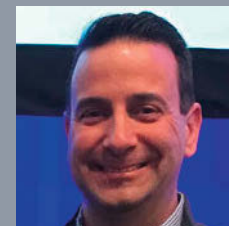
Dr. Matthew X. Joseph
Executive Director of Learning,
Providence Public Schools,
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Shad McGaha
Chief Technology Officer,
Wichita Falls ISD, Texas



Chitra Mittha
Director, Education Institutions
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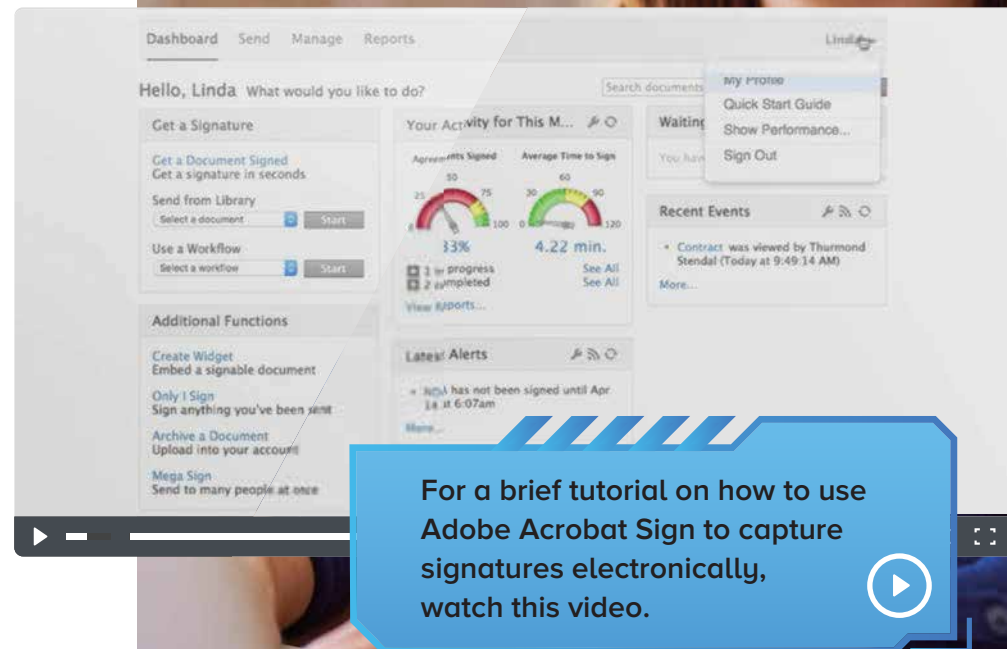
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How paperless workflows work

Distributing forms and collecting peoples' signatures traditionally has required a lot of shuffling of paper back and forth, which can be time-consuming, costly, and inefficient.

With an automated solution such as [Adobe Acrobat Sign](#), users can send documents to be signed electronically in just three easy steps: Upload the document, type in the signer's email address, and hit send. Signers simply click a link to review and sign the document electronically from within a web browser on their computer or any mobile device—with no downloads or signups needed. Schools can also create and embed forms to be signed within their website using [Adobe Acrobat Sign web forms](#).

The Adobe Acrobat Sign platform enables administrators to track and manage the status of all digital forms and documents, send reminders for people to sign required forms, cancel requests, and view a detailed audit trail for any transaction. It also works with Microsoft software and other tools already in use among schools. As Microsoft's preferred e-signature solution, Adobe Acrobat Sign integrates seamlessly with Microsoft applications: You can create, edit, and sign documents without leaving the Microsoft 365 environment.



Key benefits

As K–12 leaders have seen firsthand during the pandemic, it's not always convenient to send paper forms back and forth, collect physical signatures, and track the status of forms approvals—especially when school buildings are closed for any reason. Moving these processes to a secure, automated digital environment can...

Save time.

With secure digital workflows, parents, students, employees, new hires, and others no longer have to schedule time to meet in person with administrators to sign and/or drop off forms and documents—and administrators no longer have to wait to obtain signatures. Instead, all of this activity happens instantly online. What's more, administrators don't have to comb through filing cabinets or desk drawers to find the documents they're looking for; a simple keyword search can pull up the required forms on a computer or handheld device in seconds.

Independent research confirms that digital forms and workflows can save users time. [A third-party analysis by Forrester Consulting](#) indicates that reducing the steps it takes to get a manual signature saves employees 1.5 hours per transaction, on average. Over the course of three years, this adds up to an average of 125 hours saved per user.

Save money.

With manual processes and paper-based forms and documents, school systems spend a significant amount of money on paper and shipping costs each year. The Forrester Consulting analysis revealed an average cost savings of \$21.50 per transaction in switching to digital workflows.

“If a student gets hurt, (administrators) have the ability to search right there and have all that information in their hand, up to date and current.”

Make life a little easier.

With digital workflows, stakeholders can complete and sign forms from any internet-connected device, including a smartphone. This makes the process more convenient for faculty and staff who are on the go, especially those who aren't tethered to a desk all day. It also makes the process more equitable for parents who might not have access to a computer at home.

This increased mobility can enhance student safety as well. “Think about all those medical release forms,” says Shad McGaha, chief technology officer for the Wichita Falls Independent School District in north central Texas. “If a student gets hurt, (administrators) have the ability to search right there and have all that information in their hand, up to date and current.” This expedient access to information could help save lives.

By deploying Adobe Acrobat Sign, organizations can...



What forms and workflows can you digitize?

Creating more dynamic workflows through the use of digital forms and [electronic signatures](#) can build efficiencies throughout K–12 education.


This transformation can make it easier for parents to register their children in school, provide necessary health information, and give permission for their children to attend field trips and participate in extracurricular activities. It can simplify procedures for onboarding new employees, enrolling staff in healthcare plans, and signing off on teacher evaluations.

While the potential use cases in K–12 education are nearly endless, here are three examples that serve to illustrate the power of back-office automation.


Signing contracts

With nearly 22,000 students across 37 schools, the Providence Public Schools in Rhode Island handles many contracts with service providers. Getting these contracts signed and approved used to involve a lot of faxes and mailings between various schools and departments, and this process could take several days. These delays meant that services weren't being delivered to staff and students as promptly as they could be.

“Being able to do this work digitally creates an efficiency model for us,” says Matthew X. Joseph, executive director of learning for the district.




Listen to Joseph as he describes how the use of Adobe Acrobat Sign has cut this process down to less than a day—resulting in a much faster delivery of essential services.




Approving IEPs

The process of creating and approving Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) for students who have special learning needs can be quite cumbersome. Parents and school systems need multiple signatures as part of this process, including the signatures of medical care providers.



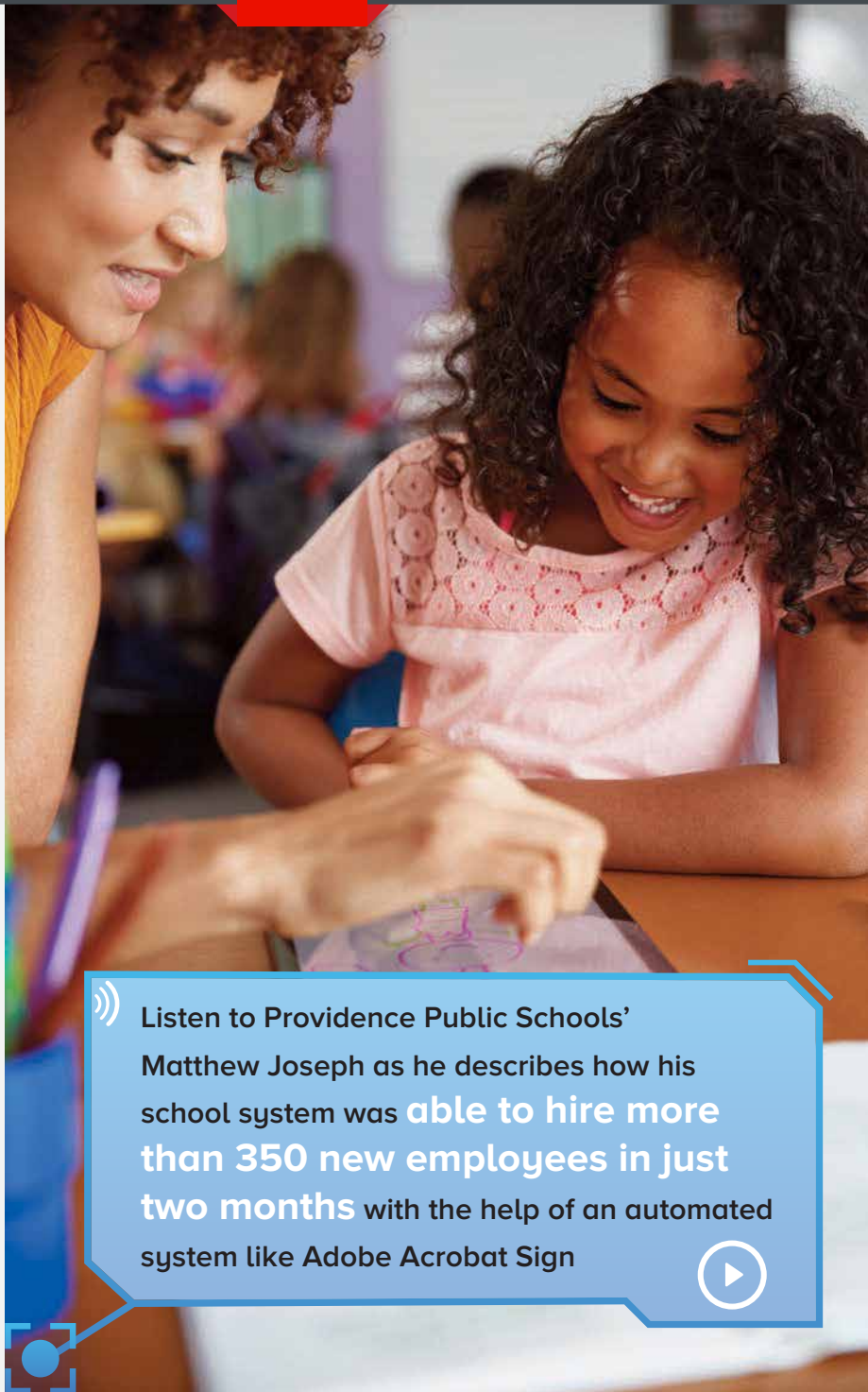
Listen to Adobe's Chitra Mittha as she describes what it was like as a parent to go through this arduous process—and how a solution such as Adobe Acrobat Sign can make a huge difference.



Hiring and onboarding employees

The paperwork that's required when school systems hire a new employee can be overwhelming. New hires must fill out and/or sign their [offer letter](#) or contract, federal and state tax withholding forms, a direct deposit authorization form, health insurance forms, and other benefits information. They must certify that they have read the employee handbook and are aware of all rules and requirements. It can be burdensome not only for new hires to complete all of these documents, but for HR staff to keep track of their progress.

E-signatures and automation can streamline this process while helping HR departments track and manage compliance. That's especially critical at a time when [staffing shortages are hindering schools' ability](#) to deliver exceptional service to students and their families—and every day that a position goes unfilled can be critical.



Listen to Providence Public Schools' Matthew Joseph as he describes how his school system was **able to hire more than 350 new employees in just two months** with the help of an automated system like Adobe Acrobat Sign



Secure, compliant data management with every transaction

Data privacy and security are top-of-mind issues for K–12 leaders, as they should be. Many forms and documents within K–12 education contain the Social Security numbers and other personally identifiable information for students or employees. If stakeholders aren't confident in the security of digital workflows, they won't be inclined to adopt these processes.

"There is authentication to ensure that only the person who needs to sign a document can see it."

A common concern about signing and submitting documents electronically is that it's not as secure as obtaining a manual signature. In reality, it's even more secure.

Adobe Acrobat Sign is certified compliant with the world's most rigorous security standards, such as ISO 27001, SOC 2 Type 2, and PCI DSS—technologies widely used in the banking and credit card industries. In addition, role-based permissions are built into the platform. Users can specify who has access to certain documents, and only [authorized users](#) can view them.

With Adobe Acrobat Sign, "You don't have to run to the printer or the fax machine because somebody else could grab a document," Mittha says. "There is authentication to ensure that only the person who needs to sign a document can see it."

Contrast that with the security of paper-based forms, where anyone can view the documents if they're left out in the open—and data can also be retrieved from a printer, copier, or fax machine by anyone with the technical know-how.

To learn more about the security of digital documents and workflows within Adobe Acrobat Sign, visit the [Adobe Trust Center](#).



Creating a seamless transition to a paperless school environment

The adoption of digital forms and workflows within K–12 education depends on users embracing the technology and being comfortable with it. Here are three ways that school systems can build trust in electronic signatures and encourage stakeholders to use them.

01 Choose a trusted provider.

One advantage of using Adobe to support electronic signatures and workflows is that it's a trusted brand. As the originator of the [Portable Document Format \(PDF\)](#), Adobe has decades of experience in developing the software used to create and manage digital forms. And nearly 90% of users within Adobe Acrobat Sign schools consider it to be a well-known and trusted brand, according to a recent study conducted with [Hotwire](#).

02 Educate your user community.

Walking users through the process and making sure they're comfortable with it is essential for getting them to buy in. In the Providence Public Schools, Joseph created a video demonstration of the process using screen recording software, and he uploaded the video to the district's YouTube channel. He also carved out some time to take stakeholders through the process step by step during live Zoom sessions.

03 Start with low-stakes opportunities.

"A teacher's evaluation shouldn't be the first document they sign electronically," Joseph says. "They're going to be tense enough as it is. Start with permission slips or something that's low stakes at first. If there is an error, it's not going to be something that can't be corrected. Then, when it becomes time for an IEP or a college recommendation or something that's a little bit more high stakes, it's not going to be the first time they've done it"

Listen to Dan Armstrong, solutions consultant for Adobe, as he explains why choosing a trusted provider is a key advantage.



The bottom line

Among the many disruptions the pandemic caused to school district operations was the ability to properly manage what have traditionally been paper-based forms and processes.

However, school systems that implemented fully automated solutions have discovered that replacing their old paper-based processes with digital workflows and electronic signatures protects the data on those forms more effectively, while saving time and money and improving the experience for everyone involved—parents, teachers, and administrators alike.

For more information about how Adobe Acrobat and Adobe Acrobat Sign can improve efficiency within K–12 schools, visit AcrobatForEducation.com.





Adobe Acrobat Sign

Adobe Acrobat Sign helps schools go paperless, which revolutionizes the business of running an institution. Use Adobe Acrobat Sign to create seamless workflows that are simple for staff and students to complete and can save your school both time and money. Reduce errors, increase security and compliance, and foster operational resiliency. From HR, finance, and procurement forms, to student-facing forms like IEPs and device consent forms, paperless workflows powered by Adobe Acrobat Sign create digital experiences in schools that make life a little easier for the entire campus community. For more information, visit AcrobatForEducation.com.

Additional Resources

Back-Office Innovations in Higher Ed
Part One: Devising a More
Dynamic Workflow (Nov. 3, 2021 webinar)

WATCH NOW 

Back-Office Innovations in Higher Ed
Part Two: Creating Secure,
Compliant Workflows (Nov. 30, 2021 webinar)

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