

Toyota Partners with EVSC to Improve Annual Collection of 14,000 Netbooks

May 10, 2013

EVANSVILLE, Ind., May 10, 2013 – Janit Market is pleased she can continue teaching her English classes at Central High School with only a brief interruption when student netbooks are collected this year. She's also confident that because collections are more efficient, the distribution of netbooks next school year will be much more successful – the goal being to deliver a computer to each student on time.

That hasn't always been the case.

"In the past, there was no uniformity to collections – and students were out of class too long," Market said. "Now, we have a team of people who are solely focused on collections. I can keep an eye on my students and they take care of the paperwork."

The difference?

A partnership between Toyota and the Evansville Vanderburgh School Corp. (EVSC) that takes aim at ensuring the collection and distribution of 14,000 netbooks (grades 6 through 12) runs as smoothly as the production lines at the automaker's plant in Princeton. In fact, members from the Toyota Production System Support Center (TSSC) have provided on-site support free of charge since October, helping to create a more efficient system of collection and distribution.

EVSC is just one of nearly 200 companies and not-for-profit organizations that have been aided by Toyota in communities across North America.

"It has been an amazing turnaround," said David Smith, superintendent for EVSC. "We knew that training a team of individuals in operational excellence would be beneficial, but this work with TSSC has helped us to see very practically how efficiencies can free up people and money, allowing us to direct resources to our core work in each classroom.

"We are excited with the success of the first two days of collections and anticipate a much smoother distribution cycle next fall."

Netbook collections began Thursday, continued Friday and will also take place early next week. Rick Cameron, chief operating officer for EVSC, pointed to some immediate improvements:

- Less time taken away from the classroom during the collection process. In the past, 30 students missed up to an hour of class time; now, that has been reduced to 12-and-a-half minutes – a 79 percent improvement.
- Drastic reduction in manpower, which saves money. Previously, 15 information technology employees gathered at each school to handle netbook returns, and teachers were responsible for checking in netbooks in homerooms. Today, five employees handle the same workload, plus only one information technology staff member is needed to answer technical questions. This frees up other IT staff to continue with the regular work of the school system.

- Standardized work. In the past, each school had its own method of collections and distribution. Today, as at each Toyota plant across the U.S., each school follows the same guidelines.
- Accurate inventory. Via a bar-code scanning process, each laptop is now accounted for in a much more accurate manner.

“In the Toyota Production System, it all comes down to eliminating waste through solving problems,” said Craig Kelle, Toyota Production System (TPS) manager at Toyota Motor Manufacturing, Indiana. “Before TPS, there was wasted time and duplication of work. For instance, while the correct number of netbooks were shown by the system to be available, they were not available at the correct locations.”

As part of the improvement strategy, some “trial runs” took place at Central High School, which proved a turning point, Cameron said. “Those involved could really see the improvements unfold. We had a material and information flow chart; it just jumped out at you, how much more efficient we could be.”

Cameron said that while many savings in time and money have been realized through EVSC’s Operational Excellence Program over the past two years, the experience with TSSC has caused the school system to think about other areas in which process refinements can be made and savings realized. “We have already started to look at Just-In-Time inventory for our bus-garage service. We are taking TPS and trying to make it *our way*.”

That is music to Toyota’s ears.

“In a nutshell, that is why we do this,” said Scott Dickson, TSSC manager. “While business and industry sectors are familiar with lean processes such as TPS, it is encouraging to see a school district thinking in such a way and willing to devote time and effort to becoming more efficient. To see that light come on and for Evansville Vanderburgh School Corp. to carry this to other parts of its operation is fantastic. That is forward thinking.”