

Blackboard & Cushing Academy



Blackboard Transact helps K-12 schools increase operational efficiency, improve campus security and enhance the overall student experience. Located in Ashburnham, MA Cushing Academy, a school with 450 students and 150 staff, was looking for a commerce management solution to deploy on its campus to streamline payments. Prior to Blackboard, Cushing Academy did not have a one-card system in place. Instead, the school had been operating with a “term bill” credit-based system to collect payments from parents and students for transactions on campus. The campus administration wanted a more efficient and scalable solution and turned to Blackboard Transact as their campus commerce platform.

Looking for a complete solution

Prior to 2008, Cushing Academy used a credit-based “term bill” system to collect payments. This system required the school to mail its bills and payment invoices to parents. However, with almost 60% of the student body comprised of international students, Cushing realized that collecting payments from parents around the world was very challenging and time consuming. Cushing realized it could not continue to operate effectively under these circumstances and needed to find a better solution. The school researched several options and found that Blackboard offered the most complete solution that met their needs.

“We spoke to our peers as well as read articles and reports on the various campus commerce solutions and we felt Blackboard was the best fit for our school,” says Bruce Lemieux, Director of Technology at Cushing Academy. “Blackboard provides an easy, integrated system for student transactions and campus security.”

The school also wanted to find a universal debit card solution with online capabilities that would enable parents to make direct deposits online to student accounts 24/7 and provide greater freedom for students to access their accounts.

“Having a debit-type system in place allows us to collect funds easier, which is very important for us in our day-to-day operations,” said Lemieux. “The Blackboard system makes it very easy for parents to add funds to the card and provides added convenience for our students who don’t have to carry cash on campus anymore.”

Cushing



Blackboard

“Blackboard Transact has been great for our campus. We are able to easily collect payments from parents, which helps us save time and improve our overall campus operations. As we continue to enhance our campus facilities, we hope in the future increase our usage of Blackboard Transact at more areas around campus, including adding security capabilities.”

Bruce Lemieux,
*Director of Technology,
Cushing Academy*

In addition to campus commerce, the school also plans to add security management capabilities, another benefit of the Blackboard solution.

“Security is very important to us,” said Lemieux. “We hope in the future to add more security capabilities, including video surveillance and door access, which Blackboard offers as part of their platform.”

Deploying Blackboard on Campus

Cushing Academy deployed the Blackboard Transact solution before the start of the fall 2008 term. With the Blackboard on-campus commerce and online account management capabilities, the student ID card is used across campus at various locations, ensuring students have greater access to the things they want and need. “We selected Blackboard because of its commerce management capabilities,” said Lemieux. “It is easy to integrate and can expand across our campus to help us do more things in the future.”

Currently, the school has installed Blackboard Transact at the student bookstore, convenience store, and pro shop, and it plans to add vending and laundry services in the coming months. Additionally, the business office uses Blackboard to manage not only all the campus transactions but also off-campus trips for the students. When Cushing takes students off-campus, a student can use their campus ID cards to purchase tickets and transportation, and the costs are automatically deducted from the student’s account.

The school also notes that its students have started using the Blackboard solution in other creative ways, such as fundraising activities. Combining the debit-card capabilities of their student ID card and wireless readers, students can swipe their card to make donations to various causes on campus, including collecting funds for their senior class gift.

The Impact on Cushing

Since implementing Blackboard Transact on campus, Cushing Academy administration, staff, parents, and students have already experienced positive results. The school has benefited from greater operational efficiency by reducing time and delays in collecting and distributing funds.

“Blackboard has been great for the students but also for our staff,” said Cathy Costa, Assistant Director of Human Resources at Cushing Academy. “Blackboard has delivered new efficiencies for the student ID card. We’ve seen an increase in activity and use in the student ID card as well as greater use of the payment gateway for direct deposits to student accounts.”

Now, the business office is able to run reports of on-campus spending and activity to see where students are using the ID card and how they are spending funds. Cushing Academy also points out that the parents responded positively to the Blackboard Transact platform and have found the system very easy and convenient as well. “Parents have responded very well to the Blackboard system because it offers a seamless operation for direct deposits,” says Costa. “We see about 5-10 new deposits daily from parents.”

The school notes that the impact on the students is also noticeable. “The students love the card because they don’t need to carry cash on campus. It gives them freedom to make purchases whenever and wherever they want,” said Lemieux. “The card has become a real convenience for the students because they can have food delivered to their dorm rooms and can easily pay using their campus ID card.

