

Leading Educational Products Provider Slashes Spending by Implementing Labor Management Program at Integral Fulfillment Center

1 Introduction

School Specialty, Inc. is a leading provider of educational products and services headquartered in Greenville, Wisconsin. Established in 1959, the company offers a comprehensive range of products designed to support and enhance the learning environment, including classroom supplies, furniture, technology, and specialized educational materials. Catering primarily to schools and educators, School Specialty also provides resources for special education and school health and safety. With a focus on innovation and customer satisfaction, the company operates through both direct sales and a robust online platform, continually expanding its offerings through strategic acquisitions. To maintain its high standards, School Specialty is on a journey to improve labor management across its distribution operations.

2 The Challenge

The School Specialty, Inc. facility in Greenville, Wisconsin, encompasses a significant area, reflecting its role as the company's headquarters and major distribution center. The facility is substantial in size, with the building covering approximately 500,000 square feet. During their peak back-to-school season the facility employs over 400 associates. Optimizing labor during this key period is paramount to achieving customer satisfaction and meeting financial goals. The company sought to implement a labor management program to ensure productivity, accuracy, and consistency across all aspects of the distribution center.

3 The Solution

The educational products provider and Alpine Supply Chain Solutions partnered to roll out Blue Yonder's Labor Management System which included developing and implementing Reasonable Expectancies (REs) for 18 unique job functions in the facility. The tasks cover all aspects of the provider's operations including receiving, put-away, picking, packing, cycle counting, shipping, returns processing, and more. The Project Consisted of Multiple Phases:

Phase 0: Project Kick-Off

Alpine met with all levels within the organization to ensure confidence in the new program was instilled right out of the gate and questions could be asked and answered in an open forum.

Phase 1: Interface & Configuration

Alpine worked with School Specialty's partner (Open Sky Group) resources to create all interfaces between the WMS and LMS. As part of this process, all 18 job functions were configured, allowing REs to be utilized.

Phase 3: Best Practices Development

Collaborating with management and floor associates, Alpine developed best practices for each function, focusing on optimizing processes and workflows. REs were crafted around these best practices to ensure efficiency.

Phase 4: Validation and Sign-Off

The developed REs were validated with the operations team to ensure all activities were represented and all expectations were accurate. Sign-off was obtained to proceed with implementation.

Phase 5: Training

Associates were trained on new processes and leadership was trained on observations, coaching, and system use. The goal was to ensure that individuals and the overall operation benefited from the program.

Phase 6: Rollout of Accountability & Recognition Programs

With the goals established, accountability and recognition programs are now being implemented.

4 The Results

The labor management program has exceeded expectations, creating a culture of accountability, continuous improvement, and enhanced employee engagement. With the initiative in place, School Specialty has successfully navigated through its peak season with reduced overtime, reduced headcount, and improved customer on-time deliveries. They are on track to reduce their annual variable labor spend by over \$1.5-2MM. Additionally, safety, consistency, and accuracy are being significantly improved.

Next up: Alpine and School Specialty will roll out the labor management program to their Mansfield, OH distribution center, ensuring operational excellence spreads across their network.

