

CASE STUDY: MINNETONKA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Making 1:1 Learning a Reality and a Success

Located eight miles west of Minneapolis, MN, Minnetonka Public School District is among the highest performing districts in the nation. Minnetonka has embraced technology as an essential part of preparing students for the 21st century. All classrooms have SMART boards, sound systems, and access to student response systems. The district has also launched a pilot 1:1 learning initiative using iPads. Every 9th and 10th grader has an iPad on which they do their assignments, collaborate with peers, conduct research, and receive feedback from teachers. At the heart of this 1:1 initiative is Schoology.

Schoology is Minnetonka's online learning management system (LMS) and is a critical part of Minnetonka's successful 1:1 program. According to Dave Eisenmann, Minnetonka's Director of Instructional Technology and Media Services, "Our district's use of interactive whiteboards changed teaching by digitizing instruction. Now, Schoology is making this content easily accessible to students in an online, interactive community." Using Schoology as the hub of their digital cycle, teachers post everything from lecture notes and worksheets to links to videos and other online resources to the platform, making them accessible to students at school, in class, and at home.

"For our students with iPads, Schoology is an extension of their classes. It's really made communication and learning a fluid, seamless process," said Ben Stanerson, a Minnetonka High School instructional coach and former science teacher. Students can download an assignment from Schoology, complete the work on their iPads, and turn the work in to their teachers in Schoology's Dropbox. Teachers can then grade, comment on students' work, and return it to students in Schoology. Students can even ask questions while working on their assignments using the messaging feature. "Students are more willing to ask questions outside of class because of Schoology," said Ben.

As teachers and students have grown more comfortable with their iPads, teachers are expanding the use of the devices to integrate them even further into the teaching and learning process. For instance, Schoology's quiz feature is being used more widely to gauge students' understanding of a topic before class begins and to assess their learning at the end of the class or after homework has been turned in. With Schoology, students can take the quizzes right on their iPads and can get immediate feedback from their teachers.



9,500 students
1,500 teachers
6 elementary schools
2 middle schools
1 high school

Ben is also working with teachers to utilize Schoolgy's Discussion Board feature in more robust ways. Teachers post a question or assignment to a Discussion Board. Students then post links, videos, screen shots, and Google Docs back to the Discussion Board for their classmates to review, comment on, and learn from.

Classes are also using the Schoolgy app for the iPad in innovative ways. "Teachers are making learning vocabulary much more interactive and engaging," Ben explained. "Students take pictures on their iPads of objects that illustrate the vocabulary words posted by their teachers. They can quickly upload the pictures from the iPad's Camera Roll to a Schoolgy Discussion Board using the Schoolgy app. All of the students can see the images that their classmates uploaded and can make comments about each other's photos."

According to Ben, "Schoolgy has made the iPad program successful for us. Even teachers with low technology confidence have found it easier to integrate the iPads because they only had to learn one system to distribute and collect digital materials. Schoolgy is a valuable and reliable resource for teachers and students working on integrating iPads into their teaching and learning."

An LMS for the 21st Century

While Schoolgy is now powering the district's 1:1 pilot, it's been an integral part of teaching and learning in Minnetonka since the 2011-12 school year. In 2010, while at an educational conference, Julie Carter, Minnetonka's Director of Technology at the time, stumbled upon Schoolgy. The platform's simple, collaborative interface and streamlined communication drew her in immediately. After watching a short demo she knew she wanted the system for the district.

The teachers in Minnetonka felt they had outgrown their existing LMS, Blackboard, and wanted a 21st-century system more aligned with how students want to communicate and use technology. After the platform was presented as an alternative to Blackboard, the district decided to pilot Schoolgy.

During the 2011-12 school year, Schoolgy was rolled out to every teacher in the district (though Blackboard continued to be supported). By the 2012-13 school year the district was 100% Schoolgy-based with every teacher, student, and parent using Schoolgy to share information. "Our students and teachers love it," explained Dave. "It is remarkably intuitive to use for teachers, students, and our technology staff, so staff development is minimal compared to other products we have experienced."

Enhancing Communication to Enhance Student Engagement

At Minnetonka's elementary schools, teachers primarily use Schoolgy to communicate with families and provide resources. Teachers are introducing more collaborative work with their younger students and using Schoolgy to provide a safe environment. Middle schoolers have embraced Schoolgy and work together in and out of the classroom on projects, even answering their peers' questions before teachers have seen them. "It's really important for students to be able to participate in an online social



CASE STUDY: MINNETONKA PUBLIC SCHOOLS CONTINUED

environment that is geared towards schools," explained Ben. "As our students move into college and the workplace, they will need to know how to effectively communicate and collaborate in an online environment. Schoology is good practice for that."

While only 9th and 10th graders currently have iPads, the district hopes to expand the program to include grades 8 and 11 next year. Whether Schoology is accessed on an iPad, iPhone, laptop, or desktop computer, Minnetonka's high schoolers have come to rely on the course feeds and updates that Schoology provides. Parents can even subscribe to the calendar RSS feed to keep on top of assignments and due dates. In addition to facilitating better communication and the 1:1 pilot, Schoology has made differentiating instruction much easier for teachers. Tests and quizzes can be created, taken, and graded using Schoology, which allows teachers to administer daily formative assessments and quickly adjust lessons and assignments based on where students are in their learning. Teachers can also provide additional resources or support through Schoology for those students struggling with a concept.

Doing So Much More for So Much Less

Minnetonka has realized many positive benefits from adopting Schoology, not the least of which are the savings in personnel time, hardware, and electricity. Because Schoology is cloud based, Minnetonka is no longer paying for servers or electricity to host their LMS. Schoology is so intuitive that very little staff time is spent training or troubleshooting with users. All support and customization is provided by Schoology so the personnel time to manage the solution is minimal.

"The staff at Schoology is incredibly responsive to our needs and suggestions with a turnaround time for updates and development of new features that I didn't realize was possible." said Dave. "Schoology is an amazing product which I believe is a game changer for education."