

CASE STUDY: PALO ALTO UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

In Search of an Easy-to-Implement, Scalable Learning Management System

In early 2011, a large number of teachers in Palo Alto Unified School District were no longer using the district supported learning management system (LMS). A server crash caused a loss of data while a system upgrade in 2009 reduced rather than enhanced functionality of the system. Teachers were frustrated so the district decided it was the right time to adopt a new LMS.

"We had very specific criteria for the system we were searching for," said Ann Dunkin, Director of Technology. "We wanted a cloud-based system that was user friendly, facilitated online discussions, and allowed teachers to push resources – from links and PDF documents to videos and photos – to students," said Ann Dunkin, Director of Technology. "Teachers also really wanted a social networking tool. Many were using Facebook to encourage collaboration and to communicate outside of the classroom but not everyone was comfortable with an open social network, and Facebook isn't accessible at the middle and elementary schools."

Palo Alto
Unified School District

11,000 students
641 teachers
12 elementary schools
3 middle schools
2 high schools

Ann started to research their options. She was immediately drawn to Schoology because of its intuitive interface. "We didn't want a system that required extensive training. With Schoology, students and teachers could both start using it immediately without training." Schoology's flexibility was also very attractive to Ann. "I liked that we could choose the features we wanted to use and that the open, cloud-based platform made it much easier and faster for Schoology to implement enhancements based on our needs."

By spring, Ann and her colleagues had decided that Schoology had the potential to be a good fit for Palo Alto and moved forward with a pilot.

Improving Learning and Communication throughout the District

The implementation process, including importing data from the district's student information system, went smoothly. By August, Schoology was rolled out to four of the district's schools, including 200 teachers and 4,000 students.

Teachers have already found that Schoology has significantly increased their ability to be effective in the classroom and has improved communication between students, teachers, and parents. High school students especially like the text messaging feature that alerts them to when tests are coming up and when assignments are due.



Two fifth grade classes are using the online messaging feature to talk with sixth grade students about the transition from elementary school to middle school. The students are sharing stories and providing peer support in a way that wouldn't be possible without Schoolology.

More Users and More Uses in the Future

Palo Alto has been so pleased with Schoolology that they plan to implement it in more schools, including elementary schools. The previous LMS was only used in secondary schools. "Schoolology is such a cost-effective solution that we'll be able to install it in many more of our schools," said Ann. "We'll have more users and more functionality for the same price we paid for our old LMS."

Ann and the Schoolology development team have collaborated on several enhancements to the system, like the Workload Planning feature, and Palo Alto has been an active participant in testing other new features such as integration with Turnitin. In the coming year, Schoolology will rollout several more custom applications for Palo Alto that integrate the LMS with many of the district's other systems, such as their gradebook, so that parents can have single sign-on access to their students' grades, attendance, and classroom data.

According to Ann, "Teachers are able to change their instructional practices to meet the needs of today's students because of Schoolology."