



CASE STUDY

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

A large number of teachers in Palo Alto Unified School District were no longer using the district’s legacy learning management system (LMS). A server crash had caused a loss of data. Before that, a system upgrade 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, Chief Technology Officer at the time. “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. “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.”

Ann started to research their options. She was immediately drawn to Schoolology because of its intuitive interface. “We didn’t want a system that required extensive training. With Schoolology, both students and teachers could start using it immediately without training.” Schoolology’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 Schoolology to implement enhancements based on our needs.”

Ann and her colleagues decided that Schoolology was the best fit for Palo Alto and moved forward with a pilot followed by a full district rollout. Since that time, Ann Dunkin was selected by the Obama Administration to be Chief Information Officer of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

Palo Alto Unified School District

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

Improving Learning and Communication throughout the District

The implementation process, including importing data from the district's student information system, went smoothly. Teachers have 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.

As an illustration of the benefit of Schoology's built-in collaboration capabilities, fifth grade classes use 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 Schoology.

More Users and More Uses in the Future

Palo Alto has since implemented Schoology across the district, including in its elementary schools. The previous LMS was only used in secondary schools. "Schoology is such a cost-effective solution that we were able to install it in many more of our schools," said Ann. "We have more users and more functionality for the same price we paid for our old LMS." According to Ann, "Teachers are able to change their instructional practices to meet the needs of today's students because of Schoology."