

PEARSON

Challenge

After more than 20 years with a legacy technology system, the Fairbanks North Star Borough School District in Fairbanks, Alaska was ready, willing, and able to upgrade its student information system (SIS) and introduce a web-based grade book to the district. With a staff of more than 1,900 and a student body of 14,000+, instant access to accurate student information via a centralized network had become the number one need for district educators.

Fairbanks needed to change an outdated data and reporting process that no longer worked for the district. Historically, at the end of every school year, each school collected student data and drafted statistics and reports for review by the district and the school board. During an annual summer retreat, these reports went under review to assess which academic areas needed improvement and which group of students required assistance. Following this assessment, a team was assembled to develop a plan of action for the next school year. Without a web-based grade book, it took the district nearly a full school year to actively help students in need of special attention or additional academic support.

In 2004, the school board passed a district priority to use technology to enhance learning, monitor student progress, and involve parents while increasing communications and support for students and families of diverse cultures. At Fairbanks, schools had previously faced limitations on timely communication with parents when it came to daily attendance reporting. Without a parent portal or web-based grade book, parents could not access real-time data that provided them with updates on student attendance, homework assignments, test dates, and relevant teacher comments. Lack of access to such data often resulted in frequent calls to the school, which caused extraneous work for the administrative staff and teachers. Additionally, a bi-annual parent/teacher conference and report card structure did very little to proactively and positively impact student performance or troubleshoot areas of concern. With infrequent progress reports, parents were missing out on the opportunity to provide more meaningful guidance from home.



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Janet Toohey, Director of Information Systems for the Fairbanks North Star Borough School District.

Limited conference times left little opportunity for parents and teachers to raise the level of discussion beyond grade updates.

Following many years on a legacy system, Fairbanks was ready to respond to the changing needs and goals of its district by finding a solution that enabled educators to make timely decisions that impacted student performance, while creating an ongoing, collaborative forum for parents and teachers to engage in timely intervention to areas of concern.

Solution

Fairbanks worked with three web-based grade books until being introduced to PowerTeacher, Pearson's easy-to-use, teacher-friendly electronic grade book software, at an industry conference in 2006. While the district was hesitant to introduce new software to its teachers, PowerTeacher offered a unique set of enhanced capabilities worthy of review.



Following the conference, Pearson invited a group of Fairbanks teachers to take part in a beta testing for PowerTeacher, which presented a challenge to some teachers who had never used an electronic grade book. With Pearson's help through the beta process, Fairbanks' teachers continued to gain confidence in the software and Pearson's ability to respond to their feedback during the critical testing phase.

PowerTeacher would be made available to the district through PowerSchool, the first student information system designed specifically as a web-based solution offering teachers and administrators easy access to real-time data via a standard web browser. The combination of PowerSchool and PowerTeacher offered Fairbanks a single standardized and centralized SIS solution.

Upon completion of the successful beta process, Fairbanks teachers and administrators chose to implement PowerSchool and PowerTeacher for all 34 K-12 schools within the district. As a result of Fairbanks'

active involvement and useful feedback to PowerTeacher, Pearson collaborated with the district on the next two versions of its web-based grade book – PowerTeacher 1.1 in the 2007-2008 school year and PowerTeacher 1.5 during the 2008-2009 school year.

The latest version, PowerTeacher 1.5, offers teachers more than 30 key features and usability enhancements suggested by teachers and administrators (including the Fairbanks staff) and a rich application with deep functionality aimed at improving user adoption and the user experience. Fairbanks' invaluable input during the most recent beta testing resulted in two significant updates to the software: the addition of a customized grade scale and the ability to view student reports per individual vs. per class.

Benefits

Fairbanks has completed two successful school years with PowerTeacher. With the real-time features and functionalities of PowerTeacher, Fairbanks teachers and administrators are now equipped to make timely decisions that impact student performance, i.e. teachers can change a lesson plan based on the needs of a specific class. Today, parents and teachers can intervene immediately when students hit a trouble spot or require extra support – not at the end of the semester or at the annual parent/teacher conference.

The centralized software enables Fairbanks educators to pull real-time data and adjust class levels at any point during the school year, saving valuable time in a student's academic progress. In addition, district counselors and administrators can now easily identify at-risk students, or students with cultural needs, and connect them with the right support person. This is significant for the Alaska region, since many students come from native, bi-lingual villages.

The benefits of PowerTeacher's attendance function extend well beyond its ability to report real-time updates to administrators, teachers and parents. As part of the



QUICK FACTS

DISTRICT: Fairbanks

STUDENTS: 14,000+

TEACHERS / STAFF: 1,900

CHALLENGE: Implement a solution that works for almost 2,000 staff members who need a solid system every day

SOLUTION: PowerTeacher

YEARS IN PRODUCTION: Two

NCLB requirements, the district must pay close attention to attendance trends and patterns. For the past two years, PowerTeacher has helped Fairbanks reduce its overall drop-out rate and provide more accurate data for state reporting requirements.

“With more than 5,000 SIS users each day, we rely on the quality, stability, and accuracy of PowerTeacher to make timely decisions that impact student performance,” said Janet Toohey, Director of Information Systems for the Fairbanks North Star Borough School District. “Today, our teachers are more self-reliant than ever, which is a direct result of the centralization and usability of Pearson’s software.”

Visibility into timely and accurate student data continues to impact the day-to-day lives of K-12 students, teachers and parents across the U.S. Educational technology solutions like PowerTeacher continue to lead the way and provide a means to best to connect the dots between a student’s performance today and that same student’s full academic potential tomorrow.

About Pearson

Pearson, the global leader in education and education technology, reaches and engages today’s digital natives with effective and personalized learning, as well as dedicated professional development for their teachers. This commitment is demonstrated in the company’s investment in innovative print and digital education materials for preK through college, student information systems and learning management systems, teacher professional development, career certification programs, and testing and assessment products that set the standard for the industry. The company’s respected brands include Scott Foresman, Prentice Hall, Addison Wesley, Benjamin Cummings, PEMSolutions, Stanford 10, SuccessNet, MyLabs, PowerSchool, SuccessMaker, and many others. Pearson’s comprehensive offerings help inform targeted instruction and intervention so that success is within reach of every student at every level of education. Pearson’s commitment to education for all is supported by the global philanthropic initiatives of the Pearson Foundation. Pearson’s other primary businesses include the Financial Times Group and the Penguin Group.