

Fort Lee School District – Success Story

“Whether you are an administrator, teacher, student or parent, education is about getting what you need, not just what everyone else gets. There is no other solution that is as complete as what Pearson offers.”

Steven Engravalle, Acting Superintendent of Schools, Fort Lee School District

New Jersey School Executive Credits PowerSchool as Total Solution

Challenge

Fort Lee School District (Fort Lee) is a Pre-K–12 school district with approximately 3,800 students, more than 400 staff members, and a budget of \$54 million. Fort Lee includes an elite high school, with Advanced Placement® (AP®) and International Baccalaureate® (IB) programs, which require running split-day schedules. The district had been using another student information system (SIS) mainly as a student database, with data entered by school secretaries.

Steven Engravalle, the new Acting Superintendent of Schools of Fort Lee, and the chair of the State Technology Committee at the New Jersey Association of School Administrators, advises educators statewide on issues involving school technology. He firmly believes student information systems should provide a better, more personalized education experience for teachers, administrators, and student learners. For example, Engravalle noted that special needs students benefit from the federally required Individualized Education Program (IEP). Engravalle would like to see student data from the district’s SIS (such as test scores or classroom performance) provide IEPs for use by all students—whether special needs, gifted and talented, or otherwise.

Upon review of Fort Lee’s SIS, Engravalle perceived the SIS as antiquated. This system’s limited functionality required building schedules and reports by hand. Building a schedule to support the AP and IB programs required that the administrators not only consider periods and classes, but also student course requests, teacher schedules, teacher course requests, and dozens of other factors that make the process complex. Additionally, the system did not allow schools to integrate high-stakes exam scores to student data files. Measurable and efficient results were a priority for the Fort Lee School District, and without a system for storing, organizing, and reporting student test data, the district could not easily chart collective student progress. Engravalle quickly saw that Fort Lee needed a more efficient, higher-functioning, and more effective SIS.

No one in Fort Lee’s staff—including the district technology coordinator—felt comfortable attempting the advertised additional functions of the district’s then-current SIS without additional training from the provider. However, additional training and suggestions for how to improve the implementation and use of the product were not available. “They let us flounder; we didn’t know where to take our questions,” said Engravalle. “Customer service was the issue.” The Fort Lee School District needed a new SIS to provide exemplary customer support to the staff, students, and parents as well as to take the burden of managing school schedules and student data off district staff.

Solution

Searching for a total solution, the new acting superintendent recalled his previous experiences in two Sussex County boroughs where Pearson's PowerSchool successfully provided online access and involvement for both parents and students.

Engravalle suggested Fort Lee look into purchasing PowerSchool as a total SIS solution. His decision raised concerns within the district that the software change could end up being just another burden on teachers' already overloaded task lists.

"As an administrator, when I add something to a teacher's desk, I have to take something away," Engravalle emphasizes.

However, once Fort Lee began investigating Engravalle's suggestion, the staff found that PowerSchool makes the teacher's task lists easier to manage, not harder. The Pearson solution is intuitive for educators to navigate, and its functionality minimizes time spent on administrative tasks such as scheduling or creating reports. With PowerSchool, Fort Lee benefits from using PowerScheduler, which employs a time-tested scheduling algorithm. PowerScheduler uses the school's available resources—such as the course catalog, teachers, rooms, and students—to create a master schedule. PowerScheduler considers all factors and determines the best possible schedule from hundreds of thousands of possibilities. With its advanced functionality, PowerScheduler generates master schedules that minimize conflicts. This feature is imperative for school districts like Fort Lee that offer a wide range of classes, including Advanced Placement and other accelerated curriculum options. PowerScheduler effectively manages the diverse requirements of a modern school district like Fort Lee.

Benefits

PowerSchool provides many different SIS capabilities available in one product. Fort Lee now can benefit from the convenience, customer support, current student data, and a comprehensive concentration of information.

Convenience

More than a mere database of student grades, PowerSchool's navigational system saves staff time compiling various reports. "I don't need my people trying to guess how to print out an attendance report," Engravalle said, and PowerSchool's user-friendly interface allows users of differing levels to easily print a variety of reports. Additionally, PowerSchool can generate reports about one student across multiple years so that parents, students, and teachers can track progress throughout the student's development and identify areas that need improvement or extra attention. "Teachers don't have time to disaggregate data," Engravalle said, which is something that PowerSchool can help them attain.

With proper implementation and support, educators can begin to use PowerSchool in ways that best fit their students and school systems. PowerSchool's web-based PowerTeacher™ feature has begun to furnish Fort Lee teachers with the flexibility to produce their reports and manage their grade books. Additionally, it gives teachers control over the look and feel of the user interface. Mouse-over events, fast 10-key entry, keyboard shortcuts, zoom in and zoom out, click-and-drag capability, floating score inspectors, and right-click menus are a few examples of features of PowerTeacher.

Teachers represent one of the largest groups of users of student information systems, so access and ease-of-use are important aspects of any SIS. For convenience, PowerSchool provides mobile options, which include iPhone®, iPad®, iPod touch®, and Android™ OS-based devices. PowerTeacher Mobile enables teachers to use the most common grade book features on their iPad. The district technology coordinator especially appreciates the PowerTeacher app because it provides Fort Lee educators more flexibility, allowing them to create assignments, record student scores, and access student information from anywhere. As yet another move to foster 21st century learning, Engravalle implemented a standard practice of providing iPads for school administrators to give them real-time access to student grades, schedules, standardized test scores, and demographic data in PowerSchool. In the future, he plans to expand this commitment to innovation by issuing iPads to all physical education teachers to help them expedite grading and attendance for their classes through use of the PowerTeacher app.

Support for Fort Lee

Fort Lee also requires ongoing support, an outlet for technical questions, and suggestions for the most effective ways to use the product. Pearson provides multiple forms of assistance to customers, including telephone support, e-mail support, and PowerSource, the online technical support website for Pearson customers. Users of PowerSchool and other Pearson products have access to PowerSource which provides an expansive knowledge base that includes over 25,000 articles, as well as forums for educators to connect and collaborate with more than 125,000 members from around the world. This form of exchange is the best way to share and try PowerSchool custom pages, reports, and other functions within PowerSchool.

Customers like Fort Lee may also use PowerSource to access online training and tutorials. Distance Learning, which provides users with anytime, anywhere access, allows busy administrators and educators to learn more about the system on their own schedule and pace. This ensures Fort Lee users to take full advantage of the capabilities offered through PowerSchool.

Up-To-Date Student Data

Engravalle believes PowerSchool's online grade book feature eliminates the need for interim reports which, by the time they are delivered, contain outdated information and cost valuable resources to print and mail. The District no longer issues interim reports in any of its schools since the implementation of PowerSchool. With PowerSchool, parents and students can view grades in real time when a teacher uploads them. These more current results enable parents and students to continuously monitor academic performance. Parent and student access to performance information provides a collaborative environment for teachers, students, and parents, enabling a more tailored learning and teaching process.

PowerSchool offers a comprehensive standard/competency report card that contains marks, comments, special programs, attendance, testing information, and assessment information to paint a more comprehensive picture of student progress at the click of a button. These standards and competencies can be associated with a course or a student in any given report—allowing a teacher to see which standards the students in his or her class are meeting and which might need to be retaught.

Additionally, PowerSchool enables individual teachers to assess student competencies and enter them on a report card, replacing the old method where teachers collectively reported on a single, paper card for each student.

Concentrated Comprehensive Information

As a state educational Technology Advisor, Engravalle supports statewide implementation of PowerSchool. He said it would ease data transition for students moving across the state. Moving one file across the system would reduce the timely collection of a student's health, IEP, and guidance files, and consolidate them to one location. Engravalle emphasizes this detailed information will help education systems meet children where they are, see where they need assistance, and figure out how to get them where they need to be.

For Engravalle, it is important to consolidate a student's information in one easy location so that educators can plan their lessons and meet the needs of each student from a broader perspective. Combining grade book data and student information with assessment results not only helps create a complete picture of student performance and achievement, but also brings the district closer to providing a more individualized learning plan for every student. Engravalle aims to provide an individual educational plan and program for every student, no matter their skill level.

Furthermore, by integrating a student's school record with state test results provides state education decision-makers a clear picture to track progress and identify needs by school, region, population, and more.

Fort Lee has consistently made it to the top 75 in the New Jersey Monthly list of Top Public High Schools in New Jersey, and Engravalle has even higher aspirations for the district: "Our goal is to be number one on the New Jersey list and PowerSchool will help us get there."

About Pearson

Pearson, the global leader in education and education technology, engages today's digital natives with effective, personalized learning, while also providing dedicated professional development for their teachers. This commitment is demonstrated by Pearson'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. In addition to PowerSchool, the company's respected brands include Scott Foresman, Prentice Hall, Addison Wesley, Benjamin Cummings, Stanford I/O, SuccessNet, MyLabs, SuccessMaker, and many others. Pearson's comprehensive offerings help inform targeted instruction and intervention so that success is in 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 are the Financial Times Group and the Penguin Group.

For more information about PowerSchool, please visit our website at www.PearsonSchoolSystems.com, call 877.873.1550, or email us at pss_sales@pearson.com.