In a changing educational landscape, Oxford Community Schools, like every other public school in Michigan, was fighting not only to retain students but to attract the attention of new students. To reverse the trend of declining enrollments and reduce the resulting loss of funding from the State of Michigan Department of Education, Oxford innovated its K-12 offerings and began featuring alternative options to students, including an online virtual academy. The plan worked, but Oxford needed adequate education technology systems that would unify classrooms and work across both seated and virtual classrooms, and at the same time, limit the need for additional technical staff and their accompanying salaries to manage.

The district revolutionized its systems by partnering with PowerSchool Learning and the PowerSchool Student Information System (SIS) — unifying both its physical and virtual classrooms, increasing collaborating and communication between teachers and staff, and controlling costs district-wide.

“We were committed to 24/7 learning options and accessibility, and having one unified system that would work across all of our different school types was a huge must for us,” says Tim Throne, Oxford Community Schools Superintendent. “With PowerSchool SIS and PowerSchool Learning as our foundation, we are now unifying our classrooms with solutions that integrate seamlessly, communicate and share data, and inspire collaboration across the district.”
Located in southeastern lower Michigan, Oxford Community Schools serves approximately 6,000 students (850 in its virtual academy) with 350 teachers, 30 administrators, 10 technical support staff, and 25 general support staff. Faced with its primary need to unify classroom solutions and refrain from hiring additional staff to implement and manage new technology, the district also recognized that it had disparate educational technology tools that did not integrate well and required staff, students and parents to juggle multiple logins. The district struggled with limited collaboration between teachers and administrative staff, including a lack of a universal calendar, and inefficient communication district-wide.

“We have such a high usage rate because teachers really like it. As teachers became more familiar with the system, they understood how it helped them become better teachers. By seeing student results and by being able to communicate more effectively, efficiently, and in a timely manner with parents, teachers have come to understand they couldn't live without PowerSchool.”

— Tim Throne, Oxford Community Schools Superintendent

“The creation of the online virtual academy was considered visionary because no one believed that online learning would become so important in K-12, and therefore, we had to pioneer technology solutions that would increase communication not only between staff, administrators, and teachers but also with parents,” Throne says.

Overview

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“With new software systems, we wanted to be able to replicate all of the technical, behind-the-scenes infrastructure that we enjoyed in the seated world in a virtual world. If a student transferred from our traditional classroom to our virtual school, we wanted all of that student’s information in the gradebook and learning management system, including grades, attendance, assignments and test scores to transfer to their new school. And we had to do so without hiring additional staff,” says Throne.

“It was important to extend student learning, provide alternative modes and methods of learning, and provide more individualized, paced instruction to use these tools, but we couldn't double our staff.”

The Solution: PowerSchool Student Information System and PowerSchool Learning

“This was an important decision for us that would help us well into the future, so we did an exhaustive search for the right solutions for our needs,” Throne says. “Money was not a factor for the initial purchase. We weren't going to let price be a stumbling block for picking the best student information system and learning management system in the marketplace.”

Oxford Community Schools chose PowerSchool products because, based on extensive research, they felt the company featured the strongest, most comprehensive, products available. PowerSchool SIS offered the district a robust, easy-to-use student data management solution that included the PowerTeacher digital gradebook and leading state reporting capabilities. With PowerSchool Learning, Oxford Community Schools was providing teachers with a dynamic learning management system that would allow them to create interactive lessons and engaging content, and enjoy easy collaboration with other teachers and classrooms.

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Unifying the classroom
Since Oxford Community Schools has embraced PowerSchool SIS and PowerSchool Learning, it is enjoying a “one-stop shop with 95 percent usage rate,” according to Throne. Positive results have included:

- Increased efficiency of teaching and learning
- Individualized instruction, including ability for students to work at their own pace
- Universal calendar shared by all relevant staff
- Streamlined communication district-wide via single sign-on with Google Apps
- Improved collaboration between teachers, who can share best practices, notes, lessons, and more
- Advanced opportunities for students to develop 21st-century skills using discussions and WikiProjects
- Enhanced parent engagement with comprehensive access to children’s class pages, grades, assignments, and attendance

“We have such a high usage rate because teachers really like it. As teachers became more familiar with the system, they understood how it helped them become better teachers. By seeing student results and by being able to communicate more effectively, efficiently, and in a timely manner with parents, teachers have come to understand they couldn’t live without PowerSchool,” Throne says.

Integrated solutions improve efficiency
Having two powerful solutions that communicate well while unifying the classroom through seamless integration has helped Oxford staff become more efficient. Educators no longer have to struggle with disparate technology tools and manage multiple logins.

“Systems are now integrated and data is flowing freely, which means a bigger return on investment that we see.

Whether it’s not spending hard dollars on support costs, an increased return on efficiency by teaching staff, or an increase in student growth and learning, having a unified system is helping Oxford Community Schools operate more efficiently and effectively,” says Throne.

“A unified system allows educators to easily jump between applications on the education side. And then on the management side, counselors, administrators, secretaries, and all of the behind-the-scenes staff that are managing data have a single source of data entry so we are ensuring clean, quality data,” says Debbie Fox, Oxford Community Schools Senior Technology Consultant. “We’re not enrolling students in five different applications. It’s just one application, and that student data is then being shared with twenty-some other applications. It’s a way of keeping data clean and ensuring data is accurate throughout the system.”

Improved teaching capabilities and collaboration
Oxford Community Schools reports that with PowerSchool, it’s been able to offer more individualized learning and extended learning opportunities without adding staff. “We’ve increased our use of technology to provide better, individualized student instruction, and we’ve been able to produce results with having the exact same amount of technical support personnel that we had back in 2000. We’ve probably more than quadrupled the number of technical devices and applications people are using, yet we’ve been able to maintain an environment in which we haven’t had to increase the investment of support,” Throne says.

Oxford Community Schools’ teachers can now collaborate and share class sites, notes and lessons. When they are creating their lessons, they can adjust in real-time and share new learning videos and other course content with teachers.

“We have situations in which two teachers are sharing the same PowerSchool Learning page,” Fox says. “They are in different classes, but they can share the
same content. They don’t have to create separate pages or duplicate their work, and instead, work together as a team. Because it’s collaborative, I can also go in and see what they have set up on a daily basis.”

**Innovative intranet with teachers as “students” using the system**

Oxford Community Schools has used the PowerSchool Learning platform to set up its own district intranet with teachers and administrative staff as users. The collaborative site, named “The Cats’ Den” in reference to the high school mascot (Wildcats), is used for everything from staff professional development and learning resources to a shared calendar, district announcements, state initiatives, and more. The site also houses PowerSchool Learning class resources for easy access for teachers to share.

“One of the cool things we anticipated and planned for was creating our own professional learning environment with the same tool that our own students would be using,” explains Throne. “Our teachers really become the student inside the LMS. That was a really big win for us. Because it’s the same tool that teachers are using in the classroom for their students, when they use the Cats’ Den, they’re using it from the student’s perspective and it helps inform them on how to set up their own PowerSchool Learning pages. As users, it gives them an instant return on how they utilize the tool for their own students.”

**Conclusion**

A true return on investment can sometimes be hard to gauge in education technology solutions. However, Oxford Community Schools believes it’s easy to justify its ROI with PowerSchool and a unified classroom experience.

“Every day that goes by, students and teachers become more familiar with the product. We continue to get bigger and better ROI,” Throne explains. “A teacher will discover something new and say, ‘Wow, this is a new feature I didn’t know about!’ We no longer have disparate tools and the limitations they bring. We can now share data between physical and virtual classrooms, and we are collaborating to help improve the education experience. Every day, we are increasing our ROI, and it keeps getting better.”

**About Powerschool**

PowerSchool is the leading K-12 education technology provider of solutions that improve the education experience for 100 million students, teachers, and parents in over 70 countries around the world. We provide the industry’s first Unified Classroom experience, empowering teachers with best-in-class, secure, and compliant online solutions, including student information systems, learning management and classroom collaboration, assessment, analytics, behavior, and special education case management. We streamline school office and administration operations with online solutions for student registration, school choice, and finance/HR/ERP. We drive student growth through digital classroom capabilities and engage families through real-time communications across any device.