

Edsby at Farmington Municipal Schools

How one school district has big plans for Edsby over time

Farmington Municipal Schools has its eye on the future. And with Edsby, it's investing in plumbing for that future.

The public school district of 10,000 students and 1,200 staff in the northwest corner of New Mexico was looking to lay the infrastructure for standards-based grading and common core curriculum. It was also seeking a way to share assignments.

At the same time, it wanted to continue to benefit from the culture of collaboration and sharing that students, teachers and other staff in the district have enjoyed for the previous 19 years with the popular education email and groupware product FirstClass.

In the 2012 school year, Farmington adopted social networking software Edsby to help it facilitate some of this.

Migration from FirstClass

Farmington had confidence in Edsby because it was designed and published by the same core team that built FirstClass. "Everything you did there [with FirstClass] was nice and solid," noted Charles Thacker, Director of Technology, Farmington Municipal Schools. "Having this group start something with a different name, I didn't see how it could possibly be bad."

Thacker said the motivation to find another solution for group collaboration than FirstClass was his biggest motivation.



Farmington Municipal Schools Director of Technology Charles Thacker speaks with a parent.



The Farmington Learning Initiative is putting laptops into the hands of all 6-12 grade students in the district.

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"We had a lot of staff that wanted to use Edmodo or similar tools. Edsby really came across as the most user friendly, was easy to get up and going and had the best potential for growth. In this case, we felt comfortable coming in early because we'd be listened to. And when we saw we could tie Edsby in and connect to our student information system (SIS), that took care of a whole bunch of concerns."

Edsby connects to legacy systems like SISes, authentication systems, LMSes and other structured data stores to give students, teachers, parents and administrators a single place to log in to see everything important about a school and a child's academic progress.

Farmington is seeing some use of Edsby so far as a FirstClass replacement. The biggest impediment, says Thacker, has been that Edsby groups (the collaboration spaces in Edsby popular for school teams, clubs and professional development) have traditionally only been available at the school level. Farmington wants school district-level groups, which Edsby intends to introduce by September 2014.

Edsby for attendance and grades

A handful of teachers in the district are experimenting with and like Edsby's built-in attendance and gradebook, but most don't use it at this time as the district currently uses the PowerSchool SIS as its system of record for attendance and grades.

"Our district has adopted Common Core and is migrating to standards based grading (initially for K-8 and eventually K-12). However, PowerSchool's gradebook does not fit well with this model. I don't think PowerSchool will be our standards based gradebook going forward. I would prefer we use Edsby if we're not going to use PowerSchool's gradebook," said Thacker.

Thacker wants Edsby to be able to fit a standards-based grading model with the ability to push core standards and objectives to staff teaching a particular subject, as well as the grading configuration the district uses, and have all term (quarter, semester, finals, etc.) grades pushed back to PowerSchool and have attendance taken in Edsby and pushed back to PowerSchool.

Edsby supports multiple grading schemes in its gradebook and connects to PowerSchool, and is working with Farmington to achieve this.

Also on Farmington's Edsby wish list: electronic portfolios, or ePortfolios, so students can start storing educational results and exemplary pieces of work and carry them

forward. And the district is looking forward to Edsby's new polling feature.

"I'm very excited about the survey piece," said Thacker. "Staff here are really anxious to use it given our current Farmington Learning Initiative in which all 6-12 grade students have a laptop assigned to them 24/7 during the school year."

Converging on Edsby

Thacker's objective, as with many districts, is to migrate as many legacy systems as possible to a single platform. And Farmington is optimistic Edsby could be that platform.

"If we can get everything into one spot, great. Most people would choose to only be in one. Nobody wants to flip back and forth. If, in the short term, we could get everyone to Edsby for assignments, collaboration, attendance and gradebook, that would be a positive step forward," said Thacker.

Farmington is also optimistic about the 360-degree view of a student that Edsby can offer administrators, given its integration with the district's legacy systems.

"Who are you? What do you know? What don't you know? What do we need to focus on? If we can get a traffic light-like signal on every

element per student, then that tells us exactly where to focus. Edsby gives admins this sort of dashboard info on students, but the system has to be used wider here."

Thacker acknowledges that ambitious technology rollouts like Edsby don't happen without occasional user pushback.

"I love Edsby and use it all the time."

"It's like asking a big chunk of educators how important tech is in their classroom in general. Some insist it's critical, others dismiss it. Right now Edsby is voluntary. Teachers are poking at it. You'll always get some users that complain regardless of what you give them. Those who stick with it are those seeing the power and want to grow with it. For the most part staff see value, and see it as beneficial to them and their students."

1,600 unique student users every week

Many teachers that use Edsby at Farmington love it and run all their classes on it. Some use

Edsby for assignment submission, electronically from anywhere. Some use it to offer flipped instruction and to share class activity with parents.

As many as 1,600 Farmington students currently log in to Edsby every week, with usage expected to grow.

"I use Edsby to assign work, give assignments, post directions and share helpful websites and videos," said Laura Dalton, 7th Grade Language Arts, Heights Middle School in Farmington, New Mexico. "I use it with all my classes and all my students. And the teachers on my team use it to communicate about and document about students."

Teacher Cheryl Stahl of Hermosa Middle School in Farmington uses Edsby's social classroom to flip instruction in her classroom. She posts handouts with information and websites for students to research at home. Students then come to class and collaborate to complete assignments.

"I utilize Edsby in all my classes—6-8 grade computer classes and yearbook—every class, every period, every day. I love Edsby and use it all the time," she said.



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