

# CUSTOMER CONNECTIONS



## SCHOOL DISTRICT PROFILE

- » Public school district located in northwestern Pennsylvania
- » About 5,500 total students
- » Fourteen schools

### CHALLENGES

- To meet state-mandated reporting requirements, district needed a system that collected data from all schools, including vocational school
- Sprawling district wanted centralized, web-based Student Information System for all employees, including teachers, administrators, nurses and guidance counselors
- Wanted a solution that would improve communication between teachers and parents
- Needed a customizable system that could meet changing district and statewide requirements over time
- Wanted the ability to create multiple reports from district-wide data, not pockets of separate information
- With a small IT staff, the district needed a partner that delivered outstanding, ongoing support and training

### BENEFITS

- Meets the State of Pennsylvania's stringent, changing reporting requirements
- Parents have real-time access to accurate administrative and grade information about their children
- No longer have 50 different grading applications in use, reducing support and training needs
- Improved communication between the school, parents and children
- Centrally managing reports simpler, faster and more time-efficient than requiring schools to each do their own reports
- Ability to customize **eSchoolPLUS** allows district to adapt as needed
- Centralized database ensures consistent, up-to-date records
- Single database results in one-time data-input, dramatically cutting time and errors
- Web-based system allows teachers to work from home

## Warren County School District selects the eSchoolPLUS Student Information System

When the State of Pennsylvania required school districts to submit a myriad of reports, Warren County School District's existing student information system failed the test.

Spurred by this requirement, the district began researching available solutions that not only would facilitate reporting to the state but also would centralize student data, improve communication between parents and schools and that was easily customizable by the eight-person information technology department and the software provider, said Amy Stewart, director of Instructional Technology and Communication.

"We were having difficulty with our current system meeting state reporting needs — and even the reporting needs internally," she said. "Data was being pulled from the left, the right. We needed a central database where all the information was stored."

### Change for the Better

"We knew we'd need to find a company that was dedicated to truly working with its customers. We didn't want someone who would sell us the software and then move on," said Stewart. "This solution was going to be used by practically every member of the district's community. As such, we had to have a real partnership with the provider, someone we knew would be with us all the way."

After reviewing solutions from several vendors, Warren County School District selected SunGard K-12 Education's **eSchoolPLUS**, a web-based student information system, due to the developer's knowledge of Pennsylvania's education regulations, the system's power and features and the company's success with other districts around the country, said Stewart.

Part of the Pennsylvania school district's research included visiting SunGard K-12 Education's support center, she said. Over the six-month process, the school district also spoke to SunGard K-12 Education's clients and users, both from IT and non-IT departments, said Stewart.

"When you implement a piece of software this large—something that encompasses the whole organization—SunGard has a very clear plan of what needs to be done."

AMY STEWART  
Director of Instructional Technology and Communication,  
Warren County School District

In addition, SunGard K-12 Education has a well-planned implementation strategy for districts planning to use **eSchoolPLUS**, she said. This strategy streamlined technology adoption, said Stewart. "The documentation is very clear on what we needed to have done before trainers came in," she explained. "When you implement a piece of software this large—something that encompasses the whole organization—it was good to know that they have a very clear plan of what needs to be done."

### Making the Move

Working with SunGard K-12 Education's engineers, Warren County began rolling out **eSchoolPLUS** in modules. But before the first teacher began using the grading system, the district worked on the technology's back-end, reviewing existing data and determining which information needed to be transferred to **eSchoolPLUS**.

"Topics like reporting, grading and how to determine grade point averages must be decided beforehand," said Stewart. "We didn't pull a lot of information over from the old system because we didn't have faith in its integrity."

The system went live the following year. "I've never seen something so diverse, so complex, go so quickly," said Stewart. "SunGard K-12 Education's engineers were able to keep up and get it up and running."

### WHAT OUR CUSTOMERS ARE SAYING

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Once the back-end work was complete, a trainer came on-site to train the IT department and members of each department who, in turn, participated in "train the trainer" sessions. "We had a trainer and an implementation team that came to us," Stewart said. "I can't say enough positive things about our trainer. We've been able to keep one consistent trainer as we've gone through, and he's been fantastic."

## Built to Suit

"One of the major reasons we went with **eSchoolPLUS** was to pull our school districts' schools and career center together so students can have one grade, and it doesn't have to be done by hand like we had to do before we purchased **eSchoolPLUS**," said Stewart. "But now the state wants that information provided separately. We want it together for us because we need grades together, discipline together and attendance together, no matter which school a student is attending. But now for the state we have to sift that data out. SunGard K-12 Education has done a great job meeting both our district's needs and our state's needs."

SunGard K-12 Education proved a strong ally, even during a particularly challenging time in the 2007-08 school year when the state frequently changed its reporting requirements, said Stewart. "I tell you what, the state reporting team has been champs."

## Sweet Success

Today, teachers must use **eSchoolPLUS'** electronic grade book, something that few if any would now do without, said Stewart.

"We need a win-win, and that's what we've got. I think at this point, your true test is if you proposed to take it away what would happen?" she said. "I think we'd have a lot of screaming."

Since **eSchoolPLUS** is web-based, teachers can securely log-on and grade students'

work from home, always a big boost to employee satisfaction. Parents, too, are heavily using the solution's remote Home Access Center to track and monitor their children's school lives and work.

"We obviously don't have 100-percent of parents online, but even so, Home Access Center really has changed the dynamics of our parent-school communication. Instead of parents coming into parent-teacher conferences to find out their student's grades, they're able to come in and discuss strategies because they have a far better pulse on the status of their children," said Stewart. "It's probably made our teachers more accountable. Parents do question them about assignments, about grades. It's increased the quality of communication between parents and teachers. It also keeps the kids accountable."

The system also helps teachers, administrators and parents stay aware of children who might otherwise have fallen behind, helping students accomplish their educational goals and aiding the district's ability to increase student achievement, she added.

"It really affords the opportunity to those kids who need the extra help," said Stewart.

## A Home Run

In fact, Warren County was so satisfied with SunGard and **eSchoolPLUS** that the district also acquired their web-based financial and human resource management system, **eFinancePLUS**, said Stewart. Using either solution allows administrators to create useful reports based on centralized, secure and accurate data, benefiting the entire community, she said.

"This software is rich in functions, yet easy to use. Any time an application makes a job easier, everyone wins," said Stewart. "I'm delighted to say that's our experience with SunGard K-12 Education and **eSchoolPLUS**."

## About Us

SunGard K-12 Education is a leader in the K-12 Education Industry, providing secure, web-based, and reliable software solutions for student management, financial and human resources, learning management, and special education in K-12 schools. SunGard K-12 Education currently works with over 1,500 school districts around the country to deliver K-12 software solutions, designed specifically to support student achievement.

### To learn more:

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