



CUSTOMER CONNECTIONS

TAMALPAIS UNION HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT SELECTS eSchoolPLUS.



SCHOOL DISTRICT PROFILE

- Public school in San Francisco Bay area
- Celebrating its 100th year in 2008
- 3,849 students in the 2008-2009 school year
- About 220 full-time teachers on-staff
- Five schools including three comprehensive high schools, grades 9 to 12; one continuation high school; one independent studies high school

CHALLENGES

- Users' reluctance to move from existing system to a new solution
- Poor relationship with prior supplier
- Need to satisfy a diverse user community including teachers, parents and administrators
- Desire to move to a truly Web-based student information system
- Requirement to better involve students and parents in school activities
- Multiple data repositories disrupted records' accuracy and timeliness

BENEFITS

- Parents have real-time access to accurate administrative information about their children
- SunGard Public Sector's responsiveness to Tamalpais Union High School District's requests resulted in at least four enhancements created to meet the district's specific needs
- Data integrity, network uptime and accessibility are no longer concerns due to eSchoolPLUS's true Web-based structure, reliability and security



eSchoolPLUS PROFILE

- Student Administration
- Home Access
- Performance Analysis
- Teacher Access

"We believe that eSchoolPLUS represents a major step forward in the architecture, which will lead to greater reliability and stability and greater teacher control."

JOEL HAMES

Senior Director, Information Technology, Tamalpais Union High School District



Just as the Tamalpais Union High School District fosters a sense of community between parents, students, teachers and administrators, the five-school district sought a similar relationship with their Student Information System provider. The California school district, which supports approximately 4,000 students, needed a user-friendly, web-based system that would enhance communication and provide a centralized, secure and up-to-date repository of student information; provided by a vendor willing to meet the district's changing needs.

With their requirement and wish-list firmly in-hand, Tamalpais Union High School District's Senior Director of Information Technology, Joel Hames, and other advisors began researching their options. After testing a handful of available solutions, the technology team unanimously selected eSchoolPLUS from SunGard Public Sector.

"SunGard's training and implementation plan was much better-presented and planned than other vendors—it certainly distinguished itself from other companies in its comprehensiveness and the quality of its training," said Hames.

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"I think **eSchoolPLUS** and SunGard have a great advantage in that they are a larger organization, with a well-entrenched, well-established support system in place," he continued. "Sometimes you can get lost in larger organizations, but that is not the case with SunGard Public Sector. We know the support people by name, and yet the company's large enough and has enough resources to keep up with the changing demands of education."

New Tools for Schools

Although Tamalpais had another SIS installed, users in all categories were dissatisfied with the system. Hames was becoming frustrated by that vendor's lack of communication and desire to help.

Just a few years after implementing the first SIS, Hames and the IT advisory group dug deep into available student information systems, once again immediately winnowing out any that were not proven Web-based solutions. The process led the team to SunGard Public Sector's **eSchoolPLUS** and **eSchoolPLUS** Home Access, which the vendor demonstrated to students, faculty and parents.

"We believe that **eSchoolPLUS** represents a major step forward in the architecture, which will lead to greater reliability and stability and greater teacher control," said Hames. "In the end, **eSchoolPLUS** is one of the only fully Web-based systems so we were finally achieving what we wanted to do: Put in place a Web-based administrative, teacher, and parent/student portal for our district."

Top of the Class

Since its implementation last year, **eSchoolPLUS** has garnered rave reviews from parents and students, who can now access a wealth of information via the secure, password-protected portal, Home Access.

"We did a survey last year — teachers and staff in one group, parents and students in another — and found tremendous parent and student satisfaction with Home Access," explained Hames, adding that according to the district's master technology plan, all teachers will be trained to use these online tools by 2011. "Parents want more teachers to participate and publish their grades online. As teachers become more comfortable with the system and the concept, that shift will happen."

The district plans to further leverage **eSchoolPLUS's** capabilities by tapping into the expanding repository of test scores in order to intervene in cases where students begin to have difficulty. "This should be our primary source for data," he said. "That being the case, a company with vision can see, 'Now that we've got this data, maybe we can do more with it.' I feel SunGard describes the vision better than the other companies:

It's something that doesn't necessarily pay off immediately, but does pay off in the long run."

Making It Happen

Tamalpais, a self-proclaimed "pushy" district, is unafraid to voice its opinion, said Hames. Having suffered through a negative experience with its first SIS, Tamalpais was vocal about any concerns, and SunGard's sales and support teams were quick to respond.

Hames, for example, attended all 50-plus training sessions for staff, and communicates with SunGard via its annual client conference, the technical support line and his membership in SunGard's Customer Advisory Committee, he said. This gives him visibility into SunGard's product plans, allows him to share ideas and concerns, and further opens the lines of communication, notes Hames.

SunGard's responsiveness quickly removed any hint of burn-out from Hames' prior experience. "SunGard has been very responsive and understanding. That's what we didn't have for two and a half years with our other vendor," he said.

The district, for example, requested four changes, including the lack of a catch-all area for miscellaneous information. "We saw that this was missing early on, talked to SunGard about it and they implemented a function called Student Notes," said Hames. "That was a big deal and a great thing to have out of the gate. It didn't seem to them like a big issue, but I know if we'd launched the system without this capability it would have been a problem for users."

Lessons Learned

Having learned what it didn't want from a student information system, Tamalpais Unified High School District is optimistic about **eSchoolPLUS** and the possibilities for even further growth with the system. As the relationship continues, as teachers become more comfortable with the technology and parents increasingly rely on the portal to monitor their child's performance, Tamalpais and SunGard expect to remain at the top of the class.

"We're very satisfied with the system and with SunGard," said Hames. "We're going to continue to devote the time and money we need to in order to make sure **eSchoolPLUS** meets the needs of our district."

Connect the Community

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