



Overview

Country or Region: United States
Industry: Education—K-12

Customer Profile

The Pennsylvania Virtual Charter School (PAVCS) was founded in 2001 and is based in Norristown, Pennsylvania. It employs 235 people and, in 2010, enrolled 3,800 students.

Business Situation

With a growing number of virtual charter schools in the state, PAVCS needed to become more competitive and therefore sought to streamline business processes and control costs.

Solution

PAVCS replaced Windows SharePoint Services 2.0 with Microsoft SharePoint Server 2010 and upgraded to Microsoft Office 2010 and Windows 7.

Benefits

- Expense-reporting costs down by 50 percent
- Compliance processes streamlined dramatically
- Third-party software costs down by U.S.\$45,000 yearly

Charter School Streamlines Processes, Saves \$45,000 a Year with Collaboration Solution

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Michael J. Rublesky III, Senior Director of Technology, Pennsylvania Virtual Charter School

Facing increasing competition, the Pennsylvania Virtual Charter School (PAVCS) needed a way to make itself the school of choice for parents who are seeking a public-school environment that students can attend while at home. Executives decided the more efficient they could make such processes as expense reporting and asset tracking, the easier it would be for the school to continue providing excellent support and services to parents and an outstanding education for students. PAVCS upgraded to Microsoft Office Professional Plus 2010 and replaced Windows SharePoint Services 2.0 with Microsoft SharePoint Server 2010. As a result, PAVCS expects to reduce expense-reporting time by 50 percent and cut a week or more from some processes required for compliance. In addition, PAVCS expects to save U.S.\$45,000 a year by retiring a third-party application that it used for asset tracking.



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Situation

The Pennsylvania Virtual Charter School (PAVCS) offers kindergarten through twelfth-grade students an alternative to a traditional public school, giving them the opportunity to receive a public education using the Internet from home and benefit from a flexible, interactive environment. What sets PAVCS apart is its Diamond Model Partnership, a unique approach to collaboration among parents, certified teachers, and full-time staff dedicated to nonacademic support to ensure that students get the most out of the school's rigorous curriculum and the technology that PAVCS incorporates into that curriculum. PAVCS is especially committed to leveraging technology as a powerful education-support tool, and was among the first virtual charter school organizations in the United States to use the pioneering K¹² Inc. curriculum.

At its founding, PAVCS was one of just two virtual charter schools in the state of Pennsylvania, but by 2010, it competed for students with more than a dozen other such schools. This created significant pressure, according to Michael J. Rublesky III, Senior Director of Technology for the Pennsylvania Virtual Charter School.

“It's a big decision for a parent to choose a charter school, and so we have always worked hard to appeal to parents, showing them we can offer the best of what's available in traditional public schools while being a credible alternative to them,” Rublesky explains. “But now that parents have many other virtual charter schools to choose from, our appeal needs to be that much stronger.”

Rublesky says that one way for PAVCS to make itself attractive to parents is to ensure that the school spends its IT

dollars wisely, optimizing collaboration and efficiency in the myriad behind-the-scenes processes that support its academic objectives. “Having more than 200 staff members in various locations across the state, it's vital that we use technology to help people collaborate effectively while reducing paperwork and legwork,” he points out. Until recently, however, several key collaborative processes at PAVCS, including expense reporting and compliance, remained mired in a manual, paper-based approach.

Solution

To make all these processes more efficient, Rublesky and his colleagues decided to replace Windows SharePoint Services with Microsoft SharePoint Server 2010 and, at the same time, upgrade the school's then-current installation of Microsoft Office Professional 2007 to Microsoft Office Professional Plus 2010. “We liked what we learned about the business logic and workflow capabilities in SharePoint Server 2010, especially as it concerns document versioning and tracking,” Rublesky says. “We especially liked the support in SharePoint Server 2010 for uploading individual sections of notes created in the Microsoft OneNote 2010 note-taking program to SharePoint document libraries, as well as the extensive integration of SharePoint Server 2010 and Office 2010 as a whole.”

Rublesky's team also wanted to take advantage of Microsoft Office Web Apps, the online companions to Microsoft Office, so that students and faculty could update documents through the browser; the enhanced video-editing capabilities in the Microsoft PowerPoint 2010 presentation graphics program; and new features in Microsoft Excel 2010 spreadsheet software, particularly

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Joe Lyons, Executive Director of Communications, Pennsylvania Virtual Charter School

Sparklines, with which users can create small charts in a single cell to simplify the discovery of data patterns. To make the move to SharePoint Server 2010 and Office 2010 even more attractive, PAVCS could install the upgrades at no cost under the provisions of its Microsoft School Agreement.

During discussion of this upgrade, team members did consider implementing Google Docs instead of SharePoint Server 2010, because PAVCS staff members had briefly used the Google product. But according to Joe Lyons, Executive Director of Communications at the Pennsylvania Virtual Charter School, that consideration was brief.

“It soon became obvious that SharePoint Server 2010 was a better choice for us than Google Docs,” Lyons says. “SharePoint Server 2010 overcomes file-size limitations and provides built-in macros and modules, enhanced security, and far more integration than the Google products. Moreover, with SharePoint Server 2010, we wouldn’t have to enlist third-party backup technologies or worry that we would lose documents.”

Deployment involved personnel from PAVCS and two of its partners: ITNest, for the initial engineering of the SharePoint infrastructure, and Microsoft Gold Partner Weidenhammer Systems Corporation, for software migration and formatting issues. Rublesky and colleagues Ryan Lightcap and Nate Achey deployed Microsoft SharePoint Server 2010 and Microsoft Office Professional Plus 2010 to more than 200 PCs for use by PAVCS staff members.

Simultaneous with the Office 2010 and SharePoint Server 2010 deployments,

PAVCS upgraded the operating system on those PCs from the Windows Vista operating system to the 64-bit Windows 7 Enterprise operating system. Based on the school’s hardware refresh cycle, the team will deploy Windows 7 to all enrolled students as well, either in an upgrade or preinstalled on a new PC, during the 2011 school year or at the request of a parent.

PAVCS also plans to deploy internally developed applications for SharePoint Server 2010 that will help streamline expense reporting, enrollment, and communications with the Pennsylvania Department of Education in preparation for charter renewal. As part of this move, PAVCS is migrating nearly 45 gigabytes of shared files. Following these deployments, PAVCS will deploy Windows Phone 7 devices to staff members for further integration with SharePoint and Office.

Benefits

Rublesky, Lyons, and their colleagues are looking forward to short-term and long-term benefits from the deployment of Microsoft SharePoint Server 2010 and Office Professional Plus 2010. These benefits include cost savings, higher productivity, and greater efficiency in responding to staff, faculty, student, and parent requests—all of which will make it easier for PAVCS to provide academic excellence and appeal more effectively to parents who are considering PAVCS for their child.

Automates Expense Reporting

By using the business logic and workflow capabilities that are built in to SharePoint Server 2010, PAVCS will move expense reporting away from its formerly paper-based environment of printed forms and stapled credit-card slips.

"We'll save about \$45,000 a year in licensing and support costs by eliminating a third-party application that we have used for asset tracking."

Michael J. Rublesky III, Senior Director of Technology, Pennsylvania Virtual Charter School

"Each month we are processing nearly 200 expense reports for remotely based staff members," Rublesky explains. "By moving expense reporting to SharePoint Server 2010, we'll reduce the time that staff members spend on this process by half. We'll also enable them to receive reimbursement one or two days sooner than before."

Simplifies Compliance

Compliance is another area in which real-time access to documents makes a difference. "We have always maintained the highest levels of document integrity and privacy, even when we used a third-party vendor for document management and storage," Rublesky says. "But now, by maintaining essential documents on SharePoint sites that run on our own servers, we can more easily provide the logs and other compliance records that are regularly required by auditors at the Pennsylvania Department of Education."

For example, Rublesky explains that PAVCS no longer must request compliance records from the third-party vendor, which involved a turnaround time of a week or more. "Instead, we can make the documents available immediately to compliance managers," he says. "This reinforces our reputation as an organization committed to the highest levels of compliance."

Tracks Assets in Real Time

Over the next two years, PAVCS will enjoy additional efficiencies and savings by using SharePoint sites to deliver information from a server-based application that Rublesky plans to develop and deploy for the business-critical process of asset tracking.

"With a one-time upfront cost of about four hours of my time, we'll provide real-time asset-tracking information for

anyone authorized to access it," he says. "I'll no longer have to spend the typical 16 hours each month producing a quarterly report, and our chief financial officer and board members will no longer have to wait for that report, or take the time to email staff members to request status information. Even better, we'll save around [U.S.]\$45,000 a year in licensing and support costs by eliminating a third-party application that we have used for asset tracking."

From streamlining staff processes to saving time and money on expense reporting, compliance, and asset tracking, the actual and anticipated benefits of having deployed SharePoint Server 2010, along with Office Professional Plus 2010 and Windows 7, are elements of a much larger picture. As Rublesky explains, "Having this technology in place is fundamental to helping us maintain our leadership in virtual charter education in the state of Pennsylvania and serve as a national model for educational innovation."

For More Information

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For more information about ITNest, call 215-394-5363 or visit the website at:
www.ITNest.com

For more information about Weidenhammer Systems Corporation, call 866-497-2227 or visit the website at:
www.hammer.net

For more information about the Pennsylvania Virtual Charter School, call 866-PAVCS-K12 or visit the website at:
www.pavcsk12.org

Microsoft SharePoint Server 2010

Microsoft SharePoint Server 2010 is the business collaboration platform for the enterprise and the Web.

For more information about Microsoft SharePoint Server 2010, go to:
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