



Overview

Country or Region: United States

Industry: Education—K–12

Customer Profile

The Pittsford Central School District, located near Rochester, New York, serves 6,000 students in nine schools. In 2010, the district employed 1,100 people.

Business Situation

Schools in the Pittsford Central School District struggled with inefficient teacher/student communications and an inconsistent environment for producing and managing student assignments.

Solution

The Pittsford Central School District completed a pilot project involving Microsoft Live@edu and made plans to implement the service to 3,000 students in grades 8 through 12 by the start of the 2011–2012 school year.

Benefits

- Helps teachers maintain focus on academics
- Saves U.S.\$40,000 yearly on storage and backup
- Provides new opportunities for academic innovation

School District Implements Hosted Email and Storage, Supports Innovation, Collaboration

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Jeff Cimmerer, Director of Technology, Pittsford Central School District

The Pittsford Central School District is located in western New York state and in the 2010–2011 school year educated 6,000 students. To help maintain a long tradition of academic excellence, the district wanted to address challenges surrounding student-teacher email communication and the need for greater online collaboration. In response, the district completed a pilot implementation of Microsoft Live@edu, a free, hosted communication and collaboration service. Based on the success of that pilot, the district will pursue an implementation of Live@edu for students in grades 8 through 12 starting in the 2011–2012 school year. Administrators anticipate using the service to help teachers focus more on academics and less on communication logistics, to help the district cut IT costs by U.S.\$40,000 yearly, and to expand opportunities for academic innovation and collaboration.

“Based on the enthusiasm of staff members who participated in the pilot and of students whom we recently polled, we anticipate a 90 percent adoption rate by our third year of having implemented Live@edu, and following it, Office 365.”

Charles Profitt, Systems Administrator,
Pittsford Central School District

Situation

Established in 1946, the Pittsford Central School District encompasses two high schools, two middle schools, and five elementary schools in western New York state. The Pittsford Central School District is renowned for academic excellence, with both of its high schools having been named more than once to the “top 100” listings of U.S. high schools in *Newsweek* and *U.S. News & World Report* magazines.

One factor behind the district’s academic leadership is a strong commitment to providing educators and students with the tools they need to maintain a focus on teaching and learning. For example, starting in the mid-2000s, Pittsford Central School District provided email capabilities for teachers and offered accounts to students as well. But because federal law mandates that such accounts be internal only, most students opted instead to use their personal email accounts for communicating with teachers and delivering assignments. As a result, there was little email-related work for district IT personnel, but quite a bit of it for some teachers.

“At the start of each school year, I would collect email addresses, but would misinterpret some students’ handwriting and have to request their addresses again,” says Karen Smith, Instructor of Environmental Sciences, Mendon High School, Pittsford Central School District. “Just as often, a student might switch email accounts without informing me, and I would have to repeat the process with that student. In either case, the paperwork consumed time and effort that should have been devoted to teaching.”

The individual approach that stymied efficient email communications between teachers and students also caused

problems in the production and delivery of student assignments. “Although we try to maintain the latest version of Microsoft Office throughout the district, students sometimes used earlier versions of the software, or different software altogether, to complete assignments on their home computers,” says Jeff Cimmerer, Director of Technology, Pittsford Central School District. “As a result, file and format incompatibility problems were common.”

Versioning conflicts and lost assignments were similarly common. “Students working on an assignment at home might email one version to the teacher, and then later update their work but forget to send the teacher the new version,” Cimmerer explains. “Or students might download a report to a Flash drive and then forget to bring the drive to school, or even misplace it. These problems were even worse when an assignment involved collaboration among two or more students.”

Solution

Cimmerer and his colleagues began seeking a way to provide teachers and students with a more efficient online work environment. “Because many students used Gmail [Google Mail] for their personal accounts, we briefly considered implementing Google Apps for Education, but decided instead on Microsoft Live@edu online services,” he says. “With our Microsoft Exchange Server messaging environment and Active Directory Domain Services, we recognized that creating and managing nearly 3,000 accounts—for our target population of students in grades 8 through 12—would be a lot easier with Live@edu than with Google Apps for Education.”

According to Charles Profitt, Systems Administrator for the Pittsford Central School District, team members also were

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impressed by Live@edu services beyond email. “Microsoft Office Web Apps and Windows Live SkyDrive seemed ideal for helping us address compatibility and versioning problems,” Profitt says. “We also saw future collaboration opportunities with Microsoft Office 365, the successor to Live@edu, as well as near-term collaboration opportunities for teachers who were using Microsoft SharePoint Server 2010 and wanted an email solution that they could integrate into that environment without a lot of effort.”

In early 2011, Cimmerer’s team selected Smith, who was one such teacher, and two other staff members to participate in a pilot implementation of Live@edu that included Office Web Apps, Microsoft Outlook Live, and SkyDrive online storage. The team also engaged the services of Computer Generated Solutions (CGS), a member of the Microsoft Partner Network with Gold competencies.

As Cimmerer explains, CGS played an essential role in the project. “CGS consultants helped provide access to unreleased code that we needed for using Microsoft Forefront Identity Manager 2010 to synchronize passwords between our Active Directory Domain Services and Outlook Live,” he says. “We needed this code, later released as an add-in to Outlook Live Directory Sync for Live@edu, because our Active Directory resides in a [Windows Server 2008 R2] 64-bit environment. Thanks to CGS, we were able to move ahead with the pilot instead of having to wait for that release.”

The team began hands-on work on the Live@edu pilot project in April 2011 and completed the project in four weeks “without a single snag and meeting all benchmarks,” according to Cimmerer. Based on the success of the project, the

district will implement Live@edu for its target students by the start of the 2011–2012 school year.

As Profitt explains, the implementation will involve no formal promotion or training, because student adoption of Live@edu will be entirely voluntary. “We are not mandating the use of Live@edu, because we’re confident we won’t need to,” he says. “Based on the enthusiasm of staff members who participated in the pilot and of students whom we recently polled, we anticipate a 90 percent adoption rate by our third year of having implemented Live@edu, and following it, Office 365.”

Benefits

Cimmerer and his colleagues are looking forward to significant benefits once Live@edu is fully implemented. These benefits include a more productive communication environment for teachers and students, a more reliable way for students to maintain and organize their work, significant cost savings on file storage, and expanded opportunities for academic collaboration.

Less Logistics, More Academics

With Live@edu, Pittsford Central School District teachers will have a full-featured messaging solution without the struggle of keeping up with students’ individual email addresses. “Thanks to Live@edu, I’ll worry a lot less about the logistics of email communications with my students, and focus a lot more on the content of those communications,” Smith says.

Students, too, will have less to worry about when it comes to producing and delivering their assignments. “File incompatibility, versioning conflicts, work left on the home computer or a misplaced Flash drive—Live@edu will put out all those fires,” Cimmerer says. “That’s because students

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will work in the same desktop-productivity environment and save their work to a single, reliable storage environment that is equally accessible from home and school.”

Yearly Savings of \$40,000

As a bonus, the Live@edu storage environment will be far more cost-effective than what the school has traditionally offered onsite. “On our onsite servers, we provide one gigabyte of storage per student, but through SkyDrive, we’ll provide 25 times that volume while saving [U.S.]\$40,000 yearly on storage and tape back-up systems,” Cimmerer says.

Stronger Innovation and Collaboration

With the implementation of Live@edu, the Pittsford Central School District also will be able to enhance academic innovation and collaboration. “With Live@edu, we’ll have a controlled environment that enables learning to take place outside the walls of the classroom and regular school hours,” Profitt says. “We’ll be able to pursue projects involving collaboration among students at different grade levels, as well as projects involving other academic institutions, without exposing our students to the entirety of the web.”

For her part, Smith envisions bringing students into a fully collaborative environment that she is already planning, based on her experience with SharePoint Server 2010.

“I have long wanted to use SharePoint Server for collaboration in subject areas where field projects are key,” Smith says. “Through a common SharePoint site, for example, students will be able to post photographic and video-based data of environmental phenomena along with their reports, analyses, presentations, blogs, and whatever other content applies. This is the kind of innovative learning environment

that encourages student creativity, problem solving, and active participation, and having Live@edu—an email solution that seamlessly integrates into that environment—will make it all possible.”

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For more information about Pittsford Central School District, call (585) 267-1000 or visit the website at:
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