



Box Forest College deploys the Microsoft Learning Gateway framework to standardize teaching practices and engage students

Overview

Country or region: Australia
Industry: Education

Customer Profile

Box Forest College in Melbourne is a co-educational public school catering for 500 students in Years 7 to 12.

Business Situation

Box Forest College wanted to standardize teaching practice and assessment, improve information sharing and provide students with relevant learning methodologies and technologies that they would experience in the workplace.

Solution

Box Forest College deployed a solution based on the Microsoft Learning Gateway called Scholaris.

Benefits

- Staff can access all the applications and resources they need from one location, and even enter attendance wirelessly from the classroom.
- Students have personalized workspaces where they can view timetables, access the Internet, and manage and store their assignments.
- Administration staff have everything at their fingertips

“We knew if we were going to engage our students, they needed relevant, up to date ways to learn and stay on top of their studies.”

Cheryl Baulch, Principal, Box Forest College

To standardize teaching practices and assessment, provide faster, easier access to teaching resources and facilitate learning, Box Forest College worked with Microsoft Partner, Solutions IT to deploy Scholaris Learning Gateway, a solution based on the Microsoft Learning Gateway framework.

Leveraging Microsoft® Office and Microsoft® Office SharePoint® Server 2007, as well as other Microsoft technologies, the Microsoft Learning Gateway enables schools to connect their student administration and learning management systems, as well as other databases, along with learning resources, calendaring, timetabling and applications and present this in individualised web portal sites for staff and students.

Staff have everything they need to do their job in one place. Students can download learning material, complete and submit homework and take part in online discussions. Administration staff have everything at their fingertips. Even parents will soon be able to access an individual portal to monitor their child's progress and view teacher feedback.

Situation

For more than a decade the use of technology had been increasing at Box Forest College. By 2005, the school infrastructure, which caters for more than 500 students in Years 7 to 12, comprised of: a wireless network which teachers use for access via their notebooks; four technology labs of desktop PCs; 15 desktop PCs in the library; a computer pod of ten desktop PCs in the science wing and 30 PDAs, which are used as data-loggers for science projects and as literacy tools.

IT Coordinator Tony Marchesan and Principal Cheryl Baulch wanted to integrate the use of this technology more closely into the curriculum to make learning contemporary and relevant.

Cheryl Baulch explains, "We knew if we were going to engage our students, they needed relevant, up-to-date ways to learn and stay on top of their studies."

However, both were convinced that in order to do so, the technology systems themselves needed to be better integrated and more accessible. Otherwise too much class time was wasted hunting for resources or applications and there were no common policies regarding storing assignments or processes for sharing teacher materials.

At the same time, Tony Marchesan, who is both the IT Coordinator and a Chemistry teacher at the College, was looking for a solution that could simplify IT management across the school so that he could manage his increasing workload.

Solution

After weighing up their options, Tony Marchesan and Cheryl Baulch decided to trial the Scholaris Learning Gateway - a solution based on the Microsoft Learning Gateway - over a 12-month period. This was deployed for them by Microsoft partner and Scholaris developer Solutions IT, who integrated the College student administration and

curriculum systems, along with school timetabling and calendar information. Information, systems and resources were then made available via a school portal solution.

The Scholaris Learning Gateway solution achieves this by leveraging the Microsoft platform, including products such as Microsoft® Office, Microsoft® Office SharePoint® Server, Microsoft® Exchange™ Server, Microsoft® SQL™ Server and Microsoft® Windows 2003 Server. As a result, the College has a complete communication and collaboration solution, as well as an online learning management system that enables teachers to create lesson plans, manage classes, and perform curriculum assessments online.

Staff at Box Forest College use their notebooks to log in using a user name and password to gain immediate access to a personalized web portal with all the applications, resources and student information they need - either at school or from home.

And as both the administration and the curriculum networks are now integrated, teachers can check student contact details, update lesson plans and post assignments without having to log in and out of the two separate networks.

Tony Marchesan comments: "Not only has it saved a lot of time, it has also enabled staff to stay right on top of development.

Information is always current; for example, when an authorized staff member updates information, the system publishes it straight away."

This has made it far simpler for teachers to stay in touch and has reduced double entry, errors and time-wasting.

Tony Marchesan comments: "Scholaris Learning Gateway has great features that teachers have been experimenting with, especially the activity tools that step them through creating online lessons and individualized learning programs."

Once teachers were familiar and confident with the Learning Gateway solution, Tony Marchesan opened up access to the students.

Via a personalized portal site, students can now store work, access email and the Internet, work collaboratively on projects, check school timetables, complete assignments and manage their homework. Both teachers and students can also use the Learning Gateway solution to collaborate on projects with other schools via the web.

Benefits

Both Tony Marchesan and Cheryl Baulch agree that the Learning Gateway solution has improved communication and helped teachers and students share ideas and information, leading to many benefits.

Easier learning management for students

With the Learning Gateway solution in place, students at Box Forest College simply log in to their secure portal site to see their daily or weekly timetable, curriculum resources, lesson plans and student assessments. This makes it far easier for them to stay on top of learning, know when assignments or school events are coming up, and communicate with the right people when they do have an issue. They also have easy access to a wide range of resources to help them learn.

Tony Marchesan comments: "We provide access to Microsoft® Encarta® and other learning resources within each student's portal site. Students can either log in using the school computers or log in from home when they need to complete school work or carry out research."

Increased job satisfaction for staff

Staff are enjoying the flexibility that the solution has brought them. They can log in to their personalized web portal from anywhere, so it's easy for them to tap into the resources they need, even if they're at home.

They also appreciate the streamlining of the administration processes, which has freed them up for more important tasks like lesson preparation, marking, research and helping their students achieve their best.

Another benefit has been the increased use of email which has seen a decrease in the number of phone calls. Staff are now communicating with each other via email and have been able to respond to parent enquiries via email as well.

Reduced operational costs

According to Cheryl Baulch, the Scholaris Learning Gateway solution has also enabled Box Forest College to better manage their annual budgets and school administration. "We've cut down on a lot of incidental costs," says Cheryl Baulch. "For example, there has been a marked decrease in photocopying and time associated with handing out assignments. "Using Scholaris Learning Gateway, teachers are creating assignments online and emailing the location and details of these assignments to their students."

In the past, teachers would have photocopied at least 30 papers and handed them out during class. Students would have taken them home and possibly handed them back when completed. This was not just a waste of paper; it was also a long process, fraught with complications such as lost assignments and time management challenges. Now teachers can see online who's completed their assignment and who needs chasing up prior to the deadline.

Curriculum Accountability

From a curriculum perspective, Scholaris Learning Gateway has given Principal Cheryl Baulch a robust and flexible architecture that enables her to streamline curriculum material, resources and content for teachers and students.

Cheryl Baulch comments: "This ensures greater accountability when it comes to following the curriculum."

“For example, teachers can quickly see what they are supposed to be teaching in class, according to curriculum guidelines.

“And I can also see where teachers are in the curriculum guidelines to ensure we are on track.”

Smart profiling tools in the Box Forest solution even show where students and classes stack up against state or school criteria.

“I can see what level individual students have reached – making it easier for me to monitor their progress through school,” comments Cheryl.

“Ultimately, it gives me greater accountability when it comes to reporting, whether to the regional office or to parents.”

Improved attendance management

The use of electronic attendance records has enabled teachers to quickly manage class attendance and update student absences in real-time, wirelessly from the classroom. This alerts administration staff who can telephone parents seeking an explanation.

Improved IT management

With Scholaris Learning Gateway, Tony Marchesan now has a solution that’s easy to manage, and can be simply scaled as the needs of staff and students evolve. The Learning Gateway has also simplified application deployment by centralizing IT management and provisioning through one browser-based interface.

Tony Marchesan comments: “The Scholaris Learning Gateway solution has proven to be much more cost-effective to deploy and maintain than we imagined.”

Engaging parents

Now that the solution has been successfully deployed at the College, Tony Marchesan plans to extend it to improve communications between teachers and parents. Parents will be given access to their own personalized web portal from where they can see how their

child is progressing by viewing academic results, assignments and attendance. They’ll also be able to view school photos, be notified of their child’s assignments due dates and read school news, keeping them more involved with their child’s academic progress and the school community.

The Future of Learning Management

Based in Perth, Western Australia Solutions IT is rapidly gaining a global reputation for the development and delivery of state of the art learning management systems built on the Microsoft Learning Gateway framework. Director of Software development Cliff Lloyd believes the company has much to offer the K-12 education market.

“We have hundreds of schools in Australia and Canada now ready to implement the latest version of the Scholaris Learning Gateway - Scholaris 2007,” says Lloyd. “Schools have seen how the product integrates their current services whilst at the same time providing a unique and efficient learning management system teachers will embrace.”

The company is also looking to the future of Scholaris 2007 with significant upgrades and added functionality due in early 2007. Improvements include a reporting module and world first Early Learner portal which will deliver the system to younger users via a graphical interface.

For More Information

For more information about Microsoft products and services, please call 13 20 58 (Australia). For more information about Microsoft's education solutions, please visit the Web site at www.microsoft.com.au/education/

For more information about Microsoft Learning Gateway, visit www.microsoft.com/australia/education/schools.msp

For more information about Solutions IT products and services, visit the Web site at www.solutionsit.com/

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