

Case Study

Southgate Community School District

Southgate Community Schools: Teacher Connectivity Breeds Whole-School Engagement.

The Challenge

How does a school district that understands the importance of collaboration – among teachers, professionals, students and even parents – best leverage all of the assets, including technology and information resources? Today’s 21st Century learning environment is charged with finding the best way to optimize instructional materials, share curricula and rich-media content resources, while facing the reality that these resources can be scarce. Furthermore, teachers’ valuable time must be protected and their best efforts must be extended beyond their classroom – to the whole school or even district. Only advanced communications tools that allow group collaboration, individual personalization and engagement of students will achieve all of these goals. But which to choose? These were some of the questions and challenges that Southgate Community School professionals were trying to answer in searching for the right learning environment.

To keep a step ahead, Southgate Community Schools, near Detroit, Michigan, recognized the need to improve the technology platform within its schools. Its lack of technology was particularly difficult for the elementary teachers: with 6 buildings housing 130 instructors teaching the same content, Southgate found itself at a loss due to its inability to share resources among its schools.

“We were at a disadvantage by not providing a 21st Century learning environment for our teachers and students,” said Mike Toschi, Southgate Director of Technology. “Southgate supports a community of collaboration, but we did not have the capacity to give our teachers the tools to share classroom information, notes and quizzes with one another or to allow our students to access this information. Our biggest challenge was finding a way to keep our teachers and students connected.”

To promote the sharing of information and collaboration across the district, Southgate needed to establish a way for its teachers and students to communicate with one another.

The Solution

The administration at Southgate explored options for implementing an environment in which teachers were able to share curriculum content, collaborate on their lesson plans and communicate in an easy and timely manner.

“Administration decided that the solution to our problem was to implement a technology platform that would improve communication throughout the district,” said Toschi. “Our teachers needed a way to collaborate both easily and effectively. For the 21st Century classroom, technology seemed the most appropriate solution.”

Southgate selected Studywiz Spark, the first and only Dynamic LearnSpace for K-12 education, to connect its teachers and students. Studywiz Spark gives teachers a place to easily manage, personalize and distribute curriculum within a multimedia setting; gives students a place to safely explore and learn new concepts; and offers parents a place to engage in their children’s progress. Furthermore, it provides administrators a place to optimize their curriculum investment.

“The multimedia capabilities, like online testing, chats and eLocker, that Studywiz Spark provides have exceeded our expectations in connecting teachers across the district,” said Toschi. “Not only can our teachers communicate with one another, but our students can also access Studywiz Spark both in and out of the classroom. Collaboration among teachers has greatly increased, and students are becoming more engaged in learning through the multimedia rich content that is available through Studywiz Spark. Even parents can access Studywiz Spark to stay up-to-speed on their children’s classroom activity. What started as an effort to connect teachers has evolved into a school-wide process of engagement.”

Studywiz Spark simplifies the complex interactions between technology and educational curricula, and makes existing curricula more dynamic by enabling personalized learning,

active communication and real-time assessment and results. With its roots in the K-12 education industry, Studywiz Spark tailors itself to the current issues and trends that impact K-12 students and the key stakeholders – teachers, parents, and administrators. Studywiz Spark has the power to be the first system to appropriately integrate mobile technologies into the classroom, and it provides access to a variety of multimedia capabilities to enhance learning, including: multicontent activity, RSS feeds, iPod synchronization, podcasts, personalized folders and teams, collaborative galleries, eLocker, eBulletin, online calendars, messaging, chat, discussion, online testing, real-time reporting and online polls.

The Results

Southgate uses Studywiz Spark as the tool that allows its schools to adapt to the changing needs of 21st Century learners. Using Studywiz Spark, Southgate is able to create and distribute multimedia content and provide teachers, students and parents with access to information from any place, at any time.

“We are thrilled with the capabilities that our schools now have with Studywiz Spark,” said Jackie McGowan, Special Education Middle School Teacher. “The ability to access information from any place and at any time is crucial to our goals. By providing our teachers, students, and even parents with this ability, we have noticed that they are re-engaging learning and are elevating it to a new level.”

During the previous school year, approximately 35 Southgate teachers and 800 Southgate students consistently used Studywiz Spark. Studywiz Spark allowed them to access: study games, tests, assignment outlines, grades, photo galleries, links and videos – to name a few. The reaction from Southgate to the capabilities provided by Studywiz Spark has been extremely positive, and teachers and students alike rave about their experiences with the Dynamic LearnSpace.

“My kids thrive on this tool,” said Joe Reynolds, Computer Teacher, Gerisch Middle School. “They want up-to-the-minute data on grades, assignments and anything else I can think of to put on Studywiz Spark. In one day alone, it has been recorded that there were over 340 student log-ins to Studywiz Spark between 4:00pm and 10:30pm – not even during the school day. These records prove that students are accessing educational information outside the classroom. This is phenomenal!”

“I really enjoy using Studywiz Spark, and I check it almost everyday, so I can keep updated on my class work and club meetings,” said Kaitlyn Lemay, Student, Southgate High School. “Studywiz Spark is perfect for when I’m at home and having trouble with my homework; I can post a question, and anyone else who is logged in can help me.”

Southgate is excited about the capabilities that Studywiz Spark provides for teachers, students and parents and has noticed a significant improvement in collaboration across the district, positioning Southgate among top schools leading the way in educational technology. In the future, Southgate foresees having its classrooms revolve entirely around Studywiz Spark’s safe, teacher-managed and content-agnostic multimedia setting for the 21st Century classroom. Southgate plans expanded use of Studywiz Spark, including:

A Curriculum Repository: The curriculum repository is a level within Studywiz Spark assigned only to teachers and is broken into classes. This is the place where teachers share the content that they’ve created with Studywiz Spark. This area will allow instant access to resources for teachers coming on board with Studywiz Spark. Southgate believes the repository will further promote a culture of integration and sharing of valuable content and best practices.

WebDAV: The WebDAV feature will allow Southgate to position the eLocker on the desktop for drag and drop capabilities. This is a need for Southgate students and teachers, because it allows much easier access to the eLocker.

Math benchmark assessments: Using the QTAssessment resource, common math tests that all elementary students are required to take for North Central Accreditation data and remediation, Southgate will create

math benchmark tracking functions within Studywiz Spark. These assessments will be created for all grades and content areas.

Parent Expansion: Southgate wants to expand Studywiz Spark access to its parents. Southgate believes outward communications to parents around the benefits of Studywiz Spark will improve parental involvement.

For further information on Studywiz Spark visit www.studywiz.com