K-12

"It is totally one-stop shopping. And we believe it's making the district far more cost-effective as well."

- Keith Pomeroy
Director of Technology
Olentangy Local School District

Customer Profile

FirstClass Provides Olentangy Local School District with District-Wide Email, Online Learning Communities, Student-Teacher Collaboration and Safe Social Networking

The Olentangy Local School District, located in southern Delaware County, Ohio, serves approximately 13,000 students from preschool through twelfth grade. It is the fastest growing school district in the state of Ohio with an annual growth rate of over 1,000 students. According to projections, the district expects student enrollment to reach more than 24,000 by 2018.

When Keith Pomeroy joined Olentangy in 2001 as the director of technology, the decisions about which networks and applications to purchase were being handled by outside consultants. In order to get better control of Olentangy's IT environment, Pomeroy knew he needed to take back the district. He evaluated the district's IT infrastructure and operational processes and concluded that a more efficient and integrated IT platform was required. His goal was to create a scalable and flexible environment for the teachers, staff and students that would meet all their communication, collaboration and knowledge sharing requirements.

The Situation

In 2001, Olentangy was using POP3 to retrieve email from the server. It was a client-based system with the software running on each user's machine. This led to several inefficiencies. For example, when someone received a new computer, technical support had to manually transfer all of the mail from the old computer to the new one. In addition, the only way people could get an updated list of new employees was to download the information from the server to their POP3 mail client. According to Pomeroy, however, people weren't updating their information which meant the email system could not be considered a reliable communication tool.

"It was clear we needed a better approach," says Pomeroy. "I discovered that we had Novell GroupWise so I went to the other districts that were running GroupWise and did some research on the system. I soon found that it didn't provide the feature-rich communication and collaboration capabilities that I knew were available with FirstClass, having used that product since 1994. There really was no other choice for me. FirstClass speaks for itself."

Today, Olentangy uses four products: Apple Mac OS for the server, FileMaker Pro from a database standpoint, FirstClass for email and collaboration, and Remote Scope for the remote management of the systems. "Those four products are the core of everything we do," says Pomeroy. "By eliminating Novell, we were able to free up $40,000 to $50,000 within our budget which would probably have added up to $60,000 a year after supplemental costs were factored in. I was able to take that money and re-purpose it."

FIRST CLASS®
Powering collaborative online communities.

With the FirstClass Collaboration Suite, Olentangy Local School teachers, employees and students now have access to the latest technologies for district-wide email, online learning communities, safe social networking, student-teacher collaboration, curriculum development, and much more. The fully integrated suite is cost-effective, flexible and easy to use and administer.

'One-Stop Shopping' for Teachers and Staff

The Olentangy staff was the first group to be introduced to the core collaboration capabilities of FirstClass Conferences, online permissions-based spaces that enable groups to securely communicate, collaborate and interact on shared topics of interest. "Some people were using Netscape Messenger and some were using Outlook, so getting them onto FirstClass was a change for them, but they were able to understand the conferencing structure in no time. And once they started seeing that information is located in central places that they can all get to, people started to adjust to that culture pretty quickly."

With FirstClass, Pomeroy has the one-stop shopping environment that he envisioned. "If I'm a teacher and I can interact with students in a space where I'm always in, I'm more likely to do that than if I have to go and learn some other product and go somewhere else to do it. If I can check my email and turn in my sick leave or my vacation leave in a space where I am all the time, I'm far more likely to do that. If all of these things are available in a single environment, it significantly improves user adoption."

> Olentangy estimates the savings from using FirstClass at approximately $1 Million over 5 years by eliminating additional software packages, training and outsourcing costs.

Enhancing the Classroom with FirstClass ED®

When Pomeroy first introduced FirstClass ED to the teachers he let them know that he didn't expect the technology to replace the classroom, but instead that it is designed to enhance it. FirstClass ED delivers the flexibility to extend education beyond the traditional brick and mortar classroom setting, providing an easy-to-use solution for automating and enhancing the process of learning. Students can access class resources as well as work on and submit assignments, and teachers can review lesson plans, share curriculum, post and access course resources and more — whether they are in the classroom or at home.

Pomeroy offers an example of how FirstClass could benefit the foreign language teachers who currently use a small piece of software for students to record their assignments. These recordings are saved as a file on the server and the teacher needs to physically be at the school to connect to the server and listen to the assignments and grade them. "If a student has a microphone connected to their computer they can record directly to a message inside FirstClass ED and then submit the assignment," says Pomeroy. "The teacher could grade this assignment from home, school, or wherever they have access to FirstClass. It's a big benefit to be able to listen to those assignments, grade them, and give immediate feedback to the students. We see anytime/anywhere access capabilities of FirstClass eliminating many boundaries."

Not long after installing the system, Pomeroy heard from the high school English teachers about the summer reading assignments for their students. "Our English teachers said they wanted to move all of their summer reading into a FirstClass ED conference so they could interact with their students in that space instead of having to wait until the start of the school year," says Pomeroy.

Pomeroy has also been trying to encourage teachers to use FirstClass for full course development. "There are a lot of great features for the teachers. For example, a teacher can build their curriculum in their space and then turn it on or off whenever they want to and make it visible to students when required. Students can turn in their assignments and when the teacher logs in, they can grade the assignments right in the FirstClass space. If the teacher wants to reveal that mark to the student they can. There is a tremendous amount of flexibility with FirstClass ED."

There are now several teachers posting assignments in workspaces, online shared spaces for smaller groups similar to FirstClass conferences, and giving students the opportunity to complete them electronically. "We had a senior who came to us and said if I don't have to carry all of my assignments in my backpack between school and home, I'd be in heaven. They are incredibly happy to do their work electronically."

In addition to posting assignments, FirstClass ED enables teachers to post class calendars, news about what's going on in their classes, discussion areas, and journals. These resources can be turned on and off, whenever the teacher wants to enable or restrict access.

Growing the "Edu-Social Network"

FirstClass offers Olentangy what Pomeroy refers to as an "edu-social network" where students and teachers can interact and collaborate in a secure online place. But he says it is not enough for the teachers to decide how the online environment should be leveraged; he wants the kids to help drive the direction. "I believe that Olentangy is entering into a one-to-one initiative right now and by giving our students access to FirstClass accounts we want them to help define this social network," says Pomeroy. "Students today do not know a world without the Internet. Social networking is their world. Having an iPod headphone in one ear and talking to your friend and texting at the same time, these are all standard activities for them."

"A benefit of FirstClass is that the district already has the kind of technology that the students are accustomed to using on the social side and can now transition this knowledge to help them better manage their school life in the same way."

The district is currently in the process of building a space in FirstClass ED for students where they can interact with teachers, staff, and other students about their activities in terms of their school lives, and the educators and parents do not have to worry about the risks associated with unmonitored sites like MySpace and FaceBook.

As an experiment, one of the teachers decided to build a conference space to see if he could get some feedback on how to improve Eagle News, the news broadcasts that run in their buildings. He posted a message out into the conference space at 3:00 p.m. on a 'snow day' and by 8:00 a.m. the next morning 36 students had posted a response. "Our students had only recently received their accounts and there weren't very many teachers using it yet, so essentially what it proved to us is if you give them spaces, they'll use them immediately," says Pomeroy. "Right away, these kids started interacting and giving very good feedback about what they thought should happen."

Pomeroy plans to bring some middle school and high school students into the training sessions with teachers, so the students can show what they're doing and what types of conferences should be added in. "We can get immediate feedback from the students on whether the teachers are headed in the right direction or whether they're completely off the mark," says Pomeroy.

"At the middle school level, they're not necessarily tied to MySpace and Facebook accounts yet, which is why they are more likely to adopt this technology," says Pomeroy. "I need these students to start designing the spaces. As soon as they design one or two spaces within that community, it will drive more students to that social networking opportunity. I truly believe that students want more than just a one-way interaction from teachers."

Pomeroy says that research shows that kids think it's cool to be smart. "…so if you're not providing the resources and the tools that they need, they'll create it on their own. Our goal is to create a system that's useful enough that students will choose to pay us to keep their accounts active when they leave rather than give them up. If we are successful in creating a system that has that type of power, we can provide the opportunity for high school and middle school students to interact with students or graduates at the college and university level who can act as mentors. This has a tremendous amount of potential for encouraging these students to achieve as high as possible."

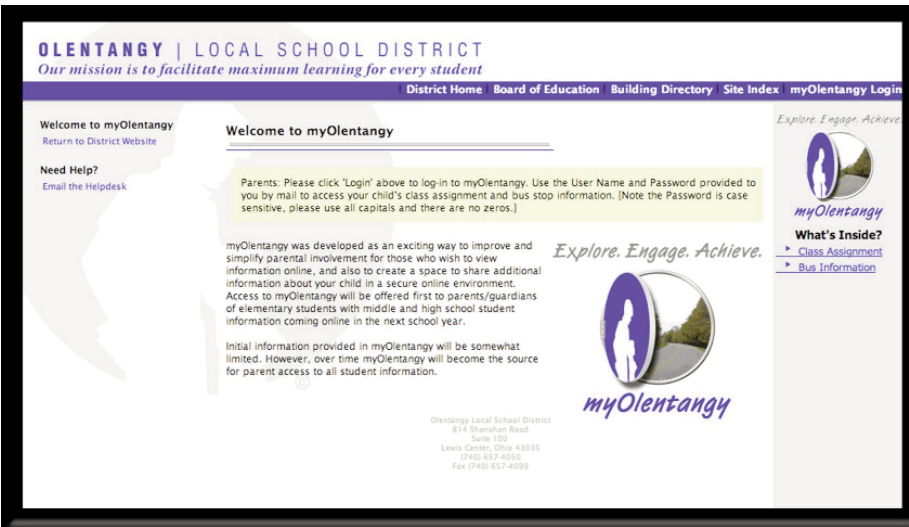### myOlentangy Portal Enhances Parental Involvement in their Child's Education

Olentangy has taken advantage of FirstClass as a development environment to create a portal for parents called 'myOlentangy.' Parents are given a FirstClass account with access to information about the school and their children – all through a secure Web interface. Rapid Web Designer (RWD), a third-party application available through FirstClass, is used by the teachers to build personalized Web pages that the parents access through the portal. RWD enables school districts to create Web templates so all district Web properties – the district, individual school, and individual teacher sites – have a consistent look and feel.

"Under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) it is illegal to post class lists on the doors of the elementary level schools," says Pomeroy. "We told our principals that in order for us to share this information, it would need to be made available to parents online via a portal, with a secure login space. Right away, we discussed the potential of implementing the portal on top of FirstClass and essentially built the portal in a month."

When the parents sign in to myOlentangy, they are given directions for easy navigation to details about their child's class assignment and transportation information.

Class Assignment shows information contained in the Olentangy database such as the school, the name of the teacher, and the classroom number. All of this information is saved in FirstClass documents and parents can request a printable version if they want to download a hard copy. The transportation information also comes from the database and is rendered out into that space.

With FirstClass, Olentangy will be able to deliver any information tied to a student ID directly to the parent area, for instance, a student's report card. "We will be able to render a PDF of a student's report card or interim report right into this space. We'll also generate student schedules directly into this area. The portal will have the consistent look and feel of the school district's Web site with all the capabilities of Adobe Acrobat right there. If a parent wants to save the file or print it, they'll be able to do that right from within their space."

At Olentangy, students at both the middle school and high school level have personal calendars in their FirstClass ED workspace for all of the different classes. If the teachers are using calendars to inform students of when assignments are due, a student can use what's called a "punch- through" calendar feature that combines all of those assignments from different calendars onto his or her own personal calendar. "We believe that we could then transition the personal calendar to the parent portal space so that a parent can see a calendar view of all of their child's assignments. Subsequently, we can do the same thing with calendars of events that are going on at a specific school. Parents will have the ability to opt in and have that calendar apply to their personal calendar inside My Olentangy News, a FirstClass conference that sends alerts to parents about

upcoming events they are interested in. The potential is endless!" says Pomeroy.

Future plans for the parent portal includes the delivery of report cards/interims as well as the option for online fee payments and paperless communication.

"We just moved to a new foodservice system which is a point-of-sale system for purchasing lunches. We're about to release the ability for a parent to look at the balance in their child's lunch account on a nightly basis. We're also looking into the concept of adding historical information so that parents will have some visibility into the food purchase patterns for their child."

The district will soon be introducing an online payment processing system within the portal from PaySchools™ to give parents the ability to add money to their child's lunch account directly within myOlentangy as well as pay student fees online.

Paperless Communication

In the midst of the myOlentangy roll-out, one of the buildings approached Pomeroy to say they wanted to replace hard copy communication with paperless communication by posting information online for the parents to access in myOlentangy. This would eliminate the issues the building was having controlling who was signing up to receive LISTSERV information about events at the building.

Pomeroy's goal from the outset was to build this together with FirstClass partner, Aptiris, and FirstClass Depot, who developed RWD. Once developed, the district could eliminate its reliance on other sources when they were ready to add more features to it. "We wanted to be able to grow this product on our own once it was in place," says Pomeroy. "And that is very much what we have done for this building, putting ourselves in a space where we know going forward we may partner at times with Aptiris or FirstClass Depot, but we can do a lot of development internally as well."

"A key benefit of the FirstClass parent portal is that we are able to set up an authenticated space for sensitive information that we know is only going out to the parents."

Olentangy is now piloting paperless communication for the building, giving the first grade parents (who chose to opt-in) a parent area in a FirstClass conference. When the principal, assistant principal and/or office staff has information that needs to be disseminated to the parents, such as a newsletter, they can post it directly into this space. This gives the building absolute control and independence when it comes to their communications.

Pomeroy hopes to move in the direction of paperless communication for more buildings, eventually eliminating paper copies of report cards, interims, and schedules. "The more we can move away from paper communication the better because there are no costs to post information in FirstClass above what we are already paying to have the system in place. Parents could still request paper copies, but that would become the exception rather than the rule."

Implementation Cost Savings

Pomeroy says he hasn't found another product that has the features and capabilities available in FirstClass. However, it wasn't until he took charge of the budget toward the end of his first year at Olentangy that the financial benefits became obvious to him. He is able to point to substantial cost savings since bringing in FirstClass and having the ability to do their own in-house application development.

FirstClass ED provides the district with powerful tools for automating and enhancing both teaching processes as well as operational processes. Olentangy is using FirstClass Application Services (FCAS) to create custom forms and workflow applications within FirstClass conferences. The district has two groups currently piloting workflow capabilities for all sick days, vacation and personal leave requests. The workflows are a paperless process that promises significant savings for the district.

"I did a cost comparison with another district that I worked with and they are spending $90,000 a year on outsourcing their portal. Over a five year forecast, Olentangy will spend $350,000 less than what the other district is spending by using FirstClass."

"The treasurer told us that she currently has two to three staff members who are spending two of every ten days manually keying in this information. The automated system will eliminate this activity which she estimates will save her staff $9,000 to $11,000 a year in terms of improved efficiencies. Nearly $7,000 of this projection is the cost of employee hours dealing with paper forms," says Pomeroy.

"We'll also see $5,000 to $10,000 worth of annual cost savings for paper in this department. Once you factor in the cost savings for every building, that's $100,000 over a five-year term."

The district will also save by eliminating the cost of purchasing another software package for managing support services such as facilities and event scheduling and IT help desk management. "We believe that we can prevent that purchase by using the capabilities already available within FirstClass. We estimate the cost savings in this area to be $140,000 over the next five years," says Pomeroy.

Each building has their own facilities and events calendar. "If we have outside people who need to interact with us, we want to bring them into our secure space because of the FERPA concerns," says Pomeroy. "For example, the Olentangy Youth Athletic Association uses our facilities all the time. We can give them an account on our system and they can do all of their scheduling right within this space." Once the rooms have been booked, the building sends the completed request via the workflow system to the business office to enter the billing information and handle the paperwork. The business office has access to all of the calendars whereas each building can only see their own calendar.

Another resource for the district is a sophisticated yet very intuitive IT ticket tracking system developed by FirstClass partner, Aptiris. This application enables teachers and staff to initiate a ticket from a public space, or if they prefer, they can call the help desk who will initiate the ticket. The IT department is able to generate reports that show the number of tickets received and from which building as well as track the status of the tickets. The system was built using FCAS to create workflows directly within FirstClass.

Working with FirstClass partner, Aptiris, Pomeroy also plans to pilot a common assessment testing application for students that they will put into a FirstClass ED space and fully license it for the district. "If we do it right within FirstClass ED, we can get the data back and start to process that information immediately," says Pomeroy. "So rather than paying someone else to do it, we can do that all in-house on our own and it will offset that cost."

FIRST CLASS

Using FirstClass, Pomeroy's team also built an in-house application for teacher evaluation. The district identified a savings of $60,000+ over a five year period that they would have incurred by purchasing a specific software application to handle this process if they didn't have FirstClass installed.

"When you look at the bottom line including what we are offsetting, we have the potential to save $785,000 over a five-year forecast," says Pomeroy. "When you factor in the reduction in training costs because teachers and staff will not have to learn several new software packages, we'll be at $1 Million worth of savings over the five-year forecast by eliminating the need to purchase other applications and preventing outsourcing costs."

FirstClass Delivers a Broad Range of Possibilities

"I consider FirstClass to be proprietary yet open source. I can build applications directly on top of it. I can also buy third party applications that are built on top of it. That is incredibly powerful," says Pomeroy. "I see us eventually consolidating all of our network storage behind FirstClass and essentially all of the interplay that's happening in the district will be happening within this space. It is totally one-stop shopping. And we believe it's making the district far more cost-effective as well."

Pomeroy concludes: "The great thing about FirstClass is that the more we look at it, the more we can do. We know that with this infrastructure, the possibilities are endless. We have the potential to be far more interactive with our students and empower them to help drive a lot of the direction that we take."

ABOUT FIRSTCLASS

The FirstClass Collaboration Suite is designed to facilitate and enhance communication, collaboration and knowledge sharing by connecting all stakeholders across an organization's community — including employees, customers, partners, and suppliers — within a secure online environment. FirstClass brings together a variety of popular technologies within a fully integrated suite of applications that is cost-effective, flexible, and easy to manage and administer. Thousands of school districts around the world, including four of the top ten largest school districts in the US, are powering their online learning communities with FirstClass.

Contact Us

To learn more about FirstClass solutions and services and how they can benefit your organization, please visit our website at www.firstclass.com or contact us directly.

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