

# Clear Creek Independent School District



## Enhancing Curriculum in Clear Creek Schools

Clear Creek Independent School District (CCISD), a rapidly growing Texas school district with 39 schools and more than 35,000 students, successfully deployed a full-scale online learning program in less than one year. All high school teachers now have an online component to their classes, students have 24/7 access to learning, and principals can easily update their school Web sites. The magnitude of this effort is even more impressive when considering where they began.

Located on the Texas Gulf Coast between Houston and Galveston, CCISD has a strong culture of collaboration and cooperation between the technology department and department of instruction. In fact, campus-level technology integration specialists (TISs) and district level trainers help teachers integrate technology into instruction in all 39 schools.

So it was not without precedent when in 2006, the district adopted its Clearway Academic Build-Out Plan. Created with the leadership of Tina Farrell, assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction, the plan called for 24/7 access to learning for teachers and students, more involvement with the community, and more efficient and effective resource management.

### Teamwork and Technology

The technology department used the Clearway Academic Build-Out Plan to define specifications an integrated learning portal and curriculum management system to better assemble, deliver and manage content and collaboration. As the district reviewed options, they put a high value on experience and support to meet their ambitious deployment schedule: high school wide deployment within the first year, followed by all middle schools, and all elementary schools in year three.

With this in mind, CCISD chose Blackboard for a platform for a comprehensive, large-scale curriculum management system for the district and customizable learning portals for each campus. Blackboard offered extensive experience in higher education as well as a strong commitment to K-12, both of which influenced the district's decision. "We felt that one of the roles we have is to push students, administrators and teachers to think about school beyond 12th grade," says Tina Farrell. "Blackboard is a robust, strong, and organized company with a strong team commitment. The company is visionary. They want to change classrooms and we want to change classrooms."

CCISD also chose to engage Blackboard Consulting Services to guide the planning and implementation of its Blackboard deployment. Administrators, trainers, and teachers imagined what the system would do and the Blackboard team worked with the campus teams to figure out how to do it, giving CCISD stakeholders a sense of ownership in their system. Blackboard consultants then led stakeholders through the design process for course management, community and content development. "Each engagement was a little different," says Chad A. Stevens,



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- + Galveston and Harris Counties, Texas
- + <http://www.ccisd.net/>
- + 35,905 students
- + 4,000 teachers
- + 39 schools and education centers
- + Blackboard Academic Suite
- + Blackboard Consulting Services

Ph.D, chief technology officer. “ But each one was very professional. Blackboard consultants worked really hard to match our personnel to their personnel.”

## Instruction Leads and Technology Follows

When Stevens became director of instructional technology in June 2007, the district had not yet purchased servers to house their Blackboard system. But by the end of the 2007-2008 school year, Stevens had become the chief technology officer, and the system contained more than 8,000 high school and professional development courses and 397 community groups. “It’s the way that our kids learn,” says Farrell. “And the Blackboard system is the platform on which our students are most comfortable. It is expedient, organized and user friendly.”

A former principal, Stevens made a point of giving the instruction department the lead in implementation. “From a principal’s perspective, there are many times where you are given technology and you are supposed to use it,” says Stevens. “This never was a technology project; it was a curriculum project from the beginning. We [the IT department] were stubborn with the instructional staff about saying, you are the owners, you tell us what you need and we’ll try to make it work.”

With Blackboard staff support, the team built the system in the fall of 2007 and trained 264 core curriculum high school teachers by January 2008. Each teacher was encouraged to post a syllabus, picture, announcement, and assignment using Blackboard course delivery technology. “We had teachers who were running with it,” says Susan Wells, director of instructional technology. “They put all of their assignments there.”

## A Community of Users

Perhaps one of the biggest surprises to Stevens is the proliferation of groups in the Blackboard community engagement system. After just six months, Clear Creek ISD supports close to 400 groups ranging from departmental organizations to student groups on campus and between campuses. For example, the district Robonauts team involves collaboration between students at several schools. Every student club, teacher group, and administrative team now has their own space for communication and collaboration.

Blackboard consultants worked closely with each school to develop a distinct look and feel for their school Web site within

## Clearway Goals

- + Improve student achievement
- + Physical, social, and cognitive development for individual student success
- + Involvement of parents/community in education process
- + Safe and effective learning environments
- + Efficient and effective management of resources
- + Implementation of efficient and effective processes

the Blackboard system. Now, every principal has easy access to a Web site they control. Instead of sending newsletters, principals post bell schedules, dress codes, news and calendars directly online. “They want to make their community theirs,” says Wells.

Once teachers logged in and discovered the ease of creating and sharing courses, they wanted the entire district curriculum available through the Blackboard system. Rather than printing handouts for distribution at professional development workshops, the district provides access to the curriculum through Blackboard content management technology. Collaboration and content management tools also help reduce preparation time and effort for teachers across the district.

Today, teachers have 24/7 access to their own learning as well. As the district develops professional development courses using Blackboard technology, teachers have year-round access to tools and resources as well as access to each other through discussion boards. The

district pushes out information to teachers and they also offer professional development courses online with more frequency and flexibility. “We’re keeping training from being an isolated four days to something that lasts throughout the school year,” says Wells. “Pretty soon you will be expected to check into the Blackboard system instead of getting e-mails.”

## Looking Ahead

The speed and scale of the district’s successful deployment reflects the ease of setting up a curriculum management system with Blackboard technology as well as the district’s culture of planning, collaboration and team work. By the end of the first year, CCISD had achieved their initial goal of providing 24/7 access to learning and made significant progress in the Clearway Academic Build-Out Plan. By 2010, all schools within CCISD will have an active learning portal and all teachers and students will have 24/7 access to online curriculum.

Parental access to online classrooms and student gradebooks combined with up-to-date school Web sites will build stronger ties between home and school. Online curriculum content will make it easy for administrators to help teachers enhance and enrich instruction online and in the classroom.

“I hope to see us really free up teachers’ time and creativity to get back to that passion of teaching,” says Farrell. “It will change the face of professional learning; teachers will be more collaborative. They will be reflecting more on their practice. I hope that when I retire some day that I have left behind a legacy that someone might say, ‘Wow, imagine teaching before we had this?’”