

Empowered in Broward County



“I feel that Blackboard has really grown in its commitment to the K-12 market. The support I’ve received from Blackboard’s K-12 team has reinforced that belief.” That’s how Dawn Sturdy, Customer Service Analyst and one of two Blackboard® System Administrators, of the Broward County Public School System in Florida describes their successful partnership with Blackboard.

Blackboard’s commitment is being tested (and passing with flying colors) in Broward County – home of the nation’s sixth largest public school district. The district’s 251 schools and 275,000 students are served by over 17,000 teachers. Meeting the professional development needs of that many educators is a monumental task.

the Broward Virtual University

The county has met the challenge with a forward-thinking program called “Broward Virtual University,” using the Blackboard Learning System™ to offer over 100 online professional development courses. The courses include core subjects such as reading, writing and math, as well as a wide variety of other topics in technology integration, physical education, and the arts. Blackboard solutions provide anytime, anywhere access so teachers can take courses at their convenience - whether it’s 9:30 PM or 5:30 AM.

The program is off to an impressive start. Just in the last 18 months, an estimated 8,000 faculty members have enrolled in courses. That immediate embrace of Blackboard Learning System is helping Broward County get a leg up in meeting the myriad standards newly required by federal legislation. As Sturdy puts it, “We are using Blackboard’s e-Learning software products to provide readily available, cost-effective resources for professional development and other requirements mandated by the No Child Left Behind legislation.”

Prior to Blackboard, the Broward County school system had been using another vendor’s course management system which they inherited through a grant to the school system. At that time, they were participating primarily in pilot programs for a few stand-alone professional development courses and were hosting the system themselves. Broward County did not have a concrete plan in mind, but they knew they had to focus on

Broward County Public School System

- + Public K-12 School district in Florida
- + 6th largest district in the Nation
- + 275,000 students
- + Over 17,000 teachers
- + Student Information System: TERMS
- + Client since 2002

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providing their teachers with the development tools they needed to be successful in the classroom. They realized after some difficult experiences that they simply didn't have the vendor support needed to move forward.

An alternative delivery method for professional development in a school district their size represented quite a challenge. The school system formed a committee to put some formal policies and procedures in place, and to move more in the direction of their university partners with an eye toward incorporating the technology that they were using. The committee spent two years vetting different vendors and evaluating their solutions. The clear winner at the end of that two-year process was the Blackboard Learning System.

WHY BLACKBOARD?

The committee cited a number of reasons for selecting Blackboard, including:

- Blackboard's commitment to serving the specific needs of the K-12 market
- Ease of use for faculty and administrators, regardless of technology expertise
- Blackboard's proven interoperability enables the district to leverage current instructional and administrative investments

"We are using Blackboard's e-Learning software products to provide readily available, cost-effective resources for professional development and other requirements mandated by the No Child Left Behind legislation. Teachers are knocking at my door for access to Blackboard - I have a list of over 100 names that want to begin using Blackboard software in the classroom."

Dawn Sturdy
Customer Service Analyst
Broward County Public
School System

Many of Broward's faculty members were already familiar with the Blackboard Learning System. According to Sturdy, "A lot of our teachers were taking courses at the university level using Blackboard, and we felt that familiarity would prove beneficial."

Finally, there were technical considerations that made the Blackboard system the optimal choice. The Broward County School System primarily uses the Apple® Macintosh operating system, and the Blackboard Learning System operates on both Microsoft® Windows and Mac platforms. And by licensing the software in an ASP environment, Blackboard was able to deliver 24x7 availability, security and support. As Sturdy explains, "We always ask ourselves the question, 'Should we eventually move the hosting back in-house?' But we always come back to the fact that Blackboard ASP offers us 99.7% uptime, and I'm happy to say that has been the case."

Looking to the future, the relationship will continue to grow, especially as Broward County plans to give teachers the ability to design and deliver supplemental instruction via the Blackboard Community System™. "Teachers are knocking at my door - I have a list of over 100 names that want to begin using Blackboard in the classroom," says Sturdy.

News of Broward County's success with Blackboard software is spreading. Says Sturdy, "Our program has been such a success, other districts like Duval County in Jacksonville are now duplicating our efforts."

To learn more about Blackboard K-12 Solutions
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