SOLVING THE TIMETABLE SHUFFLE

Strathcona runs on a networked school model. In addition to the five computer labs at the school, students need to have access to a computer at home, although not necessarily a laptop. Every morning every staff member and student logs on to check their schedule for the day. Each person only sees information relevant to their own classes and activities. This individualized information delivery, a capability of the Blackboard Academic Suite, is important to ensure that information is personalized and relevant. Staff sees relief lessons, staff meetings and times for activities they lead out of school hours.

“The software makes it easy for staff who aren’t IT savvy to develop interesting teaching programs,” says Perkins. “They’re using features such as the discussion boards, shared folders, and multi-media, as well as consolidating reference materials from many sources.” There has also been positive feedback from staff about the system’s assessment features, which enable them to set tests that can be repeated, or are one time only, and have time sensitivity built into answering questions. Perkins continues, “Staff also see the benefit of setting assessments into student’s online diaries, making expectations clear.”

In turn, students can see when sports practice or a special convening of the debating club is scheduled. The ability to update schedule changes at a central point through the Blackboard Academic Suite is faster and more comprehensive than relying on classroom notices and can be conveyed to all relevant staff and students simultaneously.
SERVING THE ENTIRE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

Strathcona has many constituents in its community outside of staff and students, including parents, the School Board and alumni. Each of these groups has a dedicated area, delivered through the Blackboard Community System™, where they can place news, announcements and meeting minutes for their constituents to access.

The lead person for each group (e.g., the Head of the PTA) has “administrator rights” for their area and can update information, make announcements and develop a unique look and feel that works best for the group. Senior Student Leaders of the Sports Houses have the responsibility as senior leaders to maintain and update the House sites.

In addition, nearly 4,000 former scholars are enrolled as Alumni using the Blackboard Community System. They keep up to date with each other’s news, job opportunities and information about reunions.

PROVIDING A DYNAMIC LEARNING EXPERIENCE

Perkins says that when Strathcona first implemented Blackboard, they didn’t expect or understand how powerful it was going to be as a learning tool, but today teachers see many benefits associated with delivering content to students through the Blackboard Academic Suite. “Initially there was some trepidation amongst some staff to move away from their traditional lesson plans to a part or wholly online model,” he says. “But now, most have embraced the possibilities.”

They’re not alone. An independent study recently commissioned by the school was conducted by Deakin University focused on how students perceive Blackboard’s technology. 98% of students deemed Blackboard as essential to both completing their homework and for connecting to Strathcona when they’re away from school due to illness or other reasons.

As a community, utilising Blackboard’s technology has allowed Strathcona to:

- Expand teaching programs and increase student satisfaction rates
- Provide easy, centralized timetabling that is personalized to staff and student needs
- Increase participation in the broader school community
- Enhance networking amongst alumni.

Perkins sums up Strathcona’s experience with Blackboard in this way. “Nearly five years after our initial Blackboard deployment, we are probably only scratching the surface of what is and can be possible for our students and their educational outcomes.”

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON HOW BLACKBOARD CAN ADVANCE TEACHING AND LEARNING AT YOUR INSTITUTION, VISIT WWW.BLACKBOARD.COM/WORLDWIDE