PowerSchool

PowerSchool's Flexibility, Security, and Support Benefit Small Minnesota District

**EDEN VALLEY-WATKINS INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT
EDEN VALLEY, MINNESOTA**

Staff at smaller school districts typically juggle multiple, changing responsibilities on a daily basis, like the IT department at Minnesota's Eden-Valley Watkins Independent School District.

IT Staff
3

Students
Nearly 1,000

Employees
165

"We all wear many hats, and each day I never know what IT challenges we'll face," says **Denise DeJuliannie, Eden Valley-Watkin's IT Director.**

One thing DeJuliannie and her team do know, however, is that they can depend on their PowerSchool products. The district has implemented multiple PowerSchool products to meet the needs of everything from the office to the classroom to the home. The district depends on unified PowerSchool solutions that are customizable, secure, and offer the best support in the industry—including a robust, well-organized user group to connect with whenever they need help.

Eden Valley-Watkins Independent School District relies on cloud-hosted PowerSchool SIS as the heart of its education ecosystem to securely manage all student data. The district uses PowerSchool Enrollment Express, built within PowerSchool SIS, for online enrollment, PowerSchool Ecollect Forms to create customizable online, fillable forms, and PowerSchool Unified Classroom® Performance Matters for its integrated assessment platform.

"PowerSchool is a great company that keeps getting better," DeJuliannie says. "I really like the support we receive from the company and that I can get from other users. I like the flexibility of what we can do with it with plug-ins and customizations. And the capability of hosting and knowing that our student data is secure and backed up is huge for us."

AT A GLANCE

Challenges

- Changing needs requiring customizable solutions
- Small IT staff with multiple responsibilities
- Issues with inaccurate, outdated student information
- Needed flexibility with student schedules
- Increasing risks of cyberattacks targeting public schools

Solution

- PowerSchool SIS
- PowerSchool Hosting
- PowerSchool Enrollment Express
- PowerSchool Ecollect Forms
- PowerSchool Unified Classroom® Performance Matters

Results

- Flexibility to easily customize products
- Clear real-time insights in a single view
- Exceptional product support
- Improved security through interoperability and cloud hosting
- Enhanced parent engagement

Convenient Access to Student Data

PowerSchool's unified edtech system has helped Eden Valley-Watkins Independent School District improve its overall operational efficiency. Quicker and easier access to data lets staff identify struggling students early so they can take appropriate action to support their success.

"Thanks to the expanded visibility into student performance and attendance records provided by PowerSchool solutions, we've been able to improve our district's academic and truancy rates accordingly," says DeJuliannie. "PowerSchool continues to provide actionable insights that empower our educators to carry out their day-to-day responsibilities more effectively and is the reason we continue to choose their unified suite of solutions."

PowerSchool SIS saves staff time when updating and managing student data. DeJuliannie appreciates the ability to search by student, staff, or parents and guardians—all from the home page.

She says, "That is a great time saver for us, as well as the ability of parents to update their own demographics information right from the parent portal. That way, our administrative staff don't have to call or email parents to update information."

The district used PowerSchool to improve student bussing, which was previously managed by a manual system in which families were mailed a postcard with their child's bus route, pickup time, and other details.

But with a new third-party system, which integrates with PowerSchool SIS, DeJuliannie and her team have created a custom screen in PowerSchool with the bus number and pickup time. Now, in addition to updating families in real-time of their bus schedules, they can send a message to let them know if the bus has broken down or if the students are going to be a little late getting to school or getting home.

Flexibility to Customize Fields, Pages, and More

One of the things DeJuliannie and her team appreciate most about PowerSchool is how it allows them to customize PowerSchool SIS to fit their needs with minimal effort. "Because it's an open-source portal, we can add customizations that you couldn't do with another system. No other SIS allows that; others are locked down," she says. **"If you want to do something in PowerSchool, you don't have to have an engineer write it for you. You can do it yourself. PowerSchool's made it very simple. It's so user-friendly."**

When new problems kept cropping up during the COVID-19 outbreak, customizations were crucial. The district was able to customize the health suite within PowerSchool SIS, which has made the nurse's job of tracking immunizations and medicines much easier. Through the health suite, the nurse is automatically notified when a student's medication is due and a timer reminds her to call the student to the office if they forget to come down.

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DENISE DEJULIANNIE
Eden Valley-Watkins Independent School District IT Director

The pandemic also caused the district to adjust student schedules to handle new hybrid learning schedules, with multiple cohorts of students split between a hybrid A and B schedule. "Putting students into the appropriate hybrid cycle and schedule would have been a huge mountain to tackle in a short period of time. We only had two weeks to get the schedule set up and live, but because of the tools within PowerSchool and the flexibility of what we can do with the portal, we could get it all done in time," DeJuliannie says.

Exceptional Support in Multiple Formats Meets Small District Needs

A common challenge for smaller schools and districts is that they can feel stuck on an island, left alone to learn and operate the technology, while larger districts may typically get more attention for support. But for Eden Valley-Watkins Independent School District, working with PowerSchool has given them peace of mind with multiple methods of support, training, and peer collaboration.

PowerSchool offers DeJuliannie and her staff company-led, award-winning support via phone, email, chat, webinars, and a community forum. Other options include the online PowerSource Exchange with free user-built customizations, regional PowerSchool-led training events (PSUs), and customer-led regional and national user group events and online forums.

"PowerSchool's support is, bar none, the best support I've gotten—next to Google," DeJuliannie says. "Not every company has that level of support for customers. It's great because it gives you the capability to handle anything and having different people to talk to and connect with is very helpful. Connections and networking in the user forums fulfill professional development that helps me in my career."

DeJuliannie and her team connect with other PowerSchool users in the PowerSchool Community online portal to share customizations. "There's always someone out there who's designed plug-ins that are just what we need," she says. "I just participated in one last week, and we talked about customization. I posed a question, and within 10 minutes, I had many great ideas I will implement here in our district."

Data Security Keeps Student Information Protected

PowerSchool is committed to protecting every school and district's student and staff data. The company takes prudent and appropriate measures to respect data confidentiality, integrity, and availability.

As the PowerSchool administrator, DeJuliannie appreciates being able to easily set security rules within her PowerSchool products, giving different groups of people access to the information they need while not exposing sensitive information to those who don't need it.

IT directors need to balance sharing information with maintaining the highest levels of data security. For instance, the Eden Valley-Watkins nurse used to export data to a third-party application so she could produce reports required by the state of Minnesota, creating a data vulnerability. Now she can do all of that securely, right inside PowerSchool.

"Student data security is huge for us. When we can keep things within one portal and not have to export it into another portal, it makes it that much more secure," DeJuliannie says.

Cloud-based hosting also improves data security for the district, especially important in a time of rapidly rising cyberattacks on public schools. PowerSchool Hosting includes 24/7/365 monitoring and 99.9 percent uptime and reliability delivered on Microsoft Azure, the largest and most certified cloud infrastructure in the world.

"'I'm a huge advocate for hosting, mainly because of all the cyberattacks hitting public schools, especially since 2020. Getting your critical information off a local server is, to me, essential," she says. "We've been a hosted district for the past 11 years, and I have never had any issues. Included with hosting is maintenance and support from PowerSchool, which saves our staff time and hassle."

With daily data backup and full disaster recovery, cloud-based hosting helps safeguard Eden Valley-Watkins against any unplanned event. PowerSchool's cloud infrastructure incorporates cutting-edge security technologies to protect against emerging cybersecurity threats.

Family Engagement Helps Support Better Student Outcomes

With PowerSchool SIS's online parent and student portals, and online registration through PowerSchool Enrollment Express, families at Eden Valley-Watkins Independent School Districts have become more involved in their childrens' educations.

The online parent and student portals give visibility into student academic performance, attendance, and school bulletins. Parents and students can view grades, teacher comments, assignments, graduation progress, fee balances, and class schedules, and communicate with teachers from within the portal. Parents and students can also use PowerSchool Mobile to access student information from their phones.

"I've helped many families load their parent portal onto their phone. It's amazing to see the look of relief on their faces when they can see—readily in the palm of their hand—their kiddo's schedule, grades, and assignments. They are so appreciative that they have this tool. And so are our students, who are constantly checking their grades and posts that their teachers may have," says DeJuliannie.

DeJuliannie says that she feels anytime access to student information has opened up new lines of communication between parents and students. "Instead of asking your child when they come home, 'How was school?', now they can see the assignments and grades and ask things like, 'I saw you got a 90 percent on this particular test or assignment. Can you elaborate on what that project was like to do?' Now, they can have those kinds of conversations, and it's great for families to connect that way."

Parent engagement via PowerSchool has also helped improve attendance because parents can see when students are late or missing class and follow up to find out why.

"When parents talk to their students about absences, they may find out it's for reasons the parent didn't realize—like if the student has a rough time in the morning and needs to talk to a counselor and ends up missing a class. Those are conversations that maybe wouldn't have been initiated if they hadn't seen that they're tardy to class the first hour every day."

PowerSchool Enrollment Express was especially helpful during the pandemic when parents could enter new student information or update data from the safety and comfort of home. The district implemented Enrollment Express a year before the pandemic, so they were well prepared once everything shifted to online.

"The ability to do the entire process from any device was so nice, as well as not having to worry about handling all that paper if we were still doing manual, paper-based enrollment," DeJuliannie says. She also appreciates an online enrollment system's data security and integrity, instead of parents filling out forms by hand and staff transcribing that information into digital format.

The Perfect Fit for Districts of Any Size

While Eden Valley-Watkins Independent School District staff may wear many hats within each of their roles, they can depend on one edtech company to provide consistency, flexibility, support, and more.

"The tools within PowerSchool SIS and the flexibility of what we can do with the portal itself are amazing," says DeJuliannie. "When we've looked for new technology solutions, PowerSchool has checked every box for us. PowerSchool has definitely invested in the product over the years, and it shows."

Visit www.PowerSchool.com or call 1-877-873-1550 to learn more.

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