

How One California District is Leading the Way with Interoperable Edtech

MODESTO CITY SCHOOLS, CA



Modesto City Schools needed an integrated platform to connect students, administrators, teachers, and parents across the district to engage students, support staff, and simplify operations—all with usable, accurate data.

Engaging 30,000 Students Digitally

Ten years ago, Modesto City Schools in California had too many applications to access learning content centrally. Teachers and students struggled to use these disparate systems efficiently, and many didn't use them at all. Accessing data was a headache, and customer service from various providers was inconsistent.

Modesto needed integrated solutions without lengthy customizations and multiple vendors. A single vendor experience could give the district the functionality they require while lowering the total cost of ownership, simplifying processes for teachers, and providing the benefits of having data that flows between tools.

So when the district decided to transition to 1:1 technology for grades seven through 12, they knew they needed one platform to power teaching and learning for their approximately 15,000 secondary students. Leaders, including Director of Educational Technology Matthew Ketchum, decided that a flexible, district-wide learning management system (LMS) was the best decision to get all teachers on board and avoid system fragmentation across schools.

AT A GLANCE



Challenges

- Cumbersome, manual data entry process required for regular CALPADs state reporting
- Supplying and engaging 30,000 students with devices without system fragmentation or interruptions to instruction
- Difficulty identifying and sharing relevant student data for high-quality, personalized instruction
- Tedious, hard-to-access, and hard-to-schedule teacher professional development



Solution

- PowerSchool SIS
- PowerSchool Unified Classroom® Schoology Learning
- Unified Classroom® Performance Matters
- Unified Classroom® Naviance CCLR
- Unified Talent™ Professional Learning
- PowerSchool Ecollect Forms



Results

- Automated, streamlined, and centralized data submissions that work well with Modesto's customized in-house programming
- A single solution to keep the learning going—at home or in class for 30,000 students
- Easy access to important student data to glean insights that drive decision-making and whole-child instruction
- Powerful, just-in-time teacher training available online

Other district priorities included tools to support high-quality instruction with data to inform student-centered learning, a platform to help professional learning communities (PLCs) be more dynamic and responsive, and a system that encourages student ownership of the learning process.

The Modesto City Schools team needed a vendor who would be a true partner and who could hit the ground running from day one. After reviewing options, they chose to partner with PowerSchool to use Unified Classroom® Schoology Learning as their district LMS.

"We first start with what is the end game, what we are trying to accomplish, and what are our resources available? The focus is on the teachers and the students when we take on any project. I get concerned when we put all our eggs in one basket, but we were also doing custom programming that was not sustainable both financially and in keeping the right people employed. Working with PowerSchool gives me the ideal solution, unified in one system, but not the risk because it is a partnership with a focus on what is important," says CTO Russ Selken.

Little did the district know that just a few years later, the pandemic would make it imperative that all grades—including an additional 14,000 elementary school students—across the district would need a device to keep the learning going. Overnight.

But getting the right learning tools in everyone's hands was just the first step.

Empowering Teachers with Integrated Edtech

It was easy for the IT department to configure Schoology Learning so teachers could work with tools they were already using, like Google Drive. The auto-rostering and integration with instructional core applications made operations easy for Ketchum.

The real challenge was encouraging teachers to use the new platform. Some teachers were early adopters, and others were resistant to change. At Modesto, using the LMS isn't mandatory, so some teachers continued with traditional methods of instruction.

Then, those teachers started to see that **using Schoology Learning gave their peers time back in their days, allowing them to focus on other key priorities to support student learning.** As Ketchum puts it,

"[Teachers] could re-use the same course design, add, and update it the next year. They saw the benefits of putting the initial work into [Schoology Learning] and how they could continue using it after that." The hesitant teachers became curious and started to wonder how they could take advantage of those time-saving benefits. Word traveled fast and created the buy-in that got more teachers excited about using Schoology Learning.

Delivering Data-Driven Instruction for Students

Today, Schoology Learning provides resources for every aspect of the teacher workflow in Modesto—including assignments, attendance, formative assessments, and entering grades. As a one-stop shop, Schoology Learning have intent of message teachers creating resources in Schoology, collective efficacy by grade level and subject area teams in Modesto.

“And then all of a sudden, the whole grade-level and subject area are starting to use [Schoology Learning] more. Then you have the school site admin say, well, the teachers are using it, we'll do our staff meetings through it. And then, you have the counselors say, well, the students are now in it, I want to have groups for seniors now.”

MATTHEW KETCHUM

DIRECTOR OF EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY,
MODESTO CITY SCHOOLS

When teachers create shareable resources in Schoology Learning, there's a collective efficacy among grade-level and subject-area teams. "It cuts down on the amount of time to onboard somebody if you have a wealth of resources to pull from already," says Ryan Reynolds, Modesto's Senior Director of Assessment & Evaluation.

When Reynolds noticed that the staff wasn't using the existing assessment and data platform and formative assessments were not being developed appropriately, selecting Unified Classroom® Performance Matters at the end of the 2020-2021 school year was easy.

The ideal student assessment platform for Modesto enables teachers to leverage data in a predictive manner rather than a postmortem review. According to Reynolds, before Performance Matters, the data culture at Modesto focused on the previous year's data and what teachers "should have done better." And that culture had to change.

With Performance Matters, Modesto teachers now have a view of current rosters and results, **allowing them to focus on delivering high-quality, personalized instruction** to the students in their classes today.

The Modesto team also says that implementing Performance Matters "aligned with our efforts to reinforce the Instructional Core, which includes supporting all learners, board-adopted curriculum, [and] engaging students using language and literacy."

"We looked at several products, and [the district] selected Performance Matters, primarily because of its integration with platforms we already had...that was a big deal. [Teachers] wanted something that just worked—worked with their gradebook and worked with their online classroom. And that data from their online classroom...would show up in the platform."

Since implementation, Reynolds' team has continued to find new features that improve their user experience. They've added custom filters, which make it easy for teachers to locate a student or a program within any school in the district. After working with PowerSchool tech support, Reynolds says his team imports "just about every kind of data that we can get our hands on." They automate data feed uploads, which Reynolds says results in "more and more free time for my staff to not have to do that anymore."

Performance Matters brings together all of Modesto's student performance data in one easy-to-use online portal, giving teachers, administrators, and staff a holistic view of student growth inside every classroom and school within the district. Before, IT administrators would have to run reports for teachers. **Now Modesto teachers have access to a level of data they didn't have before, providing deeper insights to improve student outcomes.** Reynolds says, "The early warning indicators have also been a help. We can have pre-packaged reports and metrics that we can send out very easily, so then [teachers] can target students for intervention."

One of the early warning indicators Reynolds tracks is the number of times a student has enrolled at different schools within the year. He explains that by keeping an eye on this metric, "you will quickly get a list of students who are pretty transient...they don't have a solid home situation." It's easy for Reynolds to share this sensitive student information with the appropriate users. Reynolds says he "can create a report and share it across the district. When [teachers] open it, they won't see the whole district, they'll just see their students." **With this information, teachers can proactively support students who may struggle academically while getting a footing in their home situation.**



This level of data also powers the district's Graduation Rate Intervention Team (GRIT) meetings with site administrators after every grading term. **In the last school year, there was an 8% decrease in Ds and Fs.** Reynolds says that early warning indicators within Performance Matters likely contributed to the improved student outcomes because "it's front of mind." And because the district also uses Naviance to help with student college, career, and life readiness, fewer failures mean more students prepared for life after graduation.

Preparing students for future success isn't a task only for school counselors. Giving teachers and students access to the Naviance CCLR lessons in Schoology Learning helps to ensure that fewer students are overlooked. Integrating Naviance with Schoology Learning supports both staff and students in achieving the shared goal of postsecondary preparedness. With this integration, schools like Modesto can feel confident knowing they've set their students on the right path.

Training and Supporting Teachers with a Single Platform

Using Modesto's previous system, teacher professional development (PD) was cumbersome. All new employee training was in-person, which required scheduling and coordination of facilities. Ketchum remembers that "every single time [teachers] would have to put so many details about themselves just to register for a workshop or class. The reporting was not ideal. It wasn't doing what we wanted to do for conference-type structures."

Mike Rich, the Associate Superintendent of Curriculum, Instruction, and Professional Development (CIPD) says that Modesto was "looking for a unified solution

for professional development that included course registration, automatic emails, attendance tracking, and direct course links."

Ketchum explains that the district chose Unified Talent™ Professional Learning because they "needed a better way to have our staff be able to search for trainings, register for them, complete their training, and do reports so they can get paid for our PD incentives."

Rich agrees, stating that "the Professional Learning suite met all our needs and has been crucial with coordinating PD for our 4,500 employees. We look forward to the future enhancements to the administrative and end-user sides"

The district has also benefited from automating accounts and rostering using PowerSchool. Savitri Naidu, Director of Information & Educational Technology Services, says that her team can now "automate configuration of our teachers accounts so they have the access they need as soon as they start." Naidu explains that using PowerSchool products, "[Modesto has] been able to automate their security and their log-ons—whatever access that they need."

Naidu recalls that the district was "able to implement [Unified Talent] and get it all configured within a month time period and have our users start on a new fiscal year using [Professional Learning]."

Reynolds agrees that Professional Learning doesn't just simplify teacher PD planning, tracking, and reporting—it also helps get more teachers familiar with Modesto's edtech. In fact, some of the most popular self-paced courses teachers take in Professional Learning train them on using Performance Matters, which encourages implementation and adoption of that part of the platform.

Reynolds says, "because of our professional development, things are improving, and that's what we want to see."

“The PD catalog also allows us to host self-paced modules, which is really powerful. It can be used for just-in-time training. So, if a user wants to learn how to use [Schoology Learning], they can take a self-paced course in it at that moment.”

MATTHEW KETCHUM

DIRECTOR OF EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY, MODESTO CITY SCHOOLS

Smooth Operations in a Large District

A district of Modesto's size needs to manage a lot of data. Modesto uses in-house customized programming to keep up with the latest changes in the California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System (CALPADS) required reporting. When considering a student information system (SIS), a dependable, modern, and configurable system for their specific needs was at the top of the district's priority list.

Naidu says using PowerSchool SIS partner products helps Modesto get "good data upon data entry," which makes it easy to keep reports current and prepared for the data-intensive submissions throughout the school year. **The flexibility to use pre-built reports and quickly build custom dashboards simplifies state compliance reporting for the district.** Using PowerSchool plug-ins, the Modesto team can connect all their data easier.

Most importantly, all the PowerSchool products that Modesto uses work even better together, building on existing functionality and increasing engagement.

For example, by connecting Performance Matters to PowerSchool SIS, Modesto has a single view of student performance with quick access to all the student, teacher, school, and district analytics the district needs to improve student achievement. And because Modesto connects Ecollect Forms from PowerSchool with their PowerSchool SIS, they can create, edit, and share forms online all in one place. This integration streamlines processes and helps to ensure accurate data.

Moving into the Future and Improving Outcomes with PowerSchool

For Modesto, the partnership with PowerSchool has proved to be most beneficial. Sales, support, and implementation teams routinely check in and provide the Modesto team with information on updates, features, events, and any questions or requests they have. Plus, the district gets access to robust resources from PowerSchool and the largest K-12 user community.

With PowerSchool, the district now has "an instructionally seamless experience for students and staff to navigate between applications and find their content." PowerSchool connects everyone in the district, enabling team leads like Ketchum, Naidu, and Reynolds to work together in a unified environment. With an integrated experience, all users in Modesto—teachers, staff, and administrators—need fewer clicks to access the information and content required to improve student outcomes.

Learn how Unified Classroom[®] can save teachers time, strengthen family engagement, and help improve student outcomes.

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