

Addressing School Management Software and Student Data

SERVICE ASSOCIATE Q & A

Q. *What should school leaders consider when evaluating school management software?*

A. First off, it's important to understand that the school management solution you use will touch nearly every corner of your school. This software will form the backbone of your operations for years to come. During the evaluation stage, it's vitally important for you to dig a lot deeper than features, functionality, and cost. Today, more and more school districts are moving beyond the practice of chasing checkboxes on a spec sheet and putting a lot more emphasis on the all-encompassing user experience. Even the best technology will fall short of expectations if it's combined with a poor implementation. Project management, consulting, data migration, and professional development are all crucial aspects in making sure the experience is positive for all stakeholders.

Q. *What strategies or steps can schools take to protect student information and data?*

A. A lot of this depends on whether the solution is hosted on-premise or in the cloud. If schools don't have the infrastructure or staff to manage the application and provide disaster recovery measures, the costs for hosting in the cloud are worth the added investment. Either way, making sure the network is protected with firewalls, heavy encryption and intrusion prevention systems are an absolute must and it's highly recommended

that you schedule external security audits — especially when you make any changes to the network. On top of that, there are some simple best practices to keep data secure such as implementing policies against sharing passwords and storing files on personal devices; requiring staff to use robust passwords that contain letters, numbers, and symbols; limiting the number of people who have access to certain data; and making sure staff are aware of the latest viruses and ransomware.

Q. *Is there anything new in the field of school management software?*

A. There's always something new in our space and you can't sit still for very long if you want to continue to be a leader. After observing some of the emerging trends in education, such as the way data was being used and managed in school districts, we decided it was time to build an entirely new platform from the ground up. Throughout the development, we worked directly with educational professionals and incorporated a lot of their feedback to make sure the overall experience would meet their expectations. In addition to spending a lot of time on the design and navigation, we wanted to make sure the technology and architecture could evolve with the changing needs of districts. We also included some powerful self-service support tools so people can find quick answers on their own without having to interrupt what they are doing to pick up the phone.



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Q. *What are some trends in education that you've been watching?*

A. Maybe it's because I work in marketing, but branding and user experience are two recent trends that immediately come to mind. Families are more mobile than ever and the competition for both students and staff is causing schools to put a lot more emphasis on marketing and branding. They're hiring communication specialists, developing marketing plans, and they want the systems they use to reflect their brands. In terms of the user experience, this is all about getting feedback direct from the end users of the products so we can continue to deliver what they want. We've expanded our user experience group and made our user-centric development process the guiding light that drives the direction of our solutions. ■

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