

Chapter 4

Implementing a Course Management System in a Religious School Cooperative

Angela D. Benson

The University of Alabama, USA

Sharon Y. Tettegah

University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign, USA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Public and private K-12 schools are turning to course management systems to provide enhanced classroom and online learning opportunities for students. This case describes the system-wide implementation of a course management system to serve 3000 students in a school system consisting of 12 independent church schools in a southeastern state. The challenges this project faced included the geographic dispersion of the involved schools and project team, the variance in individual school populations, and the limited in-house support staff available in the district office and in the schools to support the project. The project manager introduced another challenge by choosing to use formal project management methodologies and tools for the first time in the school system with this project.

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ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

Hope Christian Academy School was founded in 1984 in the Family Life Center of Community Baptist Church in a southeastern state by a vote of the congregation. Under the leadership of the pastor and the five members of the church's Christian Education Board, the school opened its doors two years later with 60 K-6 students in the renovated Family Life Center. By 1990, the school had expanded to a new building on church property and served more than 400 pK-12 students from the surrounding counties. Church membership was not required to enroll at the school, but parents did have to agree with the school's mission, which is to educate students spiritually, morally and academically by practicing Christian principles and promoting Christian service. In 1992, the school celebrated its first high school graduating class. During this time period, the church also expanded, with two additional congregations each about 200 miles away. The North and South campuses of Hope Christian Academy enrolled their first students in 1994 and 1996, respectively.

With its strong reputation among independent churches in the area and its willingness to help other churches, Hope Christian Academy drew interest from other independent churches that wanted to start church schools. In 2000, Hope Christian Academy School brought the church schools of two other state churches into their fold and became the Hope Christian Academy School System (HCASS). By 2011, HCASS served more than 3000 students in 12 schools in the state. Currently, eight of the schools enroll pK-12 students and four enroll only pK-8 students. Enrollment in the pK-12 schools varies from 300 – 800, while enrollment at the pK-8 schools varies from 200 – 600.

HCASS is governed by a 15-member Board of Directors, comprised of representatives from each of the member churches, and two top-level administrators, the System Superintendent and an Executive Director. The System Superintendent and Executive Director report to the Board and are responsible for carrying out Board policy and overseeing the faculty and staff in the schools.

The System Office staff includes an Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum, Chief Financial Officer and seven directors, including a Director of Technology (DT) and a Director of Counseling. The staff at each school varies according to the enrollment and grade levels served by the school. At a minimum, each school has a principal with a supporting office staff. Each school also has an identified technology contact. Some schools have one or more dedicated technology specialists, whose sole job is to provide technology support to teachers and staff, while other schools identify a teacher or staff member in the school to serve as the technology contact. The technology contacts provide limited technology support to school staff along with their other duties. While the technology specialists and technology contacts report to both their school principal and the system Director of Technology (DT), their salaries come out of their school's budget.

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