

Edsby at St. Andrew's College

Helping shape bright minds of the future at a leading private boys' school

Edsby is the killer app on the network of one of the leading private all boys' boarding schools in North America.

"Edsby is the most important application at our school for teaching and learning," acknowledged St. Andrew's College IT Director Steve Rush.

St. Andrew's, established in 1899, has a beautiful 110-acre campus on which sits a collection of Georgian-style brick and modern buildings just north of Toronto, Canada. It's known worldwide for its cutting edge use of information technology. In the 1990s, it installed desktop PCs and labs before most public and private schools. In 2002, it put laptops in the hands of all teachers. All students received laptops the following year. In 2009, the school moved to tablet PCs. Edsby was introduced in late 2012.

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St. Andrew's has long believed that technology has a role to play in helping students and teachers see their daily work, and for parents to be able to see what students are doing on a daily basis.

To facilitate this, the school initially looked at systems such as NetCommunity from Blackbaud, Desire2Learn, WebCT (later absorbed by Blackboard) and Angel. But none were appropriate. "None of them focused on reporting back what students do by day, what homework they have," said Rush. So the school developed its own system using FrontPage HTML editor and an online gradebook program.

"We had essentially 100% teacher, student and parent uptake, but unfortunately FrontPage became unsupported, and much of the work was manual and time-consuming, and so we needed a sustainable replacement," said former St. Andrews IT Integration Committee Chair Jon Butcher.

School IT staff set itself a three to five-year goal to build a parent/student/teacher portal that would provide access to all course, student,



Students at St. Andrew's College make wide use of Edsby. Photo Geoff George.

and parent related data. Then staff learned about Edsby—which was able to provide much of what the school wanted almost immediately.

"It was impressive to see 80% of our five-year plan implemented in about five months," said Butcher.

It only took St. Andrew's IT staff three weeks to receive approval to go with Edsby. "That's very fast for us," noted IT Director Rush. "Usually we're a bit more conservative. But as soon as I first saw Edsby, I thought 'this is exactly what we've been looking for.'"

Journal, report cards and more

St. Andrew's uses virtually every capability of Edsby, relying on the system for daily attendance, school news, course planning, student/teacher class collaboration,

coordinating extracurricular groups and teams, class assessments, analytics, report cards, and more. But the heart of what the school relies on it for is the daily journal: the calendar of what students need to worry about minute-to-minute.

"Edsby is a single place for students, parents and teachers to see daily work. This is the core of educational communication: students need to know what their current task is, when it is due, and have instant access to related resources. Edsby provides this brilliantly," said Butcher.

"The journal is the best kept secret in Edsby. It's a big differentiator. It focuses the students and parents on what happened in class and relevant homework," said Rush.

At St. Andrew's, Edsby also provides a comprehensive overview of information on each student that can be accessed by front office staff, including attendance, academics,



Former St. Andrew's IT Integration Committee Chair Jon Butcher (L) and St. Andrew's IT Director Steve Rush (R). Photo Geoff George.

group involvements and more. Special Edsby views allow the Headmaster and other staff to watch for at-risk students.

"Course, teacher, and student connectivity in Edsby is superb, and administration is learning to love the easy access to data," said Butcher.

The school also uses Edsby to generate report cards.

"Edsby's report card system is vastly superior to our previous system," explained Butcher. "People still thank me in the halls for that one. It saves literally thousands of clicks, frustrations, and complaints every report card cycle."

The school's previous student information system (SIS) tool for report cards required an "unbelievable number of clicks to use their notes system to get into a report," said Rush. "We used to joke that it was criminal to have to do so much work. Edsby is just brilliant. You easily move from record to record. It automatically saves data. Teachers aren't losing data. You call up your football team, your kids are there in one list, and you fill them in. The workflow matches what people really do. Report cards are now a joy."

Connected to school SIS

St. Andrew's has 613 students, 439 classes, 202 groups and 1555 parents, and they are all hosted on Edsby.

Edsby pulls data from and synchronizes with St. Andrew's Blackbaud SIS. Attendance, grades, notes, daybooks and class postings, reports and other data reside in Edsby, mapped to St. Andrew's SIS data. Edsby data is exportable.



St. Andrew's Jon Butcher and students. Photo Geoff George.

Much like at other Edsby sites, integration with the SIS enables automatic setup of Edsby users and classes, and gives teachers and administrators new ways to access legacy data.

"Edsby has provided a much deeper and richer integration with all our other systems, which most teachers could not easily access. Ease of use and productivity are the two main benefits," said Butcher.

Improvements influenced by St. Andrew's

Teachers were quick to use Edsby when it was introduced in the 2012 school year. Parents struggled with it initially, but a focused effort by Edsby working closely with St. Andrews to make parent improvements in 2013 improved usability and resulted in greater adoption. A similar effort is underway to optimize students' experiences.

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"We have 100% use of Edsby with our teachers and students. Compare that to any other product on the market where schools are often coercing or even fighting with teachers over the use of clumsy technology," said Butcher.

The ability to work directly with the software developer and help shape the product was attractive to St. Andrew's.

"So often you buy off the shelf software and don't have the ability to affect it. This was our way to influence the product," said Rush.

"It was a big ah-ha moment when Edsby said they were willing to work with us to meet our needs. So much of the big box corporate-ware available does not really suit the grassroots teacher," echoed Butcher.

There are a few pieces of custom work that St. Andrew's is still working with Edsby on, such as an online diploma tracking system to confer honors that computationally reflect students' leadership outside class.

The single biggest reason St. Andrew's would recommend Edsby? "Their willingness to listen and to implement good ideas. In the years we've been using it, Edsby has still been in development. This is a good thing. It means we are not stuck with some corporate idea of what educational data flow should look like," said Butcher.

"Edsby has met or exceeded our needs in almost every area," said Butcher.