

Edsby at Durham Catholic District School Board

A “huge hit” and “we’re just scratching the surface,” says district

The Durham Catholic District School Board is a publicly funded Catholic school district located in Durham Region, just east of Toronto, Ontario, Canada. It has 40 elementary schools, 7 secondary schools and 22,000 students.

It’s one of the latest districts in the region to adopt the Edsby digital learning and data platform for K-12, which continues to grow in popularity as more and more regions seek a single, centrally-managed digital platform.

LMS RFP & surprising results

In the Spring of 2017, Durham Catholic issued a request for proposals for an initiative driven by a 5-year strategic plan: it sought an LMS that would allow it to engage its teachers, parents and students more effectively.

District IT staff led the effort. Teachers and principals from elementary and secondary schools, staff from the teaching & learning department and district superintendents were invited to participate on a selection committee. A handful of vendors were immediately disqualified and a shortlist of 4 companies was assembled from which to receive face-to-face demos.

After the presentations, each person on committee cast votes... and the results were surprising.

“We had a lot of teachers using a lot of other LMSes. We assumed they’d be biased towards these systems they’d be using for a number of years. But it was pretty much a unanimous decision: Edsby was seen as the best solution, with pretty well all the elements we were looking for,” said Ronald Rodriguez, Chief Information Officer.

“We weren’t expecting that,” said Rodriguez, recalling the process. “Because Edsby doesn’t even have a freemium application, teachers could not have gone and registered themselves an account, because Edsby has to talk to a district’s systems to do what it does. Yet even educators using freemium versions of applications voted for Edsby.”

Tailored to the needs of local educators, students and families

Why the enthusiasm for Edsby? The selection committee believed it would make it easier for the district to show progress against the Ontario Ministry of Education’s Growing Success framework for the future of K-12 education in the province.

“We were very impressed with the way Growing Success pedagogy appeared baked right into Edsby,” said Michael P. Cain, Teaching &



Durham Catholic students with Edsby in class. Photo Durham Catholic.

Learning Consultant. “We could see it in the Edsby gradebook and the way Edsby allows teachers to look at assessment and evaluation many different ways. Even in the report card comments and workflow. The software guides the hand of the educator and keeps them on the Growing Success track.”

“The gradebook we were previously using was not designed on the basis of Ontario’s Growing Success framework. Edsby’s gradebook is superior to any other gradebook we have seen; it looks like it was created for our province,” said Cain.

Soft rollout

“The Teaching & Learning department led a series of traveling roadshows, doing ‘lunch and learns.’ Our seminars introduced the basics of Edsby and showed teachers what they could do in terms of parent/student communication. We also in-serviced teachers at monthly after school ‘Sharing of Excellence’ workshops as well. These afterschool sessions focused on more specific uses of Edsby such as using portfolios, online submissions and online tests, collaborating with Edsby groups and more,” said Cain.

District officials gave no mandate to use the software initially. They let teachers explore it on their own while making targeted elementary report card and secondary gradebook pilots. In the 2018-2019 school year, 33 of the district’s 40 elementary schools and 5 of its 7 secondary schools made use of Edsby, sending invitations home to parents to join in as well.



“We are just scratching the surface of Edsby right now and already we’re very happy with what we’ve accomplished. We believe this will change the way we do things here.”

— Ronald Rodriguez, CIO, Durham Catholic District School Board

All Durham Catholic schools are to begin using Edsby in the 2019-2020 school year. IT plans to firewall any other learning platform at that time except the district's official Office 365 document platform integrated with Edsby, and the Ontario Ministry-funded D2L BrightSpace, which the district and all other Ontario school boards receive for free and use primarily for distance learning.

Sanctity of student data

One of the biggest motivations for Durham Catholic moving to a single, official platform for teaching and learning was in ensuring the safety of student data. And in this, the district had the support of the teachers, according to CIO Rodriguez.

"We have a good relationship with our elementary and secondary unions," said Rodriguez. "We raised the issue of student data privacy with them two years prior to moving to Edsby and they understand that our job as a school board is to protect student and parent's data consistent with the Ontario Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (MFIPPA). Because we'd been doing this for two years previously, they didn't perceive moving to Edsby as heavy-handed. They recognize this is part of a philosophy of protecting teachers, students and their parents."

Durham Catholic recognized concerns around how free or freemium applications would use student data. With Edsby, the district benefits from Edsby's clear customer data policies and practices: Durham Catholic's data is owned by Durham Catholic. The data resides in data centers in the district's own jurisdiction under local government control. The district owns all of its own data and can export it from the Edsby system at any time. Its data is managed with the highest security standards. And there is no monetization of the data by Edsby or any other party.

"Huge hit" capabilities

Among Durham Catholic's favorite Edsby features is the learning evidence system that allows teachers to document, assess, tag and share visual evidence of a student's learning.

"Learning evidence has been well received by kindergarten teachers, but we've also seen teachers in high school using it! In math classes



Students using Edsby at St. Paul Catholic School with teacher Delaney Nevins. Photo Durham Catholic.

they're using Edsby to record student solutions when they're working in groups on class whiteboards. Teachers are capturing observations and conversations and using this evidence when assessing student progress. Edsby's learning evidence is helping teachers move away from only considering 'product' when evaluating student achievement. We're seeing uptake of it all the way up to the grade 12 level," said Cain.



"Teachers are just gushing, 'this is so good—I can't believe how good this is.'"

— Michael Cain, Teaching & Learning Consultant,
Durham Catholic District School Board

"Teachers are very happy with it. Just last week kindergarten teachers were just gushing, 'this is so good—I can't believe how good this is.' Prior to this we were using OneNote Class Notebooks to capture evidence of learning, and there's a huge difference between a tool that can be used for something vs. a tool that was created to do something. They absolutely love it."

At the secondary level where Durham Catholic has been piloting the Edsby gradebook, it's "been a huge hit," said Cain. "They love that students can see their grades in real time, that parents can see in real time what's going on and don't have to wait for a midterm report. Edsby gives parents a window into the classroom. You can open up a traditional student agenda and see what's for homework, but with Edsby you can also see things a student agenda can't capture such as pictures of engaged students, videos of class or school events, evidence of what your child has learned, to name a few."

"As a parent, I love it. My own children's teachers use Edsby. To pick up your phone and see a picture of your son or daughter engaged in learning, and then to be able to talk with them over dinner about what you saw on Edsby has been transformational," said Cain.

No looking back

With Edsby, Durham Catholic believes it chose wisely.

"From what I hear from our teachers, it's clear we selected the right vendor, solution and partner," said CIO Rodriguez. "A teacher told me Edsby's gradebook is the greatest gradebook he's worked with in 20 years. Once he saw the Edsby platform, he jumped right in."

"Edsby is always willing to work with us and listen to educators regarding enhancements to the platform," said Rodriguez. "We don't see a lot of this from other vendors," added Durham's Cain. "We have to give credit to the Edsby development, support and training teams. Most requests we've had have made it into production quickly."

"We are just scratching the surface of Edsby right now and already we're very happy with what we've accomplished," concluded Rodriguez. "We truly believe this is a tool that will change the way we do things here: the way teachers teach, the way students learn. All of our investments are guided by 'how will this improve student achievement?' We truly believe this is going to help us do so."