



IMS Campus Case Study

Florida Virtual School



Florida Virtual School® manages growth with interoperability standards

As America's first Internet-based public high school, Florida Virtual School (FLVS®) has experienced exponential growth during its 14 years of existence. The Florida-based institution serves more than 120,000 students in 49 states and 57 countries. The school's popularity as an alternative learning solution also provides one of its greatest challenges: delivering resources to students with a variety of hardware and software applications.

"We deliver courses and content using seven different learning management systems (LMS)," said Jennifer Whiting, FLVS's senior manager of product development. "That conversion is a very manual process and can take up to 8 hours per course plus quality assurance. It takes time to convert all that content for each LMS."

Whiting said the school has had challenges trying to resolve authentication and integration problems with third party products. "That comes at a great expense if we want to do an integration. We've had products that are not plug and play. We have had products that are SCORM conformant, but we've also had integration challenges with that content." SCORM stands for Sharable Content Object Reference Model, a collection of standards and specifications established by the Office of the United States Secretary of Defense.

About five years ago, FLVS saw value in becoming involved with the IMS Global Learning Consortium in order to solve some of the interoperability challenges facing Kindergarten-grade 12 schools. The school became a contributing member and Whiting has served on a number of committees that have helped establish learning standards for schools. Formerly co-chair of IMS' K-12 Schools group, she currently serves as co-chair of the organization's Technical Advisory Board.

According to Whiting, FLVS is starting to ask third party vendors if their products meet IMS standards in order to determine their potential for interoperability. "We have that language included in our procurement documents. I certainly talk with partners and potential vendors about IMS' Learning Tools Interoperability (LTI) when discussing integrations. We have also

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seen IMS specifications in Request for Proposals from other schools who want to use FLVS content in their learning management system. One of our LMS partners, Agilix, worked with FLVS and IMS last year to develop a (IMS) Common Cartridge export for our content, helping us to meet our school partner's needs."

In these tough economic times, establishing interoperability standards takes on an even more important role, said Whiting. "Right now, we're concerned about budget and sheer size. We are looking at reaching a million enrollments before too long. We saw some budget reductions this year, and we reorganized to provide efficiencies. We have to serve more students with less money per student allocated. Having standards that allow disparate systems to integrate seamlessly with one another potentially cuts down on the expense of developing interoperability for each individual system."

"FLVS has used Ucompass as its primary LMS since 2003," Whiting stated. FLVS and Ucompass are expanding their partnership around a new product, called Octane. Octane changes the paradigm of the LMS and allows new LMS-like tools and functionality to be easily pushed into the content pages. FLVS has deployed the Octane Ratings tool into more than half of its courses and is using the resulting data to make course decisions. It allows students to give a quick star rating to their lessons, and plans are in the works to offer students the opportunity for more detailed feedback. "We've received hundreds of ratings from students, and we use that data to determine where we need to focus our lesson re-development efforts," Whiting elaborated. FLVS and Ucompass received a Platinum Award at IMS' 2011 Learning Impact Conference for their efforts in loading Octane functions into thousands of the school's documents and course offerings.

The previous year, FLVS won a Gold Learning Impact Award for "Conspiracy Code™," a course developed with a game-development partner, 360Ed, Inc., that uses a game-based delivery approach to learning. Whiting said the school is working with Imagine Education this year, piloting their "KO's Journey" game that teaches 7th grade common core math concepts.

"I don't think these gaming approaches necessarily define the future of online learning for everybody," Whiting added. "There certainly are students who just want to take the normal online course. For some students, though, it's a very motivating way to gain knowledge. I think for all students, game-based concepts provide good, immediate feedback and

rewards. Those kinds of concepts can help hold students' attention and can be incorporated into regular learning."

Whiting points out that technology is just a delivery mechanism and that learning, whether it's from a book or computer, probably doesn't provide much learning difference. What is significant, however, is the increasing importance of mobility, which enables students' access to content anytime and anywhere. "Every child has a different phone. And meeting the needs of all those different operating systems is a bit of a challenge right now. I think it's just a matter of time before most school systems move to using mobile technology in the classroom."

Joining an organization like IMS makes sense for K-12 schools, she said, because it provides a support structure for procurement in terms of understanding how to meet those interoperability needs. And for vendors and LMS providers, joining a group like IMS makes sense because it offers the opportunity to increase business by developing interoperable systems that schools can move in and out of easily.

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IMS has recently announced a new K-12 district leadership program, the Instructional Innovation through Interoperability Leadership Council (I3LC), to provide greater opportunity for district leaders to engage with IMS and each other. For more information, visit: <http://www.msglobal.org/I3lc/>