

International School Creates A+ Performance Review System



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Justin Hardman,
solutions manager at Hong Kong International School

CLIENT:
Hong Kong International School

SOLUTION:
Blue® course evaluations software

TECHNOLOGY GIVES ADMINISTRATORS A “WHOLE-SCHOOL” PERSPECTIVE

Teachers and staff at the Hong Kong International School consistently strive to cultivate an environment of excellence. HKIS’ 2,600 students regularly score in the 90-95 percentile on standardized tests, compared to schools in the U.S. Nearly 100 percent of these students graduate and go on to attend university.

In an atmosphere of such elevated expectations, HKIS faculty and staff must focus on continuous professional improvement and preparing their students for an international future. The school has two campuses with 480 faculty and staff.

Faced with the challenge of maintaining a high educational standard across a large and diverse learning community, HKIS realized it needed to use technology to streamline its evaluations process.

In past years, teachers worked one-on-one with supervisors to set goals and review their performance against those goals. Some teachers conducted anonymous student feedback in class. Many administrators observed teachers in the classroom.

But as a paper-based system, HKIS’ appraisal processes were not always consistent throughout the organization and the documentation and feedback steps were time-consuming.

“The problem with this system was that it was hard, from a whole school perspective, to get a sense of what was being done and who needed to be followed-up,” says Justin Hardman, HKIS solutions manager. “Often, by the time you got around to checking, it was so far past the start of the year, the whole goal-setting process was less useful.”

As teachers read through stacks of student or parent feedback forms, the results were not tallied up. Therefore trends were not always apparent and results often difficult to interpret.

“If there are one or two negative comments out of 20, it is human nature to focus on those negative comments,” says Hardman. “So the fact that results were not tallied up meant that the teacher could miss spotting the overall trends, due to excessive focus on a couple of comments.”

Comparing feedback from year to year was also difficult. It wasn’t easy to track and analyze longer-term trends in teachers’ strengths and growth areas, as supported by classroom observations and various types of feedback.

WEB-BASED EAPPLE PUTS TOOLS IN TEACHERS' HANDS

HKIS' Performance Appraisal Committee met for three years to devise a new system that uses many of the ideas of Charlotte Danielson, who champions the philosophy that true school improvement comes from a focus on the interdependence of variables that affect student learning, both inside and outside the classroom.

HKIS needed a system that could automatically sort data and provide teachers with an easily accessible overall picture of their impact on student learning.

Furthermore, HKIS wanted the system to store teacher feedback over time in personal files that would enable them to generate meaningful reports for self-analysis and reflection. To gain teacher acceptance, the system needed to be confidential and user-friendly.

After a rigorous selection process, HKIS selected Blue Evaluation from eXplorance to create a Web-based system to gather performance evaluations into one central place confidentially accessible to individual teachers and supervisors.

The system is called eAPPLE (Appraisal Process for Professional Learning and Excellence). HKIS started to implement it during the 2006-07 academic year.

"We chose Blue because it's a flexible product that would grow with us," says Hardman. "We wanted a system that would allow administrative oversight, while at the same time let teachers control their own information. Also, we needed something that would allow large-scale feedback processes but also facilitate one-on-one performance reviews.

"In short, we wanted a professional development tool that would be supportive for educators, rather than a top-down management exercise."

With eAPPLE, students and parents now fill out their feedback forms on the Web. Automatically tabulated results are stored in an organized, central location.



Teacher goalsetting and supervisor-appraisal processes are an adjunct to the system, enabling administrators a better way to standardize school-wide evaluation processes.

eAPPLE enables administrators, teachers, and teacher-coaches to keep processes on schedule and facilitate communications between all parties involved.

One major advantage to using an electronic system is that both faculty and administrators have access to the same information at the same time.

Teachers control the creation of their personal reports that assist their yearly goalsetting.

Some designated data, particularly in feedback and end-of-year summaries from the teacher, are accessible to administrators. Teachers are aware of who has access to which of their personal data and reflections. When logging onto the system, they know who and when someone has accessed their personal data.

HKIS teacher David Elliott says that goals and professional development plans are easy to enter and he is now getting a more complete picture of the student experience in his classroom.

The first part of the system launched was student feedback. In the past, only one class per teacher was surveyed due to the huge task of tabulating the data.

"The summaries, data analysis, and extensive comments collected and processed by eAPPLE give you a complete feel of the experience of the students. Student feedback cannot be the only source of information, but their impressions are important," says Elliot.

To date, HKIS has conducted one round of student feedback, with over 1,500 students from grades 3 to 12, with the second round for the middle and high school being completed this quarter.

Parent feedback was collected from late February through April.

So far, the result is that, across the school, the number of teachers receiving feedback has increased through the use of eAPPLE.

TEACHERS GET MORE USEFUL INFORMATION WITH EAPPLE

"Students type more comments into the computer than they previously wrote by hand, and teachers have immediate access to aggregated results," says HKIS solutions manager Hardman.

"Faculty remark that student and parent comments are providing useful information and many teachers are using the feedback to initiate discussions about the learning environment with students."

In the end, Hardman says that eAPPLE, powered by Blue Evaluation, provides HKIS with a tool that captures the essence of conversations and provides a place to reflect on teaching and student learning.

And with school-wide information easily accessible, administrators can now identify areas where the overall faculty needs more professional development.

Teacher effectiveness is crucial to student learning. With all of its feedback and performance intelligence in one place, HKIS is helping its staff, teachers, students and parents work together and cultivate an environment in which learning can thrive — for both students and the educators who teach them.

ABOUT THE HONG KONG INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

Originally founded by a group of Christian leaders with a shared vision of educating the whole child — body, mind, and spirit — HKIS has blossomed with a reputation for excellence. In addition to a quality core curriculum, HKIS has a mission statement that includes six unique student learning outcomes that help define the school's character: academic excellence, spirituality, character development, self-motivated learning, contributing to society, and Chinese culture.

At HKIS, teacher-learning communities thrive on high degrees of collaboration and team work. This is why it has become a priority to use the best of today's technology to ensure that the school has the most effective and streamlined evaluation and feedback system possible.

