

Wednesday, February 28, 2007

Open Source for Education

Open Admin for Schools: Are Any US School Districts Using this Free Program?

Convincing school administrators to save money should be easy, right?

So, what about a school district and campus administration program that could save a school district multiple hundreds of thousands of dollars?

Why not replace expensive school administration programs with this free, Open Source alternative? What can this Free Software Do? Link to information about the Open Admin for Schools program; Here is a list of the components that are available in the secure, Web-based Open Admin for Schools product: Demographics - Stores student and family information that can be viewed and printed in a variety of ways. The student demographics are extensible; you can add your own additional data fields to store important information about students in your school(s)

Attendance - Attendance can be entered either by secretaries in the school office or by teachers in the classroom. The software has the ability to do different numbers of periods per day for elementary grades vs high school and middle years. Elementary classes can have two classes per day (AM/PM) with a homeroom teacher. Higher grades can have attendance done on a per subject period basis (and be subject-based). Attendance reports are integrated with report cards/progress reports. A variety of attendance reports are available

Discipline - A discipline module that tracks student discipline events and track outcomes is integrated in the Open Admin for Schools product. Administrators can categorize and post incident behaviors and print statistical reports

Report Card System - a flexible reporting system (with up to 20 subject objectives is integrated with attendance reporting. All report cards are printed as PDF reports and may include a school logo. All subjects may have unlimited length text comments, and can have any desired ordering. Attendance reporting will record number of school days, individual student's enrollment days, days absent, and the number of times that a student is tardy

Special Education Individual Education Plans (IEPs) -- The Open Admin for Schools program is integrated at the school district level so that special education teachers can tailor individual student programs with required modifications. These Individual Education Plans (IEPs) can be viewed by all authorized personnel. This function includes the ability to add student medical history, testing data, student team assignments and members' responsibilities. Objectives are chosen from lists of thousands, and these can be categorized in a variety of ways. Up to 32 objectives are allowed per subject and each 'subject' is specific to the needs of an individual student. The Open Admin for Schools system can generate progress reports (for use with the report card system) as well as build a comprehensive IEP report containing the yearly plan for the child. This IEP can also viewed and monitored by authorized campus and district staff to ensure compliance with all Special Education requirements

Export/Import Modules - Allows students to transfer schools within a school district without having to re-enter demographic information. The program can also export data to other programs using an XML transfer system

Online Gradebook -- Allows teachers to enter grades and assessments online, from school or home. The program can group and weigh assessment items, and post directly into the report card system

Parent Viewing -- The Open Admin for Schools system allows parents to view attendance, gradebook data, and report cards. These features integrate into existing school Websites with little effort

Online Daybook -- Allows teachers to plan and and post their lesson plans

Upcoming -- Multi-language support, Family functions, Parent-Teacher Interview Scheduling, Wherever schools want to go...Wow! What doesn't the program do that needs to get done?

Answer: The lesson plan posting module is weak.

In addition, the program needs to become School interoperability Framework (SIF) Compliant so that data can be shuffled into and out of the program (be shared, prevent the need for entering duplicate data into several programs) with other programs.

But, Open Admin for Schools will remain on the world-wide adoption list, but find limited traction in the USA (except for parochial and reservation schools). Here's why; Saving Money this Way: A Hard Sell in the USA. The Open Admin for Schools program is free, but convince your school district administrators to ditch the high-priced administrative, finance, and management programs that they currently subscribe to in favor of a cheap alternative.

You won't find many (any) takers.

So, who is attracted to the Open Admin for Schools program?

Schools (world-wide) and people who manage these schools effectively are attracted to the simplicity, low processing requirements, and solid, basic functioning of the Open Admin for Schools program. The Open Admin for Schools program seems to be indigenous to Saskatchewan, Canada. Canadian Red Tape. Apparently Canadian schools have less red tape, fewer reporting requirements, smaller budgets, and maybe a manageable bureaucracy (oxymoron?).

So, in the United States, this product is not apt to catch on, despite the fact that a school district could save from \$90,000 to multiple hundreds of thousands of dollars, the insane, obscene amount that is the going price of commercial

administrative software.

But, don't take our word for it. Check out these online demonstrations to see what this free product can do…Link to the Open Admin for Schools Administration Module demo…

Link to the Open Admin Teacher demo…

Link to the Open Admin Parent Module interface…

Link to the Open Admin Special Education Module…Free, but Priced out of the Market!What prices the Open Admin for Schools software out of US school district markets, except maybe for Parochial Schools, Charter Schools or Native American Reservation Schools?

Two answers:Reporting Requirements

Funding Source AccountabilityApparently Canadian schools don't have to report an array of data that would tax the logistical skills of Alexander the Great or Napoleon.

For example, do Canadian schools have to report to their executive and judicial branches of government?

Are there Canadian province database codes for identifying each discipline infraction that is referred to the campus office, codes for the ethnic background of each student, and reporting requirements (to the federal authorities) to discover (i.e., incriminate yourself or your staff, subject yourself to audit, lawsuit, and conviction in a trial by mass media) if minority students receive more severe punishments for similar behavioral infractions?

Does the Canadian Federal Government contribute nine percent of their school districts funding and demand 109% effort in data tracking and reporting in return?

If so, a product designed to track the basics of school management, such as Open Admin for Schools does quite well, "just won't cut it."

Does the Canadian government reimburse school districts for meals that are provided to children of lower-income families?

Do schools in Canada have to track each meal that they provide, and, if a child somehow needs to pay for a meal, but forgot their lunch money, do regulations require that the child must go hungry…then require that the food service workers throw the uneaten food out (because ineligible students cannot eat free food)?What Motivates US School Districts to Keep Subscribing to the High-Dollar Administration Products?Support for the Open Admin for Schools program costs only \$63 USD per hour.

The cost of maintaining high-priced commercial school management products is from tens (to hundreds) of thousands of dollars a year.

But, school districts can't afford the Open Admin for Schools program while "not blinking, not flinching, not balking" when paying for the commercial products. Why?

School district administrators spend the extra money to "Armor Plate their Backsides."

"Bullet-proofing" the administrative "soft-side" is more important than saving the huge sums that the commercial products cost. In fact, no expense is spared if it shields an administrative "Gluteus from the Boot."

As far as US school district administrators are concerned, Open Admin for Schools, means "open season" on administrators if "spinable," self-preservation-related data is not as easy to access as student records.Audit ProtectionOne thing that politicians, bureaucrats and school district administrators know (despite the separation of church and state) is that "he who lives by spin, dies by spin." This "self-evident" truth means that any report, analysis or audit can be "spun" in creative ways if there is enough camouflaging data. The findings of the same audit can allow a politician, bureaucrat or district official either to "live or die," either to "be promoted or demoted," either to "gain commendation or censure," either to be "praised or pilloried." The spin that can be generated about the data is more important than the facts.

What the high-priced school district administration products offer is "Audit Protection," and folks of a bureaucratic ilk know that…They are vulnerable

Their only defense is "spin"

They are compelled to "take the fall" for "higher ups"

Any money, no matter how much, is well spent if it offers "positive spin capacity" and some "negative spin repellent ammunition."This is the reason that "budget-hoarding, bureaucratic tightwads" trip over themselves to morph into "luxury buying spendthrifts" when shopping for "Audit Protection."Open Admin for Schools: Offers what Administrators Need, not what they WantSo, no matter how good Open Admin for Schools becomes, no matter how much money a school district could "save" by adopting this product…Open Admin for Schools will fail to catch on until it offers school district administrators what they want instead of what they need.

What school district administrators need is an easy to use, low-cost, quality product that covers all the basics.

What school district administrators want is a product that can spew whatever numbers are required to "make themselves look good, and to make their decisions appear to be sound", no matter what evidence to the contrary.

So, Open Admin for Schools will continue to enjoy a world-wide following; except in the United States, where "spin management" trumps effective management, every time.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Open Source at 03:00

Hi. Thanks for the article. I'm not sure what you mean about the 'Lesson Plan module'. You mean the Online Daybook? Agreed. It is weak, and I don't even have any docs created on that yet... More planning tools are on the way, including a planning interface and

weekly daybook printed output.

The SIF requirement may be a 'requirement' in the US, but the SIF is just a way to keep small vendors out of the lucrative US market, IMO. The argument may be 'interoperability', but if you look at the specs, they are half baked at best in many areas. I suspect once the specs get better, Open Admin may also be at the point that SIF might make sense, but I doubt it.

There are so many other features required for OA, that it will be at least a couple of years before we take a look at that, I believe. LDAP functionality will be much higher in priority, I believe. (but we'll see...)

OA is still changing to better support teachers in schools, particularly high schools. I will continue to do the best that I can to help teachers and schools solve the admin problems more easily, so they can focus on the core goal: Teaching Students.

Les Richardson
Open Admin for Schools
Anonymous on May 3 2007, 22:30