



School district improves the quality of education with e-business

Though Niagara Falls is a famous spot for tourists, it is also called home by some 56,000 people. With over 9,100 students enrolled in public schools, the Niagara Falls Board of Education (BOE) continually strives to achieve the highest level of partnership with its community. In cooperation with IBM and IBM Business Partner Vision Associates, the Niagara Falls BOE is redefining the bounds of e-business to fit its unique need. Now, critical information about such areas as student performance is available districtwide over the Internet via a standard Web browser to any administrator, teacher, community member or parent, regardless of where they are located or what type of computer is used.

“We had the confidence that IBM could provide the solution we needed to solve our problems while keeping costs down. Now, we have the Internet connectivity and the data warehousing we envisioned for our [school] district.”

—Guy Rizzuto
Director of Information Services at the
Niagara Falls Board of Education



“One of our goals is to effectively control financial costs while maintaining quality education,” says Guy Rizzuto, director of Information Services at Niagara Falls BOE. “IBM and Vision Associates have helped us create eScholar, a Web-based data warehousing solution, to meet our goal of improving education. Their expertise continues to help us as the solution evolves.”

Getting the information out

With Niagara Falls BOE’s old system, multiple file formats in the operational system made it very difficult to generate reports. The old system was not designed for simple interactive query and drilldown, making detailed analysis impossible for the average user. As a result, a special IS staff had to produce the reports. With reporting requirements from state and federal agencies increasing and district planning requirements growing, the reporting backlog was mushrooming.

Application	Web-based data warehousing solution for report generation and information sharing
Business Benefits	Faster report generation; cost reduction; efficient use of staff; improved relationship between school district and community
Software	IBM® DB2/400™ IBM TCP/IP IBM Firewall for AS/400 IBM DataPropagator™
Hardware	IBM AS/400e™
Services	IBM Global Services



Niagara Falls BOE’s eScholar, a Web-based data warehousing solution, helps control costs while making critical information immediately available to educators.

"We were spending a lot of time and money," says Rizzuto. "We had to wait for the IS department to generate the reports, which slowed things down and increased costs both directly and indirectly."

With eScholar in place, the Niagara Falls BOE is not only saving time generating reports, but is also able to develop important new reports. An added benefit is the improved reliability of the data. Now, the school district has more consistent and dependable information for better decision making.

IBM Global Services and IBM Business Partner Vision Associates worked together to design and implement the new system. One IBM AS/400e series server runs the IBM Firewall application and acts as the Web data warehouse server, all connected by IBM TCP/IP. Another AS/400e series server is used as an administrative system. IBM DataPropagator moves information stored in IBM DB2 databases from one AS/400 to the other. The two AS/400e servers provide the school district with the security and reliability it needs and ensures that it has plenty of room to grow.

One solution provides many answers

With its new intranet, the Niagara Falls BOE is able to generate information that helps address a myriad of issues with a single solution in areas such as learner outcome, staff development and finances. "Basically, school districts are drowning in data," says Connie Moss, assessment administrator for Niagara Falls BOE. "What isn't realized is how many decisions have to be made on a day-to-day basis. Now that information is easy to retrieve and consistent, we can make confident choices based on the data available." And the demand for such information is on the rise.

One use of the data is to help raise learner outcomes. Trying to continuously improve students' achievements, Niagara Falls BOE can analyze various factors that could impact the student's ability to learn, such as demographics. The new system allows the information to be presented graphically, making interpretation much simpler than reading rows of numbers.

Because the new system is much easier to use, teachers, administrators and office personnel are able to access the information stored in the DB2 databases and generate reports easily and quickly. As a result, they can be much more proactive in planning curriculum and course offerings.

One of the biggest benefits of eScholar is the more timely availability of reports, which allows the BOE administration to address staffing, student performance and financial issues more promptly. For example, Niagara Falls BOE's old system used to take up to three days to generate the 10-week Suite of Literacy Reports. Now, the BOE is producing these reports in 80 percent less time. And this performance improvement applies to other reporting activities as well. "Our disaggregate analysis report previously wasn't available until August. With our new system, we expect the report to be completed by the start of the new fiscal year in July, allowing administrators to be more proactive in planning for the next school year," says Rizzuto.

Investing in the future

Response to the e-business solution has been so positive that Niagara Falls BOE plans to expand eScholar to include human resources and finance as well. As with any large entity, budgeting is key to survival, but equally important is the human factor. Niagara Falls BOE hopes to use its new system to tie the two together.

The eScholar solution backs Niagara Falls BOE's commitment to community. Future plans call for expanding the scope of the solution out into the community, creating an extranet that will allow board members, teachers, parents and students to access even more information via secure browsing. Various levels of security will guarantee that confidential information will not fall into the wrong hands. "Our goal, ultimately, is for the data to be available to the state to meet its reporting requirements throughout the Internet," Rizzuto adds.

Niagara Falls BOE feels that the eScholar solution can be easily implemented by other school districts and will be marketing its solution through IBM and Vision Associates. For Niagara Falls BOE, its choice in e-business partners was an obvious one. "IBM had a proven track record with our school district, and we knew we had a challenging project ahead of us. We had the confidence that IBM could provide the solution we needed to solve our problems while keeping costs down. Now, we have the Internet connectivity and the data warehousing we envisioned for our district. With the evolving nature of the project, we look forward to a continuing partnership," Rizzuto concludes.

For more information, please contact your IBM Marketing Representative or IBM Business Partner.

Visit our Web site at:
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For more information on the Niagara Falls School District, visit its Web site at:
www.niagara.k12.ny.us

For more information on Vision Associates, visit its Web site at:
www.visionassociates.com



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