



TECHNOLOGY CENTER CHOOSES A STUDENT AND CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT SOLUTION FOR THEIR 30+ SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Overview Northeast Ohio Network for Educational Technology (NEOnet), one of Ohio’s 23 school district information technology support centers, and the Twinsburg City Schools recently implemented ProgressBook – Grade Book. They reveal reasons behind why they chose this web-based student and classroom management system, and discuss services and benefits.

Searching for Excellence The saying goes, “If you’re going to do something – do it right.” Matt Gdovin, Executive Director at Northeast Ohio Network for Educational Technology (NEOnet) agrees. Ten years ago when web-based grade books came into existence, Matt and his Information Technology Center (ITC) team found ProgressBook to be the solution that met their needs – and more!

Matt said, “It all started in the early 2000s with Doug Jones, the Nardonias Schools technology director. They had an opportunity to run the

ProgressBook beta so we got involved and were very impressed. We ultimately did a needs assessment

for a centralized web-based, not client-server grade book, and reviewed a handful of systems. The benefits of ProgressBook over other packages were impressive. In addition, the experience of Software Answers’ two founders and the fact that the company was Ohio based added to our decision. ProgressBook was our first choice to offer our school district customers the best grade book available – and it still is.”



*Matthew Gdovin
NEOnet, Executive Director*

NEONET - FAST FACTS

- One of 23 Information Technology Centers in Ohio providing services to Ohio school districts
- NEOnet provides services, software, hosting and support for applications including:
 - ✓ grade book
 - ✓ financial
 - ✓ special ed/gifted
 - ✓ library
 - ✓ student information system
- Implementation and ongoing support for state reporting training and support, technical, software and hardware support for email, VoIP, internet, printer, firewall, network, operations and other miscellaneous systems and troubleshooting.
- NEOnet’s consortium of over 30 districts supports 100,000 +students.
- Each year, NEOnet holds NEOtech, a conference for educators with eight tracks of educational sessions and vendors.

So much so, that NEOnet offers only one grade book to their client school districts. Matt continues, “To support multiple packages and do it well would be very challenging. So we explained to our customers that we found the best product in each category and offer it to the entire consortium.”

This business model works well for NEOnet. “School districts don’t worry about hardware, backups, recovery or enhancements,” explains Matt. “It’s the economies of scale that keep the schools’ costs in check. We’ve become an integral part of each district’s teams by providing setup, training – everything to support their student, teacher and business applications.”

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Day-to-Day Practices NEOnet clients include 30 school districts comprised of over 100,000 students. Their suite of products and services consist of ProgressBook, the DASL student information system, support for EMIS (Ohio’s statewide data collection system), special education/gifted software, parent and student access, email, Internet service, financial applications, and more. Matt said, “We support over a dozen great applications and continually evaluate new technologies to bring on board that can help our school districts and new customers become more streamlined and efficient.”



Kathy Peters, NEOnet Support

Kathy Peters, NEOnet Software Support Representative gets excited talking about training district staff on ProgressBook. Her top priorities include training and supporting any district staff that use or support ProgressBook. Kathy says, “Our goal is to make customers’ lives easier and ensure every new school-year rollout runs smoothly. The best part of my job, is conducting ProgressBook classroom style teacher training, especially with teachers that are resistant to change. It happens every time – I’ll highlight a particular feature, and see the smiles on teachers’ faces, because they realize the time they’ll save each week using ProgressBook.”

New school year preparations begin about two weeks before the first day of school. Kathy is either on site or available by phone to support schools with beginning-of-the-school-year processes. Kathy says, “Our grade book and student information system are completely integrated, so as schools prepare, activities are tackled just once in a single system, such as rolling information to the next year, setting up teachers and classrooms, and adding new students.

Beginning of the Year and Support Kathy said, “Through the efforts of each district’s staff, hundreds of teachers start the year smoothly from day one. Teachers log in to an easy-to-use system where all their classrooms automatically appear on the screen. Returning teachers jump right in because they’ve used the system and their lessons and assignments can be reused from the previous year. New teachers go through training, either in a

classroom style with me or with their IT or school staff because they've become experts on ProgressBook. When districts handle infrequent activities like report cards, or turning on new ProgressBook features, we help with those activities and transitions, too. We accommodate every situation to support our customers."

NEOnet is tier-one support for their school district customers, supporting new installations, day-to-day support, start-up and year-end processes, state reporting, and as-needed training. Sixteen of the other 22 Ohio ITCs also provide ProgressBook to their school district customers. Software Answers is second-tier support for those ITCs, offering software enhancements, support on issues that may arise, and documentation for system administrators, teachers, district administrators, parents and students.

**Selecting
a New
Solution**

Jennifer Farthing, Coordinator of Library and Educational Technology for the Twinsburg City Schools in Northeast Ohio, administers ProgressBook, and oversees the schools' five building libraries. The district has 4,300 students and over 250 teachers.

Jennifer described the district's 2009-2010 school-year switch to ProgressBook from Pinnacle. She said, "Our old system had been in place since the mid 90s. When we learned the vendor would no longer support it, and their new version was to be web-based, it was a great opportunity to explore other options. We talked with NEOnet about what they recommended, saw demos of several systems, evaluated system features, and even evaluated the pros and cons of staying with Pinnacle's new web-based grade book, which would have included us hosting our own data, with three new servers and additional staff. Our choice was clear – going with NEOnet and ProgressBook, and it's been a very good experience."

How I Use ProgressBook

"With pseudo classes in ProgressBook, I can be sure my athletes are doing what needs to be done both on the athletic field and in the classroom. If I see a student not doing what needs to be done, I get the assistant coaches and teachers involved. Sometimes it's just a one-time thing, but once in a while we find a student that's in jeopardy of becoming ineligible to play in our Friday night games. We get help, find a tutor – really steer the kid in the right direction. As the coach, it's all about the sports, but as an educator, we're also ensuring the student is good as a whole.

I use ProgressBook to quickly pull up a kid's address or email when college recruiters want to send information to a student.



*Joe Schiavone
Twinsburg City Schools
Teacher and Head Coach*

Every day I check attendance for my athletes. If a kid is absent, I can call their house to see if they'll attend school for the required half day to be eligible to practice or play that night."

Relying on NEOnet services, Jennifer concentrates on software and supporting teachers. “We don’t have to make backups, we don’t have to load software on servers, we don’t worry about hardware failures – it’s truly very liberating compared to our old system.”



**Embracing
New
Technology**

Twinsburg teachers have embraced ProgressBook and use features to their advantage – not just for taking attendance or entering lessons and grades! Athletic coaches love it. They form online “ghost” classes of their teams to view their players’ grades helping ensure eligibility. Many teachers give tests with multiple choice sections, using scannable forms which can upload to ProgressBook. That results in spending more time reading and evaluating extended written responses. The ProgressBook Parent Access missing assignment notification is a big hit. Administrators use ProgressBook to determine which parents have viewed their student’s grades.



Jennifer Farthing
Twinsburg City Schools
Technology Coordinator

In Jennifer’s final comment, she said, “Teacher feedback was overwhelming. One teacher even said, “Why didn’t we do this sooner?”

SOFTWARE ANSWERS - FAST FACTS

- Software Answers integrated, web-based applications include Grade Book, Special Services (IEP/ETR), Student Information System (DASL), Online Learning, and DataMap (intelligence to boost student state test scores)
- ProgressBook applications are used in all 50 states and 23 countries
- Software Answers’ ProgressBook - Grade Book application is the most used electronic grade book in Ohio.
- Over 4 million students, parents, teachers and district administrators use software powered by Software Answers
- Software Answers is located in Brecksville, Ohio, a suburb of Cleveland. With 55 employees, the company was named 4th to the 2011 Top Workplaces in Northeast Ohio.

SOFTWARE ANSWERS

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