MMS and You: Taking Advantage of Industry Standards

Bob Wachob has his hands full as a Technology Coordinator, responsible for managing student data for nearly 500 students at Jefferson County-Dubois Area Vocational and Technical School. Managing student access accounts within a school can prove to be challenging, especially when multiple accounts are required for varied systems. A student might need one account for network access and another account for student portal access, and the list can go on, depending on what systems are used within a school. The administration can impose internal schemes to ensure that usernames are the same in each system, but managing passwords so they are changed regularly with the desired level of strength, (e.g. length, mixed case, at least one number), in multiple systems, or ensuring that they are reset when they are forgotten, is time consuming for staff – and in a school, time is often a scarce resource.

Industry data standards are a good way to ensure common elements can be shared and used among varied systems. One such standard is LDAP (Lightweight Directory Access Protocol). When deploying the MMS Student and Teacher Portals, Wachob took advantage of existing network accounts because both his directory service and the MMS are LDAP-compliant.

"Students are already familiar with their network account user name and password, so now it is easy for them to gain access to the MMS Student Portal using the same account. It used to be that I was spending a good part of my time resetting students' passwords when they were forgotten. Students would also confuse what user name and password worked for each system." says Wachob. "With the MMS LDAP feature, any administrator can reset passwords across the board in one easy step. The students know that they have one user name and password. The time savings and reduction in student frustration works exponentially if you're doing it right."

SIF (School interoperability Framework) is another industry standard Wachob deploys to streamline his student information, saving his staff time and keeping his data updated. SIF integrates elements of student data from various applications by tying their common threads together to eliminate redundant data entry and the need for duplicate account information. With the MMS SIF Agent, fifteen different groups of data elements are defined using standardized rules and definitions. These common data elements enable different applications to interact and share data. MMS, Active Directory, Destiny Library Manager and Renaissance Learning SIF Agents are used at Jefferson County-Dubois Area Vocational and Technical School to automatically keep all these systems linked and their data up-to-date.

"With SIF Agents, the staff can just enter a new student into the MMS, or withdraw the student in one simple step, and the data is automatically updated on my other SIF-compliant systems," says Wachob. "This saves time and reduces a tremendous amount of work."

The MMS has been SIF-compliant since 2005 and its agent was recently re-certified for SIF 2.0. The latest MMS SIF Agent features support for twice as many data objects and an enhanced user interface for ease of use. Today, state departments of education are beginning to evaluate the use of SIF for schools to report directly to the state. One such state is Massachusetts, where the MMS SIF 2.0 Agent has been modified to meet MA requirements. Our pilot districts are now in stage 2 of testing. We're pleased to be working closely with the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's longitudinal data warehouse project and Race to the Top initiative for our districts to be able to streamline their data reporting, on-time and on-budget, as required by the state. Our clients are also able to take advantage of this agent to work with other applications. The MMS SIF Agent is available to clients at a nominal cost.

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