

Edsby at Greater Essex County District School Board

How Edsby keeps educators, students and families connected

Home to more than 36,000 students across nine communities in the Canadian province of Ontario, [Greater Essex County District School Board \(GECDSB\)](#) operates 55 elementary schools and 15 secondary schools. Thanks to Edsby, keeping all the schools and communities connected has never been easier.

The award-winning Edsby social learning environment puts connections between people, not just documents, at the center of K–12 education around the world. Schools and districts adopt Edsby for community engagement, learning management, assessment and reporting, analytics and student well-being.

At GECDSB, Edsby helps keep all stakeholders informed and teachers use Edsby to manage remote instruction—all while creating a strong sense of community.

A single, unified platform

Edsby uniquely combines safe social learning and networking tools with classroom, student and learning management features. GECDSB has been using Edsby since 2016 to give administrators and teachers a simple—yet powerful—way to communicate with students and families, while also fostering collaboration and managing digital instruction.

“What we are trying to do is reduce the amount of communication a teacher has to do on multiple fronts,” said Tayab Farooq, Manager of Information Technology for GECDSB.

Instead of having to log into separate programs for grading, recording attendance, managing assignments, giving quizzes and communicating with families, teachers can perform of these functions within Edsby. “They’re able to go to one system and do all the things they need to do,” Farooq said.

Making communication easy

James Cowper, Principal at Anderdon Public School in the district, likes having one unified system for engaging with students and families. Edsby “makes it really easy to find information,” he said. “It’s what I use to communicate.”

The Edsby user interface is like Facebook and often feels familiar to first-time users. Edsby shares a “river of news” that is unique to each school. Administrators can post updates and announcements to families and students in Edsby, and the information stream even appears on each school’s public website courtesy of a third-party



GECDSB’s School Talk group in Edsby allows students to engage freely with their friends, but is moderated by staff for digital citizenship coaching.

product. “The fact that there’s integration with our school’s website is a huge bonus,” Cowper said, noting that he only needs to post the information in one place for it to be seen by families. “Every principal in our district [likes this feature].”

Cowper and his staff also use Edsby to send confidential messages to students and parents—and families can easily reach district employees in turn. “The messaging service is fantastic,” Cowper said. “Personally, I appreciate it very much. I don’t need to get any more emails. I really don’t.”

In addition, users can create groups within Edsby, giving employees, students and families secure and convenient ways to communicate and collaborate. These groups—which are ideal for clubs, teams and even professional development—can be open or restricted to specific members, roles or communities.

Cowper, who also coaches basketball at Anderdon Public School, created a group for participants. “I can put offensive plays in one folder and defensive plays in another,” Cowper said. “I can announce that a game is cancelled, and parents can see that as well. All my communicating with the team can be done within Edsby, so that I’m not stressed out at practice. I’m there to coach basketball. If players or families want to know when the next game is, they can look in their Edsby group for that.”

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— *Tayab Farooq, Manager of Information Technology*

Facilitating remote instruction

When the COVID-19 pandemic began, many schools and districts felt unprepared to move instruction online. Yet, Edsby had GECDsB well positioned for this monumental shift.

Before the pandemic, about three out of four teachers at GECDsB were already using Edsby in some capacity or another, Farooq estimates. The more forward-thinking teachers were using the system to manage digital assignments, lead class discussions and promote collaborative learning.

GECDsB provided extensive professional development to help teachers use the system for remote teaching and learning. "There was a big up-front lift for teachers to be able to do that," Farooq said. "I would say between March and June [of 2020], it was step, error, step, error—and then I think we figured it out. As time went along, we weren't having a lot of issues."

Beyond instruction, Edsby helped keep families engaged and informed while schools were closed. Mailing nearly 40,000 report cards during the pandemic would have been challenging, but with Edsby, families had easy access to their children's progress.

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Fostering connection

The pandemic took a huge toll on students' social-emotional health and well-being. Depression and anxiety among young people doubled, [according to research](#)—with one in four adolescents worldwide experiencing depression and one in five experiencing heightened anxiety.

However, having Edsby in place helped GECDsB students feel more connected with each other and their entire school community.

Cowper used Edsby during the pandemic to post silly messages, memes and other information to foster a sense of school culture.

"We're the Mustangs," Cowper said. "I went online and had some artwork done to make a caricature of Mustang Sally, this funny little horse who wears a hat or reads books or wears glasses."

Cowper used Edsby to share these images of Mustang Sally with the school community.

Cowper also created a group within Edsby for "School Talk," a forum for students to connect online. "Throughout the pandemic, School Talk was a place for students to go and post whatever they want, and I just let them," he said. "Yeah, it was annoying when they posted a poll about what their favorite ice cream flavor for the 5,000th time, but I didn't care. They didn't do that for me. They didn't do it for their teachers. They did it to engage with their friends."



"I'm on Edsby all day. It's the main interface for my job."

— James Cowper, Principal at Anderdon Public School

Teaching digital citizenship

Not only did Edsby help build community when students were socially isolated, but Edsby helped Anderdon Public School staff teach students essential digital citizenship skills.

"What better place to learn those skills than within the Edsby platform, where it's safe behind a firewall?" Cowper said. "I can monitor what students are posting online. I can take something down if somebody uses the wrong word and we have a conversation about that the next day. It's a perfect opportunity for that [teachable moment] to occur, while making sure that students don't make that same mistake down the road on Facebook or wherever."

Cowper says the social interaction that students have on Edsby also gave him a window into what they're concerned about.

"Not because I want to police it," he explained. "I don't want jurisdiction, but it's good to know what's going on in the community. It's good to keep your ear to the rail."



36,000 K-12 students at GECDsB have been using Edsby since 2016. The district uses it for learning management, assessment and reporting and parent engagement.

An indispensable tool

Edsby gives teachers and administrators powerful insight into how students are doing academically as well as what they're talking or thinking about. With extensive assessment, reporting and analytics features, Edsby helps educators at all levels be more effective.

"I'm on Edsby all day," Cowper added. "It's the main interface for my job."