

Keys to a Successful PowerTeacher Pro Rollout

Many districts have had wonderful success with rolling out gradebooks. Others wonder where they went wrong, or why their teachers are not on board.

Here are the keys to ensuring a successful gradebook rollout for your district, and to keeping your teachers informed and happy.



1. Get Teachers Involved Early!

+ WHAT TO DO:

The most important key to success is getting teachers involved early. Several months before rollout, communicate to teachers that you are considering rolling out a new gradebook. Clearly articulate the reasons and the benefits for moving to a new gradebook. Hold sessions where they can see the new gradebook, learn about the new features, and offer feedback. If your teachers have enhancement suggestions, let them know that you will communicate those back to PowerSchool.

— WHAT NOT TO DO:

Because of time pressure, some districts skip the communication, and simply spring the decision on teachers and force them to make the switch. This is a clear recipe for disaster. In general, teachers are more comfortable with what they already know, and can be very apprehensive about having to learn a new system. Suddenly forcing a big change on them is a definite way to start a teacher rebellion, with demands for keeping the old system. Make sure to communicate early and often about the switch to a new gradebook.

2. Explain the Origin, Vision, and Direction of PowerTeacher Pro

+ WHAT TO DO:

Some gradebooks were developed over a period of 10 or more years. As a new product, PowerTeacher Pro is not going to have every single feature yet from PowerTeacher Gradebook. Nor is it going to do things in exactly the same manner as PowerTeacher Gradebook, especially when there is a better or more usable way. PowerTeacher Pro was built from the ground up as a brand new product, with feedback from thousands of teachers. The goal was to design a gradebook from scratch that provides the ultimate user experience. 18+ months of usability testing were done with teachers across the country. It's true that PowerTeacher Pro does not have every feature of PowerTeacher.

PowerTeacher Pro is constantly being enhanced. Because of the research and positive teacher feedback, PowerSchool has chosen this as the gradebook solution for all of its student information products. Now when a feature is added to PowerTeacher Pro, over 30% of all teachers in the country can potentially take advantage of it, across PowerSchool.

As mentioned above, teachers in general do not like change. It's important for them to realize all of the research and teacher feedback that went into PowerTeacher Pro. It is not designed as the next version of PowerTeacher Gradebook, and features will work in new and innovative ways. PowerTeacher Pro is being built as the next generation of teacher tools. No other gradebook on the market can match it for usability and the rich experience that it provides in a 100% web-based gradebook.

— WHAT NOT TO DO:

Districts that simply say "here's a new gradebook" without providing the context above will leave teachers confused. Teachers will wonder why they left PowerTeacher Gradebook, and why PowerTeacher Pro doesn't have a feature or two from the previous gradebook. Once teachers realize that PowerTeacher Pro is the foundation, and will be constantly enhanced, they will understand the benefits of this next generation teacher tool.

3. Explain the benefits to the district, the administrators, and to the teachers of having a browser based gradebook built as part of the SIS

+ WHAT TO DO:

Explain the benefits of not having to content with any java issues or any client technical issues. All that is needed is a supported browser. Previously teachers may be used to the headache of navigating back and forth between a Java Swing client application and the PowerSchool Teacher Portal as well as having installation issues when using different devices or having java upgrades. All of that goes away by using PowerTeacher Pro. The navigation will all occur inside the browser and there is nothing the teacher or admins need to be concerned about to run the application other than having a browser installed.

PowerTeacher Pro also allows the grade setup to be set up by the administrator so there will be no need for admins to worry that the teacher's don't have their grade setup done properly.

PowerTeacher Pro also works on any device such as Chromebooks and tablets. This provides a lot more flexibility for the teachers to access the gradebook from anywhere. Additionally this means that there is only one set of training and one workflow for every device whether it be a tablet, or a computer.

For districts that use standards based grading PowerTeacher Pro was designed from the very beginning with standards in mind. It includes vastly improved tools for working with standards in an easy way that allow the teacher to act on actionable data.

WHAT NOT TO DO:

- Do not assume that critical benefits are automatically apparent to teachers and administrators. There are key pieces of their current workflow that will be greatly improved that they may not know are there unless they are informed about all of the new functionality and flexibility that is offered as well as giving them the peace of mind that they can use any device and will never need to worry about installation.

4. Training, Training, Training

WHAT TO DO:

- + Provide teachers with plenty of opportunities to learn the application, and provide supporting materials. Make sure they understand the key features, and have access to key resources: on-line help, district materials, and access to other power users at their school. Offer multiple sessions and multiple ways to learn the application. Explore PowerSchool's self-paced online training as an option, especially for new teachers who come in mid-year and miss the general training.
- Creation of a quick reference card (or use PowerSchool's) will help teachers remember the key data, and have a resource to go to for the core functions.

WHAT NOT TO DO:

- Although the application is extremely easy-to-use, do not assume that teachers will figure out everything by themselves or without documentation. If teachers don't figure out how to do a function, they will assume that it's not in the product. In many cases, they just need to be pointed in the right direction to realize all of the advanced features in PowerTeacher Pro.

5. Train the trainer, and build a team of super users. Ensure that every school has some expert teachers who become advocates and who other teachers can turn to for help.

WHAT TO DO:

- + Offer specialized in-depth training to specific teachers who are interested. You might even run a pilot for a reporting period, to help this group get up to speed. Ensure that you have volunteers from EVERY school. When a new teacher is trying to figure out how to do something, it can be frustrating if they have to wait for answers. With several other teachers at their school who can help and answer questions, you'll build a base of happy users who get questions answered quickly.

WHAT NOT TO DO:

- Do not designate just one person in the district to become the expert in the application, and expect that he or she will be able to help everyone. It's critical to ensure that every school in the district has teachers who are at that school every day to offer support and encouragement to the other teachers. Some districts will designate just a single expert, or pick someone who is at different schools on different days. This practice can lead to teacher frustration when their peer resource is not on site that day. Building up a team of advocates prior to general rollout will help things go much more smoothly, and provide a