

# Turning Ed Philosophy into an Invisible Reality



“Better communication makes better education”

- Frank Lucia  
Principal, Pleasant Grove

**PLEASANT GROVE OPPORTUNITIES**

- Make educational philosophy come to life
- Close communication gap among staff, student, and families
- Create more time for teachers to spend with students by using collaborative software to empower others with better information

**KEY SOLUTION REQUIREMENTS**

- Integrated communication system
- Easy for teachers to use
- Simple to implement
- Fully supported

**Building an Invisible Foundation**

A new high school gave Principal Frank Lucia the chance to pour his academic beliefs into the foundation of his school’s culture. As he prepared to open Pleasant Grove High School in Elk Grove, California, Lucia outlined the key element of his philosophy: “Better communication makes better education,” he said.

Concerned about finding the right technology to make that ideal real, he and his team set out to find tools so effective and so easy to adopt that they would be “invisible,” woven right into the teachers’ day.

Keeping in mind the twin objectives of finding a great collaborative tool that teachers would actually adopt, Lucia searched for the school’s first integrated communication system. When Vice Principal Ed van Brenk introduced him to School Loop—a web-based system that links all members of the school community and requires practically no training—he knew he had found a way to turn his philosophy into a working reality.



Frank Lucia  
Principal, Pleasant Grove

**A System Teachers Actually Use**

From day one School Loop has helped teachers, students, and parents collaborate and remains one of the school’s most popular tools. “The power of School Loop is its ability to bring people together,” said Vice Principal van Brenk. Colleague Laurie Weiss added, “What makes School Loop so effective is that people actually use it.”

The Pleasant Grove community certainly gets a lot of use out of School Loop. Its 1,900 members generate about 120,000 page views per month. Students use the system daily (sometimes hourly) and 91% of the teachers publish on School Loop every week.

**Giving Back Time to Teach**

School Loop has become an essential part of the day for Pleasant Grove teachers. It takes only minutes to use and it frees them up to do what they do best, instructing and interacting with students.

“Most teachers post homework on School Loop first thing in the morning,” said Weiss. Generally, that task takes about a minute but it saves teachers time, since they no longer have to repeat directions, issue reminders, redistribute schedules, or make copies of assignments. As a result, the support network in the school and in the home are empowered to help students, and students are account-

able to their results. It has been adopted so easily into most teachers’ routines that, according to van Brenk, “School Loop is quickly becoming invisible—it’s just part of the school.”

**No One Showed Up for Training**

When asked why School Loop is so effective, Laurie Weiss answered, “It is very easy to use.” Weiss believes that School Loop’s consistent 1, 2, 3 interface and intuitive calendar are the secrets of its simplicity. “Once you learn how to post a grade and put in an assignment, you can do anything in School Loop,” she said.

Weiss said teachers “hit the ground running,” and needed practically no training. An initial demonstration was well attended, but only a few teachers showed up for the actual training. Why? The teachers felt the brief introduction provided all they needed to know to use School Loop effectively. “After the first demonstration, School Loop was intuitive enough; the teachers figured it out on their own,” said Weiss.



Pleasant Grove High School  
Elk Grove, CA

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#### SOLUTION: SCHOOL LOOP

##### General Features:

- Access for all students and staff
- Email accounts
- Web sites for all users, courses, or groups
- Automatic email reminders
- Custom calendars
- High-priority groups
- One-click group messaging
- Secure login
- Stats showing user registrations, log-ins, page views, and more
- Automatic SIS updates
- Spanish language version

##### For Teachers:

- Grade book
- Student record access
- Private drop boxes
- Downloadable, printable rosters
- Private progress reports
- News publishing

##### For Students and Parents:

- Student work portfolios
- Bottomless digital lockers
- Embedded discussion groups

#### By Teachers, For Teachers

School Loop’s interface makes sense to teachers because it was created by a teacher, Mark Gross, in his own classroom. His goal was to offer teachers what they need most—more time to help students—by letting computers do what they do best—taking care of time-consuming, repetitive tasks and linking groups together. Teachers at Pleasant Grove feel that School Loop helps them use their time more productively. “They begin to feel they’re making a mark on their students’ education,” said van Brenk.

School Loop has been eagerly adopted by parents and students, as well as teachers. Online access to homework and grades helps parents keep their children accountable and on-task. And students use the system to offer encouragement, tutor each other, and expand on the concepts they’re learning.

With School Loop, collaboration comes naturally. For example, after one high school English class, a spontaneous online discussion of literary themes arose. The discussion continued for days revealing a level of critical thinking well beyond what was possible in their 50-minute class. “When that kind of communication is possible, parents, students, and staff all become more engaged,” said van Brenk.



Ed van Brenk  
Vice Principal, Pleasant Grove

#### Easy to Implement

The IT staff at Pleasant Grove finds School Loop straightforward to run and administer. “We’ve never had any technology as easy to implement and maintain as School Loop,” said van Brenk. Integrating School Loop with the school’s homegrown student information system was their single implementation challenge. “Even though our SIS is

homegrown, we were up and running with the system in about a week,” said van Brenk. Laurie Weiss added, “They are very responsive when customer issues arise. The customer service is fabulous.”




Laurie Weiss  
Teacher, Pleasant Grove

Throughout its first year of using School Loop, Pleasant Grove benefited from the commitment of the School Loop team. Lucia and his staff have begun to understand that this software is truly “by and for” teachers. “School Loop as a company shows incredible commitment to teachers,” said Lucia. Ed van Brenk also praised the commitment of School Loop’s team, “It’s not uncommon to receive emails from Mark Gross and his team after working hours, and that shows their extraordinary dedication.”

#### A Buzz Around the District

School Loop helped Principal Lucia and his team build a digital architecture to mirror their new physical surroundings, and to pour their philosophy into the cement. Word has gotten out about Pleasant Grove’s popular communication system. “One of the best testaments to the effectiveness of School Loop is that colleagues all over the district are buzzing about it,” said Ed van Brenk. “They’re saying, ‘How can we get School Loop at our school?’”

By empowering school staff, parents, and students themselves to participate more actively in the educational process, students have a greater chance for success. With the whole community more involved, teachers have more time to do what they do best: Teach. 

#### ABOUT SCHOOL LOOP

School Loop is an easy-to-use, web-based, integrated communication system that enables a collaborative school culture. School Loop makes relevant information and resources available to everyone in the school community—eliminating time wasted hunting for information, repeating tasks, and trying to connect. As a result, the staff can spend more time helping students. Students can extend their education beyond school hours. And teachers interact more easily among themselves, breaking down the isolation of the classroom and bringing more collaboration to education. “Are you in the Loop?”



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