The Synergy Education Platform: Today’s Solution and Tomorrow’s Technology

Executive Summary

With the latest release of its industry-leading student information system (SIS), Edupoint Education Systems has consolidated its integrated solutions suite under a single brand, Synergy, as a way to introduce its next generation collaborative functionality while clearly differentiating the suite’s foundational breadth and complementary partner solutions within an industry still focused on data management <and Web migration>. The Synergy Education Platform represents a paradigm shift in the purpose and scope of SIS solutions from one limited to capturing, tracking, and reporting student data to one that addresses the information needs of the entire educational community (teachers, administrators, parents and students) in real time, enables those constituents to individually perform at their highest levels, and facilitates effective collaboration between teachers and administrators, throughout the district and across the state, and with parents.

Recognized for the vision of a leadership team that has transformed the industry multiple times over the last four decades, Edupoint has created in Synergy the most powerful SIS solution on the market today, as well as a platform on which school districts can build for the future. This paper relates the Synergy vision in terms of the synergisms it creates – across the product line, between users, and with Edupoint’s business partners.

Empowering the Educational Community

Everyone understands that student performance must improve if America is to retain its leadership role in the world. To achieve that goal, we must acknowledge that not all students learn in the same way or at the same pace. In a typical class of randomly selected students, a few will quickly grasp any lesson and, just as quickly, become bored as they wait for others to catch up. A few students will never grasp the material, for various reasons, until the lesson is presented in a different way and will soon stop trying. Predictably, teachers have tended to teach to that group comprising the middle, and the results speak for themselves.

Attempts have been made in the last two decades to group low- and high-achievers and to pace their respective curricula accordingly, and some successes have been seen, albeit more so among those pegged as high-achievers. Typically, those groupings have been selected in hindsight, after the students became bored or quit trying. Also, absent the ennui, any student will not typically excel or fail equally across all subjects; instead, when properly motivated, most students will learn some subjects easier than others. The reality is that selection for those groups may not be an accurate representation of the
students’ true overall potentials, and in fact, labeling the students as such may become a self-fulfilling prophecy with any performance increases thereby easily outweighed by decreases.

The key to success is personalized instruction, differentiated to address the individual student’s needs and implemented in real time, not from hindsight. And, of course, we need to involve parents more, and sooner, so that they are working with teachers at the pace of the lesson plan, rather than asking parents to contribute in arrears based on a weeks-old progress report or report card.

Synergy empowers the education community with the tools each contributor – and student – needs to excel. Student performance to standards can be assessed and shared in real time so that curricula can be adjusted on the fly and parents can be made aware of deficiencies before their student falls behind. Differentiated instruction is supported by giving teachers access to a variety of administration-approved lesson materials, and collaboration between teachers (and with parents) is enabled, so that they can share their assessments of those materials.

**Synergetic Solutions**

Edupoint was founded with a vision of simplified student data management through a central database and feature-rich 100% browser-based user interface. Recognizing that schools have diverse requirements from state to state and face the same demands for more powerful, yet less costly, information technology solutions as commercial enterprises, the company designed a robust, yet flexible, scalable, and extensible, Microsoft .NET-based application framework and development platform – now called Synergy Technology – to empower a self-sufficient district.

Synergy Technology protects data and application software – both Edupoint’s solutions and those developed by districts on the platform – from underlying generational changes to hardware, operating systems, and database management systems, while providing an open API for integration with third-party enterprise software. Applications built on the Synergy Technology foundation are more than tightly integrated; they become synergetic solutions – sharing data in real time, providing users with a consistent look-and-feel, and allowing a district’s in-house staff to extend their information management system as needed by easily creating or modifying business rules, screens, and reports.

By providing robust out-of-box functionality, a highly configurable and customizable architecture, and the sustainability of .NET’s base web application support, Edupoint synergistic solutions deliver short-term results, long-term value, and the assurance of a path forward for many years.

**The Synergism of People**

Undoubtedly, the integrated solutions that comprise the Synergy Education Platform deliver ascertainable and measureable value. However, to achieve higher student performance, application integration is not enough; schools need to integrate people. Teachers, administrators, parents, and
students must work more closely together. Educators and parents must respond faster with assistance when any student falters, and students need the tools to take ownership of their educational progress. Teachers want to engage more parents; yet to engage, busy parents must have visibility into their student’s daily progress and be able to access guidance on how to provide the necessary assistance or supervision.

Historically, teachers have struggled alone in their individual classroom, with little time available in their day to share tips or exchange stories of success or failure. Likewise, parents and students were ill-equipped to improve performance when they were only informed of a student’s status and progress after a test, homework assignment, or worse, at the end of a grading period. By the time parents could help, if they even knew how to help, the class had most likely moved on to a new lesson. The solution for each of these issues is to provide timely, accurate, and actionable information to each constituent.

The Synergy Education Platform provides that solution. Unlike any SIS solution on the market, Synergy has created a collaboration environment that directly engages all education constituents and helps them communicate more effectively and adapt instruction more quickly to the students’ individual needs. New functionality delves deeper into the micro-classroom environment to expand longitudinal analysis at the school and district level, and for the first time, provide a technology solution at the macro environment by uniting Synergy users across the state. Synergy’s value to each constituent is described next.

**Teachers**

Synergy’s primary focus enhances three key functional areas for teachers.

1. **True Integrated Learning Management with Response to Intervention (RTI)** – teachers will no longer instruct static lessons and stale curriculum. Instead, Synergy provides robust lesson plan content development tools and a content library for sharing custom and third-party content, all within the same application used to communicate, score students, and manage the classroom.

   Synergy lets teachers:
   a. Align standards to instructional elements
   b. Develop all curriculum elements (lesson/unit plans, tests, answer keys, etc.)
   c. Identify all necessary materials, including instructional best practices guides

   Synergy provides a lesson content repository and rating system for teacher reviews of instructional materials. Content is assessed by course or grade level and rated based on benchmark results, formative results, or standardized test results. The repository can be accessed by curriculum managers, department heads, and teachers. The district can push content to the classroom, create and support best practice instruction delivery, and target interventions. Teachers use Synergy’s one-click feature to create grade book entries directly from the curriculum content.
Synergy enables a true RTI solution tightly integrated with the same tool used to facilitate standard instruction. Regardless of the RTI model employed by a district, Synergy provides an integrated solution with every essential element: assess, screen, and identify students in need; apply proven instruction, and measure results.

2. Dynamic Adaptable Instruction and Individualized Learning Plans (ILPs) – tightly integrated assessments allow teachers to not only perform ad-hoc formative tests; they also leverage the system’s ability to identify the patterned ability of learners per standard and dynamically group students by performance. Teachers can transition those students who need additional interventions as well as those who qualify for accelerated learning. Rather than delivering static, prescribed, lowest-common-denominator instruction, Synergy creates an adaptive learning platform that produces dynamic instruction based on student achievement of common core standards as measured by tests aligned to classroom averages, weighted measurements, or PowerLaw® identified performance. With Synergy, the result is an adaptive ILP that does not require teachers to update the plan through a separate system; the ILP is implicitly updated throughout teachers’ day-to-day use of the Education Platform.

3. Enhancing the Digital Classroom – Synergy creates an integrated digital classroom that leverages the latest technology to prepare students for the modern workplace. Synergy enables the creation of digital drop boxes, integrated communications, and assignment and classroom resources. It provides real time instructional aides, including tweet- and text-based interaction blogs and workgroup project management, to facilitate the growth of students’ digital portfolios.

Students and Parents

To achieve better educational outcomes, students and parents must be better engaged in the classroom and learning process. They require the ability to monitor progress and test scores and to access learning resources from home. Parents also require the ability to monitor student daily activities and to be proactively informed of their students’ attendance, discipline issues, and class changes and to receive timely current grade summaries.

Synergy provides a robust self-service solution that is accessible over the Internet through browser-based and mobile applications. The Student/Parent portal provides more engaging interactions both in and out of the classroom, including blogs, teacher/student monitored forums, electronic workgroup activities, digital lockers, and drop boxes. In addition to providing self-service access to current information and grades, Synergy will send proactive reminders regarding assignments and class schedules via email and texts to help students learn organized self-management – skills they will use in their real world careers.

Because nothing is more frustrating to an engaged parent than to lack the information needed to help their student through educational challenges, in addition to the self-service information available,
Synergy identifies student weaknesses and provides parents with quick and simple access to aligned content and instructional assistance that enables parents to provide impactful guidance in helping their students through daunting lesson materials. Synergy provides the structure within which districts can deliver relevant assistance and content directly to the common core or other state-aligned standards.

**Campus and District Administrators**

Administrators have long sought a true Individualized Adaptive Learning Platform through which the entire education community could be engaged. With the introduction of the Synergy Education Platform, Synergy Streams, and the industry’s most comprehensive implementation of mobile applications, that day has arrived.

With Synergy, district and site administrators have a tightly integrated solution that provides the structure for authoring creative instructional material, aligned standards, supporting materials for performance assessments, and automated post-measurement analysis of student strengths and weaknesses. Importantly, Synergy adds the self-help resources that empower students and parents to augment any implemented classroom interventions.

No other SIS solution provider aggregates and makes available to all of its partner districts the instructional content created those districts. The Synergy solution does, and with the supporting data that allows a curriculum manager to assess its effectiveness and suitability for identified student groups, including test results that indicate success rates, teacher ratings of instruction content, common core alignments, and ancillary self-help content. Not only is Synergy’s approach the correct one – economies of scale accrue through engaging the macro educational community in content creation – it also provides the community with historical information that allows the identification of successful tactics that can be used to provide interventions for specific student weaknesses based on common core. Heretofore, local districts have been limited to the longitudinal information within their own data warehouses, however meager that volume may be. With Synergy, districts have instant access to a robust data warehouse populated with content from all districts within the macro-community.

**State Departments of Education**

In addition to the economies of scale described above, state agencies will also benefits as Edupoint rolls out additional Synergy functionality in the coming months. The product roadmap has identified functionality to perform unique student identifier generation/resolution, unique staff identifier generation/resolution, district-to-district student transfers, and data uploading, transforming, and loading (UTL) for all disaggregated SIS databases. Synergy’s extensive data mining and analytics will provide robust federal reporting, including reports for Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and common core longitudinal analysis.

**Open Synergy: Total Solutions**
The era of closed, proprietary SIS solutions is over. To attain the cost efficiencies and long-term value schools require as budgets shrink and performance demands increase, SIS solutions will be expected to accommodate flexible implementations, third-party add-on applications, and extensive customization. Synergy Education Platform’s open, industry-standard architecture, client-accessible application development environment, and strategic partner network supports those goals.

Industry technology leaders have chosen the Synergy platform. Prominent examples include the financial management application developed on Synergy by Weidenhammer Systems Corporation, an education IT services provider, and Edvantage™, the industry’s premier data warehousing and analytics application from Versi-Fit Technologies. In addition to complementary technologies, our partners may provide implementation and technical support for their system components and/or a strong regional presence and loyal customer base that can benefit from Edupoint’s solutions.

Edupoint also considers its customers to be its business partners and seeks their input when developing new products and functionality. The Synergy platform is also uniquely capable of supporting multiple campuses or districts with individual system configurations, which has enabled the company to build strong relationships with educational technology consortiums dedicated to providing IT solutions to all of their member school districts.

**Invest for the Future, Enjoy ROI Today**

Synergy Education Platform offers a compelling value proposition to school districts of any size. Smaller districts will choose the proven Synergy SIS and Synergy Special Education solution for their incomparable out-of-the-box functionality and modular design that allows rapid implementation between school terms and phased roll-outs to accommodate the user learning curve and those districts’ limited resource allocation. Larger districts will appreciate that Synergy Technology’s .NET-based application development tools allow them to “control their own destiny” by building or integrating new applications and customizations. Synergy Stream’s collaboration capability, student/parent web portal, and advanced mobile technology can produce the student performance improvements that have eluded schools for decades, and the

At Edupoint, we don’t believe that the Individualized Adaptable Dynamic Instruction education platform of the future is a wispy dream of vague potential; it is a viable solution today that has been designed to facilitate evolution over time. Synergy Education Platform is that solution. An investment in Synergy today will deliver short-term ROI, and Edupoint’s reputation for flawless execution means schools can rely on its promise of long-term sustainability.