

White Paper for Teachers

Teacher Data Management Challenges and the Grades2Go™ Solution

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30,000 Data Points and Counting

The Challenge

Have you noticed that of all the data management software applications out there, hardly any address a teacher's unique needs? Even the best ones are little more than simple gradebooks, adding few of the modern tools that could help improve job performance, build accountability, streamline communication, and organize your most important asset — the intellectual property you create each and every school year.

Your data and communications challenge as a teacher is huge, probably far bigger than for most other professions. Unfortunately, the size of the challenge is set to explode because of public demands to “improve education” and “make teachers more accountable.” Estimating the homework and classroom attendance workload alone gives some eye-popping results:

Data Type	Marks per term per student	Marks per term per class of 20	Marks per term per 5 classes of 20	Marks per 4-term year
Homework	25	500	2500	10000
Attendance	45	900	4500	18000
Total	70	1400	7000	28000

The total number of data points you need to enter each year, even at the basic level, is almost **30,000!** If you add more data, like assigned/due dates for tasks and custom comments for grades and attendance, the number goes rapidly higher, and your workload soon increases beyond the reasonable. But amazingly, the question of how best to handle this huge data problem, so crucial to the success of education, has hardly ever been addressed.

The Grades2Go™ Solution

Mindspark's Grades2Go™ Teacher's Database and Communications Manager addresses this data challenge by creating a database platform specifically for teachers. By tightly integrating all the necessary databases, it facilitates rapid entry of data (both desktop and mobile), effortless generation of customized PDF reports, and email-automated report distribution to students and their stakeholders, within just a few mouseclicks. And instead of a closed architecture that makes data files useable only within the application, Grades2Go™ utilizes standard Microsoft Access 2003 (desktop) and SQLite (mobile) databases that can be read and manipulated by literally hundreds of software programs, ensuring that the data remains **yours**, and useful, forever.

Data Mobility

The Challenge

In today's age of smartphones and tablets, your mountain of data should be accessible 24/7. Ironically, the old-fashioned gradebook already made that possible, much better than some of the current solutions. Today's web-based gradekeeping systems seem to address it quite well, but they mostly serve the needs of administration rather than the teacher. Your data challenge is actually made worse because it is moved beyond your control. The type of information you can store is dictated by the service provider, and data can be difficult to retrieve, especially from prior years. In the worst case, if your school switches to another provider, or if the vendor goes out of business, your accumulated data can disappear completely.

And what if you want to grade papers at the beach, or in the car on the way to the beach? Unlike the old fashioned gradebook, you usually have to wait until you can sit in front of a computer. Even with a smartphone, web-based grading solutions are cumbersome. Teacher mobility just hasn't been a worthwhile issue for most service providers or school administrators.

The Grades2Go™ Solution

Grades2Go™ truly shines when you add an Android mobile device! Whether at the beach or in a car, Grades2Go™ Mobile for Android allows you to **easily** work with your data 24/7. New entries automatically appear on Grades2Go™ Desktop after you synchronize with a USB cable (via Grades2Go™ Android Sync).

Student Progress Journaling

The Challenge

Not long ago, a student's progress could be sufficiently documented by grades alone. One or two reports a term was the standard and was accepted by parents. Today, the picture has changed dramatically. Parents and administrators demand more frequent reporting and greater accountability. Grades have to be justified with solid evidence, and feedback to the student needs to be more immediate and detailed. The challenge demands better and easier ways to "journal" student progress.

The Grades2Go™ Solution

Both Grades2Go™ Desktop and Grades2Go™ Mobile for Android provide a simple way to maintain student progress journals. This function is in addition to individual grade/attendance commenting, which is equally simple. Grades2Go™ can also maintain separate journaling for students on individual education plans.

"Just-In-Time" Communications

The Challenge

We know that failing students can't be turned around unless warning signs are detected and communicated in a timely fashion. But this is easier said than done. It requires analysis of data, creating of reports with a clear message, and communication to necessary stakeholders (a student's Support Circle: student, parents/guardians, guidance), taking an inordinate amount of time and effort.

Web-based grading claims to solve the immediate feedback problem by allowing parents to see grades as soon as they are available. However, grades on the web can't substitute for a more detailed story of a student's classroom performance.

The Grades2Go™ Solution

Grades2Go™ Desktop can generate nicely formatted and customized student progress reports, attach them to custom email cover letters as PDFs, and distribute them electronically to student Support Circles, for an entire class at once — and all with just a few mouseclicks! Since more data is available than in web-based solutions, attached PDF reports can include crucial information like grade comments and

student progress journal entries, in a format that's easy to print, review and save. Grades2Go™ takes most of the time and drudgery out of this enormous task, finally making more frequent “just-in-time” reporting a *practicality*.

Building and Managing Intellectual Property

The Challenge

If you're like most teachers, you don't think of the tasks and assessments you create as your “intellectual property.” You think of them as “just my job.” But the results of your creativity are a huge part of your “value-added” as a teacher. You should treat them as personal assets, just like an author would treat his body of work.

Your tasks and assessments (intellectual property) should be well organized and managed so that they serve as an archive from which you can easily select current assignments, and to which you can easily add new entries. But how can you easily organize and track such an archive? Again, few if any software solutions exist.

The Grades2Go™ Solution

Whenever you create a new task on Grades2Go™ Desktop or Grades2Go™ Mobile for Android, it's automatically added to a special course archive. Each task can easily be associated with document; if none exists, it can be immediately created (Desktop only). Task masters and documents are automatically filed by course, and copies are made for the current course section and year.

When adding a new class assignment via Desktop or Mobile, you are presented with a list of existing tasks from the course archive.

Building Accountability and Effectiveness

The Challenge

As a teacher, you are now facing a tide of public criticism aimed at public education. Accountability and metrics are the new demands of parents and administrators. Media hype about “weeding out bad teachers” by looking at student performance, and increasing pressure for merit-based pay, can only heighten teacher anxiety. To counter the pressure and deflect criticism, teachers must be on top of their game by demonstrating continuous improvement in performance, effectiveness and accountability.

The Grades2Go™ Solution

Along with its efficient archiving, Grades2Go™ keeps aggregate data on grades achieved for individual tasks. This data can help inform the effectiveness of tasks and assessments over time, as well as aggregate changes in student performance.

for more information on Grades2Go™ and Mindspark Inc, visit mindsparkinc.com