



Magnolia ISD Administration Meets More Efficiently and Inexpensively via Wimba while Teachers Reach More Students

"We wanted a user-friendly, versatile, convenient, and robust system through which we could communicate, collaborate, and share information immediately."

-Charlie Brown, Communications Specialist, Magnolia Independent School District

When Charlie Brown, Magnolia Independent School District's (Texas) Communications Specialist, was asked to name some of the reasons why his district has been successful by using Wimba Classroom to hold live online and archived staff meetings and classes, his list quickly became quite extensive. Brown says Wimba Classroom has been successful because:

- It is end-user friendly
- It provides live and archive session access
- It has increased the participation in meetings because it is Internet-based, not building-based
- It reduces the cost of the time and travel of driving to different meeting sites
- It allows sharing of documents & applications
- It is built for interaction, both video and audio
- It is an integrated aspect of Moodle
- We don't have to manage the server, and the maintenance/technical support staff is great
- It's easy to manage the back-end as a system administrator
- It provides students with synchronous and asynchronous opportunities to review material and then communicate with teachers

• It provides access to homebound students Northwest of Houston, the Magnolia Independent School District (MISD) is dedicated to be the best district in the State of Texas. MISD's mission is to provide an educational environment that will enable all students to develop essential academic skills for a lifetime of learning and to prepare students to be responsible, contributing citizens in a diverse and changing world. To do so, it has five clear goals:

- MISD students will achieve their maximum academic potential.
- MISD will provide a secure, nurturing, and disciplined learning environment.
- MISD and the community will be partners in the continuing improvement of the educational system.
- MISD will recruit, retain, and develop the high quality staff required to provide the best educational experience for all students.
- MISD will maintain an effective, transparent information management system that will facilitate informed, data-driven decision-making.



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Magnolia, TX
www.magnoliaisd.org

WIMBA PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

- Wimba Classroom

KEY BENEFITS

- Saves gas and time used for driving to meeting sites within the district
- Increased attendance of meetings
- Reaches homebound students
- Integrates into Moodle

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WHAT THEY'RE SAYING

"[Wimba Classroom] has increased the participation in meetings because it is Internet-based, not building-based. It is also built for interaction, both video and audio, it is an integrated aspect of Moodle, and we don't have to manage the server - and the maintenance and technical support staff is great."

*-Charlie Brown, Communications Specialist,
Magnolia Independent School District*

MISD consists of two traditional high schools, two junior high schools, two sixth-grade campuses, eight elementary schools, and an alternative high school, ALPHA Academy, a school of choice which provides high school students with an alternative academic program that incorporates a curriculum which includes computer, packet, and teacher-driven instruction.

"I believe that Magnolia is a quality community that supports a quality school district," says Michael Holland, Superintendent of MISD Schools, on the district's website. "We ought to make our schools out of glass so people can see what a fantastic job our teachers are doing. The schools belong to the people, and I have an obligation to them and to their children. However, it takes the efforts of the entire community - parents, staff, and children, all working together - to reach our vision. Please come and join us in our quest to become the 'best district in the state of Texas.'"

To help attain its goal of being the best district in Texas, between 2001 and 2006, MISD used a desktop/room video conference solution to have weekly meetings with its administrative staffs across the district (which is approximately 40 miles wide) in order to save the cost of time and travel for staff who had drive to these meetings throughout the district. This system required users to attend meetings in specific rooms in specific buildings through the area. However, "it wasn't very convenient and the learning curve for our end-users was a continual source of troubleshooting," says Brown, who was the Distance Learning Facilitator and a Board Member of the Texas Distance Learning Association (TxDLA) at that time.

Since most of the district's staff uses laptops, reconnecting and selecting the correct IP

profile was a problem when they used the video conferencing solution, and, according to Brown, there was even significant trouble with the audio. "On top of [the audio problems], our curriculum directors met face-to-face with campus-based personnel and it was difficult to get them all together across the district or into the video conference room at each campus if the director was 'brave' enough to take on that technology."

After five years of slogging through the desktop/room video conferencing units, Brown and his TxDLA Board Chair - who worked for North Texas State University and had been using Wimba Classroom - began using Wimba Classroom for two board meetings a year, and it quickly seemed like a "viable option for Magnolia versus desktop/room video conferencing."

And once he received a demo from Wimba, "it was a no-brainer...and the price was right."

According to Brown, MISD wanted "a user-friendly, versatile, convenient, and robust system through which we could communicate, collaborate, and share information immediately." Additionally, the fact that all the end-users needed to do was sit at any computer in the world, open the browser, go to a link, sign-in and participate, was a bonus.

As MISD implemented Wimba Classroom, its ease of access proved to be helpful in gaining better participation across the district since staff members didn't need to travel to attend a meeting, especially since campuses don't all release students at the same time. Having the ability to archive was also a tremendous benefit for those who couldn't make the live meetings.

Currently, via Wimba Classroom, MISD has weekly administrative meetings, weekly curriculum



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meetings with teachers, and bi-monthly meetings with campus-based technology staff and instructional technology staff.

In addition to holding administrative meetings live online, several MISD teachers use Wimba Classroom to archive mini-lessons or tutorials and then post the archives on their blogs.

Teachers across MISD are finding Wimba Classroom to be useful for classes in different subjects. For example, one math teacher uses it with all six of her classes, while a high school BCIS teacher who has a student with a medical condition that leaves him homebound will soon allow the student to attend class virtually while the rest of his peers are in the physical classroom.

Finally, MISD also has a handful of online classes running on the Moodle course management system in which teachers will begin to include additional live and archived classes. Though MISD only currently uses Wimba Classroom, the entire Wimba Collaboration Suite integrates so thoroughly into Moodle that it takes on the same look-and-feel as other Moodle activity modules. Students and teachers can access Wimba from within Moodle, making it very easy to use. Now, whether adding voice, podcasts, video, application sharing, or instant messaging, teachers using Moodle can easily bring their courses to life.

About Wimba

Wimba develops web-based collaboration software designed for online education, language learning and live interactive communications. Our collaborative applications enable learning professionals to fully embrace the new wave of teaching and learning opportunities afforded by the Internet; regardless of geographic location, bandwidth or operating system. Our classroom collaboration solutions enable educators to conduct live, online classes, meetings, office hours and other collaborations, and our language learning tools add oral interaction directly into course content, webpages, study groups and assessments. With simplicity and power, Wimba adds new dimensions to online, accessible education, enhancing the learning experience for both students and instructors.

