

Strategic Planning Experience

Xplain has provided strategic consulting to a wide variety of organizations both formally and informally. This includes private companies, several publicly traded companies, and public services.

LVUSD Technology Strategy

The project most similar and relevant in scope, type, entity served, and structure is the Xplain's work on a technology strategy for Las Virgenes Unified School District. This project is similar to what the City of Westlake Village will need for a variety of reasons:

- Performed for a public organization
- Had a number of confidential and governmental issues to deal with which are likely more restrictive than those impacting the City of Westlake Village
- Required a wide variety of outreach efforts including both one-on-one private interviews and public forums
- Required public relation efforts to keep the broader community informed
- Dealt with a public, non-technical audience

The deliverable of this project is a public document, and is included in this package for your perusal as a sample of the type of end product the City of Westlake Village should expect. That said, in strategic planning, the "journey is the reward." The document you see would have near zero value if delivered on the first day.

Instead, the value of the strategic plan was getting all the relevant constituents on the same page including Board of Education, District administration, teachers, principals, parents, students and even the community. As a result, the most relevant items to review are the comments from those involved in the process. And, in the case of the LVUSD project, many of the comments come from people very well known by the City.

In addition, it's important to look back on the effectiveness of the strategy after it's been in place for a few years. To that end, please see the comments from the current Superintendent of Las Virgenes Unified School District, in addition to a letter from the President of the Board of Education.

Testimonials and Comments on Work Product

The best way to understand the process used to create the LVUSD strategy (which is very similar to how we'd create a strategy for the City of Westlake Village) is to understand what those involved thought of the process. Xplain Corporation, led by Neil Ticktin, worked with a large number of people within and around the school district. Here are some of their comments on the experience.

In 2008 the Las Virgenes Unified School District contracted Xplain Corporation to assess the district's use of educational and operational technologies, and to recommend a strategy for implementation and exploitation of existing and future technology. Led by Xplain principal Neil Ticktin, this process was nearly a year in the making, and provided an in-depth analysis of operations and culture at two high schools, three middle schools, nine elementary schools, an alternative high school, and a multi-site preschool program, as well as the centralized support structure of the district.

Technology is ever-changing, and the approach by Xplain was to identify a strong, collaborative and cost-effective structure for integration and use of technology on an ongoing basis, toward the objectives described by the Technology Vision of the school district. Since any change in an organization such as this requires support from many stakeholders, the design of this strategy evolved from a study of workflows, needs, capabilities, and goals in both schools and the administrative service center.

The Technology Strategy created by Xplain went above and beyond expectations, providing a historical understanding of the district's current state, as well as a pathway to rapid and effective advancement. As the study progressed, many of its eventual recommendations became clear along the way, enabling positive changes in existing operations even prior to the delivery of the final strategy document. A number of such specific recommendations were included in the final Strategy, along with broad direction and a framework for sustainability - a dynamic approach to progress that would not become obsolete.

As a member of the Board of Education, I am aware of the critical point that schools are currently at - where technology can provide breakout change to move the education system forward and enable us to remain competitive in a global economy. I am extremely satisfied with the work done by Neil Ticktin and Xplain Corporation on behalf of our school district, and I believe it will provide a foundation for significant advancement for many years to come.

- Dave Moorman
President, Board of Education
Las Virgenes Unified School District

Xplain's work on the Las Virgenes Unified School District Technology Plan went above and beyond expectations. Mr. Ticktin is thorough in all aspects of his work, from data collection, to research, to the final product. He is detailed oriented and responsive to his client's changing needs. He is not only knowledgeable in his field, but he is skilled at explaining all aspects of technology so that even the layperson can understand.

Mr. Ticktin is never constrained by scope or time. He does whatever it takes to deliver a complete work. He is available to his clients, and it is always a pleasure to work with him.

- Jill Gaines
LVUSD Board Member , Board Technology Committee
Las Virgenes Unified School District

On behalf of the Board of Education and our entire community, I would like to thank you for all of your work in developing our District Technology Strategy. It will prove to be a valuable foundation as we build our educational programs in the coming years.

- Donald M. Zimring, Ph.D.
Superintendent
Las Virgenes Unified School District

Using Xplain as an outside consultant to deliver a strategic technology plan, we were able to address the issue of "We don't know what we don't know." Neil's skill at embedding himself into the workplace to obtain a true assessment of how District employees perceived and used technology was a work of art. Employees embraced his questions as he demonstrated an interest in their concerns. This created an opportunity of understanding that resulted in some immediate improvements in workflow at fundamental levels. This success created broad support and confidence in the project which was specifically to develop a strategy to move forward, but resulted in a comprehensive and relevant assessment of past and present, tips for immediate improvements and a comprehensive understanding and pathway to future direction.

The work product provided by Xplain exceeded our expectations for its breadth and scope, thoroughness of understanding, and rational scalability for growth in the years to come. Our foundation operates to support the school district. We financed the project and are very pleased with the performance of Xplain to not only deliver a comprehensive document but to also build goodwill in the process. This makes implementing the strategy plan that much easier.

Nicely done.

- Ned E. Davis,
Vice President
Las Virgenes Educational Foundation

Neil Ticktin was extremely thorough in his assessment of our technology usage and infrastructure. He literally 'imbedded' himself into the workings of the district in order to get a working knowledge of our strengths and areas of need. Neil became an instructor along with his role as a reviewer. My technology skills increased every time we met. The resulting document is chock full of suggested solutions and resources.

- Mary Schillinger,
Assistant Superintendent, Education
Las Virgenes Unified School District

In a highly collaborative move three years ago, the Las Virgenes Unified School District and the four cities served by the District (Agoura Hills, Calabasas, Hidden Hills and Westlake Village) implemented a new and exciting Technology Partnership Program. This partnership reflected a commitment by the cities to provide financial support to the District to help support and upgrade its overall technology program. As part of this approach, the four cities asked the District to provide a strategy and plan, and in June 2008, the District contracted Xplain Corporation to do exactly that.

With this background, I am pleased to report that the cities welcomed and embraced the recently completed technology study undertaken by Xplain Corporation. Headed by Neil Ticktin, this work product was carefully designed and implemented over a multi-year period. Indeed, at key milestones during the course of the study, Mr. Ticktin provided several important updates on the progress of his work to the City Managers representing the four cities, as well as solicited our feedback.

Additionally, by all accounts from contacts I have had with District officials, teachers, Educational Foundation representatives, and fellow city colleagues, this study surpassed expectations on virtually all fronts in terms of its thoroughness, clarity, and objectivity. Most importantly, the study conclusions charted a clear and concise roadmap of the steps, actions and strategies needed to be taken by the District to successfully upgrade and then manage its technology services both in this decade and beyond.

If the District adopts the plan, the four cities providing funding to the District are assured that their dollars will be used wisely in advancing the overall District/Cities Technology Partnership Program launched several years ago. As the City Manager of one of the four cities served by the District, I offer my special thanks to Neil Ticktin and his team for their outstanding work on this challenging project and for keeping me and my colleagues informed of the progress of the study as it was being conducted and then completed this past year.

-Ray Taylor
City Manager
City of Westlake Village

Letters in Community, Reaction

The following are letters printed in the local paper, The Acorn in the weeks surrounding the reveal and primary discussion of the LVUSD technology strategy.

As educators, we are charged with preparing today's children to enter into a world that few of us fully understand ourselves. The educational community needs to constantly be updating not only what it teaches, but how it teaches.

About a year ago, with funding provided by Las Virgenes Education Foundation and donations, the Las Virgenes school district contracted Neil Ticktin's Westlake company, Xplain Corp., to create a comprehensive technology strategy. That document has now been released and is open to comment.

I am pleased to see content in the plan that will help elevate the abilities of teachers and create huge gains on how learning will take place, not just tomorrow, but today. If we implement the strategy outlined, I believe we'll be at the forefront of the educational community. Teachers will have the tools to engage students as part of a modern learning environment.

The key to the plan is the chief technology officer. The CTO would lead a coordinated effort for technology to serve its users. Instead of the disjointed "bolted on" approach we have been using, we would have a more integrated system.

The CTO will provide leadership focused on technology to facilitate the acquisition and use of technology as well as ensuring a consistent approach to maintenance and replacement.

We are fortunate to have such generous support from our local cities. Through monies which can only be used for technology, the plan outlines how we can afford a CTO without having to pay for the position out of the school district's general fund.

The plan is an exciting, comprehensive road map to what we need to do to prepare our students for today's world. I'm thrilled to support a plan that moves forward with technology in spite of the budget issues that plague us.

- Sandra Pope

Pope is president

Las Virgenes Educators Association, the teachers union.

The new LVUSD technology strategy has been unveiled on the district's website, and after reviewing it, I was inspired to draft this letter.

The technology strategy proposed to our district exceeds the needs of all stakeholders. As an educator, I appreciate the student centered approach that underscores the entire document. Every proposal is made for the educational benefit of our students.

The strategy outlines the creation of student pages on our schools' websites. Students will be able to use these to incorporate all of their teachers' information into a single page. Imagine the convenience for a student to be able to look on one page and see the homework from every class he or she has.

The creation of a new wiki for our staff, parents, and students has also been proposed. The wiki allows for tremendous new learning opportunities. Our students are already using these tools independently. How powerful is it, then, to relate content to our students by using the technology they are already comfortable with.

The possibilities are incredible. My students at LCMS will not only be able to collaborate with a class across campus but also with other classes across the district. By making collaboration with partners from different schools commonplace, LVUSD can be at the forefront of preparing our students for today's business world.

I am truly excited for the future learning opportunities our students have awaiting them if the district approves this comprehensive plan.

- David Fazio

Fazio is a teacher at Lindero Canyon Middle School, in LVUSD

I'm writing to express my support for the newly released report for the Las Virgenes Unified School District. As a teacher in the district for the past 13 years, I've seen the starts, stops, and start again of technology integration in education. We've made some tremendous progress of utilizing technology tools such as emails and webpages for communication with our students, parents and community members.

But the work of integrating technology as seamlessly into education as it has been integrated into our lives and work outside of academia still needs to be further addressed.

- Jason Busby

Busby is the social science department chair of Agoura High School

Recently, my husband and I had the privilege of attending our son's Back to School Night at Agoura High School. We were impressed with the caring natures of the teachers at Agoura High and were also blown away by the high quality of the curriculum and the teachers' accessibility through websites and e-mail. The district's newly released technology strategy has already enabled, and will continue to foster, more parent teacher communication than ever before and our students will clearly benefit from these increased interactions.

Everyone should take the time to peruse this new technology plan, available on the Las Virgenes Unified School District's website at www.lvusd.org. This budget-conscious and forward thinking plan will take Las Virgenes well into the 21st century as it seeks the establishment of a district chief technology officer to steer all existing and future plans onto the same road.

The plan also outlines a central LVUSD "wiki" site which will enable streamlined, seamless communication among district teachers, parents and students. The opportunities laid out by this plan have students' and teachers' goals intersecting in a way that's sophisticated, yet easy-to-use and economical.

Kudos to LVUSD for achieving excellence, and continuing to strive for improvement.

- Rachel and Matt McKagan

Rachel McKagan is a Media Clerk at Yerba Buena Elementary in LVUSD
Matt McKagan heads the award winning music program at Lindero Canyon Middle School in LVUSD

I understand that the LVUSD is in the process of determining how to manage their technology strategy for the future. Our entire community would benefit if they fully implement the five strategies recommended in the new technology strategy guide. Our students need to have technology integrated into their education. For example, students could take courses online when the courses are offered at other schools.

Teachers need to have technology available to improve their teaching. For example, with a district-wide technology system, teachers could share lesson plans, test preparation ideas and teaching concepts.

Parents need technology to be better informed about their student's performance. How many of us ask our kids "How was school?" and get "fine" as the answer? With access to online information, we could get alerts about upcoming projects or about test results.

Schools need technology on site to help students learn in more creative and dynamic ways. For example, there is an opportunity to transition libraries into media centers where a wide variety of media is available in addition to books.

The community also will be able to take advantage of the school district's technology by accessing classes, lectures, videos, etc. through the public component of the site. We will all benefit from the full and immediate implementation of this plan.

Ann Sturman
Parent, Westlake Village

I have recently read the executive summary for the Las Virgenes Unified School Districts Technology Strategy. I'm in favor of moving forward with this endeavor as quickly as possible.

It sounds to me like this is a well thought out plan that primarily uses existing sources of revenue and doesn't require additional spending by the district or schools beyond what is already available through Measure G and the 4 Cities grant to the schools.

I've known Neil Ticktin, who led the creation of the plan, for 10 years or so. He's about the most saavy technology guru I know. And Dave Moorman, LVUSD board president, is a long time friend as well. I'll throw my support behind Neil and Dave, and I know they can be counted on to act intelligently and spend wisely.

If the Measure G and 4 Cities funds are there, then we ought to spend them to implement this plan. Let's find the CTO (chief technology officer) and move ahead swiftly. Lead, follow or get the heck out of the way, and I'd rather the district take the lead on this one. I see this as an opportunity where the district has a chance to make up for lost time and get current, or even out in front of the technology curve.

- Rob Jordan
Parent, Agoura Hills