

# Blendedschools.net & Blackboard Managed Hosting<sup>SM</sup>

## IMPROVING THE QUALITY AND REACH OF ONLINE LEARNING FOR K-12 SCHOOLS

### Challenge: Laying the Foundation for Growth

Blendedschools.net (BSN) is a not-for-profit organization that helps promote blended learning by providing K-12 curriculum, learning technologies, professional development and a collaborative professional network. BSN's mission is to serve as the experts in creating complete online curriculum and in training educators on how to create, facilitate and manage their courses—not on managing the technology infrastructure.

So when BSN was presented with an opportunity to quickly expand across multiple school districts, they faced a critical decision: Who would create and manage the infrastructure to support

them? "We knew that we needed to lay a foundation from which we could easily scale," says Jed Friedrichsen, CEO of Blendedschools.net. "BSN currently supports over 77,000 students across 163 school districts. With such a large enrollment base spread across a broad geography, we decided that a centrally managed solution would be the only way to go."

### Evaluating the Move to Managed Hosting

BSN needed to assess the cost/benefit of moving to a managed hosting solution, and considered two key indicators in their decision-making process:

- ▶ **Return on Investment (ROI):** BSN took into account the monetary costs of supporting staging and production servers, backups, and the overall environment—not just the hardware and software, but the network, support time and facilities required for hosting the environment as well. They determined that it'd be difficult for an organization to replicate environments and provide the same level of support and environment that Blackboard Managed Hosting provides for the same costs.
- ▶ **Value on investment:** This was a more nebulous calculation. Not having to run and manage a server environment would enable key staff to focus on what they do best. For BSN, it's curriculum and professional development. Staff members would be freed up to focus on BSN's core mission and strategy, resting assured that Blackboard Managed Hosting would be expertly managing the server environment

*Blackboard Managed Hosting enables us to focus on the work we're charged with doing, affording us the luxury of knowing that our system is up and running and stable.*

Jed Friedrichsen, CEO



When asked what guidance he would offer peers who are considering the move to managed hosting, Friedrichsen offers this: “My recommendation: Make your expectations clear before you buy service. Then buy the level of service and communication channels that match your needs. Things to consider: How do you prepare for growth? How will you handle upgrades, customizations and integrations? I think you have to have the future in mind—what technologies will be integrated into Blackboard, what level of support you’ll need, products, etc. They all have to be a part of the conversation to best decide what’s right for your organization.”

## Solution: Blackboard Managed Hosting

After evaluating their options, BSN chose Blackboard Managed Hosting as the right fit for two primary reasons:

- 1) **They wanted the best administrators, software engineers and troubleshooters possible supporting their online environment; and,**
- 2) **BSN need needed to ensure the maximum uptime available.**

“Any outage during the school day could be disastrous—not only would it impact the ability of students and educators to successfully complete courses in a timely manner, but it could affect long-term adoption as well,” says Friedrichsen. “An outage would disrupt the confidence in and momentum of online learning that we’ve worked so hard to build in our communities.”

That’s why Blendedschools.net went with Blackboard Managed Hosting. Blackboard’s 99.9% uptime guarantee\* and dedicated round-the-clock support team enable BSN to focus on the work they’re charged with doing, knowing that their system is up and running and stable.

“We have been Blackboard Managed Hosting clients for many years now, and feel very plugged in to what’s being done to support and maintain our environment,” continues Friedrichsen. “It’s a highly collaborative relationship, and we feel like the Managed Hosting team is partnering with us every step of the way to make the right decisions, the right upgrades and the right advancements at the right time.”

\*The 99.9% SLA is available for institutions upgrading to Release 9.1, who currently have or plan to move to the Platinum Level Service or higher, subject to meeting Best Practice Requirements; Restrictions apply. All qualifications must be met. Requires execution of the 99.9% SLA Addendum to the Blackboard Managed Hosting contract.

When online learning is a part of the overall course delivery strategy, as it is with BSN, downtime is simply not an option. Maintaining, scaling and supporting an online environment require domain expertise. “Frankly, it’s in our schools’ best interests if we focus on what we do best—supporting and training educators on course development—and put our trust in the technology experts at Blackboard to manage our infrastructure,” adds Friedrichsen.

## Benefits in Action: Emergency Preparedness

Two days before a hurricane was due to hit the East Coast in 2011, BSN was notified by Blackboard Managed Hosting of the safety measures they’d taken to make sure that the system would be up and running. The note listed all of the prevention resources that were in place: multiple connections, multiple pipelines, backup generators, backup fuel, etc.

“I was impressed with the level of redundancies and fail-safe measures Blackboard had in place—things that we couldn’t have possibly prepared for ourselves in such a short timeframe,” says Friedrichsen. “This is real-life proof of the value of Blackboard Managed Hosting. We don’t have to worry about things like natural disasters or emergencies. We can focus on and invest in the adoption of blended and online learning, and not on battenning down the hatches for unforeseen or potentially catastrophic events.”

The threat of the hurricane provided a tangible illustration of the peace of mind that Blackboard Managed Hosting clients enjoy—whether preparing for an unexpected emergency or simply serving as a reminder of the technical depth and breadth of Blackboard’s well-designed infrastructure.

For institutions where online or blended learning is either a core delivery method or part of a larger long-term strategy, ensuring that their environment is stable and can weather any issues is critical.

“At the end of the day, our schools rely on BSN to provide the expertise on curriculum and professional development, and we rely on Blackboard Managed Hosting to provide the technical expertise that enables us to do that,” comments Friedrichsen. “We focus on our core competency, and Blackboard Managed Hosting focuses on its. And it’s been a winning partnership so far.”

