



## Increase Student Ownership through Self-Reflection

9-12th grade arts students express themselves by documenting their creative process and reflecting on their learning.

## Empower Students to Gain Independence

3rd-grade teachers using different assessment methods provide the ability to personalize instruction and allow students to demonstrate their learning.

# Case Study

The School District of Elmbrook Uses FreshGrade to Foster Student Ownership

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Chris Thompson  
CIO



Sarah Scott  
High School Arts Teacher



Katie Spadoni  
3rd Grade Teacher

Elmbrook wanted to make a change in the way they approach education, shifting from ‘one-size fits all’ to fulfilling a commitment to personalized learning for every student. Elmbrook’s extensive search for a portfolio solution led the district to FreshGrade. Using FreshGrade they have given students the tools to reflect on and take ownership of their academic growth; made student work in the classroom visible to parents; and have found success enabling teachers with easy to use technology that solves real classroom challenges.

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The School District of Elmbrook is located fifteen minutes west of Milwaukee, and covers the City of Brookfield and the Village of Elm Grove. The district serves over 7,000 students with a staff of over 1,100. Elmbrook consistently ranks as one of the top five school districts in Wisconsin, and their flagship high schools, Brookfield Central and Brookfield East, are regularly ranked in the top 400 high schools in the nation by Newsweek magazine.

## A Commitment to Personalized Learning for Every Student

The challenges school district leaders face are diverse and vital to the success of students, teachers, and schools. According to K12 Blueprint, infrastructure, access, devices, data, and platforms are current educational priorities for information and technology leaders.

In Elmbrook, CIO Chris Thompson encouraged teachers to select and test the technology that works best for them and their students and bring him their solutions. Since teachers have their finger on the pulse when it comes to new technology, the benefits of letting them choose the best portfolio platform to implement district-wide were huge. Once brought to his attention, Thompson needed to evaluate tools to ensure that solutions chosen by teachers could scale across the district.

“We created structures for educators to share solutions across our district and opportunities for educators to learn about new things. This includes professional development time for teachers built right into the school week at all levels. Every month there is the opportunity to pursue learning at the individual educator’s choice. This professional development model has worked well, as teachers naturally rise up to present and share solutions across the school system.”

## The School District of Elmbrook Uses FreshGrade to Foster Student Ownership

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Leaders at Elmbrook were drawn to FreshGrade for its ease of use. Training time was not needed — even for younger students. At Elmbrook, the team believes that time should be spent on learning, not training on how to use tools.

“When we look at scaling technology tools, there are some decisions we make. We look to avoid manual class rostering. FreshGrade integrated with our Student Information System and we liked that. We also use Clever and FreshGrade had that option for us. It can meet needs from kindergarten to high school — and solutions that do that are hard to find. We also look for platforms we are confident will be easy to administer. Educators appreciate the automated notifications and the automated roll-up of student outcomes compared to other solutions.”

“When we decided to move from FreshGrade Free to FreshGrade for Schools and Districts, we were ready for some of the admin tools. A small example was the automation of class creation, syncing, and parent invites. Paring down the many applications used in a School District is a challenge faced by so many education and technology leaders. In the School District of Elmbrook, if something works for a school they’ve committed to making it work we want to give them permission to use it. We used to have 20 key applications; now we are down to about six.”

Prior to implementing FreshGrade, Thompson had been seeking a solution for personalized learning. He had researched student portfolios for four years but had yet to find something that worked for both academic studies and the arts.

“FreshGrade fosters greater student ownership, offers Elmbrook students a rapid feedback cycle, and provides students more ways to demonstrate their work. At Elmbrook, we do not treat all children the same, and we need to celebrate their differences. Students need to choose activities that are right for them and pursue learning targets to the depths they can pursue them. When using FreshGrade, students can more readily draw on their strengths and interests, and teachers can individualize a student’s experience.”



FreshGrade gradebook showing which activities students have chosen to do.

## Building Success With FreshGrade

Thompson rolled out FreshGrade across the district. Today, increased use of FreshGrade is greatest in middle and high school Art, Music, and Physical Education.



FreshGrade has supported our district commitment to personalize learning for every student, fostered student ownership, and offered rapid feedback for students.”

### SAVE TEACHERS TIME AND MAKE ADOPTION EASIER

“Teachers have discovered the need to foster student ownership and offer rapid feedback for students. Introducing new technology to students has changed from a 60-minute training session to a 5 or 10-minute introduction. To support this, we have to select tools that are easy to use and simple to apply to the learning environment. This makes trying and adopting new technology a lot easier than it was. Teachers can now learn about a new technology then turn around and use it the next day. Teachers working with teachers and our professional development structures have greatly supported adoption among educators.”

### INCREASE PARENT ENGAGEMENT AND FEEDBACK

“At Elmbrook Schools, we have a highly engaged parent population. When we looked at portfolio solutions, the range of needs went from presentation portfolios to daily work portfolios. FreshGrade fell into the latter. The expectation in elementary is that teachers will communicate with parents about once per week about class work and give a class update. In some classrooms, parents are invited to their child’s portfolio, and they are coached by teachers on how to give feedback through “Parent PD” and information nights. Parents love knowing where their child is in their learning journey. At parent teacher conferences it’s easy to pull out the iPad and walk them through their child’s progress if they aren’t following along. Often students take ownership of this process and share their work in FreshGrade with parents and peers directly.”

### HELP STUDENTS THINK CRITICALLY ABOUT THEIR LEARNING AND REFLECTION

“Students really like FreshGrade. We are teaching them the ability to think critically about the feedback they give and receive. FreshGrade is a great solution for this practice. In some classes such as high school art, checking with every student daily can be a challenge. FreshGrade offers students and educators an additional channel for conversation and partnership. FreshGrade really gives students the opportunity to document and reflect on their learning daily. FreshGrade allows students to draw attention to their work for help and celebration.”

**November 11th Reflection** Hide

**ACTIVITY DETAILS**

Please tell us about your learning!

- 1) What is the "big idea" you learned from your seminar and practice?
- 2) How well do you understand the "big idea"?  
(1=not at all 2=some 3=I understand! 4=I could teach it to others!)
- 3) How did you learn best (what resource worked for you)?
- 4) What do you still need from your teacher?

November 11, 2015

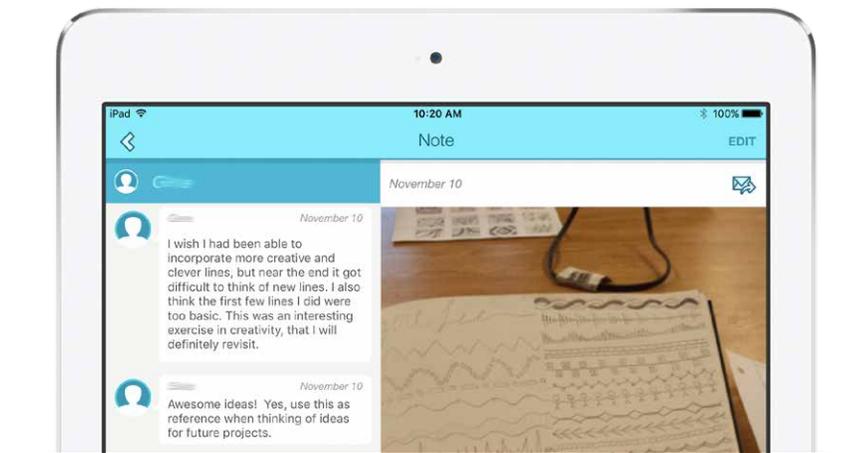
today I was working on climates. It was fun and I learned a lot. I learned about different climates around the world and learned that weather and climate are not the same thing. I learned this by watching a video on fresh grade! I liked it! I am very proud of how much I learned and I think I used my time very wisely. I don't think I need anything. Thanks!

Example student reflection on FreshGrade portfolio.

## Increase Student Ownership through Self-Reflection

In her high school art classes for 9th-12th grade, Sarah Scott's students use mixed media, ceramics, sculpture, drawing, and painting to express themselves and deepen their learning about the arts. Students are given time to work independently on projects and are asked to document their creative process. For Sarah, the integration of documentation began as an exercise where students took a picture every day. Students were encouraged to bring in their own devices, and initially, they documented their work using a variety of different methods.

Shifting to FreshGrade, Sarah discovered a better way to empower students to capture and own their learning. Students were introduced to the platform and invited to document their day by answering two questions, "What are you working on?" and "What does your day look like?" Sarah and her students took their practice a step further by answering a series of reflection questions, either choosing one reflection question or being assigned one to answer each day.



Example reflection from student portfolio.

“  
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Using FreshGrade also helps Sarah get to know her students better. With all of their communication in one place, it's easy for students to post questions and comments when it works for them, and for Sarah to view and respond to them. "FreshGrade creates another dialogue beyond the classroom. It starts a conversation more than email does," she says. In class, Sarah can pick up on visual cues that students are struggling or excelling, but comments from students in FreshGrade provided her with a different perspective. Some students who were working very successfully were struggling internally with their creations and creative process. Sarah now uses those insights to directly address some of the general challenges for the group or the more specific challenges faced by individual students.

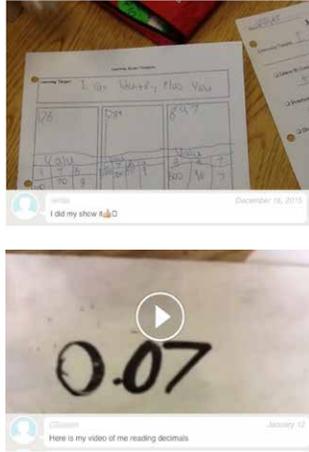
As a result of using FreshGrade, students in Sarah's classes are now documenting their work daily and sharing more through the platform than there is time for in class. Students are thinking more critically about their own work and using self-reflection to evaluate and enhance their learning. Sarah tells them, "it's like your social media use." This workflow is very positive for Sarah as it provides her with access to the student's progress, pictures, and reflection. Students have bought into the process and like being able to see their past work as well as the evolution of their creative process.

## Empower Students to Gain Independence

Katie Spadoni started using FreshGrade with her 3rd-grade class in 2013 after observing a broad range of abilities among her students studying math. Katie and her team of 3rd-grade educators were looking for a platform to personalize student learning, pacing, and resources. FreshGrade was well suited to their needs, and they started out using the portfolio and assessment platform primarily for math. "It was a eureka moment as FreshGrade allowed me to give students specific resources."

“FreshGrade makes me feel more effective as a teacher by allowing me to personalize instructions for the kids.”

By adopting FreshGrade, Katie can easily assign students specific resources and provide personal responses to their work. The ability to use different assessment methods gives Katie and her team the ability to personalize instruction and allow students to demonstrate their learning through notes, videos, and photos. "FreshGrade makes me feel more effective as a teacher by allowing me to personalize instruction for the kids. Each child is different and needs to be honored and embraced."

LEARN IT!	PRACTICE IT!	SHOW IT!
Mini Lesson Seminar Flipped video lesson	Partner work Interned based practice Independent Practice	Paper/pencil Link Google Document Video
		

In 2015, Katie and her team began using FreshGrade for Schools and Districts and expanded their practice beyond math to reading, social studies, and science. "Some students don't love writing about their progress, so capturing a video with FreshGrade is a great option."

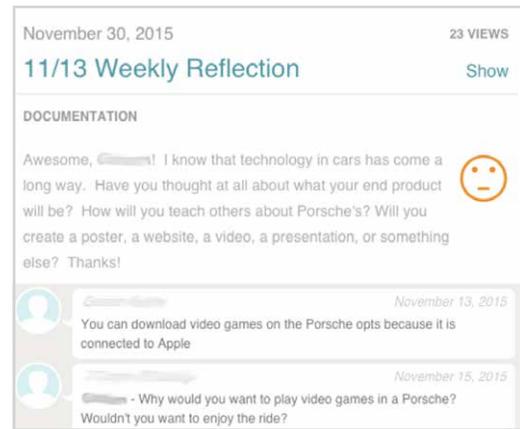
## The School District of Elmbrook Uses FreshGrade to Foster Student Ownership

With teacher and student engagement increasing, Katie and her team started creating activities in FreshGrade to push information and lessons to students, then asking them to reflect on their learning by asking questions such as “What did you do today?” “How well did you use your time?” “What do you need from your teacher?” Not only does FreshGrade help identify what students need, but it also empowers students to see how they are progressing and gaining independence.

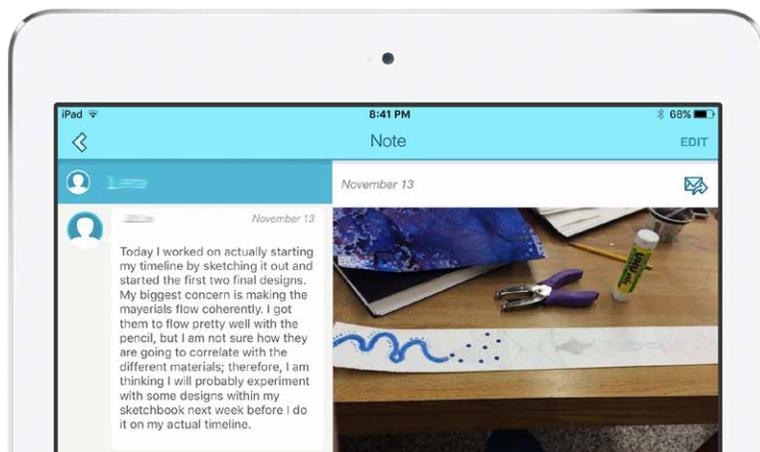
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FreshGrade has also enabled Katie and her team to demonstrate learning targets, a key focus at Elmbrook. Any time activities align with learning targets and show growth and progress, the teachers make a point of sharing the activity with parents. “It used to be just for teachers; now we include parents in our world so they can see how far students have come instead of seeing just the end.”

Katie was particularly excited about how the variety of options, especially on iPad, to allow students and teachers to capture learning and reflections in so many different ways. Students are given autonomy, and teachers get the information they need to monitor and encourage student progress. Teachers in Elmbrook work together and share best practices, using FreshGrade to share activities they’ve created from one class to another. This helps teachers scale their work on the platform. According to Katie, “this is great for the community of learning in the district.”



Example parent and student communication.



### ✉ Contact Us

Contact [inquiries@freshgrade.com](mailto:inquiries@freshgrade.com) to learn more about how FreshGrade can be used for School and District initiatives.