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**SCHOOL INNOVATIONS
& ACHIEVEMENT:
INCREASING LEARNING
TIME IN AMERICA'S RACE
FOR THE FUTURE**

Jeff Williams,
Founder & CEO



CIO REVIEW
44790, S Grimmer Blvd.
#202, Fremont, CA-94538

School Innovations & Achievement: Increasing Learning Time in America's Race for the Future

A National Company in the Sierra foothills Creates The Achievement Initiative to Connect Schools, Parents and Kids

By Ed Goldman

(Ed Goldman was a Northern California business correspondent for the Los Angeles Times for 10 years. For the past three years he has written a daily column for the Sacramento Business Journal, which recently published a collection of his daily columns, But I Digress.)

Jeff Williams firmly believes his technology company has cracked the code of the central, systemic challenge facing K-12 education in America. "It's all about showing up," he says.

Williams—Founder and CEO of School Innovations & Achievement (SI&A), a national technology and services company based in the Sierra foothills—is talking about the challenge to learning time caused by absenteeism. "In the early years of learning, not showing up is associated with lower academic performance, especially in reading and math, he says. Nationally, one in every 10 kindergartners and 1st graders is chronically absent, which is defined as missing more than 10 percent of the school year.

"That's 18 days per school year—but because it's 'just' a couple of days a month, it sometimes goes unnoticed," he says.

In response to, and in anticipation of a worsening crisis, Williams's company created the Achievement Initiative with Attention2Attendance (A2A) as its product-and-services foundation. While "chronic absenteeism" is all the buzz these days in education and technology circles,

for Williams, the term "is like predicting the past. If we wait for students to reach the stage of chronic absenteeism, they'll have missed too much learning time to catch up."

That's why, he adds, "A2A is designed to address absences as they happen. Our challenges are in real time. If you find yourself in quicksand, you don't want to spend a lot of time wondering how you got there. You want to find a solution—and that's what we've done, one that works 100 percent of the time."

A Strategy to Connect Schools with Parents and Students

The Achievement Initiative is a strategy intended to connect schools with parents and students, providing district leadership with information that's current, compelling and usable. "It provides data-driven decisions that include analysis, research and results," Williams says. "And it creates, or reinforces, a culture of achievement and engagement whose hallmark is showing up."

Williams says the Achievement Initiative programs are designed to engage parents and school principals in the battle to keep children in the classroom and on a productive course to their future. A2A, for

instance, has already been deployed with remarkable success: to date, it has tracked more than 1.5 million schoolchildren's records of attendance and absences at more than 1,500 school sites.

"If we're unwilling to increase the number of school days in a year—or the average number of hours in a school day—then we have to focus on the attendance crisis," he says. "That's what we have to fix. Now."

The education and technology sectors have taken note of A2A's outcomes, which include the statistic that in the first year of deployment, parental engagement increased a staggering average of 950 percent. Late last year, A2A garnered two major awards. First, it was recognized for making a positive difference in education by K12 leaders who named it to District Administration magazine's "Readers' Choice Top 100 Product for 2013." Three days later, the magazine you're reading right now named A2A one of the 20 Most Promising Education Technology Solution Providers of 2013. This magazine recently awarded SI&A that same recognition for 2014.

"The loss of learning time in U.S. schools is an epidemic for which some well-meaning people are prescribing the

wrong medication,” Williams says. Though his firm specializes in creating and servicing technology for the education sector, Williams believes technology alone isn’t the answer.

“You need the right software, which we have, but also proper execution, diligent across-the-board follow-through and rigorous outcome measurement,” he says. “After all, if you don’t measure how you’re doing, how can you know if something needs to improve?”

One set of measurements that alarms Williams and company is America’s standing in reading, math and science competency compared to other countries. “A Washington Post article from just four years ago showed that the U.S. ranked 17th in reading, 31st in math and 23rd in science,” he says. “In short, we’re very average. And I’m sorry, but that’s not what we expect or should be demanding of ourselves in this country.”

Taking on the Challenge—While Unburdening the Staff

In an era of sometimes devastating fiscal cutbacks, Williams is concerned that school staffs are taking on ever-bulkier administrative workloads while also being expected to improve learning results.

“We want teachers and administrators to do what they do best, which is to engage with students and parents,” he says. “You can’t create a culture of achievement, which is one of our mantras here, if you’re trying to accomplish too much with too few resources.”

To illustrate the concept, SI&A created a pyramid that shows as its foundation the need

“If you find yourself in quicksand, you don’t want to spend a lot of time wondering how you got there. You want to find a solution—and that’s what we’ve done. A2A is designed to address absences as they happen”



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to enlist the organization—the school site or district’s employees and the parents—and then, as one ascends the structure, the need to communicate, support the effort, measure the right things and, ultimately, to provide oversight.

“This increase in parent communication is especially critical for reaching at-risk students,” Williams says. “Absences are addressed almost immediately after they occur, which promotes better and earlier intervention.” In addition, nearly all trancies and excused absences measurably diminish after parents receive

A2A By the Numbers: A Continuing Success Story

As of press time, School Innovations & Achievement’s iconic software-and-services product, Attention2Attendance, or A2A had won three major education/technology awards. It has also:

Gathered the largest sampling of comparable, non-aggregated attendance data in the state—a fact not lost on California Attorney General Kamala Harris, who based her office’s report on the state’s learning crisis on A2A data;

Posted these client results in the 1,500 schools and for the more than one million students where it’s been deployed:

- 950 percent increase in parental communication;
- 26 percent reduction in truancy;
- 30 percent reduction in excessive excused absences;
- 50 percent reduction in chronic absenteeism.

Perhaps most encouraging of all, 54 percent of the students who were notified didn’t require a second intervention. — Ed Goldman



Chronic Absenteeism What This Means To Learning Time



That would total an additional **6,397,812** days in school!

the first notification. The increase of parental involvement results in demonstrably better attendance patterns (especially in early grades), prevention of future absences and the establishment of good attendance for the future.

‘Bot Seriously, Folks

Attention2Attendance, the foundation of the Achievement Initiative, is bolt-on software for any school district School Information System (SIS) that automates attendance interventions from the cloud. A web-based application, it saves time with SI&A’s exclusive data ROBOT capabilities to securely retrieve, validate and analyze data.

The SI&A team then turns that data into actionable reports, which identify key absenteeism patterns, highlighting areas with the greatest attendance concerns. The Achievement Initiative builds on the momentum already started with the A2A Base Program, finding solutions in district data to direct targeted, research-based communication campaigns.

“With abbreviated IT support at schools,” says Susan Cook, SI&A’s COO, “our data ROBOT integrates seamlessly into a school’s current program and immediately assures data accuracy, and validates attendance dates, codes and usage.”

“This powerful tool removes the need for district and school site infrastructures to support aggregating complex student data, consolidating lists, while maintaining servers and Internet connections. In short, it eliminates failure points between these processes,” Cook says.

“Better data,” says Williams, “supports better decisions.”

It’s also “cleaned” data. SI&A uses a rigorous process of checks and balances to identify invalid information, questionable

data entries, erroneous codes and unusual data variances within the district. As often as each week, district attendance information is reviewed by three different independent teams and automated data routines to ensure accuracy—by checking data constancy, unexplained anomalies and comparative analysis to district historical trends.

“If any anomalies are identified—home language is missing, guardian information is missing, address is missing—we issue ‘data alerts’ so that the schools can update their Student Information System,” says Cook. “Our team of experts understands data, which is why the precision of our data is unmatched. Some districts use A2A as their data of record because of the numerous data-integrity checkpoints built into our process.

Williams says that through his company’s patent-pending technology and processes, “We can extract data from any Student Information System (homegrown or otherwise) and compare districts to 1.5 million students and more than 1,500 school sites. We can also do this with non-clients, with less than 30 minutes of their IT department’s time, and then compare their data with our A2A data-set: averages and best performing districts.”

Adds Cook: “We can look at truancy, chronic absenteeism and excessive excused absences by detailed student attributes like grade, ethnicity, school site, English language learner, and so forth.”

Williams says that when certain data get aggregated, they can hide worrisome issues and useful, actionable facts. “I’ll give you an example,” he says. “A 96 percent attendance rate can co-exist with high absence rates in Kindergarten and first grade. But absence rates change significantly in transition years and tend to keep climbing.”

“Aggregated data won’t show grade & school-site specific issues,” he continues, “which can cause

Districts to focus strictly on average daily attendance (ADA) rates rather than performance predictors, such as absences and lost learning time.”

Detailed” Backgrounds

By the time Williams founded SI&A 11 years ago, he’d already enjoyed a varied but targeted career in paying attention to details.

He holds a Master’s degree in Finance from California State University, San Diego, where he also served on the faculty, and another master’s, in taxation, from Golden Gate University. His bachelor’s degree is from Santa Clara University and he’s been a certified public accountant since 1987.

Williams has done extensive forensic accounting, and has specialized in helping rapidly growing small businesses stay their strategic courses. He’s taken a similar approach with SI&A, keeping the company in fighting trim (it currently has a work force of approximately 100 employees).

“Susan Cook and I have made it a top priority to keep everyone in the company talking to each other,” he says. “Everyone here has a pretty good idea of what everyone else does—and everyone knows that the company’s culture requires absolute candor.” Cook laughs and clarifies, “Civil candor.”

Cook, who has worked alongside Williams since the company’s founding, is a respected industry expert in line management operations, individual and team coaching, and organizational alignment to meet critical goals. She served as the general manager for AT&T Business Systems, and as a vice president and general manager at ARC, Inc. Immediately prior to joining SI&A, she owned a successful consulting business that provided CEO coaching, executive and management training, organizational and managerial effectiveness, and organizational design. Her clients included high-growth

companies and companies in transition. She holds a B.A. in Psychology from the University of Missouri at Kansas City.

Williams and Cook take a great deal of pride in the corporate culture at SI&A: it’s easy going in terms of two-way communication among management and line employees, but vigorously hard working. “We meet every deadline that we or our clients set,” Williams says.

The company’s headquarters in El Dorado Hills features several open areas in which people can meet spontaneously, a regulation outdoor basketball half-court (Williams is



one of the most frequent lunchtime players), a fitness room and state-of-the-art conference rooms.

“I think what makes this company so different from others and what I’ve worked for is the genuine spirit of collaboration,” says Grace Spencer, Product Management Vice President. “We have a ‘flat’ organization: anyone can talk to anyone else. That kind of communication prevents messages from getting filtered and misinterpreted—and it allows our people who are out in the field to remind us what our clients’ concerns are.”

Right now, those concerns are invariably positive for A2A—a product that Williams says, without hyperbole, “works 100 percent of the time. That’s not a boast; it’s a documented fact.” He smiles. “But it’s also worth boasting about, isn’t it?”

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20 Most Promising Education Tech Solution Providers

The education sector is evolving with nature defining speeds toward new ways of teaching and learning. The metamorphosis is brought out by advent of technology in education. Smart mobile devices, social networking, virtual classrooms, identity management systems, faculty evaluation systems, data analytics and array of educational technologies have taken education to all new heights—both within and outside the classrooms.

The major change is reflecting in the traditional book based learning that is being replaced with digital solutions. With this, teachers now have the ability to engage students in better ways like projecting the 3D image of DNA on to the screen and simulating the process of Meiosis and Mitosis. The same technology can be applied to any streams of learning. Assisting these learning methods are a multitude of smart devices, which were earlier considered as distractions for students. But the very devices are now leading way for immersive learning. Teachers are distributing learning contents to all the students' devices and roaming across the class instructing and helping individuals with doubts.

Technology is also helping the institutions to better cater to student's idiosyncrasies, through data analytics. The historic academic data is analyzed with respect to student's social background, their interests and the current trends in education to guide them towards the best courses and colleges available and also help design best teaching methods to suite their learning abilities.

With universities growing in size, establishing various branches and offering online education, it becomes necessary to securely manage student and staff data, ensure strict and smooth authentication processes and manage identities. All these needs are catered by identity, student and faculty management systems.

There are array of such technologies that are changing education landscape for good. Now the teachers have better instructional tools, administrators have better management tools and students have better learning tools. Behind the scenes are group of companies that are fueling this educational transformations through their innovative technological solutions.

In this edition of CIO Review, we bring to you "20 Most Promising Education Technology Solution Providers 2014" and "20 Most Promising Education Technology Service Providers 2014," featuring the best solution and service providers offering technologies and services related to Education. The companies listed here showcases extensive business knowledge and innovative strategies combined with talent base across locations.

A distinguished panel comprising of CEOs, CIOs, CMOs, VCs, analysts and CIO Review editorial board has selected the top players from over thousand companies. The listing provide a look into how education solutions work in the real world, so that you can gain a comprehensive understanding of what technologies are available, which are right for you, and how they shape up against the competition.

School Innovations & Achievement

recognized by CIOReview magazine as



An annual listing of 20 companies that are in the forefront of tackling education technology challenges and impacting the marketplace


Pradeep Shankar
Editor-in-Chief
CIOReview


Christo Jacob
Managing Editor
CIOReview

Company:

School Innovations & Achievement

Key Person:

Jeff Williams
Founder & CEO

Website:

sia-us.com

Description:

School Innovation and Achievement supports school districts with innovative programs that improve attendance, streamline processes, and fulfill state and federal obligations.

20 Most Promising Education Tech Solution Providers

Company	Management	Company	Management
Aver Information, Inc. Fremont, CA averusa.com	Michael Kuo, Co-founder and CEO	Respondus, Inc. Redmond, WA respondus.com	David Smetters, CEO & Founder
Biometric Signature ID Lewisville, TX biosig-id.com	Jeff Maynard, CEO & Founder	School Innovations and Achievement El Dorado Hills, CA sia-us.com	Jeff Williams, Founder & CEO
BrightBytes San Francisco, CA brightbytes.net	Rob Mancabelli, CEO & Co-founder	Skillsoft Nashua, NH skillsoft.com	John Ambrose, Senior VP, Strategy & Corporate Development
Civitas Learning Austin, TX civitaslearning.com	Charles Thornburgh, Founder & CEO	SpectorSoft Vero Beach, FL spectorsoft.com	Jason Judge, CEO
Ellucian Fairfax, VA ellucian.com	Michael Betz, Senior Vice President & Chief Marketing Officer	Standard For Success Cloverdale, IN standardforsuccess.com	Todd Whitlock, Co-founder & CEO Alan Degener, Co-founder & Director of Product Development Robbie Grimes, Co-founder
Hitachi ID Systems Calgary, Canada hitachi-id.com	Idan Shoham, CTO and Co-founder	Thinkgate Charlotte, NC thinkgate.com	Eric Waynick, Founder & CEO
Hobsons Cincinnati, OH hobsons.com	Craig Heldman, CEO	Tools4ever Lynbrook, NY tools4ever.com	Jacques Vriens, Founder & CEO Dean Wiech, MD
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KEV Group Irving, TX and Toronto, Ontario kevgroup.com	Bram Belzberg, CEO	UNIT4 Utrecht, Netherlands unit4software.com	José Duarte, CEO
PerfectForms Carlsbad, CA perfectforms.com/education	Paula Selvidge, Ph.D, President & CEO	Verificient Technologies New York, NY verificient.com	Tim Dutta, Co-Founder & CEO

We've cracked the code
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