



Education Support Center Offers Free, Centralized IT Support to Norway Schools

Norway

Customer Profile

Norway's public education system has more than 3,000 schools, consisting of more than one million students and teachers.

Situation

To meet Norway's new educational standards that called for IT integration in classrooms, more centralized, qualified, technical support for teachers and students was needed.

Solution

Microsoft Norway partnered with the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) to establish the Education Support Center. Staffed by university students, the center provides free IT support on Microsoft Office and OpenOffice.org to almost 1,170,000 teachers and students in Norway.

Benefits

- Provides one national, centralized support solution
- Supports almost 1,170,000 students and teachers
- More than 4,000 service requests addressed in two years
- Employs eight trained university students

"Our center gives a much-needed service that is available for all students in Norway, independent of means, class, and location."

—Kine Ranneklev, Coordinator of the Education Support Center, Norwegian University of Science and Technology

To encourage increased IT use in schools, Microsoft Norway and the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) opened the Education Support Center (ESC). Initially funded by a Partners in Learning grant, the center provides technical support for teachers and students, allowing teachers to maintain their focus on education.



Situation

National studies conducted in Norway showed that although there were many PCs available in classrooms, they were not being used to their potential. The availability of IT support also varied widely across the country, and it was up to each school or community to offer what support it could. That meant that while some teachers had great support resources available to

them, others had no help if they experienced computer-related problems.

Teachers who had technology issues without IT support became frustrated and would quickly stop using available school technology. "A normal reaction for teachers is if something doesn't work once, they cope with it, but if it doesn't work twice, then they will not use it again," said Jan Helge Luth, Academic Audience Manager, Microsoft Norway. "If they have one place to call when something doesn't work or they need user tips, they will feel more secure about using technology."

“The focus of the teachers can be on learning and not on using time to solve technical issues. That is the main benefit of the support center.”

—Jan Helge Luth, Academic Audience Manager, Microsoft Norway

The Norwegian government had rolled out a new education curricula that encouraged more IT integration in classrooms and better technology know-how by students. If teachers were going to meet the goals of the new curricula, a national support service would be a great asset.

Solution

Using Partners in Learning grants to provide the funding, Microsoft Norway contacted the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) about collaborating on the project. Together they created a plan for a flexible, scalable model for running a national support center. NTNU was the ideal choice to house the center if the project was to be sustainable over time.

“NTNU is the leading educational institution within the technological field. This, with the fact that the IT department’s user support group has been run using students for over 40 years, made us a perfect candidate since the ESC also would be using students as its workforce,” said Kine Rannekleiv, Coordinator of the Education Support Center.

Two years into the project, it is clear that the pilot program has succeeded in creating a reliable, sustainable solution to the information and communications technology (ICT) challenges faced by Norway’s teachers and students every day. The program, called Skolehjelpen, which translates to “school help,” has 1,500 schools in 20 counties registered so far, amounting to almost 40 percent of all the schools in Norway. And the more than 3,700 service calls the center has handled to date shows the need it has filled for teachers and students.

Having demonstrated this success, the ESC began to be fully funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Education six months ago. Now the Norwegian government is covering all the operating costs of the center, so the ESC can continue employing eight trained students and one coordinator to staff the center and keep its support services free to all its users.

Benefits

The program’s benefits have been numerous. Besides offering IT support from a trained and knowledgeable staff, the center is available to all areas of the country regardless of economic or social factors. Teachers are more comfortable trying technology and using new IT equipment knowing they can receive technical support. And as teachers integrate technology into their classrooms and lesson plans, students benefit from the IT exposure and using the ESC for their own program support.

“The ESC is a great supplement to local IT departments and saves them a lot of time and cost,” said Luth. “This time saving can then be used to do proactive work and development of their own ICT service. But most of all, the center encourages integrated classroom use of ICT because teachers feel secure that they have a helping hand when they need it. The focus of the teachers can be on learning and not on using time to solve technical issues. That is the main benefit of the support center.”

For more information
Partners in Learning general inquiries:
pilquest@microsoft.com

Partners in Learning in Norway:
www.microsoft.no/education/
www.microsoft.com/norge/education/pil/default.aspx

Education Support Center/Skolehjelpen:
www.ntnu.no/skolehjelpen/

MyNerd Program:
www.mynerd.no/
www.windowslive.no/mynerd/

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This benefit is strongly felt at the local level. For example, in Asker municipality one help desk supported more than 3,000 employees in all their IT needs. The ESC now takes on some of that burden.

"Teachers make up approximately 650 of our 3,000 employees, and they have many questions," said Geir Graff, Head of ICT Development for Asker municipality. "We have chosen to reroute the Microsoft Office-related questions from that group of 'customers' to Skolehjelpen, and that has so far shown itself to be a good routine. In addition, we have distributed the posters and information to our schools about the possibilities for the teachers and students to contact Skolehjelpen directly, and this is gaining momentum as we speak. It saves our central help-desk personnel a lot of calls and makes the service they can offer the other 2,350 employees a bit better every day."

The ESC also maintains a centralized database of known problems. Once a situation has been solved at one school, any other schools calling with the same issue will get much quicker service and solutions.

"While Norway has over one million students and teachers at over 3,000 institutions, the center is proud to have partnered with more than 40 percent of them. That is a major accomplishment," said Rannekleiv.

Future of the Education Support Center

With funding now secure, the ESC can focus on increasing participation in the program by getting the word out to the one million students and teachers in the Norwegian school system. When the program began, the original focus was on teachers. But since spring of 2006, the center has also been available to students looking for IT support, although word of this new benefit has been slow to get out. "We only communicated this to the schools by informing our contacts. This was obviously not enough. We saw that most of our support requests still came from teachers, even though students outnumber teachers 10 to one," said Rannekleiv.

To address this goal, the ESC has started a new campaign called the MyNerd program. The program offers the same software support, but targets students in the way it is advertised, and is integrated with Microsoft® Windows Live™ services.

"Our goal regarding students is to provide a service that evens out both social and economic differences across the country," said Rannekleiv. "With our center it doesn't matter if your parents are computer geniuses or if they are computer illiterate. It doesn't matter if your school has 10 old computers, or it provides laptops for every student. Our center gives a much-needed service that is available for all students in Norway, independent of means, class, and location."