# Edsby and Veracross at The American School in Japan

*A modern backbone for an international school's teaching and learning*



*The American School in Japan's four schools in Tokyo educate more than 1,700 students.*

The American School in Japan (ASIJ) is a private, non-profit international school located in Tokyo. Founded in 1902, it offers an American-style education to students from pre-kindergarten through 12th grade.

ASIJ has a diverse student body, representing over 60 nationalities. Its mission is to provide a challenging and supportive learning environment that nurtures the development of 1,700 students across four schools: early learning, elementary, middle and high school.

## Constrained by previous systems

In 2016, ASIJ determined it needed to modernize and migrate from its legacy systems. Its previous student information system (SIS) was so old administrators needed to install a terminal emulator to use it. Teachers weren't able to look up parent contact info, and even had to ask the office for parent email addresses.

The bigger problem, according to ASIJ, was its learning management system (LMS). Its previous system didn't have a gradebook and was simply used as a repository for documents, with folders full of PDFs. Teachers had to use a separate standalone electronic gradebook, which led to one of students' biggest concerns in satisfaction surveys: not having visibility into how their grades were calculated. Teachers didn't have access to photos of the children they were teaching. In the absence of a calendar in its LMS, students had to cross-reference a schedule document or build their own calendar to know what classes they had on a particular day.

"We had a hodgepodge of solutions. Everyone was on their own. Every student had a completely unique experience in every class. Most students had 8 different electronic destinations to go to," said ASIJ Director of Technology Warren Apel.

## Review process

The organization's leadership team determined it wanted the following in its new systems:

- A grade book that would help support the move away from calculated percentages and towards standards-based grading. It wanted to provide effective feedback to students while moving the focus away from calculated average numerical grades.
- The ability to share student academic progress across teams, so teachers, counselors, and administration could know how students are doing in all of their classes

- A way for teachers to privately document and share observations about students' social-emotional needs and challenges
- Quick access by teachers to important emergency information, such as medical notes (allergies, etc.) and home contact details
- Analytic reports for counselors and administrators to use data to inform programmatic decisions, instruction and student progress

ASIJ selected a new LMS first. It reviewed over a dozen platforms and narrowed its selection to two contenders. Teacher focus groups and surveys strongly preferred Edsby to the other front-runner.

"When we demonstrated both systems to teachers and school leaders, they were far more impressed with the Edsby interface and with the additional features and options Edsby provided," wrote Apel in a memo to school leadership in 2017 announcing Edsby's selection.



**"Edsby checked all the boxes. Teachers got access to info and a gradebook that can do qualitative standards-based feedback. The fact it also had calendaring and messaging was even better."**

*- Warren Apel, Director of Technology, The American School in Japan*

## Edsby: More than an LMS

"Edsby is much more than a simple LMS replacement and solves other problems we have, such as making information more accessible, making office tasks more efficient, and helping to overcome connectedness issues behind our low student belonging survey results," the memo read.



*Prior to Edsby, ASIJ's previous LMS was essentially being used as a repository for folders full of PDFs.*

"We knew we wanted to move away from averaging and point-based grades. Most LMSes only offered the choice of either IB-style grades or traditional American letter grades, percentage scores and averages. Edsby checked all the boxes as far as giving teachers access to info and a gradebook that can do qualitative standards-based feedback. The fact it also had calendaring and messaging was even better," said Apel.

Today, the school uses Edsby for assignments. Teachers use a journal feature in their Edsby classes to share information. Edsby's standards-based gradebook shares feedback instantly with students and parents. Students' photos can be seen by teachers in Edsby, helping them learn new faces in their classes and manage seating plans. Teams and clubs have their own Edsby groups for social interaction, schedule and files management. And everyone, including students, parents and teachers, can see the day's schedule in Edsby, showing them where they should be and when.

## Veracross

In 2018, a year after Edsby was established, the school changed its SIS to Veracross. Students and parents already using Edsby hardly noticed the change. Edsby's automatic rosters were configured to pull data from the new SIS.

"In 2018, we were the first school to use both Veracross and Edsby, so there was some work to do in creating the data synchronization, but now it's working very well," said Apel. "We're super excited about what the future holds."

ASIJ uses Veracross to manage the school's 8-day rotating schedule, record health center visits and document details like a student's learning support status. The Veracross email list feature allows teachers to send standard email messages to all parents in a class simply by emailing a class "alias" using their standard email client. Teachers also enjoy a Veracross Memorize Name Game that helps them associate students' faces with names.

## "We're super excited about what the future holds for Edsby and Veracross."

*- Warren Apel, Director of Technology, The American School in Japan*

## Two systems in harmony

Today, Edsby and Veracross are backbones of ASIJ's teaching and learning infrastructure in its middle and high schools. They can be relied on to work together to manage and understand the school's most important data, including the school's big picture, according to school officials.

"We absolutely love Edsby's analytics," noted Apel. "Edsby's analytics is one of the best interfaces for understanding student achievement in a standards-based environment that I've ever seen. Its heat map is beautiful."

## Cost savings

The two systems have represented significant cost savings for the school. In its adoption of Edsby alone, the school has been saving $60k USD every year since 2018 over the cost of its previous system.

## ASIJ students on Edsby

"It's easy to use and has everything in the same place."
"It's easy to get used to and easy to use."
"It's very useful because grades, resources and announcements are all in one site."
"It's very easy to access your grades on Edsby, which is very useful!"
"If every teacher uses Edsby you can find all the homework in one place."