

## CASE STUDY

Association of Christian Schools International

# ANYTIME, ANYWHERE, PD IN FOCUS® IS THERE

**Professional Learning Model:** PD In Focus

**Focused Area of Need:** Multiple Areas

**Organization Type:** Parochial/Private School Association

## OVERVIEW

**The Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) is the largest Protestant education organization in the world.** With nearly 25,000 member schools in more than 100 countries, ACSI's ability to provide effective professional development to each individual educator is a huge challenge. In 2010, ACSI partnered with ASCD to

- Provide a professional development program that would be available to users all over the world anytime, anywhere.
- Deliver the professional development program through ACSI's portal so that users could access the service with a single sign-on.
- Offer a wide range of topics to meet the individual learning needs of nearly 25,000 members.

*“We realized that providing on-demand instruction was a way to serve our educators, no matter where they are and no matter what the challenges or barriers to professional development were for each of the educators.”*

—Shannon Bomar, Director for Professional Development, ACSI

## BACKGROUND

With the goal of advancing excellence in Christian schools, ACSI provides a range of services that include teacher and administrator certification, school accreditation, and high-quality professional development.

With nearly 25,000 member schools in more than 100 countries, ACSI educators have served more than 5.5 million students worldwide. In addition to its headquarters in Colorado Springs, Colorado, ACSI has 25 offices around the globe. ACSI's professional development mission is to "deliver the highest possible quality of professional development that will equip, inspire, and encourage Christian educators."

Across ACSI's network, from urban to rural regions and from wealthy to impoverished areas, teachers are learning, collaborating, and growing with the help of ASCD's PD In Focus (PDIF) online application. The platform makes it easy for educators to tackle challenges, find solutions, and share their own experiences. Millions of students served by ACSI reap the benefits.

**“ASCD’s PD In Focus provides our users with an excellent collection of professional development courses that address important issues in education today. ASCD does a great job of creating content that is timely, instructive, and accessible for educators.”**

-ACSI staff member

## CHALLENGE

Providing high-quality professional development to ACSI's global membership presented an enormous challenge. ACSI's vision is to help educators learn new skills and deepen their knowledge so that they can better serve their students, but how could the association address each educator's needs in a cost-efficient way?

"With that many schools stretched so broadly across the globe, it's a challenge to get professional development to each individual educator," said Shannon Bomar, director for professional development at ACSI. "[We] realized that providing on-demand instruction was a way to serve our educators, no matter where they are and no matter

## ORGANIZATIONAL PROFILE

### ACSI

- **25,000** member schools
- **100+** countries with ACSI member schools
- **25** ACSI offices around the world
- **5.5** million students touched worldwide

what the challenges or barriers to professional development were for each of the educators."

ACSI wanted to meet individual learning needs when in-person training was neither cost-effective nor practical. "We all know that teachers are incredibly busy," said Bomar. "They have such busy schedules and they're overloaded. They take their work home with them. For them to engage in professional development is a challenge in both time and finances. We thought if we could provide something where they could have access to what they need, when they need it, then that would help them overcome some of the challenges they experience."

## ASCD SOLUTION

For the past 30 years, ACSI has focused on event-based professional development, a method that no longer meets the evolving needs of its constituents. Professional development is not an annual event; it's an ongoing process. Teachers' needs continually change and traveling long distances for professional development seminars was becoming increasingly difficult.

ASCD's PD In Focus online application offers the perfect solution. With this tool, ACSI can provide the learning educators need on the topics that interest them in a convenient and efficient way. No matter where they teach or what particular problem they face, educators at ACSI member schools can access hundreds of hours of professional development videos that include real-life classroom examples, strategies, and best practices.

ASCD's PD In Focus online application delivers on-demand video streaming that shows effective teaching practices in action. Educators of any grade, subject area, or experience level will find powerful examples of strategies and concepts that they can

immediately put into practice. With videos tied to ASCD's award-winning books, such as Carol Ann Tomlinson's differentiated instruction series and Douglas Fisher and Susan Brookhart's best-selling texts on formative assessment, the PD In Focus platform offers ASCD's quality content in action.

For ACSI, the primary benefit of the PD In Focus online application is that the videos blend classroom theory with practical applications. The videos provide clear lessons in digestible chunks. A teacher who needs classroom management tips for his 7th grade students can find strategies, ideas, and best practices that he can implement the very next day. A 12th grade teacher interested in brain-based teaching can find related videos, as can a principal interested in Response to Intervention.

"One of the things that I think is really a strength of ASCD's content is that ASCD does a fabulous job of blending theoretical educational theory with practical application in the classroom. So often with professional development, taking theoretical, research-based concepts and applying them in the classroom can be a struggle," said Bomar. "You have real teachers and real students. I think ASCD has done a great job of taking theory and application and making them accessible."

ACSI was able to customize the PD In Focus online application to ensure that all of the content would align with the needs of Christian school educators. ASCD also provided ACSI with a single sign-on feature that gives members who log into ACSI's portal seamless access to the PD In Focus content. ASCD was able to provide exactly what was needed to create a culture of ongoing professional development for a global network of educators. ACSI's members also gained access to additional online tools and resources from ASCD, including special forums for PD In Focus users to discuss lessons and exchange knowledge.

**If you realize midway through the day that you need to learn some new skills for classroom management, then you have access to be able to dig in and start increasing your skill set tonight, when you get home, while the kids are out at recess, or on your lunch break.**

-Shannon Bomar

## PD IN FOCUS FEATURES

The PD In Focus platform offers more than 800 on-demand videos on a variety of popular topics, including differentiated instruction, the Common Core State Standards, formative assessment, STEM education, and much more.

Some of the platform features include a custom channel creator, group discussion boards, assignment capabilities, and reporting tools.

In addition to being a personalized learning tool, the PD In Focus application can also be used with groups. Schools and districts can use the platform to deliver professional development to thousands of teachers in any grade or subject area. Teacher teams or professional learning communities can work collaboratively on video topics and use the facilitator materials to guide discussions. Professional development leaders can set up learning groups, make assignments, and monitor activities and progress. Also, schools and districts can embed the application within their existing professional learning initiatives to connect research-based practices with real-life examples of effective classroom instruction.

Survey data shows that more than 80 percent of PD In Focus users are likely to recommend the platform to a colleague or peer, and more than 84 percent of users give the PD In Focus system a positive rating. In addition, the platform has received several industry awards, including the 2015 EDDIE Award for Best Online Professional Development Tool.



## RESULTS

"We have rural schools in areas like northern Montana and Idaho. We have schools in South Africa that are using this content. In these rural places, they would not have access to this professional development. And now, they have it at their fingertips. It kind of brings a lump to my throat because I've talked to educators in South Africa and, because their Internet access is so limited, they will buffer a video segment all night so that they can watch it in the morning. When you hear that someone had to buffer a video all night, it really makes you think of how blessed we are [to not have to do that], and it encourages me that we were able to provide something for that educator that they truly wanted," said Bomar.

**“**We felt like this is a way that we could put tools that they need in their hands. Right now. Today.  
—Shannon Bomar

By providing teachers with opportunities to continue learning, growing, and developing their own professional abilities and skills, ACSI is helping millions of students learn and achieve. Since the relationship with ASCD began, ACSI students have viewed nearly 100,000 PDIF videos. ASCD courses consistently rank in the top 25 to 30 percent of total courses completed on ACSI's platform in a given year. ASCD courses also consistently rank among the top 25 most popular courses on ACSI's platform and are frequently included in the top 10.

"For the education system to work well, we have to be about educating every person in it, and that means that students are going to grow and achieve more in their own academic pursuits when their teachers are growing and learning. Any way that we can support teachers to continue learning, growing, and developing their own professional abilities and skill sets, the more we are helping students," said Bomar.

"As Christian educators, we really look at the whole child—not just the test scores but also how have they grown personally, how have they grown spiritually. The more that we can grow and support our educators, the more equipped they are to support their students," said Bomar.

For ACSI, the partnership with ASCD has been a productive one. "ASCD has always been incredibly responsive to us when we've had questions and needs," said Bomar. "Anyone I've worked with at ASCD has been quick to jump in and help. It's a great relationship."

### Top Ten Most Watched PDIF Videos on ACSI's Platform

