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Simpat Tech Supports ESP Solutions Group's **Ed-Fi Data Collection System Development** and **Dashboard Modernization** Initiatives

The Ed-Fi Alliance is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit funded by the Michael & Susan Dell Foundation that aims to transform education through data interoperability. "By connecting educational data systems," the Alliance's website states, "we empower educators with comprehensive, real-time insights into their students' performance and needs."

In 2016, when the ESP Solutions Group undertook its first Ed-Fi implementation for a long-term customer in Wyoming, the need for a partner with a background in Ed-Fi became clear. Mutual connections led to an introduction to Ashish Patel, Founder and CEO of Simpat Tech.

"When we started, it was more an engagement out of necessity, in the sense that we had no prior background in the infrastructure base for Ed-Fi," explains ESP Solutions Group Vice President of Development, Jim Rife. "We were looking for somebody who had the credentials. When Ashish started working with us, it became clear that he had the next level up the rung of skill sets – not just development skills, but architectural and business analysis skills as well."

STANDING UP THE WYED-FI DASHBOARDS

Work on the project began with standing up an ODS and an API, recalls Kathleen Browning, Product Manager at ESP Solutions Group. "We got a dashboard set up with dummy data, and then we started working with the few districts in a pilot environment, so that we could actually use Wyoming data to stand up an implementation."

Patel's prior Ed-Fi experience became especially important as work on the WyEd-Fi dashboards progressed. "I relied on Ashish a great deal to help me debug bugs, because at the time we were the first company to actually implement the 2.0 dashboard," notes Browning. "It had been rewritten by a third-party from the 1.x version to a 2.x version, and Ashish helped me debug the whole 2.x version. I opened over 50 trouble tickets with the Ed-Fi Alliance. Ashish helped me resolve a lot of those."

Browning continues, "In addition to setting up the API and the ODS, and helping me debug the C# code for the dashboard, Ashish stood up our TeamCity and Octopus development deployment environments. He also implemented a staging and production deployment environment behind a firewall on the Wyoming servers.

MANAGING WYED-FI DEPLOYMENTS

Since the WyEd-Fi project's inception, both the size of Simpat Tech's team and the scope of its work with ESP Solutions Group have grown.

"Every time we upgrade from a different version of the ODS, we go with Ashish's team," shares Browning. "They've been vital in the success of our Ed-Fi maturity." Since the launch of the 2.0 dashboard, Simpat Tech has continued to support the WyEd-Fi project in updating to a 2.5 ODS and then to a 3.4 ODS, including a parallel 2.5/3.4 environment for districts that aren't yet ready to migrate to the 3.4 ODS.

To date, Simpat Tech remains responsible for the configuration, management, and source control of all the WyEd-Fi deployment resources – no small task, as Rife explains that, "EdFi has a fairly robust deployment mechanism. It's got a lot of moving parts, and it uses remote technology to do a build, and then send the build to various places. Sometimes you're sending it to test environments, and sometimes you're sending it to production environments. There's all the security associated with that, and questions about which build needs to be in which place at which time."

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TRANSITIONING TO DASHBOARD UI MODERNIZATION WORK

The ongoing success of the WyEd-Fi project led ESP Solutions Group to engage Simpat Tech on an additional Ed-Fi dashboard modernization proof-of-concept project.

According to Patel, "The current Ed-Fi dashboard is meant for teachers and administrators to get a quick view into how a school or student is performing. However, the user experience is a bit dated. Our goal with this project is targeted at improving the user interface, updating the systems that drive the data, and developing a more responsive experience that works on any device size."

Expanding on this, Rife notes that, "The goal was to take a page of the user interface and implement in this new technology. The main questions were, What does it look like in a modern framework? And can it look pretty similar to what it does currently? And then can you put it in a technology that is device independent?"

Though the project began as a relatively small three-month engagement, ESP Solutions Group quickly proposed a second stage to address a number of security and authentication issues that were deferred in order to speed up the first initiative. "We were using a canned database of data for metrics that go in the user interface, and they wanted us to use the new interface that they have in Ed-Fi," shares Rife. "So we expanded the work through a second project with those two additional items."

AN ONGOING PARTNERSHIP FOR ED-FI SUCCESS

A key factor in the successful partnership between ESP Solutions Group and Simpat Tech, Rife describes, has been Simpat's tight process control mechanisms.

"They communicate and give us feedback on where they're at and what they need," he shares. "They don't just listen and then go off and do things. They listen, and if anything's not clear, they get clarity before they go to work so that they don't end up spinning around, chasing their tail. They do a good job in advance of anticipating and asking the right questions so that they're clear on what it is you want them to do."

Rife is quick to recommend Simpat Tech to others. "After you've worked with people for a while, you get a sense of whether you trust them or whether they're being straightforward with you. I don't ever worry about that with Ashish. He knows anything we communicate to him is business-sensitive and needs to stay that way. He's not going to leverage that for his own purposes or go do something with somebody else against our interests."

The only caveat to Rife's recommendation? "It's like how you don't want to tell everybody where the best restaurant is," he jokes, "because then you can never get a seat there."

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To learn more about how Simpat Tech can support your next development project, reach out to our team for a personalized assessment based on your needs.

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