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Contact: Toby Ritt

E-mail: tritt@imagetrend.com

Phone: 888-469-7789

Using Web-Based Software to Manage Student Data

By: Toby Ritt

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The last decade has seen amazing technological advances in the field of education. Through the use of Web-based data management systems, schools and other educational institutions have begun to utilize the same powerful information technology practices deployed by the business world to streamline data and utilize it in meaningful ways to help to improve communication and achievement.

Students, teachers, parents, and administrators are now able to easily communicate, share information, and manage their tasks from any computer with an Internet connection to unify entire school communities around single, powerful databases, saving time, cutting down on duplication of efforts, and reducing rising costs for document storage.

Student information systems are leading the way in this education technology revolution by allowing information to be shared throughout an institution in real time. Tasks that once required mounds of paperwork and files such as attendance records, grades, report cards, scheduling, and discipline tracking can now all be centralized under one integrated data management system and distributed to the appropriate parties through secure, permission-based log-ins.

For years, schools had been accustomed to printing or ordering new attendance forms and distributing them to each classroom to be collected and entered later in the day. Today, schools are able to allow teachers to enter attendance directly from their classroom computer and make it available to the office immediately without ever having to pick up a pencil.

Another great example would be the production and compilation of report cards. Teachers once had to fill out forms that required them to merge information after computing scores with a calculator from hand-kept grade books to submit them to the office by an acceptable date to transfer them to report cards.

Today, Web-based grade books allow scores to be automatically computed, and then grades to be assigned according to scale and instantly transferred to report card templates with the click of a button, allowing more time for teaching and caring and requiring less time for filling out paperwork.

Technological advances are also helping teachers and administrators to spend less time on administrative tasks and more time using already-existing data to help to improve student performance.

Stephen Searl is a fourth-grade teacher at Oak Grove Elementary School in Bloomington, Minnesota. He said, "The school district's data system has all of the information we could ever want about our students...demographics, standardized test scores, district assessments, and much more. It helps us to track how effectively we are reaching students and driving improvement. For example, we can easily compare students' Developmental Reading Assessment levels from the beginning of the year to the end. This is a powerful tool for the beginning of the year to help to sort our students into ability groups for subjects like reading and math."

By allowing data to be shared easily and reported on dynamically and in real time, administrators and teachers are now better able to make knowledge-based decisions by identifying those areas in their student body that are most in need of improvement and to group students into class sessions accordingly. The result is better targeted plans designed to meet the needs of a variety of children by addressing specific areas needing improvement. Alerts can be set to automatically notify administrators if certain students drop below minimum standards to ensure timely intervention and remedial action.

In addition to allowing for the tracking of standardized testing and developmental benchmarks, student information systems provide a powerful tool for parents to stay actively involved in their children's education. In the past, parents have typically had to wait for mid-term assessments to be distributed to gauge their child's performance in the current term. Through student information systems, parents now have access to their student's current assignments, upcoming tests, and current grades from their desktop at the office or in their home. By providing parents with this information on a daily basis, it empowers them to take a more active role in making sure that their child is getting the most of their education.

These advantages can be put to use by public, private, and charter schools alike.

Mike Lancaster is the superintendent of schools for the Diocese of Madison, Wisconsin. He said, "Implementing a diocesan student information system is a great benefit, not only for the individual schools, but for the diocesan schools office as well. Aggregate reports that once required weeks of finding, compiling, and transmitting information will literally be generated with a few clicks of the mouse. The system saves time, for teachers and for office staff, allowing them to spend less time on managerial issues and more time teaching children. Communication with parents has also been greatly enhanced through the use of e-mails and self-service parent views. "

Private schools find student information systems offer many additional advantages that can promote their administrative needs, such as tuition accounting and payments, enrollment process administration, as well as promotion of the alumni community and fundraising.

Most Web-based student information systems are now offered to schools on an Application Service Provider (ASP) model, making them affordable to any size institution or budget. Rather than spending money on costly technology infrastructure (servers, technical staff, etc.), schools are able to implement a



solution on a rental basis including hosting for a low monthly fee, which probably amounts to a little more than a few dollars per student per year. The ASP model also reduces the headaches involved with system maintenance, software downloads, backups, and the installation of upgrades, while providing institutions with the highest levels of security for their sensitive information.

Many schools in New Orleans were relieved to have computerized data stored in this fashion compared to those who had on-site filing cabinets destroyed in the blink of an eye when Hurricane Katrina hit in late August 2006. Those schools that had used utilized off-site computer services to house their data were able to pick up right where they had left off, since they still had all of their previous student data in place.

The advancing world of technology—student information systems, in particular—offers institutions the chance to make a very small investment that will benefit all of the school's stakeholders.

As our culture continues to rapidly transition from an industrial to an information-based economy, it is only natural that educational institutions will not only continue to look for ways that will educate and prepare the workforce of the future, but that they should also personally benefit from this as well.

Toby Ritt works as an account executive for ChurchWerks Student Information System, specializing in providing data management solutions to the parochial school community, www.churchwerks.com.

About ChurchWerks

www.churckwerks.com

ChurchWerks, a Web-based application designed for the Catholic school community, allows parents, teachers and administrators to easily communicate, share information and manage their tasks. *ChurchWerks* offers data entry fields that provide tracking of student sacramental history and the liturgical readings of the day are available on the calendar. The accounting tools streamline the management of tuition and fees and can quickly generate billings, statements and accounts receivable. Best of all, because it's a Web-based application, it can be accessed by teachers and parents from any computer with an Internet browser, so it's available when you need it, where you need it – at school or at home.

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