

Texas school district uses Lexmark MFPs and software to streamline its testing and grading process. The new approach has reduced costs, reduced the time it takes to grade tests, provides scores immediately to teachers and quickly logs scores into the district's student information system.

## Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District speeds student test scoring from weeks to minutes with Lexmark solution

### The Organization

Encompassing 186 square miles bordering Houston, the 100,000 students in Texas' Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District (CFISD) are served by more than 7,000 teachers, counselors, supervisory personnel, attendance officers, and administrators in 78 schools. The district is a leader in deploying computers and networking technologies that enable students and teachers in more than 5,000 classrooms to leverage instructional software and networking resources. The Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) and the State of Texas Long Range Plan for Technology form the foundation upon which Cypress-Fairbanks bases its initiatives.

### The Challenge

Even with its plan to spend \$67 million on technology over the next three years, CFISD is no different than any other school district in its quest to use those funds wisely and control expenses. The district set one of its goals to become more efficient in its use of output technology. Agreement was universal that the entire process of generating and handling student testing bubble-sheets was in need of an overhaul. Streamlining test administration and scoring could have a positive operational and budgetary impact.

"We were using the traditional centralized model of printing bubble sheets, distributing them to each school, and then collecting and shipping them back to a central location for scanning," said Margaret Reed, CFISD's Director of Information Services. Even though sheets were pre-slugged and personalized for each student, getting them into the correct classroom was not always easy. By the time bubble sheets were generated, shipped out, and reached teachers, new students often had entered the district and others may have moved to a different school. "The sheets sometimes didn't reflect who was in the classroom," said Reed.

"Tests sheets are scanned with a single finger tap on the operator panel, which automatically instructs Remark to do the actual scoring, and have the results immediately fed into our student information database."



Margaret Reed  
Director of Information Services  
Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District  
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When the district's secondary schools began administering rigorous secondary formative assessment tests six times each academic year instead of just two, the use of couriers and staffers to transport sheets grew more intense – and expensive. Reed calculates that across the entire K-12 spectrum, CFISD generated and processed 1.6 million test sheets.



After collecting all sheets and transporting them to a central location, the tests were scanned using a pair of standalone scanners, each attached locally to a desktop computer. Batching sheets correctly was crucial; if second graders sheets became intermingled with those from a test given to first graders, the wrong answer key would be applied. With all sheets passing through just those two scanners, getting test results back to the district's teachers often took an entire week. "It was impossible to continue with this centralized method," said Reed, herself a former classroom teacher. "We had to move to a fully decentralized model in order to serve our teachers and students effectively."

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### The Solution

Reed was already familiar with Lexmark based on discussions with her IT counterparts in other Texas school districts. "We knew that Lexmark's K-12 solutions group was in the business of providing actual proven solutions that support district goals and student achievement, not just selling equipment," Reed said.

Invited to set up a proof-of-concept demonstration system, Lexmark installed a multifunction printer (MFP) that combines a business-class laser printer, copier, scanner, and fax machine into a single, fully networked compact unit. Based in part on the capabilities of these units and their integration with CFISD's student database, the district published a request for proposal, soliciting bids from several vendors for a complete turnkey solution, not just for hardware. Most vendors were able to meet some of the requirements set forth in the RFP, but only Lexmark was able to provide total integration with the district's internal systems.

Ultimately CFISD chose Lexmark and now operates a fleet of about 80 Lexmark MFPs. Lexmark K-12 solution specialists customized the color touch-screen operator panel of the Lexmark MFPs and created a custom

script using Lexmark Document Distributor software that interfaces with the district's Remark Office OMR® (optical mark recognition) software.

"Tests sheets are scanned with a single finger tap on the operator panel, which automatically instructs Remark to do the actual scoring, and have the results immediately fed into our student information database," Reed said. "It's very powerful."

To keep its fleet of Lexmark MFPs at the top of the class, CFISD entered into an extended maintenance agreement with Lexmark that ensures fast on-site response with certified field engineers. Through the use of Lexmark management software, the district is now able to track paper and toner use at each device. Doing so allows the purchasing department to order replacement genuine Lexmark toner cartridges only as needed.

### The Results

With its 80 MFPs, teachers now print bubble sheets on demand. Personalized and slugged with information from the student information database, the test sheets are always accurate. Printing sheets in each school has eliminated the expense and delays associated with central site generation, distribution, and collection. The ability for teachers to scan bubble sheets immediately after a test with a single finger tap, provides them with test scores via e-mail in just minutes, far faster than the traditional waiting period of up to one week with centralized scoring.

CFISD is now expanding its use of the solution by increasing test frequencies, and also to generate surveys for other purposes.

Throughout the project, the district discovered that a complete solution is not just one of hardware or software, but of the company and people behind the products. "Our relationship with Lexmark is a true, unique partnership," said Reed. "This was a huge high-profile project and the Lexmark team stayed onsite until everything was customized, tested, and fully operational. It has been a very rewarding experience for us."

With its customized Lexmark solution, the Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District has cut expenses, vastly improved its responsiveness, and won the appreciation of its thousands of teachers. For Reed, the entire Lexmark experience rates an A+. "With other technology vendors, you see a commitment with the salesperson. Our relationships with Lexmark go much deeper, and that is something that continues to this day."

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