Prince George’s County Public Schools

Maryland elementary school boosts student achievement, reduces test grading times from hours to minutes with Lexmark Testing and Grading solution

Challenge

Tracking student achievement through assessment testing is an essential tool in every school district nationwide. As schools comply with No Child Left Behind, the use of optical mark recognition (OMR) or “bubble sheet” test forms has increased significantly. Like other districts, Prince George’s County Public Schools (PGCPS) has long used these bubble sheets to administer tests and score their results.

The rigid schedule and the necessity of transporting these expensive preprinted bubble sheets to a central facility for scanning and test scoring impeded flexibility and slowed the educational process. “We lacked the timeliness of being able to give an assessment on the fly on a daily or weekly basis,” said Evelyn Adams, a teacher at Carmody Hills Elementary School. Teachers wishing to give interim quizzes had to grade them by hand. For Adams’ 18 students, that meant up to two hours spent grading a 20-question test.

In addition, while the standardized bubble sheets were well-suited for upper-grade students, district officials discovered they were not a good fit with first- and second-graders. “These younger students don’t yet have the manual dexterity needed to fill in those small bubbles when each question has five answer choices,” said Adams.

PGCPS decided the time had come to seek improvements in its testing and grading approach to better support student achievement, reduce costs and speed up the time between administering the test and understanding the results. An ideal solution would allow teachers to quickly and easily prepare a quiz or test, print bubble sheets in individual schools and scan them immediately to obtain near-instant feedback. The solution had to be affordable, easy for teachers to use, and fully compatible with the district’s IT infrastructure and student information system.

Meet Prince George’s County Public Schools

Prince George’s County Public Schools (PGCPS) is the second-largest school system in Maryland and the eighteenth largest in the nation. Its $1.7 billion FY2009 budget supports 208 schools and the 10,000 teachers who serve 128,000 students. Newsweek named five district high schools to its coveted 2009 America’s Top Public High Schools list.

Products in use:

- Lexmark multifunction products and laser printers
- Lexmark Testing & Grading solution
Solution

A team of teachers recommended installing the Lexmark Testing and Grading solution for a pilot test in Carmody Hills Elementary School. The Lexmark Testing and Grading solution includes a Lexmark multifunction product (MFP) and unique software that lets teachers and administrators prepare tests, print them on plain paper, scan and score tests immediately, create reports and analyze data all in support of student achievement.

Teachers can now prepare tests and quizzes “on the fly,” print customized bubble sheets on plain paper, administer the test, scan the completed test sheets on the same MFP and review the test results immediately. Printing the personalized bubble sheets for each student on demand also eliminates the expense of stockpiling proprietary, expensive pre-printed bubble sheets.

Rolaetta Alford, the school principal at Carmody Hills, believed it would be easy for teachers to master with minimal training. “It took just 15 minutes for the teachers to get a handle on it.”

To meet the needs of the school’s youngest students, Lexmark designed an alternative bubble sheet featuring larger bubbles. “We have a 15-item test available for the primary grades with just three answer choices, but the bubbles are three times bigger,” said Alford. “Students get a chance to experience testing and it is age-appropriate for them.”

Results

With the Lexmark Testing and Grading solution pilot fully functional, Carmody Elementary School is seeing the results in three primary areas: student achievement, time savings and cost savings.

Teachers now have immediate feedback from student exams and quizzes. “Teachers know if they need to re-teach or if they can just go on to the next skill,” said Alford. “It frees up a lot of time and we don’t spend time teaching concepts that the students already know. We can spend more time teaching those objectives that they are still having problems with.”

According to Alford, the time savings for teachers is tremendous. “You’re looking at an 80% to 90% time savings,” said Adams. “That frees me up to spend time on things that make a difference in my students’ achievement.”

Normally, increasing test frequency would result in a corresponding rise in paper consumption, a budget sore spot in most school systems. “Paper savings in an elementary school is one of the biggest benefits of a Lexmark system,” said Adams. “With the Lexmark Testing and Grading solution, we’ve been able to implement two-sided answer sheets. That cuts my paper use in half—a tremendous paper savings for an elementary school.”
A tertiary benefit is that the elementary school students are learning how to take tests. “They have very quickly learned some of the key things about taking tests, and that is a skill,” said Alford. “When it comes time to take the Maryland State Assessment, this will be nothing new.”

Lexmark went to considerable lengths to ensure a successful pilot, said Alford. “The Lexmark systems engineer and the account manager have been very responsive to our suggestions. Anytime we call, they’re here,” she said.

With the pilot test of the Lexmark Testing and Grading solution completed successfully, Alford and Adams are now working with the PGCPS IT organization and teachers in other district schools to lay the groundwork for a district-wide implementation.

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