Mobile County Public Schools

Mobile County Public Schools saves $200,000 with Lexmark Testing and Grading solution

Organization

Alabama's Mobile County Public School System (MCPSS) operates under a $472 million annual budget with 96 schools and 4,156 teachers serving nearly 63,000 students.

Challenge

Like thousands of other school districts, MCPSS administers tests at the end of each academic quarter to assess students' progress. For years, the district purchased optical mark recognition forms, better known as bubble sheets, on which students mark test answers and which are optically scanned for electronic test scoring.

The process of distributing bubble sheets to all 96 schools and then processing test results had become a slow, arduous chore fraught with cost, delay and frustration. Each school had one non-networked standalone scanner and personal computer used to scan thousands of bubble sheets. But, collecting test result data required manually dialing into every school, a job that fell to Alton Lott, a programmer/analyst in MPCSS's IT organization. "With a second week for administering make-up exams, I had to manually dial into each school twice to fetch the data," said Lott. "It was a very aggravating process." In addition, MCPSS, like districts nationwide, was finding the expense preprinted sheets increasingly prohibitive. MCPSS burned through one million sheets a year.

Teachers, administrators, and IT staffers agreed the time had come to find an automated, networked solution to replace the aging, single-function scanners. Even with $600,000 allocated to the project, Lott believed he'd still need to manually dial into each school twice. That was before he learned Lexmark could automate the entire process—and cut that capital expenditure by $200,000.

> *"By using the Lexmark Testing and Grading solution to print bubble sheets preslugged with the class name, student, teacher, and school, we digitally capture that information, allowing the sheets to be scanned at any location and processed in minutes."*

Alton Lott
Programmer/Analyst
Mobile County Public Schools
Mobile, Alabama
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Solution

Following a proof-of-concept demonstration and a full-scale pilot test in 10 schools, MCPSS purchased the Lexmark Testing & Grading solution for a districtwide rollout. This comprehensive, customizable hardware and software solution is based on Lexmark's multifunction products (MFPs) that

combine laser printer, copier, scanner and fax into a single, compact, easily managed unit.

Using the accompanying software, teachers and administrators prepare tests and print bubble sheets on plain paper, eliminating costly preprinted forms while gaining full control over forms design. Later, they use the same Lexmark MFPs to scan and score the test sheets. With Lexmark's powerful scripting tools, scanned information is easily formatted for automated export into virtually any student information system and electronic gradebook.

"With the MFPs connected via the network to a server, I no longer have to dial into each school twice to capture test scores," said Lott. "Within 15 minutes of scanning bubble sheets, the data is in our STI™ student database and we can view test results on our website. By using the Lexmark Testing and Grading solution to print bubble sheets preslugged with the class name, student, teacher, and school, we digitally capture that information, allowing the sheets to be scanned at any location and processed in minutes."

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Results

Implemented districtwide in just weeks, the impact of the Lexmark Testing and Grading solution was immediate. "For the first time, we are able to post grades to the website within minutes of scoring," said Lott. "It previously took 10 days to collect the information and post the results." Teachers can interpret test results and rapidly implement differentiated instruction strategies to provide students with individualized extra help in just days instead of weeks.

Not only did MCPSS spend $200,000 less than it expected to, the Lexmark solution is generating additional savings. By combining separate printers, copiers, faxes, and scanners into integrated MFPs, one cost-effective maintenance agreement replaced several separate ones, countertop space was reclaimed, and electrical consumption decreased. Costly preprinted bubble sheets that had to be kept in inventory under lock and key are no longer purchased; instead, they are printed on demand onto inexpensive plain paper.

To ensure the ongoing success of the project long after initial deployment, Lexmark education industry experts continue to partner with MCPSS, meeting with Lott regularly. "I give Lexmark five stars out of four," said Lott. They've been very responsive."

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MCPSS is already looking ahead to developing new applications. With the Lexmark Testing and Grading solution's ability to create, print, score and analyze parent, student or community surveys, attendance sheets, registration forms and more, the possibilities are virtually endless.

The Mobile County Public School System is benefiting at every level. The district's 63,000 students get their scores back quickly, helping them understand their strengths and weaknesses while the concepts are still fresh in their minds. Teachers make curriculum adjustments in days instead of weeks. At the district level, the savings and efficiencies generated by the Lexmark Testing and Grading solutions are helping to balance the budget. Alton Lott gives Lexmark high marks: "It has been the best technology deployment experience for me in eight years."

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