

## How Can a School Produce and Manage All That Data?

Remember the E-hint, "Schools That Break the Mold"? Two of the characteristics present in schools that "break the mold" were:

1. Decisions are based on data that result in changes in instruction.
2. Frequent and ongoing monitoring of pupil progress.

Those two characteristics require that the classroom teacher be able to input relative data quickly and easily and that the data be available to a variety of audiences in a timely manner. Of course, technology can help this process. However, old or limited technology can also make this process the source of irritation, duplicated efforts, and frustration.

Increasingly, the data collected for grading a classroom assessment may be used as an indicator for various applications. With local curriculum and assessments closely aligned with state standards, classroom data serves as an accurate indicator of student progress on the standards. It also serves as data for grades within the classroom, data to measure the extent of implementation of curriculum, and as data to consider in curriculum review. As schools have determined more and more connections in the data entries, the tendency is to use the existing tracking system and add a new one for each new application of the data. The problem is that with this method, the data has to be entered into more and more applications or programs and the time required on the part of the teacher increases. Teachers are finding that data entry takes too much time. And schools are finding that entering scores multiple times leads to more errors in data.

The frustration with entering and using data should not stop or hinder the educationally sound decisions that schools are making. As the use of data evolves into multiple applications, the software packages that demonstrate a capacity to be extended and flexible have a definite advantage for schools. As schools search for data tracking software packages, the ability for flexibility and growth should be high on the priority list of features.

There are many school information systems available. We, at CLI, could not begin to analyze all the possibilities for schools to consider nor do we endorse any particular package. However, considerations of the following characteristics may help a school district make wise choices in this expensive purchase.

## HOW CAN A SCHOOL PRODUCE AND MANAGE ALL THAT DATA?

The software should:

- Track students over their entire school career within a district
- Disaggregate all data according to needs for state and federal reporting
- Have the ability to modify how data is analyzed to meet changing requirements
- Allow for various security levels so that all data, even secure data, can be collected but is available only to those with the authority to view
- Track health data, custodial issues, discipline, lunch data, attendance, enrollment, graduation, standardized test data, and academic progress of students
- Track certification, attendance, professional qualifications, and experience of teachers
- Allow for the input of local and/or state curriculum standards
- Link data entered for grades within a teacher's grade book directly to local and/or state curriculum standards
- Manage "special population" data efficiently
- Contribute to or produce state and/or federally required reports easily
- Print reports for multiple combinations of data
- Print grade reports that include progress on curriculum issues
- Allow for multiple methods of calculating grades or reporting student progress
- Allow for multiple methods of calculating grade point average, honor rolls, class rank, etc.
- Provide extensive, effective training for all users of the software

If all of these characteristics are present, then a school can meet the two criteria discussed earlier without undue burden on teachers for more paperwork and more data entry.