



Western Heights Public Schools Meet NCLB Requirements, Gain US\$400,000 in Revenue

Overview

Country/Region: United States

Industry: Education

Customer Profile

The Western Heights Public Schools, located in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, serves 3,100 students from six schools with a combined teaching staff of 240.

Business Situation

The district needed to meet NCLB reporting requirements to track student performance from grade to grade and to implement successful remediation programs based on formal assessments.

Solution

The district implemented a combination of Microsoft® Class Server 3.0 and Chancery Student Management System (SMS) version 4.3, which are both School Interoperability Framework (SIF)-compliant and communicate through an Intel Zone Information Server (ZIS).

Benefits

- Report time cut by 95 percent
- Instructional plans map to student registration
- Differentiated learning
- New revenues of US\$400,000

“We adopted the Microsoft and Chancery solution to meet NCLB requirements and improve student education. That we can do this and see major new revenues at the same time—that’s tremendous.”

Joe Kitchens, Superintendent, Western Heights Public Schools

The Western Heights (Oklahoma) Public Schools are using an integrated instructional management system and student information system solution to produce assessment reports that meet No Child Left Behind requirements and drive decision-making. The Microsoft Class Server 3.0 and Chancery Student Management System (SMS) solution—which is compliant with the Schools Interoperability Framework (SIF) and interoperating through an Intel Zone Information Server (ZIS)—allows teachers to evaluate student needs based on multi-year records of student assessment. Teachers also can create differentiated learning plans for groups of students within classes, supporting students at different learning levels. While the district adopted the solution to enhance education rather than to make money, it has enabled the district to gain US\$400,000 in additional federal and state school revenues.

Situation

School districts around the country are working to meet the requirements of the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. NCLB sets extensive requirements for assessing student performance and ties federal funding to student achievement. Western Heights Public Schools Superintendent Joe Kitchens is well versed in those requirements.

“The law requires us to assess 95 percent of our students,” says Kitchens, “and that’s not just 95 percent of all students, but 95 percent of students at the district, school, grade, and class levels. And we have to measure not just individual performance, but also performance relative to ethnicity, gender, special needs, English as a second language, and other groups. To meet these requirements, we have to collect huge amounts of data that we never tracked before.”

Western Heights Public Schools is based in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma and serves 3,100 students in six schools with a combined faculty of 240.

But the data management issue is only part of the NCLB challenge for Western Heights and school districts around the country, says Kitchens. The other part of the challenge is analyzing the data and setting up remediation plans to boost student performance.

“Instructional management is really two issues,” says Kitchens. “The assessment data is insufficient unless it ties directly to the ability to create instructional intervention programs, because that’s the ultimate mission of a school district: to better the instructional experience for children.”

That’s the mission but, until recently, Western Heights faced a significant challenge in

meeting it. The district was using two software solutions: Chancery SMS as its student information system (SIS) and Microsoft® Class Server, Web-based K-12 curriculum management and delivery software, as its instructional management solution. But the two applications did not interoperate, leading to a host of problems.

The smaller problem was that information on students had to be added separately to each solution. “If you entered a name into Class Server, you hoped that the name, grade level, and scheduling information was the same information going into the student information system—but there was no guarantee of that,” says Kitchens.

The greater problem was that the lack of integration meant that information from the two solutions could not be used together. Because SIS data did not automatically populate Class Server, there could be significant lags between the time that changes in registration were implemented in the SIS and the time those changes were reflected in Class Server. This inhibited the ability of teachers to use Class Server for all of the children actually attending their classes. That’s a significant issue in a district in which 30 percent of the students don’t finish the year in the same class or school in which they began it.

Because the district’s system kept student information in distinct, unintegrated data “silos,” it was impossible for a teacher to review a student’s performance over the course of several years and, thus, better understand the student’s learning requirements. It was also impossible to meet the NCLB requirement to maintain a comprehensive record of student performance throughout the tenure in the district—potentially up to 14 years’ worth of data. Because data had to be manually integrated from a variety of sources, more

than 20 people spent several weeks each year compiling the reports the district needed to meet federal and state requirements.

Solution

At the start of the 2003-2004 academic year, Western Heights migrated and upgraded its Chancery and Microsoft solutions. The district now runs Chancery SMS version 4.3—a Microsoft .NET Framework application and the first version of Chancery SMS to be certified as compliant with the Schools Interoperability Framework (SIF)—and Microsoft Class Server version 3.0. The solutions interoperate via a SIF-compliant Zone Integration Server (ZIS), the Intel Integration Engine. Both solutions run on the Microsoft Windows Server™ 2003 operating system.

Class Server runs on two Dell PowerEdge servers, a front-end application and Web server running the Internet Information Services 6.0 component of Windows Server 2003, and a back-end database server running Microsoft SQL Server™ 2000 Standard Edition. About 10GB of learning resources are stored on the Web server and about 200MB of student information is stored in the back-end database.

Chancery SMS runs on a similar two-server configuration, with a dedicated application server and Web server on the front end and a dedicated database server on the back end. Chancery SMS stores historical student data, enabling Western Heights to build a longitudinal record of students as they progress through the district year after year. Accordingly, the database is expected to grow at an estimated rate of 30 percent annually. To maximize the ability to conduct custom reporting and analysis, the solution uses SQL Server Reporting Services and a separate SQL Server data warehouse.

The use of the SIF-compliant solutions together with an Intel ZIS allows Western Heights to populate all relevant systems, including Class Server, with student information as soon as it is entered into the Chancery SMS. The single point-of-data-entry eliminates the need to populate each solution separately, ensures data accuracy and, most important, enables the district to use student registration data to drive state assessment information to the correct teacher and class, regardless of how recently the student changed classes or schools.

“We use Class Server to create our own assessments that tie to state assessments,” says Kitchens. “To distribute those district assessments properly, to distribute instructional content properly, and to distribute reports so big that we can’t afford to print them—such as the Stanford 9 assessments—we need Class Server to work from up-to-date information in our student information system. Our ZIS and SIF-compliant solutions make this possible.”

Benefits

Fast, Powerful Reporting Meets NCLB Requirements

Western Heights now has the ability, for the first time, to maintain records on individual student achievement throughout a student’s years in the district. This enables Western Heights to meet a key NCLB requirement for such reporting—but the benefits to the district only start with legislative compliance.

“Understanding when and how student performance issues began is crucial to addressing those issues with successful remediation,” says Kitchens. “The Chancery and Microsoft solution, which tracks multi-year performance, gives us the depth of information our teachers need to understand student deficiencies and devise successful remediation strategies.”

"Thanks to Chancery and Microsoft, we save 95 percent of the time and cost of reporting with our previous solution."

Joe Kitchens, Superintendent, Western Heights Public Schools

Administrators, meanwhile, are able to produce instructional performance reports at various levels—grade, school, and district—based on ethnicity, gender, socio-economic group, student learning style, and other factors. Thanks to SQL Server Reporting Services, they can drill down over multiple factors and use sophisticated filtering capabilities. The result is better decision making based on real-time information.

Reports are also produced far more quickly and cost-effectively than ever before. The annual statistical report that Western Heights prepares for the state of Oklahoma used to take 10 days to assemble. Now, Kitchens reads the report himself in a matter of seconds.

"Our state and federal reporting used to require 20 people at all levels of the organization rolling up data over the space of several months of intermittent effort," says Kitchens. "Now, one person manages the entire process in one week. Thanks to Chancery and Microsoft, we save 95 percent of the time and cost of reporting with our previous solution."

Enables Differentiated Education

Driving more effective assessment reports to teachers and administrators is one key benefit of the SIF-compliant Chancery and Microsoft solution. Changing what happens in the classroom in order to boost student performance is another.

"Every child has different interests and aptitudes, so every child learns in a different way and at a different pace," says Kitchens. "If you go into a classroom with 20 students, you'll have four or five—or sometimes even more—different learning groups. So we need an instructional management solution that not only lets us teach to our state standards, but that also allows teachers to create differentiated lesson plans for the various

groups of learners in the class. Our integrated Class Server and student management solution gives teachers an excellent understanding of each child's abilities and aptitudes, and then enables the teacher to put together the resources for those differentiated lesson plans. You can't imagine how difficult this was to do by hand."

In addition to enabling differentiated learning, Class Server enhances the process of education at Western Heights by giving every teacher access to a tremendous inventory of learning resources, including best practices and lesson plans of other teachers, multimedia and Web-based content, video, graphics, and text. Class Server also enables Western Heights teachers to take advantage of the original learning content being created by teacher-developers throughout Oklahoma as part of that state's innovative VISION project.

Yields \$400,000 in New Revenues

The district receives approximately US\$5 million annually in federal funding from the free and reduced-price school lunch program. Because the district can now integrate student information system data with its SIF-compliant school lunch software through the ZIS, it can identify students for whom they are not receiving lunch funding—but who almost certainly qualify because they are the siblings of qualified students. This year, that increase in the district's count of economically disadvantaged students produced another 8 percent, \$400,000, in revenues to the district.

"We didn't adopt this solution because we were going to save or make money," says Kitchens. "We adopted the Microsoft and Chancery solution to meet NCLB requirements and improve student education. That we can do this and see major new revenues at the same time—that's tremendous."

For More Information

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For more information about Chancery Software products and services, call (604) 294-1233 or visit the Web site at: www.chancery.com

For more information about Western Heights Public Schools, call (405) 350-3410 or visit the Web site at: www.westernheights.k12.ok.us

Microsoft Class Server

Microsoft Class Server 3.0 makes it easy for school districts to create, deliver, and grade standards-aligned tests and lessons over the Web—helping teachers track and improve student achievement against local curriculum standards, and meet the challenges of No Child Left Behind. For more information about Microsoft Class Server, go to: www.microsoft.com/classserver

Software and Services

- Microsoft Windows Server System
 - Microsoft Windows Server 2003 Standard Edition
 - Microsoft SQL Server 2000
 - Microsoft Class Server 3.0

Hardware

- Dell PowerEdge servers

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