

Observer

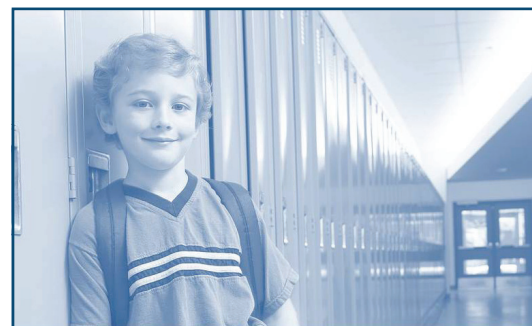
Certica Solutions' Newsletter for K-12 Administrators

Welcome

Certica Solutions welcomes you to the latest issue of *Observer*, an online newsletter for K-12 administrators. *Observer* provides news, information and best practices in the areas of education policy compliance and accountability.

To subscribe to *Observer*, please visit www.certicasolutions.com/signup

Certica Solutions provides compliance and accountability solutions for K-12 education. The company's data certification software, called Certify™, enables districts to maximize funding, optimize regulatory reporting, and ensure compliance with education policies and mandates. Certica counts among its customers several state departments of education, multiple educational service agencies, and numerous school districts nationwide.



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The 2010-2011 school year marks the final phase of Florida's unprecedented – and expensive – class size amendment. Districts are seeking innovative, cost-effective ways to manage data, ensure compliance, and avoid financial penalties.

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Graduation Rates – Looking at the Data Behind the Numbers

Efforts to lower rising dropout rates – and boost graduation rates – have been hot topics in education for more than a decade. Title I regulations issued in October 2008 require each state to establish a single graduation rate goal and annual targets that reflect improvement toward meeting that goal. These state targets, approved by the U.S. Department of Education in September 2010, are just one of several mandates and incentives designed to push America's schools toward higher rates of graduation.

Many school districts struggle to achieve graduation goals today. Initiatives designed to assist at-risk students include differentiated instruction, pro-active intervention strategies, and careful tracking by teachers and counselors. But another key element in getting a handle on graduation rate is to look at student data.

...daily “early warning” indicators highlight students whose grades, credits, attendance or behavior can be markers for dropping out or not graduating on time.

Certica Solutions works with school districts to achieve graduation goals in two important ways:

1. by identifying students who are at risk of dropping out or not graduating on time, so that interventions can be initiated; and
2. by ensuring that student data is complete and accurate, thereby leading to accurate reporting of early leavers and high school completers.

Graduation Indicators

Certica has recently partnered with a New York State district to develop a solution which allows school personnel to monitor student graduation indicators. These daily “early warning” indicators highlight students whose grades, credits, attendance or behavior can be markers for dropping out or not graduating on time.

Being pro-active is key. As an example, one New York district would have achieved a 7% higher graduation rate in 2008-2009 simply by pro-actively identifying students with insufficient Physi-

cal Education credits to graduate on time. With Certica's Graduation Indicators application, districts can have access to up-to-date information and can intervene before it's too late.

At any point in time, school staff can:

- View students with failing grades in required high school core courses, as well as credit and grade deficiencies relative to thresholds for promotion and on-time graduation;
- Identify students who are under-performing on state assessment tests;



- Pro-actively identify students with poor attendance patterns; and
- Track patterns of disciplinary incidents which may indicate that students are at-risk.

Staff can then use these early warnings to plan interventions to assist with on-time graduation and dropout prevention. Such interven-

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Graduation Rates – Looking at the Data Behind the Numbers

tions may include individualized behavior plans, mentoring and tutoring programs, extracurricular activities, or school-to-work programs.

Data Reporting

Another important step toward achieving higher graduation rates is to ensure that data related to student enrollment, transfers and withdrawals is complete and accurate. Several states have recently implemented more comprehensive standards for the collection of student transfers and withdrawals – which has a direct impact on the calculation of a district’s dropout and graduation rates.

Many districts are challenged by these changes, however. As an example, in 2007-2008, one Midwestern state abruptly changed its requirements for documentation and reporting of student withdrawals and transfers. The change left many districts scrambling as they saw their state-calculated dropout rates falling precipitously.

Did so many more kids dropout in 2007-2008? No, but districts weren’t ready to supply all the information that the state was now requiring, such as the destination location of inter-district transfers and exact dates of departure and re-enrollment. The result was an artificially inflated dropout rate for that year, as students who lacked documentation were counted as dropouts.



Certica’s Certify software helps districts react more quickly to changes in state standards, and ensure that enrollment data is complete, accurate and consistent. Districts which use Certify have an automated, pro-active mechanism to help school personnel review errors and omissions in their data, every day – from the moment school opens in the fall – so they can be well prepared for state data submissions.

Whether through early tracking of graduation indicators or improvement of enrollment data reporting, increasing the rigor around the monitoring and recording of student data has shown to have a direct effect on the improvement of graduation rates.

Another important step toward achieving higher graduation rates is to ensure that data related to student enrollment, transfers and withdrawals is complete and accurate.

Florida's Class Size Amendment: Managing a Data-Intensive State Mandate

In 2002, Florida citizens approved an unprecedented amendment to the state constitution that set limits on the number of students in core classes (e.g., Math, English, Science) in the state's public schools. The mandate was phased in gradually by calculating classroom averages first at the district and school level, with the aim that by the 2010-2011 school year, the maximum number of students in each core class would be 18 students in grades Pre-K – 3; 22 students in grades 4 – 8; and 25 students in grades 9 – 12.

The mandate has been challenging and costly for the state to implement, requiring nearly \$19 billion in appropriations to defray operational and facilities costs since the amendment was put into law. A November 2010 ballot initiative sought to pull back on the stringency of the mandate – in a campaign that generated national attention – but failed to pass, leaving schools and districts to implement the final phase of the amendment, i.e., compliance for each and every core classroom.

This year, districts have been forced to shift faculty away from non-core programs such as Music and Art, use lean budgets to hire extra teachers, and reassign students to classes with available space. The biggest blow is that districts which do not comply with



the mandate are penalized by the state approximately \$3,000 per student over the classroom limit.

The Data Challenge

Perhaps one of the most challenging aspects of complying with the amendment is ensuring that district submissions of student, teacher and course data to the Florida Department of Education accurately reflect the number of students in each classroom. You might wonder, how difficult could that be? After all, why shouldn't the data in student information systems reflect the number of kids enrolled in each class?

Florida school districts learned early on that the calculation of class size wasn't as simple as taking attendance in a classroom. Complicated scheduling meth-

ods, multiple classifications of teachers, situations such as inclusion classes, co-taught classes and classes that span grade groupings, have made for an extremely complex set of calculations.

State counting methods have been difficult to follow, but are exacerbated by the fact that student, teacher and course schedules tend to be fluid at best, and sometimes even erroneous, in the first several weeks of the school year. Student systems may have duplicated student records, for example, which will often escape the notice of school and district administrators. District spreadsheets, reports and database queries showing such information can be difficult for administrators to use and understand, as well as being difficult to maintain. Yet that data will be reported to the Florida Depart-

ment of Education, and used to calculate class size.

Given the challenges of implementing the state mandate this school year and the fact that districts stand to pay penalties if found to be out of compliance, district administrators must have pro-active, innovative and cost-effective ways to monitor class size and implement a class size compliance strategy.

Early Warning

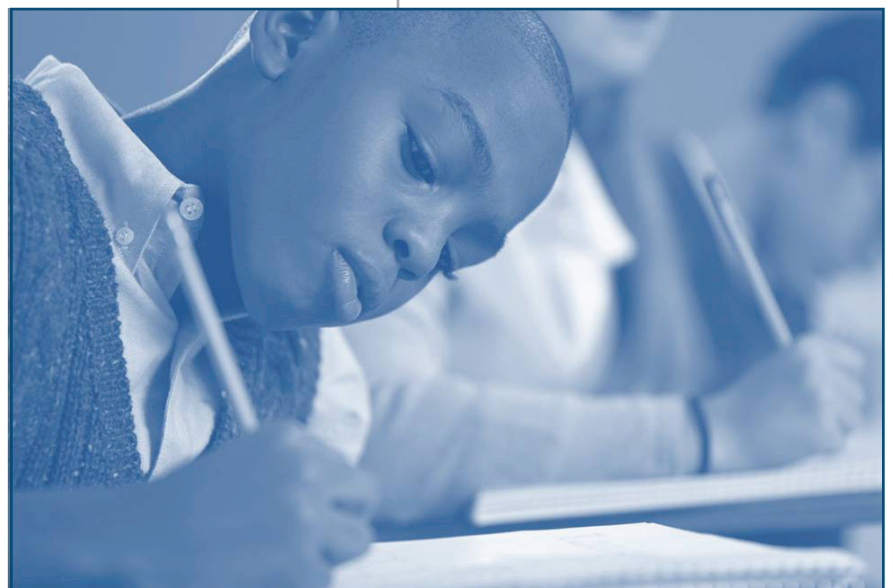
At the start of this school year, Certica introduced a new application, designed in collaboration with two Florida districts, which gives school and district staff daily access to classroom, teacher and student information – for every classroom exceeding the limit. School and district staff can receive “early warning” email notifications about non-compliance, so they can remedy problems immediately, either by correcting data errors in their student system, or by making changes to student, course and teacher schedules.

The rapid improvement in compliance is substantial. One Florida district reduced the number of classrooms out of compliance by 99% in a two-week period this past October, by quickly identifying data problems and making corrections. Further, districts find that they can achieve productivity gains for their school and

administrative personnel, while reducing their dependency on a small handful of individuals who understand the class size calculations.

A pro-active, daily approach to monitoring means that schools can begin the process of adjusting schedules and assigning teachers earlier in the school year, thereby avoiding costly penalties when data is submitted to the state and not over-assigning teachers if classrooms are found to be under the threshold.

The biggest blow is that districts which do not comply with the mandate are penalized by the state approximately \$3,000 per student over the classroom limit.



What's New at Certica?

- In 2010, Certica was pleased to bring new talent to its technical teams, in district support and engineering roles. We welcome Stacie Miller who has joined our Texas support team, and Robert Yonge who has joined our New York team. Kevin Curley joins Certica's software development team, based in Massachusetts.
- Certica introduced CertifyCALPADS in 2010, a hosted data certification service which allows California school districts to easily validate and monitor the data in their CALPADS state submission files – on a daily basis, at any time during the year. Users are automatically notified by email when data problems are identified, giving schools and districts the ability to rectify data issues quickly, and ensuring that the district meets state certification deadlines. As of December 2010, Certify software is used by approximately twenty California districts and the Alameda County Office of Education.
- Certica Solutions released version 4.8 of the company's Certify K-12 data certification software this year. Highlights include:
 - 1.A new dashboard-style meter on the Data Certification Scorecard which allows users to easily assess the overall quality of their data.

- 2.A refined algorithm for the Data Certification Score to better reflect a district's data clean-up effort.

- 3.Roll-up email notifications that allow district users to receive a consolidated email for multiple schools.

- 4.A new filtering feature which allows district users to quickly choose particular schools – or groups of schools – when viewing roll-up Data Certification Scorecards.

- 5.Enhancements to the Certify architecture which allow Certica to provide targeted reporting and analytic applications within Certify, such as the Class Size Monitoring application introduced this year.



Who's On Board?

The community of Certify software users is continuing to grow. We welcome the districts and educational service agencies who joined us in 2010:

- Alameda County Office of Education
California
- Amityville Union Free School District
New York
- Anaheim Union High School District
California
- Arlington Central School District
New York
- Carmel Central School District
New York
- Central Islip Public Schools
New York
- Colton Joint Unified School District
California
- Dallas Independent School District
Texas
- East Ramapo Central School District
New York
- Hampton Bays Public School District
New York
- Harrison Central School District
New York
- Hastings-on-Hudson Union Free School District
New York
- Hemet Unified School District
California
- Humble Independent School District
Texas
- Killeen Independent School District
Texas
- Lake Elsinore Unified School District
California
- Lodi Unified School District
California
- Millbrook Central School District
New York
- Monrovia Unified School District
California
- Montauk Union Free School District
New York
- Northport-East Northport Schools
New York
- Ossining Union Free School District
New York
- Perris Union High School District
California
- Porterville Unified School District
California
- Rochester City School District
New York
- San Mateo Union High School District
California
- Scarsdale Public Schools
New York
- School District of Indian River County
Florida
- Silver Valley Unified School District
California
- Temecula Valley Unified School District
California
- Union Elementary School District
California
- West Babylon Union Free School District
New York

[Click here to view our interactive customer and resource map.](#)

News and Best Practices

Learn more about what Certica user districts are doing to improve their data, streamline their data reporting processes, ensure optimal funding and better demonstrate compliance with education policies.

- **Killeen ISD Partners with Certica Solutions to Improve Data Quality**

This Texas district is planning to use Certify to streamline the introduction of a new student system and reconcile a forthcoming finance system migration.

- **Certica Solutions Secures 100th School District with Dallas ISD**

The Certify user community continues to grow as Certica reached its 100th customer milestone in mid-2010.

- **Certica Solutions Continues to Expand its Partnership with New York Educational Service Agencies**

Two additional regional information centers offer the New York State Data Validation Service, powered by Certify, while districts across the state continue to adopt this service.

- **California School Districts Team with Certica Solutions to Ease CALPADS Reporting**

Certica's California customers rely on CertifyCALPADS to simplify and streamline the data clean-up process prior to state submissions.

- **Certica Solutions Continues its Growth in Texas with the Addition of Three New District Customers**

Humble ISD, Lamar CISD and San Antonio ISD turn to Certica's data certification solution to improve the quality of their data.

Upcoming Events

Meet Certica representatives and learn from Certica's users at these important K-12 conferences and meetings.

February 23-25, 2011

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)

Annual MIS Conference

Hilton Hotel, Austin TX

February 28-March 4, 2011

Texas Association of School Business Officials (TASBO)

Annual Conference

Austin Convention Center, Austin TX

In Spring 2011 see Certica at the Texas SunGard User Network conference in San Antonio, Texas and the Eagle Software User Group conference in Ontario, California. Details will be available on the Certica Solutions website.

