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ABSTRACT

This book establishes a framework that can be used to evaluate software for tracking and analyzing student records. First, it examines the characteristics the user should look for in a student-records management software package. Users should be aware of the dangers and costs of replacing a system or integrating new software into an existing system. How to make the selection process go smoothly is also discussed. Users will learn what to look for in database features, security, the user interface, system requirements, technical support, and training. The second part of the guide presents sets of criteria that can be used to evaluate software packages. These criteria cover all basic features of student-records management software. Three high-end systems are reviewed to show how the criteria are to be applied. These are: (1) "Registrar's Office" by Blackbaud; (2) "Win School" by Chancery; and (3) "Administrator's Plus" by Rediker. The final section of the guide gives an in-depth examination of the three high-end systems with a more thorough discussion of each system's strengths and weaknesses. The template this guide presents will enable a user to define the institution's needs and then design evaluation criteria to supplement those proposed in the guide to assure the most informed selection of software possible. One appendix contains vendor and product information, and the other is an evaluation checklist. (Contains 13 references.) (SLD)

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by Lisa Vecchioli

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Introduction

Organizing student records into a cohesive and efficient system might seem like an impossible task. Information comes from many sources, from administrators and counselors to teachers and nurses. Individual schools may be limited by personnel and financial concerns; large districts can be overwhelmed by the sheer number of students. And, of course, each institution has their own unique way of keeping track of and reporting on the details of their students' academic and behavioral life at school.

Fortunately, there are many software products that make tracking and analyzing school records easier. Each program offers a particular set of solutions to the complex problems of student-record management. Selecting the appropriate software package, however, is dependent on many issues and requires extensive research on how well each product can perform the unique record-keeping and reporting tasks needed.

The primary purpose of this book is to create a framework for you to select the product that best suits your needs. First, we will examine characteristics you should look for in a student-records management software package. You should be aware of the dangers and costs of replacing or integrating new software into your current system. You should also know what to expect during the selection process and what you can do to make this process go smoothly.

The second part of this guide presents sets of criteria that you can use when evaluating software packages. These criteria cover all the basic features of student-records management software and are organized in a checklist. We will review three high-end systems (see *Figure 1*) to show you how to use the criteria to evaluate any other software that is available.

System Cost

Blackbaud *Registrar's Office*	**Chancery** *Win School*	**Rediker** *Administrator's Plus*
Minimum Price		
$10,000	$950	$495
Full-Feature Price		
$20,000	$5,000	$10,495
Maintenance		
$2,000–$4,000	$500–$1,000	$350–$1,200

Figure 1. Cost comparisons of systems show a wide range of pricing.

The final section of this guide will give you an in-depth examination of the three high-end systems presented in the second section. While following the criteria set forth in the checklist, we will provide a more thorough discussion of each software package's strengths and weaknesses. We recommend that your research should reach this level of detail before making a purchase.

By following this template, you should be able to clearly define your institution's needs. Then you can design your own evaluation criteria and implement the most appropriate search strategies. The end result should be the most informed selection of student-records management software.

Chapter 1.
Choosing the Right Student-Records Management Software

Most schools today utilize computer technology to maintain at least some parts of their record-keeping tasks. They have software to input grades, create report cards, and manage school business or finances. Some schools use off-the-shelf software while other schools design homegrown solutions to address their individual needs. However, situations evolve, and needs change. In many cases, this fragmented approach is no longer effective. School computer coordinators cannot manage the computer needs of administrators and teachers because of a growing need to collect, analyze, and report on school data. For many schools, newer integrated student-records software can ease the burden and result in a complete, efficient student-records system.

Having integrated software makes it easier for users to create a profile or portfolio of information on an individual student or a group of students. Teachers, administrators, and guidance counselors have immediate access to a student's grades, standardized test scores, teacher comments, class schedule, and attendance. With this immediate access to student information, communication between a school and the community that it serves can be facilitated.

Unfortunately, newer more comprehensive software can be beyond the technical sophistication of many end users. To lessen the technical burden, today's vendors usually provide technical support and training so that their system can be used with a reasonable amount of ease. Thus, it is not necessary for teachers and administrators to rely completely on in-house computer/ technical support staff.

Basic Software Characteristics

If a software package is to be considered effective, it should track such things as student scheduling, progress (grades), attendance, and biographical information. Most software packages provide many other features which make it possible for schools to collect additional valuable information that would be too time-consuming to collect in any other way. While the use of computers in school administration has made many record-keeping tasks easier, student-records management software packages offer more thorough and efficient records management.

One type of system that a school may consider to increase efficiency is the integrated system. An integrated system is one with which the computer user is required to enter or change data in one program or "module" (Anderson, 1989). The new data or change is then immediately reflected in all other programs. For example, the registrar can edit or add information in the school-records module (i.e. student's change of address), and this change will also appear in the student-billing module. The registrar does not need to personally notify the treasurer of any changes. As this book was designed to help school administrators or committees to find the correct integrated student-records software program, all of the software products described and reviewed in this book meet Anderson's (1989) definition of an integrated system.

These software packages consist of several modules which

schools can usually purchase separately based on their need and budget considerations. The basic modules that are usually purchased consist of the following: school records (including student and faculty/staff information), scheduling, attendance, and grading. In order to meet the needs of private independent schools, several vendors also include modules that manage development/fundraising functions, student billing, and other accounting programs.

Software vendors describe their products as relational databases. This is a standard feature for most software products on the market today. The Microsoft Press Computer Dictionary (1991) describes a *relational database* as the following:

> "[a] type of database or database management system that stores information in tables—rows and columns of data—and conducts searches by using data in specified columns of one table to find additional data in another table. In a relational database, the rows of a table represent records (collections of information about separate items) and the columns represent fields (particular attributes of a record). In conducting searches, a relational database matches information from a field in one table with information in a corresponding field of another table to produce a third table that combines requested data from both tables." (p. 295)

Another feature which makes these packages so attractive is reporting capabilities. This allows users to query their data in order to create custom and pre-formatted reports that can be accessed automatically. Some software packages also allow users to scan photographs, documents (i.e. transcripts, newspaper articles, etc.), and video clips pertinent to a student's file.

Other considerations include cost, importing existing data and/or data-entry concerns, training faculty and staff, etc. Thus, administrators with whom the final decision rests will want to gather as much information as possible. Administrators can obtain information from several sources, including databases, the Internet, education journals, and company literature.

Education Literature Overview

Those who have attempted to find information on student-records management systems have quickly ascertained that most of the little available information is out-dated because technology changes at such a rapid pace. Discussions about administrative uses of computers in elementary or secondary schools began appearing in education literature in the early 1980s. These articles focused on using off-the-shelf spreadsheet, word-processing, and database-management software for managing school records, accounting, and reporting grades. Some efforts were also made to look at software specifically produced for administrative purposes. In 1986, Thomas Valesky, Frank W. Markus, and Theodore J. Meyers of the Administrative Software Clearinghouse located at Memphis State University published "Administrative Software Evaluations for School" as an ERIC Document. It provided one-page evaluations of school administrative software. Although the criteria and methodology discussed in this study are still applicable, most of the evaluations themselves are no longer useful because of the transitory nature of computer software.

While most of the education literature only marginally addresses record-keeping systems, the Alberta Department of Education in Edmonton, Canada published a report in 1991 titled "School-Based Student-Records Package Evaluation." This report described the process used to select student-records management software for that school district. It addressed many of the concerns discussed in this guide and is a fine example of how a committee should work to choose and evaluate software.

Between 1990 and 1992, Peter Wright of the University of Alberta also authored several articles defining evaluation criteria for student-records management software packages and guidelines for their implementation. Wright's work will be discussed in more detail in the section on evaluation criteria. This guide is largely based on his work.

Process for Evaluation and Selection

Gathering information on, evaluating, implementing, and choosing the appropriate student-records management software for a specific school can be a time-consuming and complex task. Because of the initial and ongoing expenses of these systems, school administrators should determine what individual needs the software product must meet in order to be considered for purchase. How in-depth this process should be depends on the size of the school and the number of officials involved in the decision-making process. Large school districts may need to draft detailed requirements and solicit proposal requests from vendors. However, small public or private independent schools may need to go through a far less formal process. Regardless of size and bureaucratic structure, each school must consider the role that the administrator will take in this process, the formation of a school-wide committee, the requirements of the school, the design of the system, the implementation of the chosen product, and the ability to consult the software company. Each of these elements must be considered to ensure the best match between a reputable software product and a school's specific needs.

The Role of the Administrator

Integrated student-records management systems allow for more efficient organization of school data. Powerful reporting and query capabilities permit administrators to track and analyze data in ways that were not previously possible. Moreover, integrated software packages give school or building-level administrators within districts more independence for gathering and analyzing data. These also keep the administrators from being "completely dependent on the services of a central or district data-processing manager" (Bozeman, 1994, p. 42).

Knowing the administrative importance of choosing an

effective integrated student-records management software product, it is clear to see that school officials need to play a vital role in deciding which administrative functions should be automated as well as selecting an appropriate software product. Administrators are able to provide important information about their school's current and future record-keeping needs. Moreover, school administrators determine the degree to which a software product will be utilized in order to "contribute to institutional improvement" (Bers, 1992, p. 3).

The school administrators' involvement in the selection process and needs analysis is crucial for the success of the software's implementation. School administrators must have some computer knowledge to be involved in the selection process and aid in the software's eventual success in meeting school needs. Besides having formal computer training, experiencing the processes of selecting and implementing administrative software may increase "technology comfort" among involved teachers and administrators. If the administrators are not directly involved in guiding the selection process, then they will probably not fully understand the system features which were designed to help them collect valuable data and information. The system will be underutilized and an opportunity for institutional improvement will be lost. Thus, administrators must set an example for others to integrate computer technology into the schools curriculum by leading the effort to computerize administrative functions.

Forming a School-Wide Committee

Choosing a school record-keeping system requires more than the involvement of school administrators. Teachers, guidance counselors, and staff must be included in the process. These people know their current needs and can offer suggestions for the future.

The first step towards establishing an administrative computing system is forming a school-wide committee that can provide input for developing school-specific evaluation criteria, solicit products from vendors, and examine those products. Connors and Valesky (1986) observe that the primary role of this committee is to identify which school administrative functions are best suited for computerization. This group should consist of a representative group of administrators, teachers, counselors, librarians, and computer experts. Each member should provide input based on their area of expertise.

Administrators should consider involving other future-users who will have the most daily contact with the system (i.e. secretaries, clerks, and business officials). Input from counselors, teachers, and office staff who are responsible for scheduling, student-record management, creating report cards, and other functions should facilitate the most appropriate software selection. The early involvement of these faculty and staff members will help to familiarize them with the system's structure and capabilities. In turn, these people will be able to take on leadership roles in the computerization of school records by performing such duties as demonstrating particular functions of the software or training other faculty and staff members. Thus, the inclusion of a wide range of people on this committee helps to ensure a successful integration of the software into the daily activities of the school.

It is important that all committee members participate in all the evaluation activities (Anderson, 1989). Attending software demonstrations by vendor sales representatives provides a forum for committee members to ask questions regarding their specific areas of expertise. Committee members should also have a chance to use the system or specific module with which they will eventually work. Many vendors provide product demonstrations on CD-ROM or on a diskette that users can install on their computers. These product demos are not the "full" system. Nevertheless, they enable users to get a sense of

what the software interface looks like, how different modules relate to each other, and how specific functions work. If the vendor provides the software on a trial basis, the school may want to consider installing those modules and loading some school data in order to get a better sense of how the system will function in their school setting. Because this is time-consuming for the computer coordinator, schools may want to do this after they have narrowed the decision down to two or three products.

In addition to needs analysis and product evaluation, committee members should be given administrative leave to observe how software packages function at other schools. Regardless of how impressive the sales representative's demonstration is, a demonstration will not be as revealing as seeing how the system functions in an actual school setting. Interviewing other schools can provide committee members with a greater understanding of how the system can increase their own school's productivity as well as what initial training and data entry tasks they face.

Needs Analysis

Once a committee has been established, the members should examine which administrative functions need to be computerized. The software packages described in this guide generally consist of modules that can be purchased separately and address particular functions such as school records, attendance, scheduling, and progress (grades or marks). The committee might begin by examining the current management process of these areas and deciding what functions could be expedited by automation and how the software must be able to accommodate the school's particular method of representing data. For example, the software system must be able to adapt to how the school calculates grades as well as how the school chooses to create and format its schedule. Most reputable

vendors provide enough flexibility in their programs to allow for user-defined fields and a variety of scenarios. However, if a specific need cannot be met by the software packages under evaluation, schools may have to make some concessions. If a school's unique needs are known before the software is purchased, accommodations usually can be made.

As schools begin to delineate how data is currently gathered and used in the four basic modules addressed by integrated student-records management software, they should also begin to establish a priority order for the integration of the selected software product. Usually, *computerized* seems to automatically imply a faster, more efficient method. Nevertheless, not all schools, depending on their size and needs, will want to automate all areas. For example, the needs of a small private elementary school may not warrant the purchase of the most powerful scheduling module available in integrated systems. It may be easier for a school like that to use a generic database program and import data into that program to create a student's schedule. Because import/export capabilities are standard in most systems, this arrangement should not present a problem. However, the computer coordinator should discuss this and similar situations with the vendor to ensure that this process would work efficiently.

After the committee has determined which data-management areas need to be computerized, the committee should prioritize in what order these areas should be addressed. The school should be guided by three main factors during this process: the availability of finances, the needs of the school, and the ability to train school personnel. School funding determines which software systems a school committee should consider during the decision process. Depending on the school's needs, the committee can decide to have one or more modules implemented. Because the school records module usually forms the core database in a majority of packages, most school committees usually want to initially implement that module.

Nevertheless, other modules can either be concurrently or successively implemented. Although a school's funding and its needs determine which system (or systems) will be chosen, the ability to train people to use the system determines how effective the system will be. This is especially troublesome if the software is complex. Therefore, a committee should consider how well its school can prepare all faculty and staff members who need to access and input data in the system.

Throughout the process of analysis, it is important to remember that the primary reason for purchasing any software is to provide more accurate data on individual students. The data-gathering and reporting abilities of integrated systems allow school personnel to create fuller descriptions of individual students' progress and achievement than was previously possible using traditional reports. Student-records software provides a greater variety of comment, increases pupil involvement in and responsibility for the reporting process, assists the integration of curriculum and good pedagogic practice, and produces a more constructive and positive diagnostic assessment of pupil progress (Wilson and Armstrong, 1993).

System Design

As the working committee members gather information about packages, they should consider how the system will ultimately serve their unique and general institutional needs. A set of criteria should be drafted in order to compare and evaluate each system. The "General System Considerations" and "Evaluation of Individual Modules" that are included in this book are designed to be resources for committee members who are beginning to develop evaluation criteria.

Peter Wright (1990) advised that as the evaluators think about how the system will meet their particular needs, the resulting analysis should be a reflection of the following:

- Current needs and requirements (i.e. how things are presently done),
- How things should operate in the future,
- Potential uses of the system that committee members previously did not know were possible.

Wright (1990) also suggested that a "staged approach" to evaluation where "systems are evaluated against progressively more detailed criteria" should be used (p. 218). The first stage of evaluation is characterized by the performance of certain tasks: 1) the identification of software products, 2) the acquisition of information such as literature reviews, 3) discussions with product developers/vendors as well as the faculty and staff of other schools who use different software products, 4) the general screening of available software, and 5) the analysis of institutional needs. During this stage of evaluation, committee members should partake in system demonstrations and detailed discussions with developers/distributors. Throughout this process, analysis will shift from general system considerations to the module-specific criteria[2]. The knowledge and expertise of individual committee members will be invaluable as the analysis begins to narrow in focus.

Once this stage is complete, the committee members should be able to recommend a system that will meet most, if not all, of their school's current and anticipated needs. The decision should be based on sufficient data and information as well as a thorough analysis of available software products. However, if a final decision is not imminent at this point, the committee members might consider developing a quantitative measure on which they can base their decision. This process includes assigning weighted scores to both the general-systems and module-specific criteria as well as calculating the performance of each system based on how well it performed compared to how well it could have performed[3]. While this approach is certainly more objective than

using a "checklist" procedure, it is probably too time-consuming for the members of evaluation committees who also have teaching and administrative responsibilities. As Wright (1990) indicates, this process is more suited for districts or consortia of private independent schools that have the time and resources.

Security

System security is a paramount concern for the systems administrator, school administrators, faculty, and staff as well as for parents and students. Most software packages have security features that give different levels of access to the faculty, staff, and administrators who must use the system on a daily basis but do not require access to all the data. The systems administrator is usually able to set passwords with different access parameters for each user. For example, teachers may have "view only" access for student records. If the system is running over a school network, it may be wise to store student records data on a different server than the one that runs curriculum software.

While data access and hardware requirements can be worked out with the vendor, data security moves beyond these issues. Unfortunately, the more integrated a data-management system becomes (i.e. its accessibility because of related software or multiple users), the greater the security risks (Ellis, 1984). Because there is always a concern that students may gain access to their own or the records of other students in order to change or falsify information, schools need to plan carefully to avoid this scenario. Faculty and staff should be instructed to keep passwords secret, log off computers when they are left unattended, and keep computer screens out of students' view (DeLoughry, 1989).

Cost

Although certain software packages may seem financially attractive to the members of a school committee, the appeal is lost when the committee members discover that new hardware must be purchased in order to fully support the software. Thus, committee members must consider all of the possible costs that may accrue during the implementation of their integrated student-records management software packages of choice. These considerations can often limit the number of packages from which a school can choose. Some issues that should be discussed include additional hardware, systems administration, data entry/conversion of existing data, and training.

Hardware Requirements

While the actual cost of the software is easily determined, there are other direct costs that the school will absorb. One of these is purchase of the appropriate hardware required in order for the software to run optimally. For instance, the school may need to upgrade existing hardware, purchase new hardware, or install a network. Therefore, members of the committee need to determine what they want, what they need, and what they can afford before and after the software is installed.

Systems Administration

Another cost to consider is the salary of the person who will be responsible for systems administration. If a system is too complex to be maintained by existing staff, the school may need to hire a systems administrator to manage the daily operations of the system. However, if a systems administrator or technical coordinator is already on staff, the school may be required to compensate this individual for taking on more responsibility or may need to hire additional part-time assistance.

Data Entry/Data Conversion

The conversion of data from an existing system or data entry requires both staff time and resources. If a school has already computerized some student-record information, the staff will be able to use the ASCII transfer capabilities that are inherent in all the software packages to import data into the new system. Unfortunately, some data may not convert. Consequently, the staff will need to identify and manually enter the information, or the systems administrator will have to work with the vendor to determine how those data elements can be converted. Schools that have a substantial amount of data may consider hiring temporary workers to enter the initial data. In addition to this, the staff must determine the approximate time for converting or entering data and the most appropriate point in the school year for initiating and completing this process. Many schools may decide on doing this over the summer. However, if the data entry requirements are minimal, it is possible that the task could be accomplished over a Spring or Winter recess.

Training

Designing and implementing a training program is another important cost consideration for the committee. Initial training needs will depend on the number of modules that are purchased and the number of faculty and staff that are affected. Most software vendors offer individual and comprehensive training for their products at their corporate headquarters. The members of the committee may decide to place the systems administrator in charge of training faculty and staff in-house once he/she has received training from the vendor. If the school creates a full-time position to maintain the student-records system, this may be the best option for staff training.

If systems administration is a part-time responsibility of a computer coordinator or teacher, he/she may not have enough

time to effectively train and support faculty and staff. Thus, the school administrator may need to send several staff members for module-specific training. For instance, the registrar might only receive training in student-records maintenance. However, some vendors also offer on-site training for up to five days at the school. Although the additional fees that the vendors charge for this convenience can be expensive, the trainers are experts in using the software and teaching others about it.

The committee members also should consider drafting an in-house procedures manual that details how individual modules function in each area of school administration. A manual should be an effort of all faculty/staff who have become experts in using specific software modules. The manual could include descriptions of user-defined fields and systems configuration, procedures for entering grades and taking attendance, how to enter new students into the system, etc. Although this process is time-intensive, it will help ensure consistency as new faculty, staff, and administrators learn the system.

Hiring a Consultant

At some point in the evaluation and/or implementation process, the committee members or faculty/staff may need to seek outside expertise from an educational consultant. An educational consultant can assist the faculty, staff, and administrators with gathering and analyzing data about different products. While helping in this process, some of the consultant's responsibilities could include contacting vendors and arranging product demonstrations or visits from sales representatives. After all of the information has been gathered and analyzed, the educational consultant could help present the data to a working committee. If the committee is not comfortable with or knowledgeable about computers, a consultant might evaluate software and offer advice about hardware selection and installation.

In order for a consultant's efforts to be utilized to the fullest extent, he/she will need cooperation from the faculty and staff members on the committee. When selecting a consultant, the committee should consider several basic factors. According to Connors & Valesky (1986), a consultant should meet the following standards:

- The consultant must understand education administration.
- The consultant must understand/know how to use more than one or two software packages.
- The consultant should have a good record in administrative computer consulting in education institutions.
- The consultant should be able to maintain a comfortable relationship with the school administrator and staff.
- If the consultant is to advise on networking options, hardware needs, or installation, he/she should also have considerable experience in setting up and administering a network.

Chapter 2.
Evaluation Criteria

Evaluation criteria cover the basic features of student-records management software that vendors should provide. The evaluation criteria are based on Wright's (1990) model for evaluating student records and National Computing Service's (1997) *Student Information Management Checklist*[4]. The next chapter contains a checklist for evaluating student-records management software produced by three leading companies. A blank checklist is provided in Appendix 2. Users of this guide can quickly assess the basic system as well as module-specific features. A more in-depth discussion of each individual software package can be found in the chapter following the checklist, which details each product's particular strengths and weaknesses.

Although data-gathering and record-keeping needs will vary, there are mutual needs and concerns that schools share despite their many differences. Wright (1990) organized some of these basic considerations in five categories: 1) System Scope and Company Profile, 2) Ease of Use, 3) Technical Merit, 4) System Qualifications, and 5) Support, Services and Training. Since these essential elements ultimately reveal how well the software "performs," they are crucial to administrators and computer support staff in either large school systems or small private independent schools who are evaluating student-records software packages.

In addition to general system considerations, it is also necessary to evaluate and assess each module under consideration for purchase. Unique institutional needs will play a larger role at this stage of evaluation. The evaluation criteria for individual software modules are divided into four sections: school records, scheduling, attendance, and grading. Some vendors may sell software products that address each of these functions. These products can be either purchased individually or sold as one package. In addition to these basic modules, software vendors may also provide modules to handle tasks such as student billing, development, or library management. Some companies offer a variety of "add-on" features that schools can purchase to further enhance the basic software. "Add-on" features could include a master-schedule builder or a bar code/ scanning function. Although every available module cannot be evaluated, brief descriptions of additional features and how they relate to each product's basic modules are found in the respective discussion.

The sample evaluations in this guide are mostly based on company literature and product demonstrations of the software. The publishers of the products that are included in these sample evaluations were given an opportunity to comment on a draft of this report. Representatives from Blackbaud, Chancery, and Rediker provided detailed comments as well as clarifications. Informal interviews with administrators and teachers were also conducted in order to assess how the product performed in a particular school environment. Some of the users were located by the vendor. Other users volunteered their input after a request for information was posted on the K–12ADMIN (educational administration) or K–12ASSESS (educational assessment in grades K–12) listservs.

Although these evaluations are not case studies, they do reveal basic strengths and weaknesses of individual packages. The products evaluated here are building-level as opposed to district-wide solutions[5]. Because the needs of individual schools

vary considerably, certain criteria will be less important or irrelevant to the school committee's final decision.

Thus, this guide may not be complete for each school and the criteria defined here should be augmented to fit a school's particular need. Bruce Curran, Director of Computer Services in Region 10 of Texas, states that "...selection criteria should focus on the problems that a system must solve in order to be a contender for selection. Reputable vendors all meet the basic needs of schools. Determine what is unique about your needs and make sure the vendor supports whatever that is." (from "Three Steps to Choosing an Administrative System," at http://www.thejournal.com/past/nov/1196app2.html).

Chapter 3.

Evaluation Checklist for Student-Records Management Software Packages

GENERAL SYSTEM CONSIDERATIONS

System Scope and Vendor Profile	
Does the system address the major functions (student records, scheduling, attendance and grading)?	
Blackbaud:	YES—Additional available products include business, admissions, and development packages.
Chancery:	YES—Additional available products include library-management software and teacher gradebooks.
Rediker:	YES
Are these functions integrated into the system?	
Blackbaud:	YES
Chancery:	YES
Rediker:	YES

Does the system have security features that would prevent unauthorized personnel from accessing or updating information?	
Blackbaud:	YES
Chancery:	YES
Rediker:	YES
How long has the company been in business?	
Blackbaud:	15 Years
Chancery:	12 Years
Rediker:	17 Years

Ease of Use

Does the system have a graphical user interface that allows both mouse and keyboard entry?	
Blackbaud:	YES
Chancery:	YES
Rediker:	YES—Administrator's Plus is DOS-based, but it can be mouse-activated. Some of the modules are Windows-based; these start up with an icon.
Does the system allow users to define new data fields? How many?	
Blackbaud:	YES—Some fields may be renamed.
Chancery:	YES—There are a number of custom data fields, flags, codes, and lists.
Rediker:	YES—Of 160 fields, 151 can be defined by the user.
Does the system provide a report writer that includes a suite of standard reports, in addition to creating user-defined reports? How many standard reports are there?	
Blackbaud:	YES—There are 50 or more standard reports.
Chancery:	YES—There are over 50 customizable report templates.
Rediker:	YES—Every module has its own report writer. Each report writer can save up to sixty reports. Users are able to modify the reports or add new ones.

Does the report writer allow users to view reports on screen as well as print to printers and files?	
Blackbaud:	YES
Chancery:	YES
Rediker:	YES
Does the system allow for a flexible query capability?	
Blackbaud:	YES
Chancery:	YES
Rediker:	YES
Does the system provide online help features and documentation?	
Blackbaud:	YES
Chancery:	YES
Rediker:	YES

Technical Merit

Is the system a Client/Server product (capable of being networked)?	
Blackbaud:	YES
Chancery:	YES
Rediker:	YES
Can the system interface with the Internet?	
Blackbaud:	YES
Chancery:	YES
Rediker:	NO
Does the system perform real-time updating when information is entered from a workstation?	
Blackbaud:	YES
Chancery:	YES
Rediker:	YES

Can users create, modify and manage import/export files?	
Blackbaud:	YES
Chancery:	YES—Users can do this in ASCII import/export and .dbf file export.
Rediker:	YES

System Qualifications

How often are software enhancements and updates provided?	
Blackbaud:	Software enhancements are provided on an average of once a quarter. (This may vary from year to year.)
Chancery:	Software enhancements are provided twice a year.
Rediker:	Software enhancements are sent to Rediker customers at least once a year.
Is there an advisory board of users that provide regular feedback regarding the vendor's products and services?	
Blackbaud:	YES
Chancery:	YES—Product and service feedback is provided through four user-group meetings.
Rediker:	NO—However, users are regularly polled for feedback.
How long has the product been available to consumers?	
Blackbaud:	***Registrar's Office*** (DOS) has been available since 1987. The Windows version has been available since 1995.
Chancery:	***Win School*** has been available since 1994.
Rediker:	***Administrator's Plus*** has been available since 1981.

Support, Services and Training

Does the vendor provide toll-free technical support via phone and electronic mail?	
Blackbaud:	YES
Chancery:	YES
Rediker:	YES

Does the customer reach a "live" person as opposed to an answering service when contacting technical support?	
Blackbaud:	SOMETIMES
Chancery:	NO
Rediker:	YES
Does the vendor provide software updates with the annual support agreement?	
Blackbaud:	YES
Chancery:	YES
Rediker:	YES
Is remote-access support available? (i.e. can technical support staff, via dial-up or Internet, access a customer's database?)	
Blackbaud:	YES
Chancery:	YES—Support is available via video conferencing and Internet.
Rediker:	YES
Is on-site training available? (Will support staff visit customer site for user-specific training?)	
Blackbaud:	YES
Chancery:	YES
Rediker:	YES—A representative will visit a school for a 2- or 3-day workshop
Is off-site training available at the vendor's facility including seminars and workshops?	
Blackbaud:	YES
Chancery:	YES
Rediker:	YES—Two big workshops are offered in Hampden, MA. One is offered in March, and another in June or July
Are training workbooks and documentation provided?	
Blackbaud:	YES
Chancery:	YES—Documentation corresponds to specific modules
Rediker:	YES

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EVALUATION OF INDIVIDUAL MODULES

School Records	
Does the system permit rapid data entry, especially for registration?	
Blackbaud:	YES
Chancery:	YES
Rediker:	YES
Does the system allow for alphanumeric student I.D.?	
Blackbaud:	YES
Chancery:	YES
Rediker:	YES—This can be done with the ***Grade Quick!*** program.
Does the system accommodate all necessary school information?	
Blackbaud:	YES
Chancery:	YES
Rediker:	YES
Does the system allow user-defined information fields, tables, reports, and queries?	
Blackbaud:	YES
Chancery:	YES
Rediker:	YES
Does the system produce standard and user-defined reports?	
Blackbaud:	YES
Chancery:	YES
Rediker:	YES

Does the system allow for simultaneous access to individual student, staff, school, and class records?	
Blackbaud:	YES
Chancery:	YES
Rediker:	YES
Does the system allow an unlimited number of contacts for each student?	
Blackbaud:	YES
Chancery:	NO– There are only six contacts for each student.
Rediker:	YES
Does the system track student activities as well as manage health, discipline, test scores, and achievement information for students?	
Blackbaud:	YES
Chancery:	YES
Rediker:	YES—Discipline is a separate module. Health, test scores, etc. are tracked in user-defined fields.
Does the discipline management allow for user-defined discipline infraction and response codes, notes on infractions, and discipline reporting capabilities?	
Blackbaud:	YES
Chancery:	YES
Rediker:	YES
Can the system can easily produce mailing labels?	
Blackbaud:	YES
Chancery:	YES
Rediker:	YES

Scheduling

Does the system allow various organizational patterns (e.g. semester, full year)?	
Blackbaud:	YES
Chancery:	YES
Rediker:	YES
Can the system support a variety of scheduling modules including Block Scheduling, Rotating Schedules, Modular Schedules, and Team Teaching?	
Blackbaud:	YES
Chancery:	YES
Rediker:	YES
Does the system allow a variable number of instructional periods/days?	
Blackbaud:	YES
Chancery:	YES
Rediker:	YES
Does the system maintain previous, current, and next-year timetables?	
Blackbaud:	YES
Chancery:	YES
Rediker:	YES
Does the system have a master schedule building capability?	
Blackbaud:	YES
Chancery:	YES
Rediker:	YES
What is the maximum number of periods per day for scheduling?	
Blackbaud:	It can schedule up to 99 periods per day.
Chancery:	It can schedule 42 periods per day and fourteen days per cycle.
Rediker:	It can schedule 24 periods and eight days in each cycle.

Does the system facilitate rapid entry of course requests?	
Blackbaud:	YES
Chancery:	YES
Rediker:	YES
Does the system accommodate student preferences?	
Blackbaud:	YES
Chancery:	YES
Rediker:	YES
Does the system generate a potential conflict matrix and a report on which students have these conflicts?	
Blackbaud:	YES
Chancery:	YES
Rediker:	YES
Can the system schedule flexible lunch periods?	
Blackbaud:	YES
Chancery:	YES
Rediker:	YES

Attendance	
Does the system allow flexible reporting on all maintained attendance data?	
Blackbaud:	YES
Chancery:	YES
Rediker:	YES
Does the system allow input by either keyboard or optical scanners?	
Blackbaud:	YES
Chancery:	YES
Rediker:	YES

Does the system allow for attendance entry by user-defined group (i.e. the football team will be absent this Friday)?	
Blackbaud:	YES
Chancery:	YES
Rediker:	YES
Does the system track and store absences and tardies for each student on a period-by-period, daily interval, and minute-by-minute basis?	
Blackbaud:	YES
Chancery:	YES
Rediker:	The daily/period attendance modules must be purchased separately. The system is not able to track students on a minute-by-minute basis.
Does the system track reasons for absences, tardies, and early dismissals?	
Blackbaud:	YES
Chancery:	YES
Rediker:	YES
Does the system allow for user-defined absence and reason codes?	
Blackbaud:	YES
Chancery:	YES
Rediker:	YES
Does the system allow for the transfer of absences, tardies, and dismissals to the report card system?	
Blackbaud:	YES
Chancery:	YES
Rediker:	YES

Grading

Does the system allow users to enter grades in a variety of ways (e.g., manual, scanner, download, and import from gradebook)?	
Blackbaud:	YES
Chancery:	YES
Rediker:	YES
Does the system interface with electronic gradebook programs?	
Blackbaud:	YES—Interfaces with ***GradeQuick!*** by Jackson Software.
Chancery:	YES—Has its own cross-platform gradebook, *eClass Grader*.
Rediker:	YES—Interfaces with ***GradeQuick!*** by Jackson Software.
Does the system allow for alpha, numeric, and user-defined grades?	
Blackbaud:	YES
Chancery:	YES
Rediker:	YES
Does the system allow users to define grading options, GPA calculations, and multiple GPA calculations?	
Blackbaud:	YES
Chancery:	YES
Rediker:	YES
Does the system allow users to customize GPA calculations?	
Blackbaud:	YES
Chancery:	YES
Rediker:	YES
Can the system produce report cards, progress reports, and transcripts?	
Blackbaud:	YES
Chancery:	YES
Rediker:	YES

Chapter 4.
In-Depth Evaluations of Systems Reviewed in the Criteria

Registrar's Office for Windows

BLACKBAUD, INC.

GENERAL SYSTEM CONSIDERATIONS

System Scope and Vendor Profile

- ***Major Functions***

Blackbaud's *Registrar's Office for Windows* supports all the major functions that are usually included in student-record management software: school records, scheduling, attendance, and grading. This system

consists of one module that supports the programs for each function. It also includes programs for managing and customizing reports as well as a query feature to search existing data.

Users can purchase additional modules to augment basic features found in ***Registrar's Office for Windows***. These modules include *Automated Student Scheduling, Automated Master Schedule Creation, Scanning and Barcc ·· Gradebook, Faculty Access, Interface,* and *POLAR*. Although users are not required to buy additional modules, some modules provide features that are necessary for making the basic features truly effective. For example, *Automated Student Scheduling* and *Automated Master Schedule Creation* permit staff members to schedule students on the basis of course requests and create a school's master timetable, the *Gradebook* module allows teachers to enter grades and comments from their own classroom or home computer.

With the inclusion of all major functions in one module, ***Registrar's Office for Windows*** is a very unique product. While most vendors sell modules that address a particular function individually, Blackbaud requires customers to purchase all the functions at once regardless of whether every function is immediately utilized. This structure is convenient and possibly cost effective for schools prepared to implement and utilize all the functions. However, it does not give much flexibility for those users who are approaching the computerization of their administrative tasks incrementally.

While ***Registrar's Office for Windows*** addresses all of the basic student record-keeping needs of a school, some schools, particularly private institutions, may have additional business and administrative needs. Understanding those needs, Blackbaud provides software for automating school business, admissions,

and development functions in addition to managing school records, attendance, and progress (grades). Blackbaud's complete software product line ***Academy*** is divided into four modules: 1) *Registrar's Office*, 2) *Business Office*, 3) *Development Office*, and 4) *Admissions Office*[6]. The ***Academy*** suite of software is an integrated system. This means that all information is stored in one database that is shared by each module. Therefore, all modules are immediately updated when data is added or changed. For example, student information that is first recorded through the *Admissions Office* module does not need to be re-entered into *Registrar's Office* or any other Blackbaud module that the school has purchased. Each of the ***Academy*** modules can be purchased separately based on a school's budget or record-management needs. More information about these additional product lines can be found in the appendix at the back of this guide.

◆ Database Features

Registrar's Office for Windows, as well as the other modules in the ***Academy*** product line, is designed to run on a PC or IBM-compatible platform. Users interested in software for a Macintosh system will be disappointed that Blackbaud does not provide a Mac version of its products. However, *Gradebook* is cross-platform. Thus, teachers who wish to enter their grades at home but only have a Macintosh computer will be able download their data into ***Registrar's Office for Windows*** at school.

◆ Security

Blackbaud provides security features that allow users (administrators) to set up passwords that restrict users from viewing, changing, or adding to specific fields of

information. For example, an administrator can set up a password in the ***Registrar's Office for Windows*** that would enable a guidance counselor to view a students' grades in order to help him/her make decisions about higher education, but not alter any information about that student. Thus, Blackbaud helps administrators ensure that users are only able to access areas of the database that are pertinent to their positions or functions.

◆ *Vendor Profile*

Blackbaud, Inc., incorporated in 1982, is a private company located in Charleston, South Carolina. Its first product, ***Student Billing*** (an Accounts Receivable program designed to run on a microcomputer), remains a part of the suite of school administration software that it currently sells. Today, Blackbaud supplies software for fundraising, accounting, school administration, and grants management. According to the information on its web site, Blackbaud has over 11,000 customers, thirty-six percent of which are schools. Throughout the 1980s, Blackbaud experienced quite a bit of growth and quickly expanded their market beyond the scope of independent schools to nonprofit organizations. Continuing its expansion into the 1990s, Blackbaud developed a product line of software for corporations and foundations that make grants available to nonprofit organizations.

Ease of Use

◆ *User Interface*

Registrar's Office for Windows is a Windows-based product in which the users can manipulate the system

with a mouse through pull-down menus, point-and-click options, and online help features. The program group in Windows 3.1 for ***Registrar's Office for Windows*** includes icons for each of its functions. (*Figure* 2).

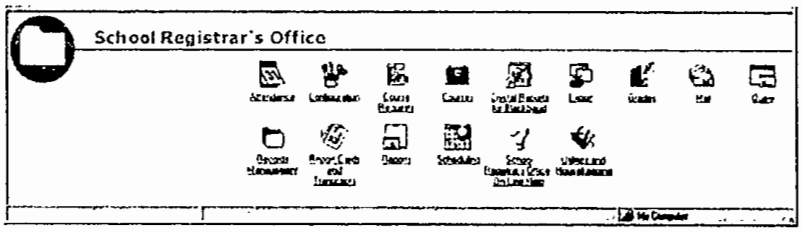

Figure 2. Functions are represented by icons.

Once a particular function is accessed (for example, "Students"), each screen is arranged in a file-tab format. To retrieve information from a particular file, the user clicks with the mouse on the appropriate tab (*Figure 3*).

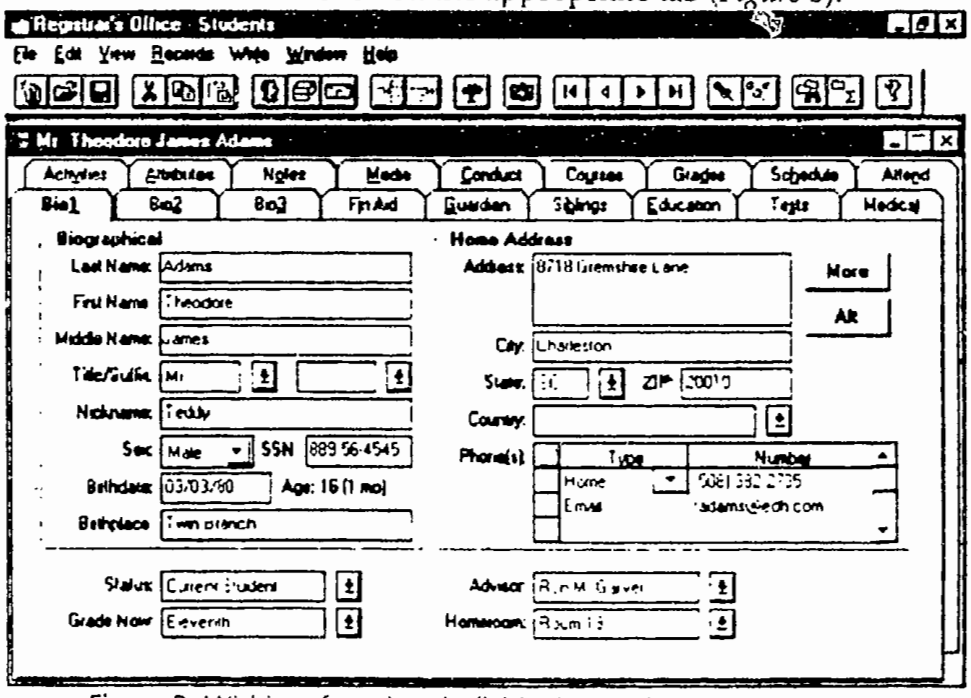

Figure 3. Within a function, individual records are broken down into a file-tab format.

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When viewing the product demonstration software, this arrangement seems to be graphically clear and easy to use. However, the tabs do not always clearly indicate what information is contained within the file. This ambiguity is noticed when accessing student biographical information. When a user selects this option, he/she is presented with three files entitled "Bio1," "Bio2," and "Bio3". Because it is not apparent what information is found in each of these files, the user is required to search each of the files in order to find the desired information.

◆ *Online Help Features*

The context-sensitive online help feature can guide the user through a file by explaining its format and defining available fields. The online help feature also provides detailed instructions for performing specific functions such as printing mailing labels or creating reports. Similar to other Windows products, users can search the online help feature in order to find a particular topic and annotate the text or mark the topic for future reference. As with any manual file system, both administrators and office staff will more than likely need time to familiarize themselves with the plethora of Blackbaud's pre-defined fields.

◆ *User-Defined Fields*

Registrar's Office for Windows permits the creation of user-defined fields. The "Attributes" field allows users to customize the database by developing fields to track miscellaneous data or information that is specific to a particular school. Depending on a school's data-gathering needs, there may be fields that a school is unable to fully utilize such as "boarding."

Blackbaud designed ***Registrar's Office for Windows*** to anticipate current and future needs of school administrations. Thus, users may confront the possibility of not being able to take advantage of everything that this integrated software has to offer. Nevertheless, it is possible to assign pre-defined values to fields, change field names, and hide fields in order to refine the software to fit an institution's unique needs.

◆ Report and Query Features

Registrar's Office for Windows has extensive report and query capabilities. One can access pre-formatted reports by clicking on "Reports" in the ***Registrar's Office for Windows*** program group. This function generates pre-formatted reports for such things as attendance, course/class, conduct, grades, requests, student scheduling, faculty/staff and miscellaneous. These pre-formatted reports, defined as report types, include a range of information or report names from which users can choose. For example, some of the report types found in "Grades" include grade-distribution report, student-grade report, course-grade report, course-withdrawal report, etc. Once one chooses a report name, it is possible to further define the information included in the report by specifying a particular date range, department, course, or grade level. Reports can be printed to the computer screen or printer, sent as an e-mail, or exported to a spreadsheet program.

Blackbaud has teamed with the Seagate computer company to incorporate the highly acclaimed ***Crystal Report Writer***. This software allows the user to create templates and format reports to individual specifications.

Query allows users to gather information through the creation of user-defined criteria that may not be

accessible in pre-formatted reports. One may use this feature in order to complete such projects as a roster of eleventh-grade juniors who are members of student council or the examination of ethnic distribution in advanced-placement courses.

Technical Merit

◆ *System Design*

As a relational database system, ***Registrar's Office for Windows*** supports advanced queries and custom report generation. Since this software is scalable, it can be run in a single-user or network environment. Designed to run in a client/server environment, Blackbaud products can be updated in "real time" when information is entered from a workstation.

◆ *System Requirements and Response Times*

The hardware requirements to effectively run Blackbaud's ***Registrar's Office for Windows*** can be easily met with today's standard office equipment. The company clearly states that hard disk space and memory requirements will vary according to an institution's database size and how many software applications are running. Blackbaud's recommended workstation has a 100 Mhz (or higher) Pentium processor with 16 MB of RAM. But the workstation must have at least a 486 processor that runs at 66 Mhz. The network or database server requirements are Pentium 133 Mhz processors with 64 MB of RAM. One must keep in mind that more memory and a faster processor will insure that system response times are quick. Blackbaud also requires

Windows, Windows for Workgroups, Windows NT, or Windows 95 as an operating system.

System Qualifications

◆ *System Maturity*

Although the Windows versions of Blackbaud's products are fairly new, this company has been developing and upgrading the product line since it first incorporated in 1981. Blackbaud introduced its first Windows product, ***ParaGon***, in 1991 and has slowly introduced the Windows versions of each of its product. A Windows version of ***Student Billing*** is scheduled for release in the summer of 1998.

◆ *Software Enhancements and User Groups*

Users who enroll in Blackbaud's Software Maintenance Program are entitled to receive software enhancements, updates, and maintenance. Registration in this program also entitles users to enroll in Blackbaud's User Groups in which they can share information and challenges. Blackbaud clients typically chair and organize these groups. However, a Blackbaud representative attends the meetings and gives an informational briefing. In addition to this, Advisory Groups, which are comprised of clients who work with Research and Development, provide suggestions for upgrading software or adding new products. Customers must annually pay twenty percent of the initial cost of the software in order to be a part of this program. Thus, schools that purchased a $10,000 single-user version will have to pay $2,000 annually, while schools that

purchased a $20,000 network that accommodates eight to ten users must pay an annual fee of $4,000.

Support, Services and Training

◆ *Technical Support*

After the initial software purchase, Blackbaud provides software and maintenance support for thirty days. When this thirty-day period is over, customers need to enroll in the Software Maintenance Program in order to receive maintenance and software enhancements. Users who are a part of this program have access to Blackbaud's toll-free telephone and e-mail support. This short support period may be a disappointment to users, considering the sophistication of the product and the high cost of maintenance support.

◆ *Training*

The inclusion of many different fields allows users to organize a variety of information. However, the numerous amount of fields in ***Registrar's Office for Windows*** can be confusing to some users. Therefore, administrators should allow faculty and staff a wide enough learning curve to master Blackbaud's software, especially if a school had very few parts of their records-management tasks computerized previous to purchasing ***Registrar's Office for Windows.***

Blackbaud makes a variety of product training packages available to its customers. Blackbaud-designed courses are given at its corporate headquarters in Charleston, South Carolina. Prices for these training sessions vary; a two- or three-day session can range from

$600 to $900. In additions to the training options that were previously described, customers may wish to consider purchasing the comprehensive training package. This package includes on-site training and consultation; a Blackbaud representative will visit for up to five days to assist users with training or installation problems that are unique to the institution. The comprehensive training program starts at $9,000 for customers who are enrolled in the Software Maintenance Program. Those who are not enrolled in this program will have to pay a higher cost.

EVALUATION OF FUNCTIONS

Note: Although these criteria are set up to review individual modules (school records, scheduling, attendance, and grading), all of these modules are integrated as functions into Blackbaud's ***Registrar's Office for Windows*** *software.*

School Records

Information about student and faculty/staff or course records are represented as individual icons in the ***Registrar's Office for Windows*** program group (see *Figure 2*). ***Registrar's Office for Windows*** allows users to keep track of important student data such as biographical, guardian, conduct, medical/health, activity, attendance, schedule, grades, courses, education, and test information. Because all functions are integrated into one software module, users can easily access needed information about an individual student without having to move between modules. This product provides many

pre-defined fields for users to enter information. For example, the "Bio 1" tab allows users to maintain an unlimited number of address and contact points. In addition to this, users can indicate when correspondence should be delivered to different addresses in order to accommodate those students who live with different parents or guardians during certain parts of the year.

"Conduct" keeps track of disciplinary infractions as well as merit/award information. Users can define the disciplinary infractions and the corrective actions taken because Blackbaud allows users to assign pre-defined values to fields. Teachers or staff members can record a disciplinary incident and describe the situation in detail. With this information, users also can automatically generate a parent letter. "Attributes" stores basic school information as well as other data that may be entered into user-defined, trackable fields. "Notes" maintains more detailed information. Teachers, counselors, administrators, and staff who have access to "Notes" can record and access anecdotal information about a student's performance, conduct, activities, etc.

In addition to its basic features, Blackbaud offers some features which are very unique. In order to facilitate the quick entry of data, scanning and bar coding options are available[7]. A feature that comes in the standard package enables users to scan photographs, text, and other information into school records. Another feature allows users to store and display information about family relationships of students. Thus, schools can maintain and track detailed information on individual students as well as store and manage student records.

Registrar's Office for Windows also tracks information about faculty and staff. Similar to student records, these screens are arranged in a file-tab format and contain biographical, course, and assignment

information for individual staff members. Other data files allow users to augment basic information. For example, "Restrictions" stores information about the periods which faculty members are available to teach, and "Assignments" stores information on non-teaching related duties (i.e. proctoring, extra-curricular activities, etc.). "Attributes" can be used for storing additional information in user-defined fields.

"Course Information" enables users to store complete course descriptions. Users can define the grading requirements for a specific course, display the periods the course will be offered, and list the faculty that are available to teach the course. It is also possible to indicate pre- and co-requisites for specific courses. After the pre- and/or co-requisites are defined, the software will automatically flag a student who is not eligible to take a course because he/she does not meet requirements.

Scheduling

The scheduling component, also a part of ***Registrar's Office for Windows***, meets most of the basic evaluation criteria. To accommodate a schedule based on student requests, facilitate automated entry of course requests, or automatically build a master schedule, it is necessary to purchase additional modules. *Automated Student Scheduling* places students in classes based on their course requests. To facilitate rapid data entry *Scanning and Bar Coding* is also necessary. After establishing classes, determining preferences and timetable, automatically creating a master schedule will require *Automated Master Schedule Creation* as well.

The scheduling function allows users to define days and terms of the school year, maintain scheduling data

for an unlimited number of school years, and include any number of scheduling patterns (block, modular, rotating schedules, etc.). Users can also create different schedules for different grades or levels if needed. It is also possible to define "common periods" such as homeroom, lunch, chapel, etc., at which time no classes can be scheduled. The scheduling component will also build the school master calender indicating holidays and special events. Because of the Windows environment, making changes to the schedule is done easily by using the mouse to "drag" classes to different locations in the schedule.

Other components of ***Registrar's Office for Windows*** that relate to scheduling tasks are "Courses" and "Course Requests." Information about individual courses is maintained in "Courses." "Course Requests" expedites student requests by allowing users to assign core curricula either by student or group of students, indicates scheduling conflicts automatically, and provides request totals for students and classes.

Attendance

The attendance feature allows users great flexibility by enabling them to record attendance in a variety of ways: class, day, section, homeroom, grade, student, and pre-defined group of students. User-defined codes allow teachers and staff members who are taking attendance to quickly indicate why a student was late or absent. Using this information, reports can be generated which show how many students were absent or late for a particular reason. It is also possible to include more detailed comments regarding a student's attendance. All of this information appears automatically in the student's school record. This feature can be especially useful to teachers

and administrators for parent conferences, meetings with the student, etc. Reporting features display attendance for the entire school, grade or class and provide the flexibility for users to define whatever information is needed. For example, it is possible to report how many students cut class on a particular day or range of days. In order for teachers to record attendance from their classroom, schools should purchase *Faculty Access*. This module enables faculty and staff to add, edit, and access attendance information. It also provides teachers with limited access to student-record information without buying another user's license. Thus, faculty can access a student's biographical and parent/guardian data, conduct information, and grades.

Grading

Blackbaud's grading component meets all of the basic criteria by providing the flexibility a school needs for managing and reporting grades. The grading component can define how grades are weighted, and how they will figure into GPA, credit, honors, and course-average calculations. Users can specify formulas, which can vary for different courses, that should be used to determine grades. Employing user-defined criteria, the grading component can calculate grade-point averages and class rankings as well as determine honor roll members.

Gradebook is an electronic gradebook module which can be purchased in addition to ***Registrar's Office for Windows***. It allows faculty members to enter grades and comments from their desktop computers. Data can be transferred via diskette, e-mail, or shared network drive. This program is also multi-platform; it can be used in both a Windows and Mac environment.

SUMMARY

There is no doubt that Blackbaud's *Registrar's Office for Windows* offers users many options for recording and reporting upon a wide variety of student information. However, potential buyers must beware that their schools might not have any need or be able to use some of the functions that are included in this software package. Also, the complexity of the system may cause some users difficulty when they are trying to manipulate the software. Nevertheless, this package may prove to be very useful to those schools that can afford the up-front and continuing cost to maintain the software and are able to use most of the information functions.

Win School

CHANCERY SOFTWARE LTD.

GENERAL SYSTEM CONSIDERATIONS

System Scope and Vendor Profile

◆ *Major Functions*

Chancery's *Win School* is composed of twelve modules that can be purchased separately based on each school's needs. The modules share a central database of student information, thus making *Win School* an integrated solution. The eleven modules perform the major tasks of student-records management: *Details, Query, School Setup, Report Manager, Scanning, State/ Province, Attendance, Scheduler, eClass Grades, Report Cards & Transcripts, ASCII Transfer,* and *Universal Access.*

Details manages all student records as well as information about teachers and courses; it serves as the central database of information. Users can record and retrieve information in this module. *Query* provides view-only access to all of the data stored in the database and can print custom reports. *School Setup* allows schools

to customize their databases by permitting the systems administrators to define parameters in their own systems and control database security by assigning user passwords. *Report Manager* helps users perform mail merges as well as create custom reports and letters. *Scanning* accepts data entered into the system by optical scanners. *State/Province* assists in meeting state or provincial reporting requirements by providing pre-formatted built-in reports. From their titles the individual functions of the *Attendance, Marks, Scheduler, Report Cards & Transcripts,* and *ASCII Transfer* modules should be self-explanatory.

Chancery does an excellent job of providing a clear and concise overview of each module. This type of clarity allows schools to easily discern what modules they will need. Most schools will probably be interested in purchasing *Details, School Setup,* and *Query*—the key modules for managing all school information. A school may also want to acquire the *ASCII Transfer* module in order to import their data into ***Win School***. Because each of these modules are sold individually, a school can choose to automate at its own pace.

◆ *Security*

Security is maintained in the *School Setup* module where the systems administrator can assign passwords permitting the appropriate level of access for teachers, staff, and administrators. The different levels of access include view-only, full-edit, or no-access privileges. The systems administrator also defines basic information in this module such as term dates and custom fields. This capability allows schools to maintain consistency throughout their database.

◆ Vendor Profile

Based in Vancouver, British Columbia, Chancery Software Ltd. is a Canadian company that does a majority of its business in the United States. Its main U.S. office is in Bellingham, Washington with regional offices in Colorado, New York, Missouri, and Florida. Founded in 1984, the company launched its first product, ***Mac School***, as a site-based student information system. ***Win School*** followed in 1993 after customers requested a PC-based product. With its customer base of over 10,000 schools in eleven countries, ***Win School*** is one of the most widely used student-records management software products. In addition to a loyal following, Chancery's products are often mentioned in education literature. ***Win School*** and ***Mac School*** have also received awards and critical praise from *Technology & Learning* and *Media & Methods* magazines, two popular education journals.[8]

Chancery's original product ***Mac School*** is practically identical to ***Win School***. However, *Health* is not available to ***Win School*** customers. *Health* allows more comprehensive storage of student health records and permits users to maintain details of immunization records or track district-wide medical exams for hearing, vision, etc. ***Win School*** users can still track this information in the *Details* module, but not with the same level of specificity.

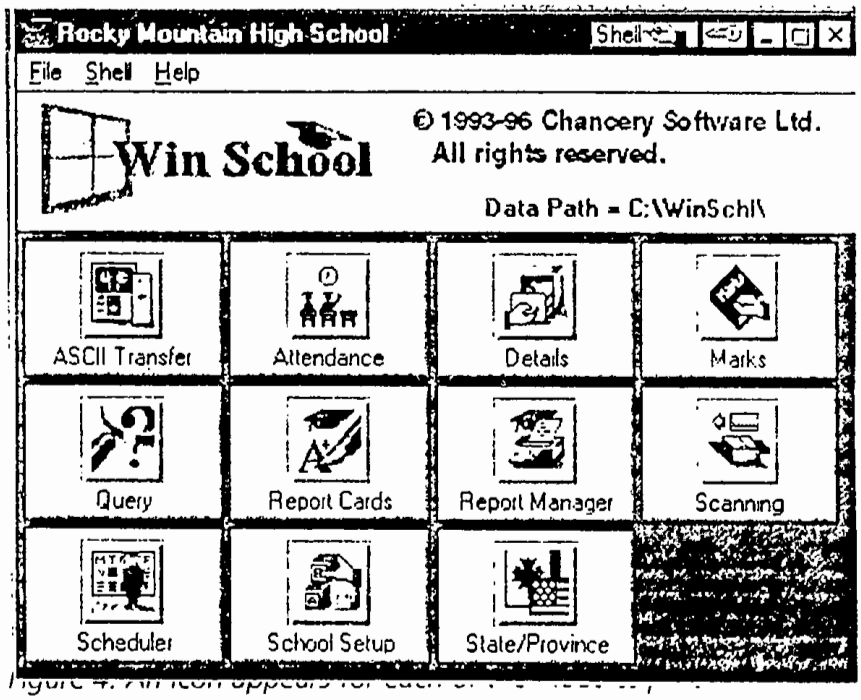
Besides providing software programs for school record-keeping, grades, attendance, and scheduling, Chancery offers a variety of products to be used by other departments in the school system. For instance, Chancery supplies one of the few systems designed specifically for school libraries. ***Library Pro*** allows schools to perform cataloging and circulation functions on an integrated

system. In addition to this, Chancery also created a system for district education administration. ***OpenSchool Data Integrator*** enables district-wide information to be managed by a single program.

Ease of Use

◆ *User Interface*

Chancery takes advantage of the Windows graphic interface in order to present screens of information clearly and simply. In ***Win School***'s program group an icon appears for each of the modules a school has purchased. If a school purchased all of the available modules the program group would look like *Figure 4*.



by the school.

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This clear and accessible arrangement is also evident in each of Chancery's other modules. For example, icons are clearly labeled "Students" or "Teachers" in *Query*. Thus, users can quickly access the needed information for a particular group.

After clicking on "Students," the complete student list appears and users only need to begin typing a student's last name in order to locate that student's record. Once an individual student's record has been accessed, the icons appear along the top of the screen: "Emergency," "Contact," "Details," "Attendance," "Marks," and "Picture." These guide the user to the information they need (*Figure 5*).

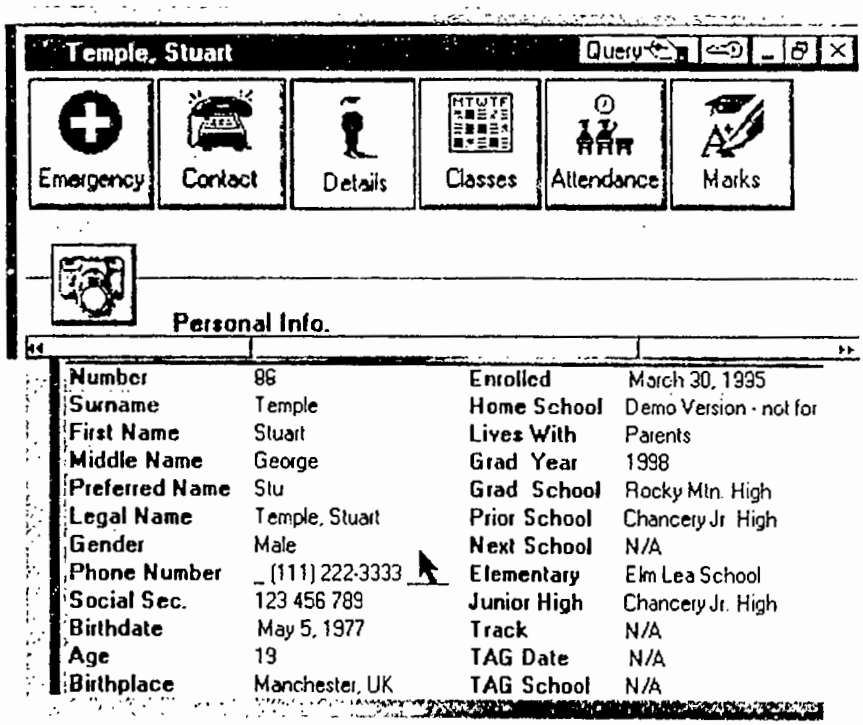

Figure 5. This basic information appears when a student's record is accessed in Query.

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Query is designed for administrators, teachers, and staff members who need access to all the information in the school's database, but do not need to know the system in great detail.

◆ Online Help Features

Standard in any Windows-based product, ***Win School*** also provides context-sensitive online help features in all of their modules. "Help" will guide users through the process of creating a report, performing a mail merge, or simply defining a particular field within a record. Manuals are provided in electronic format with the software. Schools can print copies as needed. Thus, schools are free to provide all teachers and staff with copies of the manual at no additional charge.

◆ User-Defined Fields

Win School has over 1,500 pre-defined fields in *Details*. However, users can create their own unique data fields in the "User-Defined" section of *Details*. These fields must be defined in *School Setup* by the systems administrator or whoever has access to that module. Nevertheless, ***Win School***'s pre-defined data fields do cover all the basic record-keeping needs. A school only needs to create fields that address its special needs.

Users can also create their own "flags" within a field in order to speed data entry. For example, one of the fields in *Details* is "Grade Level." Users only need to click on the flag within the field to display a list of grades and choose one that is appropriate.

◆ *Report and Query Features*

Win School has pre-formatted reports that users can quickly access from any module. For example, the list of pre-formatted reports in "Attendance" include the following: daily and period attendance reports, daily absence lists, attendance summaries for each class, and totals for homeroom attendance, monthly attendance, and term attendance. "Reports" is also listed as one of the pull-down menu choices that can be found on the top of the screen. Users only need to click on "Reports" in order to see the list of available reports.

Users can create and store custom reports using *Report Manager*. This module is a desktop publishing tool that also can be used to create and store templates for report cards, transcripts, letters, etc. Data used in different reports can be subsequently imported to other applications for statistical analysis.

Technical Merit

◆ *System Design*

Win School is designed to run in a single-user or network environment. All modules share one database of information. Because ***Win School*** is fully integrated, data only needs to be entered once. For those users who run ***Win School*** on a network, the system allows for real-time updating of information.

ASCII Transfer allows schools to import data that is in ASCII into ***Win School*** or export data for use with another program. This module allows users to specify the order and format for transferring data, as well as allow the user to run trials to make sure the data is formatted

correctly. Because the Windows interface helps users with exporting or importing information through pull-down menus and help features, staff can easily learn how to use this module.

◆ *System Requirements and Response Times*

The minimum hardware requirement for ***Win School*** is a 486 processor with 8MB of RAM for a single user. Network versions can run on a Novell NetWare server or a Windows NT server. Hardware and network requirements and system response times depend upon the system purchased and the number of users.

System Qualifications

◆ *System Maturity*

Mac School was first released in 1985 and ***Win School*** followed in 1990. According to company literature, Chancery has a customer base of over 10,000 schools in eleven countries. It also states that Chancery is the second largest vendor of student information systems in North America.

◆ *Software Enhancements and User Groups*

In order to automatically receive software enhancements or updates, customers must subscribe to one of Chancery's support programs. According to their web site, Chancery also allows users to download software updates from the Internet. Online user groups to help users troubleshoot problems will soon be available via Chancery's web site. However, Chancery's

resellers offer user-group meetings for customers in their area. These meetings are open to any teacher, administrator, or staff member who uses Chancery's products.

Support, Services, and Training

◆ *Technical Support*

Chancery has two different support programs available: "Standard Support" or "Help Desk Support." Both programs include the basic features of telephone support, self-help materials, online user groups, and software updates. "Standard Support" allows all users to contact Chancery for technical support. "Help Desk Support" allows only one designated user to contact technical support and, in return, Chancery discounts the school's "Standard Support." Also, the user must attend an intensive training class. In order to qualify for this program, schools must meet specific standards.[9]

Telephone support is available Monday through Friday from 5:00 AM to 5:00 PM Pacific Time. Chancery's "Self-Help" materials include manuals for all of their products. Through their web site users can access "Frequently Asked Questions," "Tech Notes," "Trouble Shooting Tips," "Newsletter," "Virtual Support," as well as multimedia conferencing.

◆ *Training*

Consulting and training are available for additional fees for users in either support program. Chancery defines their consulting services as helping the customer complete a project, providing advice, or customizing implementation for specific requirements.

Training classes at "Chancery University" are located at the vendor's corporate headquarters in Vancouver, British Columbia. Each of the three courses offered for *Win School* (Win School Introduction, Win School Scheduler and Win School Plus) is nine days. Because the classes are limited to only twelve people, personalized service is available for each student. On-site training is also offered in order to meet user-specific needs and schedules of a particular school. Classes are still limited to twelve people, and the school is responsible for the trainer's travel expenses.

While all of the above services are provided directly by Chancery, many of these services are also supplied by Chancery's forty authorized resellers. Customers can contact their local reseller for training and consulting services. However, these services will vary among the various resellers.

For those users who are interested in finding out more about *Win School* or any other Chancery product, Chancery provides a demonstration CD-ROM which describes each of the available modules. Chancery offers different product demos that are set up from the perspectives of each individual faculty or staff member who will be using the product. Thus, every faculty or staff member has the opportunity to learn how the product can be of use to him/her. For example, if the school principal needed to understand how student-records management software will make her job easier, she would have looked at the virtual tour of the principal's office. Because it provides thoughtful well-designed "tours" of its own products, Chancery's product demos are helpful tools for schools that are gathering information about student-records management software.

EVALUATION OF INDIVIDUAL MODULES

School Records

Details forms ***Win School***'s core database which stores all student, teacher, and course information. Most of the tab names are clearly defined by their labels. This expedites data entry and locating information. The student-record portion of *Details* is comprised of nine tab cards: "Enrollment," "Personal," "Contacts," "Groups" (extra-curricular activities), "Codes" (tracking of student enrollment, withdrawal and return), "Health," "Miscellaneous" (student transportation, legal information, or user-created categories), "Conduct," and "User-Defined" (*Figure 6*). When creating a new student

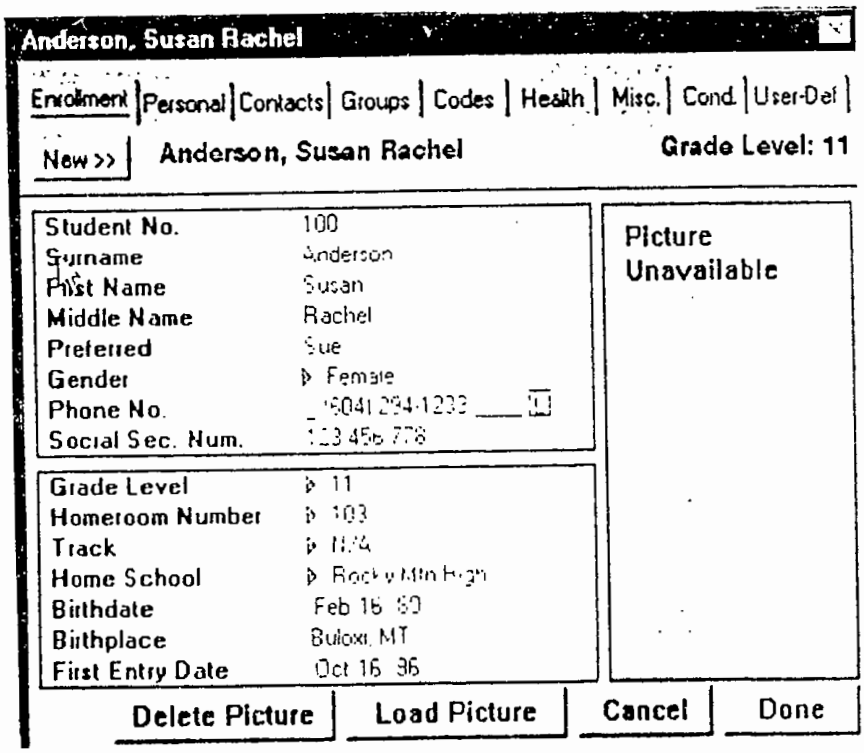

Figure 6. The file-tab format enables easy access to data on individual students.

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record, users only need to enter the student's name and assign a record number to get the student into the system. If a school purchases the module, *Scanning*, users can scan school data and avoid manual data entry.

Detail's provides many pre-defined data fields as well as opportunities to customize the ***Win School*** database with user-defined fields. Schools can track up to six contacts per student and quickly access them by clicking on "Contacts." "Miscellaneous," which also tracks transportation information, allows for user-defined flags that require a "yes" or "no" response.

Details stores a variety of pre-formatted reports that users can access quickly from the pull-down menus. Some of these reports include homeroom rosters, discipline reports, and team/club rosters. Using *Report Manager*, users also can create custom reports, mailing labels, or mail merges from all data stored in *Details*. This ability can be extremely beneficial to schools. For example, if twenty students were caught smoking in the bathroom during the week, a staff member would not have to type a new letter for each parent. Instead, the staff member could quickly generate letters to those parents by simply choosing *Conduct* and defining the reporting criteria for each letter. In addition to reporting, it is also possible to sort and search student records by pre-defined criteria such as individual students, groups of students, ID number, grade, or homeroom.

Scheduling

Chancery combines many features into one module, *Scheduler*, that other vendors might sell as individual modules or programs. For example, *Scheduler* allows users to build a master schedule based on student course

requests as well as teacher and room availability. Also, *Scheduler* automatically places students in the classes they requested. Although scheduling students is always a complicated procedure, *Scheduler* breaks this process down into five straightforward steps. First, one must enter the school parameters in *School Setup*. This includes terms or semesters, type of schedule (block, modular, etc.), and maximum faculty teaching load. Second, one must set up individual course information in *Details* that specifies when and where a course can be taught, maximum and minimum class size, pre- and co-requisites, and number of course credits.[10] Third, one must enter student course requests and teaching staff. Fourth, one must create the optimum schedule which can be manually adjusted or automatically adjusted. Fifth, one must create schedules for courses and students. As changes or additions are made to the schedule, it is possible to save multiple scheduling runs in order to choose the most appropriate one.

Scheduler meets most of the defined criteria, making it a flexible and powerful program. It accommodates a variety of scheduling modules and course structures. This module accommodates a maximum of 5,000 students in 2,000 classes and can schedule up to forty-two periods per day. Other important features in *Scheduler* are a conflict matrix that can see which students have conflicts and a program that generates other standard reports such as a master timetable, a list of student transfers, or a list of students with free periods.

Attendance

Chancery offers an array of options to schools for entering and storing attendance data. Class attendance

can be instantaneously entered into the system from the teacher's desktop computer and automatically appear in other modules. Schools can scan attendance directly into the program when teachers use a scan form or bubble sheet to record attendance. When schools record attendance data, staff members can set up daily and period attendance codes to track excused and unexcused absences. In addition to the attendance various attendance lists, faculty or staff members are also able to include detailed comments about the absences or tardiness of individual students.

As with all other modules, *Attendance* has a variety of reporting features. Users can generate standard reports such as daily absence lists, homeroom attendance reports, or student birthdays. Reports can also be limited by a user-defined date. All this information can also be included in custom reports using the *Report Manager*.

Grading

Report Cards & Transcripts is the module to track and calculate grade-point averages, earned credits, potential credits, pass/fail status, honor roll and class rank. Users define their own grading scales to calculate grade point average indicating when a particular course is weighted. Users also define custom grading scales to specify the relationship between percentage, letter grade, grade points, earned credits and pass/fail status. There is also a place for comments to elaborate on student performance. Schools can maintain data for an unlimited number of students and years in order to generate transcripts.

Data can be scanned, uploaded from *Marks*, or manually entered into *Report Cards & Transcripts*. If schools are running a multi-user version of *Report Cards*

& Transcripts over a network, grades can be entered from more than one workstation.

eClass Grades is the new electronic gradebook module for teachers to track and manage their student's grades and progress. Teachers can use this program at home or at school. Its cross-platform functionality allows users to access their data from both Windows and Macintosh computers. With this gradebook, teachers can create progress reports, report cards, and visual aids to facilitate communication with parents and students. Teachers may upload the final or term marks to the main office's computer either over the school network or on a floppy disk.

SUMMARY

From reading the prior pages, one can surmise that Chancery's ***Win School*** offers users many options for recording and reporting information. Potential buyers have a choice of twelve modules to purchase in order to customize the system according to the institution's needs. Users can record data that is both basic and unique to their institutions through its plethora of predefined and user-defined fields. Most importantly, the Windows environment of ***Win School*** allows users to input data as well as retrieve information without difficulty.

Administrator's Plus

REDIKER SOFTWARE, INC.

GENERAL SYSTEM CONSIDERATIONS

System Scope and Vendor Profile

- ***Major Functions***

Administrator's Plus consists of seven modules which address all the major functions of student record-keeping needs. These modules (*Data Base Plus, Report Cards Plus, Scheduling Plus, Daily Attendance Plus, Discipline Plus, Billing Plus, and Pictures & I.D. Cards*) can be purchased separately with the exception of *Data Base Plus* which is the core module required by all other programs. *Data Base Plus* is the file-maintenance module for all other modules and is where student and faculty information is maintained. Because *Data Base Plus* is a "required" module, it is included at no extra charge with the purchase of any other module.

One of the most attractive features of ***Administrator's Plus*** is its reasonable cost. One of the few software companies to do this, Rediker staggers its pricing based

on the number of enrolled students. There are three options: for schools with less than 300 students; between 300 and 400 students; and, more than 400 students. For schools with more than 400 students, the cost of the *Data Base Plus, Attendance, Report Cards, Scheduling, and Discipline* packages and *Master Schedule Builder* is $2,995. However, network licenses are sold separately and pricing is also staggered based on a school's size.

Rediker Software also sells additional add-on modules that are compatible with the main package. These add-on features include *Period Attendance Add-On* (to record attendance every period), *Study Hall Scheduler Add-On*, and *Scanner Interface Add-On*. Rediker released a new module this year, *Pictures & ID Card*, to take, import and view student pictures. Pictures can be taken using a camcorder and then used for ID cards or in the picture seating chart for taking attendance. Rediker also sells ***Grade Quick!*** software as the electronic gradebook product compatible with *Report Cards Plus, Attendance Plus*, and *Period Attendance Plus*.

◆ Database Features

All of the modules, with the exception of *Pictures & ID Card* and ***Grade Quick!***, are DOS-based. ***Grade Quick!***, which is designed by a different company, is available in Windows, Macintosh, and DOS versions. Considering Windows-based software is virtually standard, schools may feel that they are taking a step backwards by choosing Rediker Software. Nevertheless, the software provides many of the same features other Windows-based systems include. ***Administrator's Plus*** is an integrated package where general information for school, students and faculty is entered only once and "shared" by all other modules. Also, Rediker is in the process of

developing Windows versions of their products which should be available by the summer of 1999.

◆ Security

Passwords with different levels of access can be set up for anyone who needs access to the system. Users can access the system by pressing a corresponding function key or typing in their user name. The system then prompts them to enter a personal password. Access can be defined for individual modules allowing users to have varying levels of access to different modules. Users can either have "All Rights" (users can view and edit data), "Read Only Rights" (users can only view data) or "No Rights" (users are restricted from access to that module from the program selector). Access and security is controlled in *PassCodes & Years*, a program which is accessible either from the main menu or from "Master Program Selector."

◆ Vendor Profile

Administrator's Plus was developed by Rediker Software 17 years ago. Based in Hampden, MA, Rediker Software is a small company that prides itself on providing personal customer service. The owner, Richard Rediker (who initially developed this software) and many of the staff are former school administrators who not only understand the software, but identify with their customers and their specific needs. Mr. Rediker, the president, takes a personal interest in his customers.

Currently over 1,800 schools all over the United States and several countries around the world use Rediker software products.

Ease of Use

◆ *User Interface*

Administrator's Plus has a menu-driven interface which does take some adjustment after working with Windows-based software products. The mouse can be used to point and click in order to make choices from the menus, but the keyboard is quicker. Even without the Windows environment, users have pop-up menus from which they can choose codes for specific fields, choose other menu options, or move between programs. If users choose to not use a mouse, they make use of function keys. These keys operate in the same manner as Windows buttons, and are programmed consistently throughout each module. For example *f3* is always "Edit" regardless of the module in which users may be working. On the next page is a sample of the *ID Plus* Print Menu.

Along the bottom of this menu are function keys or "hot keys" which are programmed to access the different modules so it is not necessary to memorize any commands (*Figure 7*).

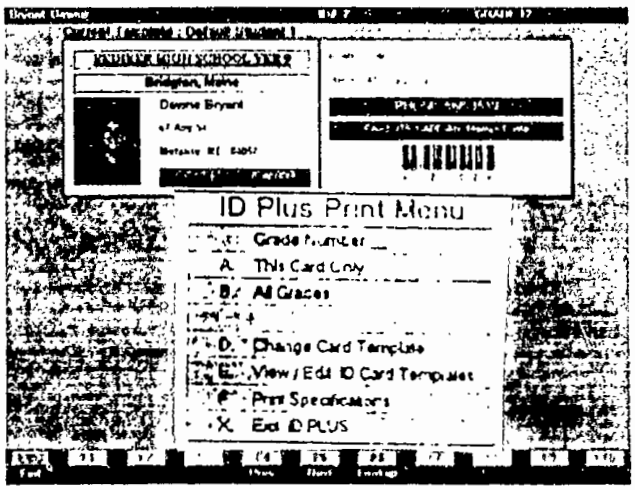

Figure 7. The active function keys are listed across the bottom of each screen.

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Because ***Administrator's Plus*** is an integrated package, users are able to access information regarding a particular student from the various modules without having to exit the current module. Function keys or "hot keys" are used to access any student information within the different modules. If users are looking at a student's discipline record in *Discipline Plus* and want to look at that student's grades in *Report Card Plus* they would use a "hot key" to move between those programs. Since function key *f10* lists all the "hot keys," it is not necessary to remember each of them. This feature is similar to the query feature in other packages which consolidates all the data for an individual student on one screen.

Student record information, maintained in *Data Base Plus*, is organized in one column (*Figure 8*). However,

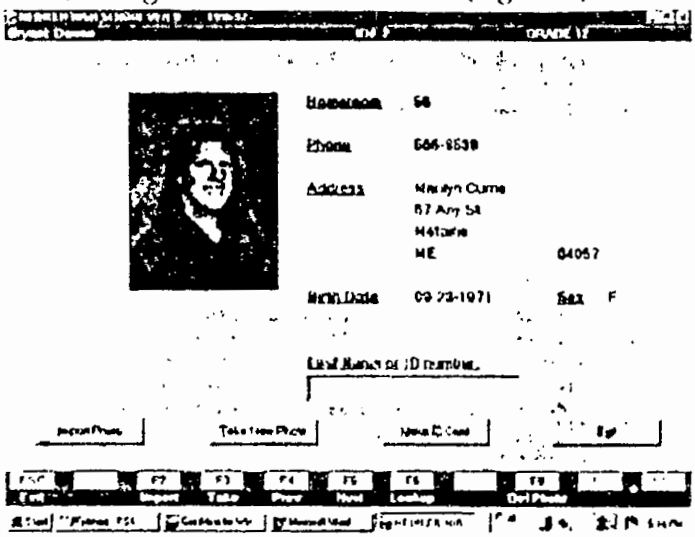

Figure 8. The single-column format is customizable and easy to read.

multiple screens can be customized with fields in any order. This feature allows each user to use a different customized screen.

Paging through three screens of information to locate a particular data field may seem cumbersome after using Windows packages where data is arranged in a file-tab

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graphical format. However, Rediker believes that this task can be easily completed using the "page up" or "page down" keys or clicking the up or down arrows with the mouse. The DOS format does not allow users pull-down menus for individual fields. However, Rediker offers macro keys to speed data entry. In a Windows program users could click with their mouse on the "Counselor" field, for example, and choose from a list of available names. When using Rediker, users may select the macro either by clicking with the mouse or by pressing the appropriate function key. It is not necessary to pre-define the data to be entered in any field.

◆ *Online Help Features*

Online help is available for each of the programs and function keys are defined by the program in use. Function key *f1* is "Help" in each of the modules. While online help in ***Administrator's Plus*** does provide some assistance, users will still have to turn to the manuals for more detailed direction.

◆ *User-Defined Fields*

Because most of the pre-defined fields included in each of the modules are basic information fields that nearly all schools will need, Rediker has left many user-defined fields available in order to customize the database. For example, there are 160 available fields in the Address portion of *Data Base Plus*. Only nine of these are pre-defined, leaving 151 fields "optional" in order to customize the student-record portion of the database. However, ***Administrator's Plus*** is missing many of the pre-defined fields included in other systems, such as multiple contacts, medical/emergency information,

immunization records, standardized test scores, etc. Nevertheless, customers are free to adjust the program to include those fields or any other fields that are necessary for their data-keeping needs.

◆ Report and Query Features

Each module includes pre-defined reports in order to quickly access information, or these reports can be used as templates for users to modify for a specific use. The "Report Writer & Mailing Label" menu in the *Data Base Plus* module allows users to create mailing labels, form letters, and create reports from data stored in this module. Reports and letters are fairly simple in design and are built using codes that tell the computer what fields and in what order the report will use. If a user wishes to customize a report, "look-up" windows are available for insertion.

Administrator's Plus has a function that allows users to access student data from any of the modules in order to create custom reports. *Data Base Plus* information can be accessed and used in the report writers in all other modules. In addition, the user can export data into a commercial report writer or spreadsheet software package, however the data must be exported to an ASCII file before this can be accomplished.

Technical Merit

◆ System Design

Administrator's Plus is designed to run in a networked or stand-alone environment. In a networked environment ***Administrator's Plus*** allows for real-time

updating of data and allows users simultaneous access to data. For those who use the deluxe gradebook program, ***Grade Quick!***, the system will also instantaneously notify teachers by sending a message to that workstation if changes are made to a student schedule. When a student is added to the gradebook over the network, his/her biographical data is sent with his/her name.

◆ *System Requirements and Response Times*

The minimum hardware requirements are a 386 processor with 520k free memory. Rediker Software does recommend a 486 or Pentium for optimal speed. The software only takes up approximately 10 MB of disk space and data storage requires 3 MB per 100 students per year. For schools who are not able to purchase hardware to meet the requirements of Windows-based products, ***Administrator's Plus*** is an ideal solution.

System Qualifications

◆ *System Maturity*

Administrator's Plus was developed by Rediker Software 17 years ago. During that time, Rediker has provided major updates for its software averaging once a year. Minor updates for individual modules are often made between major system updates. Updates are provided as part of Rediker's annual support agreement.

Currently over 1,800 schools all over the United States and several countries around the world use Rediker software products.

◆ Software Enhancements and User Groups

Administrator's Plus runs under Windows 3.1 or Windows 95. Rediker is working to develop a Windows version of ***Administrator's Plus***. This is good news for current users who like the system but are hoping for a Windows version. According to sales staff, Rediker's Windows version will be released when there is no concern about negative affects on system response time.

Rediker does not provide a formal user group or advisory group either via a listserv or arranged meetings for their customers. Because its network of users is fairly small compared to some of the larger companies selling similar software packages, Rediker does maintain close contact with its customers. Through this contact and feedback, Rediker is able to incorporate those changes into their software. Rediker is also extremely forthcoming with providing local references for interested customers to check.

Support, Services and Training

◆ Technical Support

For each of their modules, Rediker offers unlimited toll-free support to their customers for an additional $100 fee regardless of school size or number of users needing assistance. The update contract for each of the modules is, however, based on school enrollment and averages between $125 and $150 per module. Schools who need support and update contracts for each of the modules will spend a maximum of between $600 and $800

depending on enrollment. When users call Rediker's toll-free support line or sales office they will always reach a 'live' person as opposed to a message line. Users of ***Administrator's Plus*** praise Rediker's customer support as incomparable. The ability to reach technical support staff immediately without having to leave numerous messages or remain on hold allays frustration, especially for new users. Customers can also contact Rediker via email or through their web site.

Rediker provides interested customers with their software for a 90-day trial period which includes free customer support. In addition to the actual software, a product demo is included which is really some sample data loaded into ***Administrator's Plus***. If you call the sales office, one of the staff will walk you through the product demo. The software manuals are also included with the 90-day trial, providing users with a complete system overview before purchasing the software.

◆ *Training*

Rediker offers two training workshops, usually in March and June, at its corporate headquarters for $225 per person. For those who are unable to travel to Hampden, MA, regional two-day workshops are also offered for $250. A two-day onsite training is also available for an unlimited number of trainees at a cost of $3,750; a three-day onsite training is available for $4,750 in the continental United States. International training may be more expensive.

EVALUATION OF INDIVIDUAL MODULES

School Records

Data Base Plus is where all student and faculty data is entered in addition to allowing users to perform any database or file maintenance. This is the core module and none of the other module can be used without *Data Base Plus*. Each of the seven programs or functions performed by this module is clearly listed on the main menu, and they include "Customize DB," "New File," "Address," "Print," "Report Writer & Labels," "Beginning," and "Backup/Restore." *Data Base Plus* also allows the systems administrator to set up passwords defining access for each user in *Passcodes & Years*.

One of the strengths of ***Administrator's Plus*** is how clearly information is presented both on the computer screen and in the manuals. Below is an explanation of how some of these programs operate and how users set up student-records information.

- "Customize DB," allows users to enter basic school information such as school address, phone number, names of administrators, and to enter printer codes. All of the basic school information which is entered in pre-defined fields can be used in reports and letters.
- "New Files," the second function available in *Data Base Plus*, allows users to set up and define grade levels; import or export information; add, edit, delete, or withdraw students/staff; and define specifications such as student entry/withdrawal codes.

- "Address" is where users define the information fields for student and faculty records, as well as enter, add, or edit those information fields. Users can store up to 160 items for each student and 20 items for each staff member. The nine pre-defined fields of information which cannot be changed are basic information fields such as name, address, parent/guardian information, etc. After that, users have complete control over what information can be included. In addition to setting up and entering information fields to track each student, users can also define up to 60 customized screens. Customized screens enable the user to take any of the information fields and group them together to create a specific screen of information. For example, schools might create a customized screen of health information to allow quick access for the school nurse. This feature is useful because the data fields are listed in one column. Users may locate needed information by using the "page up" and "page down" keys or by clicking the up or down arrows with the mouse.

- "Print"/"Report Writer & Labels" allows users to print to a printer or to the screen to view lists or reports. Users are also able to export data to ASCII files if they need the information for other software packages. "Report Writer & Labels" allows you to design, save, and print reports or letters as well as create mailing labels. In addition to creating user-defined reports, "Report Writer" has fifteen pre-defined reports which can be copied and edited for individual needs.

- "Beginning" is a program that is used to create a directory for the next school year where the oldest

grade level is eliminated and all other grade levels are moved up one year. The manual for *Data Base Plus* provides easy-to-follow instructions that guide the users through this procedure.

Although *Data Base Plus* does not offer as many pre-defined information fields or reports as other much more expensive systems, it does offer its customers all basic record-keeping functions and the flexibility to define the database to meet user needs. In addition to this, the "Report Writer" allows the creation of an unlimited number of user-defined reports. Nevertheless, one of the best features of this program is that it is free with the purchase of any other module.

Scheduling

Scheduling Plus schedules individual students into sections and prints student and teacher schedules. In order to build the master schedule, schools must purchase *Master Schedule Builder* for a small fee.[11] However, the program is included at no charge with the purchase of ***Administrator Plus***. The manual provided with the *Scheduling Plus* software provides very detailed step-by-step instructions for scheduling students. Schools can begin scheduling for the upcoming school year during the current school year once the systems administrator "creates a new school year" in the *PassCodes & Years* module.

When beginning the scheduling process, the user enters the "Course Master List." Each course is assigned a unique number in addition to its name, level, number of credits, weight factor, GPA factor, optimum size, length, and code.[12] Then, the user prints either manual or

scanned course request forms for students to fill out. After the students hand back the forms and the data is entered, the user prints a verification report of course requests for each student, in order for parents and/or guidance counselors to double-check. When all the information has been verified, the user prints a tally form that shows how many students have signed up for each master course by grade level. Then, the user prints course sign-up lists and gives each instructor the list of that course for further verification. At this point, the user may still print one of two types of conflict matrices. However, the *Master Schedule Builder* can be used interactively or in automatic mode to resolve schedule conflicts. First the fixed singletons are entered. This is followed by the entering of singletons, doubletons, and tripletons, etc. Next, each section is placed in the order in which it was entered. "Look-ups" are available to see which courses are in conflict with a section, and even show those students that would have the conflict. Alternatively, a user may press the *f5* "Build key" and ***Administrator's Plus*** will place all of the courses for the user. When these steps are completed, the user is ready to perform the actual scheduling.

This is only a brief description of the procedure which *Scheduling Plus* helps to simplify. *Scheduling Plus* allows users to go back and change information or drop entire sections if needed. The software allows block or rotating schedules with up to twenty-four blocks meeting per day and eight-day rotations. The course master list does not include fields for either pre- or co-requisite courses, which means that the user must manually check that students have appropriate pre- and co-requisites when signing up for classes that require them.

Once the basic scheduling is complete, users can print a variety of reports including: student schedules;

student, staff and room master schedules; and course section rosters. If schools opt to purchase the *Study Hall Scheduler*, students with free periods can automatically be scheduled into study halls. *Scheduling Plus* is a straightforward, easy-to-use program with a fair amount of flexibility for creating a school's schedule. For the cost of the program, users will receive the same functionality of other more expensive software programs if they are willing to forego a Windows environment.

Attendance

Attendance Plus manages daily attendance, but if schools need to take period attendance they must purchase *Period Attendance*, an add-on module. With *Attendance Plus*, teachers take attendance in class or homeroom using either manual or scanner entry forms. These forms are submitted to the front office where attendance is entered into the system. Attendance may also be taken in the teacher's ***Grade Quick!*** by clicking on the picture of an absent or tardy student. The attendance can be electronically imported to the office for individuals or for all homerooms or sections. The office staff member can also see a list of those teachers who have not yet sent in their attendance files. He/she can then print out the attendance bulletin, warning letters to parents, or other reports.

Attendance Plus tracks both student and staff attendance using a system of register codes and attendance codes. There are six pre-defined register codes including "Absent," "Tardy," "Dismissed," "Non-Member," "Entry," and "Withdrawal" with the option of nineteen additional user-defined codes for a total of twenty-five register codes. These codes are used to

summarize attendance data on the attendance register. The second list of attendance codes which contains up to 250 codes may or may not be linked to the register codes. For example, "Absence Excused," "Absence Unexcused," or "Absence Medical" are all linked to the register code, "Absent." Two types of codes are offered so schools can have user-defined codes to track different types of absences (attendance codes) as well as a legal attendance register to reduce all of these specific codes to tardies, absences, or dismissals (register codes).

Once the daily attendance is entered, data can still be added or edited during the course of the year. Also, if it is already known that a student is going to be absent, it is possible to record that information before the day of his/her absence. Also, users can batch enter attendance codes and times for a particular grade level or any group of students who meet search criteria in a database field. For example, if all ninth-grade biology classes are going on a field trip, this can be entered automatically rather than recording this absence for each individual student. With the purchase of the "Attendance Plus Interface," schools that are networked can take daily and/or period attendance by clicking on students' pictures in a picture seating chart.

Depending on how a school wants or needs to manage attendance, this program does have some drawbacks. Although *Attendance Plus* allows for up to 250 user-defined absence codes, users cannot add messages to individual student records that would provide a narrative explanation for a the absence or tardiness. *Attendance Plus* may seem more awkward to use in the DOS environment for those who more accustomed to using other Windows-based attendance programs that have pull-down menus for codes and spreadsheet style screens for entering attendance information. However,

Rediker contends that attendance can be quickly entered into *Attendance Plus* by just typing in one, two, or three digits, or by finding the student on a "look-up" screen.

Grading

Report Cards Plus meets all of the basic criteria for defining grade requirements, entering grades into the system, and producing customized report cards and transcripts. *Report Cards Plus* is made up of twelve programs and, as with other ***Administrator's Plus*** software, these programs are basically used in the order they appear on the menu to input and calculate grades. The first program, "Customize RC" allows users to define the school's grading system and add to or edit report card comments. Users can choose either letter grades, number grades, or a split grading system that includes letter grades for lower grade levels and number grades for higher grade levels. Assigned values for letter grades and number grades can also be changed to a user's specification, but default values are already included. It is also possible to ask the system to print letter grades even though number grades are entered. Users can include up to two comments per course per student and can choose from a list of up to 190 comments. Unfortunately, it does not appear that these comments can be easily personalized for individual students. However, narratives that are entered into the teacher's ***Grade Quick!*** or any word processor may be printed on report cards.

Once the program has been customized to fit a school's unique grading system, courses and sections need to be entered into the computer. If the school is using *Scheduling Plus*, this information is already present

in the system. After courses and sections have been entered, manual and scannable forms can be printed for teachers to complete with the appropriate student grade information. The grades can be scanned in or entered manually and verification forms can be printed for the teacher to confirm that the correct grade has been entered.

Grades can also be uploaded from the electronic gradebook software, ***Grade Quick!*** by Jackson Software. ***Grade Quick!*** is available in DOS, Mac and Windows formats and comes with cross-platform capabilities so grades can be imported from a teacher's diskette regardless of which format he/she is using. If a school's classrooms are networked to the office, grades may be sent directly from the classrooms. In the near future, ***Grade Quick!*** will also make available an *Internet Access Module* for schools with a web site. This feature allows parents, with a password, to access their child's progress over the Internet.

Report Cards Plus can calculate averages and grade-point averages according to user-defined criteria. Individual courses, in other words, can be assigned weighted values for class rank and GPA calculations. A variety of pre-defined and user-defined reports can also be created. "Report Card Report Writer" allows users to customize or design report cards, transcripts, permanent labels, progress reports, deficiency letters, and honor roll congratulatory letters in addition to other user-defined reports. Both daily and period attendance can be printed on student's report card. "Statistical Reports" allows users to create class-rank reports or honor rolls. Users are also able to view or edit grades throughout the year.

Tracking student conduct is usually part of the school records module for most software products. However, Rediker Software sells a separate module for

accomplishing this task. This feature of ***Administrator's Plus*** is similar to conduct tracking in other software programs. By using user-defined codes to track both infractions and punishments served, users can print statistical reports about student behavior and send letters to parents alerting them to discipline infractions. *Discipline Plus* also keeps running tallies of who owes detentions and automatically deducts them as they have been served. *Discipline Plus* is not necessarily designed to handle positive student conduct. However, because of the programs inherent flexibility, users could set up codes to track positive behavior and allow letters of commendation to be sent to the parent or guardian.

SUMMARY

Rediker's ***Administrator's Plus*** consists of seven modules which can be separately purchased according to the user's needs. The system is DOS-based and menu-driven—a possible disappointment for potential buyers who prefer navigating in a Windows environment. One main attraction of this system is the customer service and price. Rediker offers users free technical support during a 90-day trial period as well as unlimited toll-free support for an extremely reasonable price. The price of this system is equally attractive: Rediker staggers the cost of ***Administrator's Plus*** according to the number of students attending the school of the potential buyers, and the system does not require expensive hardware to operate effectively. Considering the quality of the system and cost, ***Administrator's Plus*** may be a good choice for smaller schools or school districts.

Postscript

The process of integrating a student-records management software package into a school's administrative process should ultimately benefit the students, teachers, parents, and administrators. Collecting and maintaining information electronically on individual students allows a more complete profile on each student to be created. A variety of data that would have been too time-consuming to collect and report can now be a standard part of all student records. With integrated software packages, parents, teachers, and administrators have timely access to academic records, student activities, behavior, medical information, etc. In addition to this, data can be manipulated and reported on for the entire school community.

The evaluation guidelines and products discussed in this book are meant to serve as a model for administrators and others involved in the selection process. Thus, each reader should revise these guidelines to accommodate his or her own needs. After evaluating the products based on pre-determined criteria, it is vital to speak with users of the products under consideration. Feedback from users often reveals crucial information that might not have been discovered with even the most rigorous selection and evaluation criteria. Therefore, a combination of thorough research of user criteria, feedback from users, and direct observation of the software package within a school environment will insure a successful selection.

Appendix I.
Vendor and Product Information[13]

1. Blackbaud Inc.

Registrar's Office for Windows

Website: http://www.blackbaud.com
Address: 4401 Belle Oaks Drive
Charleston, SC 29405-8530
Phone: 800-443-9441
E-Mail: sales@blackbaud.com

For Blackbaud's complete product line, please see their web site. Here are some additional education-specific Blackbaud software products:

Admissions Office for Windows
This program tracks prospective students through the enrollment process and finally allows the user to accept, reject or enroll students.

The Raiser's Edge for Windows
Although it is not created exclusively for schools, Blackbaud's development/fundraising software is part of the ***Academy*** software suite.

Student Billing
This program generates charges, produces statements, records payments, and reports information.

School Store Minder
This program provides a point-of-sale solution for the bookstore, snack bar, cafeteria, athletic store and anywhere else on campus that purchases are made.

2. Chancery Software Ltd.
Win School and Mac School
Data District Manager
Library Pro

Website: http://www.chancery.com
Address: 2211 Rimland Drive, #224
Bellingham, WA 98226-5662 USA
Phone: 800-999-9931
Fax: 360-738-3255
E-Mail: chancery@chancery.com

3. Cornerstone Computer Consultants
Class Act School Administration System

Website: http://www.logos.edu/software/index.htm
Address: 27246 Oliver Drive
Bonita Springs, FL 34135-6054
Phone: 941-498-0960
Contact: Monk Robinson
E-Mail: monkrobin@peganet.com

4. **Digitronics Software**
   Student Services Educational System

   Website: http://www.digitronics.com
   Address: Sales Department
   420 West Lambert Road, Suite G
   Brea, CA 92821
   Phone: 714-255-1312
   E-Mail: sales@digitronics.com

5. **DPConsultants, Inc.**
   Tremont Software Student Management

   Website: http://www.software.dpc.net/products/smmod.html
   Address: 105 W. Walnut St.
   Tremont, IL 61568-1402
   Phone: 800-342-0188
   E-Mail: kayb@dpc.net

6. **Harts Systems Ltd.**
   Windsor School Administration System
   Harts Marks Gradebook System

   Website: http://www.corp.direct.ca/info
   Address: PO Box 3862
   Seattle, WA 98124-3862
   Phone: 604-734-1119
   E-Mail: windsor@harts.com

7. Hunter Systems

School Minder
Grade Minder

Website: http://www.huntersys.com
Address: 100 Century Park South, Suite 206
Birmingham, AL 35226
Phone: 800-326-0527
Fax: 205-979-3389
E-Mail: HunterSys@aol.com

8. National Computer Systems (NCS)

OSIRIS
Schools Administrative Student Information (SASI™ III and SASI™)
Comprehensive Information Management for Schools (CIMS® GIT and CIMS® III)

Website: http://www.ncs.com/
Address: 1100 Prairie Lakes Drive
Eden Prairie, MN 55344
Phone: 800-431-1421
E-Mail: info@ncs.com

9. M & J Data, Inc.

Solstar School Administration Systems

Website: http://cucare.clever.net/solstar/
Address: PO Box 36493
Charlotte, NC 28236-6493
Phone: 800-752-2236 or 704-332-9019
FAX: 704-334-9391
E-Mail: mlsalf@aol.com

10. Netel Educational Systems

SchoolNet Series School Administration Management Software

Website: http://www.netel.com
Address: 250 West First St., Suite 346
Claremont, CA 91711
Phone: 909-399-5688
E-Mail: pschultz@netel.com

11. Norris Education Innovations Inc.

UnitMaker Pro Software

Website: http://www.unithouse.com
Address: 2626 East 82nd Street, Suite 103
Bloomington, MN 55425
Phone: 612-854-7310
E-Mail: neii@neii.com

12. Pentamation Enterprises

Pentamation Education Systems

Website: http://www.pentamation.com
Address: 225 Marketplace
Bethlehem, PA 18018
Phone: 610-691-3616

13. QSS (Quintessential Software)

Student/3000 software

Website: http://www.qss.com
Address: 1000 Marshall St., Suite C
Redwood City, CA 94063
Phone: 415-306-1600
Fax: 415-365-2706
E-Mail: info@qss.com

14. Rediker Software, Inc.

Administrator's Plus

Website: http://www.rediker.com
Address: 38 East Brook Drive
Hamden, MA 01036
Phone: 800-882-2994 or 413-566-3034
Fax: 413-566-2274
E-Mail: sales@rediker.com

15. SchoolPro Software

SchoolPro Software

Website: http://www.schoolpro.com
Address: 2100 Sowtelle Blvd., Suite 202
W. Los Angeles, CA 90025
Phone: 800-867-8501
E-Mail: schoolpro@schoolpro.com

16. Skyward

Skyward

Website: http://www.skyward.com
Address: 5233 Coye Dr.
Stevens Point, WI 54481
Phone: 800-236-7274

18. Stardata Inc.

Infotracker

Website: http://www.stardata-usa.com
Address: Prado East, Suite 360
5600 Roswell Rd.
Atlanta, GA 30342-1119
Phone: 800-999-9782
Fax: 404-531-0200
E-Mail: infotracker@stardata-usa.com

Appendix 2.
Evaluation Checklist

SYSTEM COST

	Minimum Price	*Full-Feature Price*	*Maintenance*
Option 1:			
Option 2:			
Option 3:			

GENERAL SYSTEM CONSIDERATIONS

System Scope and Vendor Profile	
Does the system address the major functions (student records, scheduling, attendance and grading)?	
Option 1:	
Option 2:	
Option 3:	
Are these functions integrated into the system?	
Option 1:	
Option 2:	
Option 3:	
Does the system have security features that would prevent unauthorized personnel from accessing or updating information?	
Option 1:	
Option 2:	
Option 3:	
How long has the company been in business?	
Option 1:	
Option 2:	
Option 3:	

Ease of Use	
Does the system have a graphical user interface that allows both mouse and keyboard entry?	
Option 1:	
Option 2:	
Option 3:	
Does the system allow users to define new data fields? How many?	
Option 1:	
Option 2:	
Option 3:	
Does the system provide a report writer that includes a suite of standard reports, in addition to creating user-defined reports? How many standard reports are there?	
Option 1:	
Option 2:	
Option 3:	
Does the report writer allow users to view reports on screen as well as print to printers and files?	
Option 1:	
Option 2:	
Option 3:	

Does the system allow for a flexible query capability?	
Option 1:	
Option 2:	
Option 3:	
Does the system provide online help features and documentation?	
Option 1:	
Option 2:	
Option 3:	

Technical Merit	
Is the system a Client/Server product (capable of being networked)?	
Option 1:	
Option 2:	
Option 3:	
Can the system interface with the Internet?	
Option 1:	
Option 2:	
Option 3:	

Does the system perform real-time updating when information is entered from a workstation?	
Option 1:	
Option 2:	
Option 3:	
Can users create, modify, and manage import/export files?	
Option 1:	
Option 2:	
Option 3:	

System Qualifications	
How often are software enhancements and updates provided?	
Option 1:	
Option 2:	
Option 3:	
Is there an advisory board of users that provide regular feedback regarding the vendor's products and services?	
Option 1:	
Option 2:	
Option 3:	

How long has the product been available to consumers?	
Option 1:	
Option 2:	
Option 3:	

Support, Services and Training	
Does the vendor provide toll-free technical support via phone and electronic mail?	
Option 1:	
Option 2:	
Option 3:	
Does the customer reach a "live" person as opposed to an answering service when contacting technical support?	
Option 1:	
Option 2:	
Option 3:	
Does the vendor provide software updates with the annual support agreement?	
Option 1:	
Option 2:	
Option 3:	

Is remote-access support available? (i.e. can technical support staff, via dial-up or Internet, access a customer's database?)	
Option 1:	
Option 2:	
Option 3:	
Is on-site training available? (Will support staff visits customer site for user-specific training?)	
Option 1:	
Option 2:	
Option 3:	
Is off-site training available at the vendor's facility including seminars and workshops?	
Option 1:	
Option 2:	
Option 3:	
Are training workbooks and documentation provided?	
Option 1:	
Option 2:	
Option 3:	

EVALUATION OF INDIVIDUAL MODULES

School Records	
Does the system permit rapid data entry, especially for registration?	
Option 1:	
Option 2:	
Option 3:	
Does the system allow for alphanumeric student I.D.?	
Option 1:	
Option 2:	
Option 3:	
Does the system accommodate all necessary school information?	
Option 1:	
Option 2:	
Option 3:	
Does the system allow user-defined information fields, tables, reports and queries?	
Option 1:	
Option 2:	
Option 3:	

Does the system produce standard and user-defined reports?	
Option 1:	
Option 2:	
Option 3:	
Does the system allow for simultaneous access to individual student, staff, school, and class records?	
Option 1:	
Option 2:	
Option 3:	
Does the system allow an unlimited number of contacts for each student?	
Option 1:	
Option 2:	
Option 3:	
Does the system track student activities as well as manage health, discipline, test scores, and achievement information for students?	
Option 1:	
Option 2:	
Option 3:	

Does the discipline management allow for user-defined discipline infraction and response codes, notes on infractions, and discipline reporting capabilities?	
Option 1:	
Option 2:	
Option 3:	
Can the system can easily produce mailing labels?	
Option 1:	
Option 2:	
Option 3:	

Scheduling	
Does the system allow various organizational patterns (e.g. semester, full year)?	
Option 1:	
Option 2:	
Option 3:	

Can the system support a variety of scheduling modules including Block Scheduling, Rotating Schedules, Modular Schedules, and Team Teaching?	
Option 1:	
Option 2:	
Option 3:	
Does the system allow a variable number of instructional periods/days?	
Option 1:	
Option 2:	
Option 3:	
Does the system maintain previous, current, and next-year timetables?	
Option 1:	
Option 2:	
Option 3:	
Does the system have a master schedule building capability?	
Option 1:	
Option 2:	
Option 3:	

What is the maximum number of periods per day for scheduling?	
Option 1:	
Option 2:	
Option 3:	
Does the system facilitate rapid entry of course requests?	
Option 1:	
Option 2:	
Option 3:	
Does the system accommodate student preferences?	
Option 1:	
Option 2:	
Option 3:	
Does the system generate a potential conflict matrix and a report on which students have these conflicts?	
Option 1:	
Option 2:	
Option 3:	

Can the system schedule flexible lunch periods?	
Option 1:	
Option 2:	
Option 3:	

Attendance	
Does the system allow flexible reporting on all maintained attendance data?	
Option 1:	
Option 2:	
Option 3:	
Does the system allow input by either keyboard or optical scanners?	
Option 1:	
Option 2:	
Option 3:	
Does the system allow for attendance entry by user-defined group (i.e. the football team will be absent this Friday)?	
Option 1:	
Option 2:	
Option 3:	

Does the system allow for user-defined absence and reason codes?	
Option 1:	
Option 2:	
Option 3:	
Does the system track and store absences and tardies for each student on a period-by-period, daily interval, and minute-by-minute basis?	
Option 1:	
Option 2:	
Option 3:	
Does the system track reasons for absences, tardies, and early dismissals?	
Option 1:	
Option 2:	
Option 3:	
Does the system allow for the transfer of absences, tardies, and dismissals to the report card system?	
Option 1:	
Option 2:	
Option 3:	

Grading	
Does the system allow users to enter grades in a variety of ways (e.g., manual, scanner, download, and import from gradebook)?	
Option 1:	
Option 2:	
Option 3:	
Does the system interface with electronic gradebook programs?	
Option 1:	
Option 2:	
Option 3:	
Does the system allow for alpha, numeric, and user-defined grades?	
Option 1:	
Option 2:	
Option 3:	
Does the system allow users to define grading options, GPA calculations, and multiple GPA calculations?	
Option 1:	
Option 2:	
Option 3:	

Does the system allow users to customize GPA calculations?	
Option 1:	
Option 2:	
Option 3:	
Can the system produce report cards, progress reports, and transcripts?	
Option 1:	
Option 2:	
Option 3:	

References

[1] Readers should know that the information about the Blackbaud, Chancery, and Rediker software packages that is presented in this book is based on the products that were available during the summer of 1997. Readers who are interested in any package should contact these companies for the most current information.

[2] The module-specific criteria will be described in a later portion of this book.

[3] For a more detailed description of this process, see "Choosing a Computer Based Instructional Support System: An Evaluation/Selection Model," (Wright, 1990).

[4] Please see the appendix to contact National Computing Systems for a copy of this checklist.

[5] Several vendors do provide district-wide, records-management solutions and their names and contact information can be found in the appendix of this guide.

[6] Private independent schools who must address all of these needs will be particularly interested in the ***Academy***.

[7] This program is not included in the ***Registrar's Office for Windows*** package; a customer can purchase this module for an additional fee.

[8] ***Mac School*** won the "1993–94 Software Award" from *Technology and Learning*. ***Win School*** won the "1996–97 Software Award" from *Technology and Learning*. ***Win School*** won the "1995 Award Portfolio" from *Media and Methods*.

[9] In order to learn about these standards, please contact Chancery Ltd.

[10] It should be noted that users do not need to repeat the first and second steps each year. Rather, users will only have to make changes as they occur once the school parameters in "School Setup" have been set and the course information in "Details" is complete.

[11] The maximum price is $250 for schools with more than 400 students; the price continues to drop for schools with less than 400 students.

[12] The code is used to group courses together when printing a four-year transcript with students' courses sorted by subject.

[13] A list of links to vendor websites can be found at http://ericae.net.

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Index

Keeping track of students' academic careers from kindergarten to 12th grade has been a school administrator's nightmare. Fortunately, software is now available that can organize this seemingly impossible task into a cohesive and easy-to-use package. But selecting the right software for your school is a complex decision that requires input from staff, teachers, administrators, and technical systems personnel.

Lisa Vecchioli guides you through this process with facts, figures, enough latitude to make your own decisions, and just the right amount of hand-holding. You'll learn:

Get specific help in rating how each software package handles:

- *School Records*
- *Scheduling*
- *Attendance*
- *Grading*

- *Who should help select the appropriate software*
- *How to organize a search committee*
- *What guidelines to use for establishing your school's current and future needs*
- *Procedures for setting up product demonstrations and hands-on research.*

This book will also give you a blueprint for rating the different software packages that you'll be evaluating. With discussions of all the major functions that these programs should perform, you'll understand what to look for and the criteria to distinguish between the products available. Vecchioli puts these criteria into practice, and guides you through a step-by-step evaluation of three packages that are currently available.

You'll know what to look for in these categories:

- *Database Features*
- *Security*
- *User Interface*
- *System Requirements & Response Times*
- *Technical Support*
- *Training*

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