In the following report, Hanover Research investigates electronic enrollment and course registration options for K-12 schools. Additionally, we describe the registration processes at school districts across the country and identify promising registration software platforms.
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INTRODUCTION AND KEY FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

Every year, millions of students and their families go through the process of registering for school or class. When families move to a new school, registration often entails assembling required materials, completing forms, and waiting in line on specific registration days. For students selecting courses, registration may also involve multiple exchanges of paperwork and time spent coordinating schedules with school staff members. Technological advances, fueled by the rapid growth of the educational technology industry, have already begun to simplify these processes at school districts across the country. Dozens of manufacturers claim to have developed products that streamline the process, reducing paperwork and the amount of time families and school staff members must dedicate to the registration process.

This report investigates options for electronic student registration. The report is divided as follows:

- **Section I: Student Electronic Registration** introduces the two different types of student registration and explores different options for registering students electronically.
- **Section II: Profiles of School Registration Systems** briefly profiles electronic registration systems at schools around the United States.

KEY FINDINGS

- **There are generally two different types of student registration: start-of-year enrollment and course registration.** Start-of-year enrollment typically requires families to submit or update biographical information to the school, while course registration requires enrolled students (typically in high school) to select the courses they will take in the upcoming year.

- **New student enrollment must be completed manually by parents at most K-12 school districts across the country.** The vast majority of schools examined during our research require that parents present documents with proof of age, residency, and immunization in person at the school or district in which they intend to enroll. However, educational technology companies offer a wide variety of electronic enrollment products, and some schools have adopted electronic enrollment processes.
Some districts allow students to register for courses online, although this is not a common practice among all school districts. Most of the school districts examined require that students meet with a school staff member and complete course registration plans that are finalized by a school registrar. When districts do allow students to register for courses online, the process is generally integrated into the school’s student information system.

Multiple manufacturers produce electronic school registration systems. However, analysis of such systems generally requires a live demonstration of the product and extended discussion with company representatives. We reached out to a number of manufacturers, but all were unwilling to discuss product capabilities with a non-school-district representative.
SECTION I: STUDENT ELECTRONIC REGISTRATION

This section briefly introduces two different types of student registration and identifies possible vendors of student registration solutions.

TERMINOLOGY

Our research indicates that there are two distinct situations in which students may register with a school: when enrolling for the first time and when selecting classes for each period. In this report, we distinguish between the two registration types by categorizing them as enrollment and course registration.

The most common enrollment process at K-12 school districts is typically initiated manually by a student and/or his or her family. The applicant must present a series of documents in person to the school or district to which he or she is applying. These documents serve as proof of identity, residency, health, and other qualifications. After the application is submitted, the school or district processes the enrollment and enter the student into its system. However, recent technology has enabled some districts to digitize the enrollment process, allowing parents to enroll their students online.

The second form of student registration, course registration, is completed in person or electronically. At some schools, students may design a course plan and enter it into the online system without initial support from staff members, while at other schools, students must gain approval from school staff for each step of the registration process. Regardless, students at all schools examined must meet with school staff members at some point in the registration process to submit and receive registration documents, confirm course credits, and discuss long-term plans.
REGISTRATION SOFTWARE PRODUCTS

Schools that allow parents and students to register electronically typically do so with the assistance of an educational technology vendor. These vendors provide a wide range of software options with different prices and capabilities. Schools can choose from a variety of vendors, including:

- Active Network
- Affinity Solutions
- besimpler
- Ed Automate
- InfoSnap
- K-12 Online
- Registration Gateway
- School Office PRO

Student registration products range from fully-functional, standalone student information systems (SISs) to programs that focus specifically on student registration. Many of the standalone products, especially those from Pearson partners like Registration Gateway, are designed to integrate data seamlessly into PowerSchool or other major SISs.

Prices, capabilities, and unique features of these products vary by manufacturer. In the course of our research, we reached out to over 10 different educational technology companies for details on the student registration capabilities of their software product. Unfortunately, most manufacturers are unwilling to provide details about their products without a live demonstration. Further, they do not typically provide product information to individuals who are not employed by a potential client school district. We were therefore unable to review the different electronic registration products firsthand to provide an analysis of each product’s capabilities. We also sought out third-party reviews of student registration platforms. While organizations such as edshelf, edSurge, and Graphite review different types of educational technology products, none focuses on products with student registration capabilities.

The lack of publicly-available information and access to software manufacturers made it difficult to analyze the many software registration systems or conduct side-by-side comparisons of different products. To examine the variety of options available, school
districts may choose to reach out to software manufacturers directly or submit a request for proposal (RFP) from student registration system manufacturers.

**REQUESTS FOR PROPOSAL**

Submitting RFPs for student registration systems is not unheard of. RFPs for districtwide SISs often include sections on electronic registration and detail the specific registration capabilities that any proposed SIS should possess. RFPs for standalone electronic registration systems, while less common than SIS RFPs, have also been submitted by school districts. The requests may include requirements for enrollment, course registration, or both. Examples of electronic registration RFPs are described below.

In South Carolina, Spartanburg County School District Six (SCSD) submitted a RFP for “a fully integrated Online Registration System” that would facilitate efficient registration for the district’s 12,000 students. According to the district, vendors must:

- Host the registration system online for 24 hours per day, seven days per week, 365 days per year
- Provide secure online forms populated with biographical information provided by the district
- Provide customizable forms that reflect district characteristics
- Ensure clean and consistent data collection that meets the district’s formatting specifications
- Configure data to integrate with PowerSchool and other software
- Provide administrative tools that allow district personnel to run custom reports and check data
- Provide on-site training for personnel
- Provide online payment of fees
- Provide systems in English and Spanish.

Further, SCSD provided a detailed description of how it intended the online registration to function, including steps from the beginning of the enrollment process through registrar review of data. SCSD outlined 12 detailed expectations for its registration service provider, including:

- User-friendly interfaces
- Single point of contact with vendor
- Quick response time to issues
- Scalable application
Good end-user documentation\textsuperscript{13}

Downers Grove Grade School District 58 in Downers Grove, Illinois submitted an RFP specifically for an online student registration system. Downers Grove stated that proposed products should:

- Be compatible with a Mac operating system
- Be integrated with PowerSchool
- Accept school fee payments
- Translate into multiple languages
- Upload a variety of student documents including custody, residency, and immunization
- Provide on-site staff training\textsuperscript{14}

North Hunterdon-Voorhees Regional High School District in Annandale, New Jersey noted in its 2014 SIS RFP that proposed products should provide new families the ability to register online. The RFP also includes language requiring that proposed products allow students to post course requests through an online student portal.\textsuperscript{15}

Similarly, Tri-Creek School Corporation in Lowell, Indiana stated that any proposed “SIS must provide a user-friendly method of online registration, customizable by district staff.” This requirement includes options for parents to register students online and for students to register for classes online. Additionally, the RFP requires that the SIS allow staff members to customize registration forms and fields online.\textsuperscript{16}


SECTION II: PROFILES OF SCHOOL REGISTRATION SYSTEMS

This section describes school registration systems at various school districts that have implemented online student registration processes. The vast majority of examined schools require parents and students to complete registration in person. However, we provide some examples of districts that support electronic registration bellow.

ENROLLMENT

CHARLESTON COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT (CHARLESTON, SC)

Charleston County School District (CCSD) currently offers online registration to new families. CCSD partners with InfoSnap to provide this service.17 CCSD does not provide extensive detail about its electronic registration process, but it does note that applicants must provide the following documents:

- Birth certificate
- Certificate of immunization
- Notarized affidavit of residency
- Proof of parent’s residency.18

The InfoSnap software uses data in current school databases to securely pre-populate forms for parents, streamlining the enrollment process for parents. In addition, InfoSnap provides support services for users, eliminating the need for school staff members to serve as technical support during the enrollment process. InfoSnap’s tools import and format student data for management by school administrators. InfoSnap capabilities include custom reports, custom labels, and multiple data views. Finally, InfoSnap can be integrated with most major SIS products, including PowerSchool.19

BEAUFORT COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT (BEAUFORT, SC)

Beaufort County School District (BCSD), like CCSD, uses InfoSnap to enroll its students electronically. BCSD uses InfoSnap to enroll new and returning students, as well as to update student information in the school’s information systems. However, it is important to note that document submission must still be completed in person.20

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19 “See how it works.” InfoSnap. https://www.infosnap.com/m/see-how-it-works
20 “Online Student Registration.” Beaufort County School District. http://www.beaufort.k12.sc.us/pages/BCSD/Departments/Student_Services/Online_Student_Registration
Horry County School District (Conway, SC)

Horry County School District (HCSD) also allows families to register online using InfoSnap. However, new families must register in person for their first year in the district. Registration for subsequent years can be completed online. Documents can be submitted in person or via mail. By registering online and sending documents by mail, parents can register their students without ever visiting an HCSD campus.

Boston Public Schools (Boston, MA)

Boston Public Schools (BPS), which serves more than 57,000 students, primarily relies on a traditional in-person registration process at the beginning of each year. However, it also offers an electronic pre-registration option. BPS’ large size requires creativity in the enrollment process to accommodate its vast student population.

BPS’ maximizes efficiency in the enrollment process by dividing the year into multiple registration periods and assigning families to specific registration weeks based on the first letter of their last names. BPS offers four registration periods, but it strongly recommends that new families enroll during the first two registration periods. The January enrollment period is designed for new kindergarten, sixth grade, and ninth grade students, while the February enrollment period is designed for all other students who are new to the district. The enrollment periods are further divided according to the parent’s last name – each week during the enrollment period is assigned to parents with a specific range of last names (e.g., one week for last names beginning with A through I, another for last names beginning with J-Q). BPS divides the remaining enrollment opportunities into third and fourth registration periods, beginning in April and ending in June.

The BPS enrollment system is based on a choice model where applicants indicate their preferred schools and sort them in order of preference. Students are assigned to schools based on their preferences and a lottery that takes place after each registration period.

BPS provides a wide variety of resources to assist parents through the registration process. BPS publishes a guide on its website explaining how to visit schools, when decisions must be made, how the school assignment process works, and what the requirements for registration are. However, all of these supports do not alleviate the trouble of parents filling out paperwork and school staff entering family information into the system. BPS, therefore, allows parents to pre-register online, maximizing the amount of time spent completing and processing paperwork.

25 Ibid.
COURSE REGISTRATION

Our review of school district course registration practices revealed few districts that publish information about online course registration options publicly. This lack of information may be the result of schools circulating their registration internally, or it may indicate that schools rely on traditional, in-person registration systems. The absence of any form of guide to electronic registration suggests that the examined schools rely primarily on manual course registration. These manual processes, such as the one used at James F. Byrnes High School in Duncan, South Carolina, typically require students to complete a registration plan with a school staff member and submit that plan to the registrar for final review.28

AGOURA HIGH SCHOOL (AGOURA HILLS, CA)

Agoura High School, located in Los Angeles County,29 requires that students enroll for courses online using the AERIES SIS. Registration is built into the school’s districtwide SIS and does not rely on a standalone registration system to support efficient electronic registration. Despite relying on an entirely-online course registration process, students may still be required to meet with advisors on a scheduled registration day to complete other registration procedures such as collecting class ID cards, parking passes, and class schedules. Students are assigned to specific registration periods based on their grade and last name.30

HENRY M. GUNN HIGH SCHOOL (PALO ALTO, CA)

Henry M. Gunn High School (HGHS) in Palo Alto, California, provides 10th, 11th, and 12th students the option to enroll for courses online or in person, although online registration is the preferred option.31 Freshman students must complete registration in person.32 Online registration is completed through the district’s main SIS, Infinite Campus, which has a built-in course registration process. Students may select some, but not all, of their courses online. Courses such as math and science are assigned by the district.33

FORT COLLINS HIGH SCHOOL (FORT COLLINS, CO)

Current students at Fort Collins High School (FCHS) enroll for classes online through the district’s Naviance college and career planning platform. Regardless of whether a second- or third-year student chooses to enroll online, he or she must meet with a school counselor to confirm and finalize his or her schedule. New and transfer students must register in person.34

29 “About Agoura HS.” Agoura High School.
http://www.agourahighschool.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=29&Itemid=126#theschool
http://www.agourahighschool.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=770&Itemid=1367
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