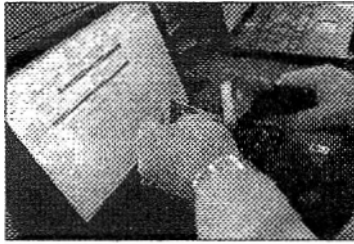


## Schools go high-tech to crack down on tardiness

### Irving ISD: Web-based program makes it easy to track late students

By KATHERINE LEAL UNMUTH  
Staff Writer

Published: October 27, 2005



**IRVING** - Much like they would at a supermarket checkout, tardy students line up inside MacArthur High School's entrance so teachers can scan the bar codes on their identification cards.

A computer printer produces their punishment, which also serves as a hall pass. It's a ticket to class since teachers are expected to shut and lock their doors at the final bell.

The school is in its third year of using the Web-based eCampus USA system. Principal Tracie Fraley said it has cut down on tardies and made punishments more equal. She can also generate reports to watch trends or check on specific students.

Irving High also uses the system, and this year Nimitz High School began using it. It's also in use in other North Texas districts, including Dallas, Frisco and Garland.

Before the system, tardy slips were written out manually. Classroom teachers were expected to keep track of late students, and they weren't always consistent with discipline.

"It was just a management nightmare to try to keep up with so many students," Ms. Fraley said. "We weren't always accurate. This way it's much more objective."

The school's enrollment is about 2,400. Several hundred students were late first period before the system, Ms. Fraley said, but now there are usually only 20 to 30 unexcused tardies.

She grins and refers to it as the "tardy party." But for students, a visit to the "tardy table" is no party. Michael Simpson, 18, a senior who has been late, preferred the more relaxed system of the past.

"It was better because the teachers let you go, they didn't feel like making you stay after school," he said. "They said just be on time next time."

Now the students receive a printout of their punishment - a warning, detention or night school depending on how many times they've been late, and proceed to class. Even if they bring a note and receive

an excused admit, the system tracks it.

"If we see a parent that is writing an excuse note every day, we talk to the parent," Ms. Fraley said.

Since the first two tardies are warnings, the early months of the school year tend to have a higher number of tardies, Ms. Fraley said.

In September, 2,642 tardies were recorded. The numbers represented repeat offenders and excused tardies. At the beginning of the school year, crowding was an issue, so buses had to make more than one run for students, making some get excused tardies, Ms. Fraley said.

As of Tuesday, there were 1,009 tardies in October.

The numbers also tend to climb again before summer. Last May there were 840 tardies.

Emily Vogt, 17, a senior, said the process seems more organized. She served in-school suspension last year for being late.

"Nobody wants to go to the tardy station," she said. "Sometimes people would rather skip than go to the tardy station."

Students can check in as tardy the first 30 minutes of class. After that they're marked absent.

Nimitz vice principal Michael Campbell said the school's tardies between classes have been reduced, but there are still about 50 students late to first hour.

"Students not getting to class on time is a big issue in our school," he said. "I think it's really working in the middle of the day, but we're still having more tardies than I would like first period. We're hoping it's going to get better."

Mike Grayson, founder of FTI Global of Fairview, who developed the system, said it came about after an information technology employee from Lancaster schools contacted him in 1999.

**The eCampus USA Internet-based program, which is used at MacArthur High and other North Texas schools, tracks the number of times a student is late. At MacArthur, the number of tardies has decreased in the last month.**

It was fully functional by 2001 and Mr. Grayson said it serves about 30 schools in the Dallas-Fort Worth area ranging from Sunset High School in Oak Cliff to Frisco High School and is expanding to middle schools.

Pricing is based on enrollment. A school with 2,000 students pays \$149 a month.

Naaman Forest High School in Garland was one of the earliest clients. Principal Steve Baker said it is a more just system than relying on teachers to dole out discipline. He said in the past some teachers were seen as the "bad guy" if they punished students.

"The thing I like is that it doesn't make the teacher the enforcer," Mr. Baker said. "Then it doesn't turn into an argument with a student saying, 'Well Ms. so-and-so let me in late.'"

Schools can opt to use a function that automatically e-mails parents if their children are tardy or one that generates form letters to send out. MacArthur uses the form-letter option.

"We didn't want to develop a system that just tracks students, we wanted a system that gets them to class on time," Mr. Grayson said. "In order to hold the student accountable you need to be able to issue the consequence immediately."

Students aren't the biggest fans.

MacArthur student Cassandra Duree, 18, complained about one first-period tardy in which she said she was standing right in front of the door when the teacher swung it shut as the 8:15 a.m. bell rang.

The computer printed out a punishment reflecting the time was 8:14:55, however, and she contested it.

"The lady said, 'You're still tardy - my computer wasn't working,'" Cassandra said.

www.eCampusUSA.net  
888.239.3121  
469.361.3487  
PO Box 3249  
McKinney, TX 75070