



Springboard for success

Lee County Public Schools equips students with Adobe certifications that build professional-level skills for careers in digital media and beyond



When it comes to competing for jobs or gaining admittance to two- or four-year colleges, graduation from high school is a bare-minimum requirement. These days, students can boost their chances of success in landing jobs and launching careers by earning technical certifications that are highly valued by employers and colleges.

Lee County Public Schools, the ninth-largest district in Florida and one of the 50 largest school districts in the United States, has become a model for other schools within the state and across the nation in equipping students with industry certifications, including Adobe Certified Associate (ACA) and Adobe Certified Expert (ACE) programs that build professional-level skills in Adobe® Creative Suite®4 Master Collection software.

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Jana Hambruch, project director, Office of Zone and Attractor Programs and Technical, Career and Adult Education, Lee County Public Schools

“Adobe is an integral part of our technical certification programs,” says Jana Hambruch, project director, Office of Zone and Attractor Programs and Technical, Career, and Adult Education for Lee County Public Schools. “Adobe understands education and shares our vision for what we’re trying to accomplish with our technical certification programs. And, because Adobe Creative Suite applications are considered the standard they are what students will need to know if they decide to pursue careers in digital media.”

The growing need for career and technical education

Lee County Public Schools is heavily focused on preparing students to excel in an information-based society. Amid today's rocky economic climate, rapid technological advances, governmental pressure, and increasing globalization, schools and teachers face increasing challenges to prepare students for the future. Effective career and technical education programs reflect the reality of the changing workplace

and give students ways to explore career options, build transferable skills, and access multiple paths to success—all while helping build a more qualified workforce.

In 2005, the district launched the Academy for Technology Excellence (ATE) at Dunbar High School. Funded through a federal magnet education grant, Dunbar's ATE serves an ethnically diverse student population. A large percentage of Dunbar students come from low-income backgrounds, and some have limited English language skills. Designed to accommodate 360 students in grades 9 through 12, the ATE offers hands-on courses taught by IT-certified instructors. A testament to the program's success in engaging students is that well over 95% of ATE students—those who started as freshman and remained in the program for all four years—graduated.

Rigorous technology curriculum boosts overall student performance

Recognizing that students sometimes need encouragement to stay in school and graduate, the ATE offers a wide range of information technology classes to tap the enthusiasm that many high school students have for computers. By providing the opportunity to earn valuable industry certifications, the ATE helps graduates secure jobs while aligning with the business community's need for qualified technical professionals.

As students finish courses and achieve certifications, their grades go up in other classes. The program also makes a difference

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in students’ performance on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Tests (FCAT), the state’s standardized tests. Statistics show that ATE students score higher on average—in some cases, hundreds of points higher—than their non-Academy peers on the FCATs. Hambruch attributes this success to the test-taking strategies that ATE students learn and to the demanding coursework in the curriculum, which strengthens students’ ability to read, interpret, and process higher-level information. They also learn how to work in a collaborative environment and how to think like mature professionals.

“With technical certification programs, we are building more than just technology acumen,” says Hambruch. “We have seen standardized test scores among students who participate in certification programs soar above the state and district average. We’ve shown that the rigorous technology education programs motivate students to excel in other core academic areas like reading, math, and science. It’s something the students desire; you can see their excitement the minute they start participating in the industry certification programs.”

A springboard to success

Equally important, these programs often inspire and engage disenfranchised students. Students who may have not even envisioned graduating from high school are graduating with diplomas and real-world job skills, with certifications to back up the skills and a sense of confidence in their abilities—and in the future.

Some Dunbar students have graduated with 19 different certifications over the four-year program. Others have landed IT jobs with titles such as application specialist, network administrator, systems engineer, and computer support technician.

Dunbar students who choose to go on to college after graduating are also benefiting from the program. A dual-enrollment option enables students to earn high school and college credits simultaneously. One student was able to get a two-year jumpstart on pursuing a degree in IT security.

An easily replicated model

With the success at Dunbar High School, the district has begun implementing additional programs. Lee County has developed a cost-effective, easily replicated model for training and testing both instructors and students that is spreading rapidly across the district. Teachers and students are taught and certified locally to eliminate the need to pay for travel costs. By certifying all of the instructors who participate in the programs, educators are well equipped to teach essential 21st century skills.

Already, all 13 high schools and two technical centers have a site license for Adobe Creative Suite 3 software. The district is standardizing on Adobe Creative Suite 4 Master Collection software to support ACA and ACE training and testing in the 2009/2010 school year. Eight high schools have testing centers and new centers are opening rapidly.

Lee County Public Schools

Fort Myers, Florida

www.leeschools.net

Challenge

- Prepare students for college and careers
- Boost student grades
- Engage disenfranchised students
- Build a more qualified workforce

Solution

- Deployed cost-effective, easily replicated industry certification programs based on Adobe Creative Suite 4 Master Collection

Benefits

- Students are achieving higher grades and standardized test scores
- More students stay in school and graduate with a head start toward college and successful careers
- Students are graduating with competitive skills required in today’s workplace

Toolkit

- Adobe Creative Suite 4 Master Collection. Components used include:
 - Adobe Acrobat® 9 Pro
 - Adobe InDesign® CS4
 - Adobe Illustrator® CS4
 - Adobe Photoshop® CS4 Extended
 - Adobe Flash® CS4 Professional
 - Adobe Dreamweaver® CS4
 - Adobe Fireworks® CS4
 - Adobe Contribute® CS4
 - Adobe After Effects® CS4
 - Adobe Premiere® Pro CS4
 - Adobe Soundbooth® CS4
 - Adobe OnLocation™ CS4
 - Adobe Encore® CS4
 - Adobe Bridge CS4
 - Adobe Device Central CS4

"We're also beginning to integrate Adobe technologies more and more as part of our core subjects. Students love using Adobe software—it's a central part of our efforts to keep students engaged and prepare them for the future."

**Denise Spence, Magnet Grant Technology lead teacher,
Academy for Technology Excellence, Lee County Public Schools**

Two levels of Adobe certification are available for Lee County's educators and students. The ACA certification, developed and deployed by Adobe partner Certiport, is a credential that validates entry-level skills needed to plan, design, build, and maintain effective communications by using different forms of digital media. As a Certiport education customer for offering the ACA exams, Lee County Public Schools can conduct unlimited ACA testing in one classroom with up to 30 computers using an affordable, once-a-year license fee, making it easier to afford and budget tests. The ACE certification is a recognized worldwide standard that indicates in-depth Adobe software skills held by those at advanced levels.

"When I saw that Adobe offered the ACA Exam Classroom License through Certiport, I thought it was really visionary," says Hambruch. "It means we have lower costs and simplified budgeting, which makes it easier to expand our implementation."

Integrating multimedia education

While Lee County Public Schools offers certifications in many different types of technologies, Hambruch believes the addition of the ACA and ACE programs will be particularly compelling for instructors and

students. Whether students are learning skills in the context of illustration, graphic design, web design and development, or film design and production, Adobe software provides the same integrated workflow capabilities that today's working professionals rely on. A common user interface and smooth integration across all Creative Suite 4 tools enable students and educators to quickly learn the software, explore creative options, and work faster and more fluidly.

While in school, students can use the software to produce impressive portfolios that will get them noticed later, as well as learn skills that will help them succeed after entering the workforce.

"With Adobe software, we are starting to open Academies of Digital Design to enable students to achieve ACA and ACE certifications," says Denise Spence, Magnet Grant Technology lead teacher, Academy for Technology Excellence, Lee County Public Schools. "What's more, we're also beginning to integrate Adobe technologies more and more as part of our core subjects. Students love using Adobe software—it's a central part of our efforts to keep students engaged and prepare them for the future."



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