



Educational Technology Markets

News and analysis of business opportunities in technology applications, distance learning, networking and telecommunications



TheHellerReport™

Vol 13 No 4 February 2002

Steve Gardner: Evolution not revolution

Steve Gardner, vp of marketing and business development for NCS Learn (Mesa, AZ) sees ESEA as part of a continual progression in the standards movement, which started many years ago, an evolution, not a revolution. It formalizes at the federal level what had already been taking place in the states -- an increased focus on how schools are progressing and how they are addressing the needs of their students.

NCS Learn likes the fact that the ESEA requires the states to tie their tests to their standards, which should help make sure that the focus is the same in the classroom and on the test.

Gardner says that the schools are realizing that they have to test. The problem is that once the test scores come out, it is too late to address problems. NCS Learn clients are looking for ways that will help them not be surprised when the scores come out and want those solutions to work within the context of normal learning.

The company addresses that need with its new *High-Stakes Management*, which ties the outcomes as measured by NCS Learn courseware to results on

high-stakes tests. This allows NCS to forecast how long it will take a student to reach a certain level or to look at a student's current learning trajectory and tell the school where that student will be at a given point in time.

"Once students are placed in the system in the fall, we can give a school administrator a forecast of their high-stakes test results," Gardner says "We can provide detail, identifying areas of weakness so teachers can modify the instructional plan and monitor progress toward the goal throughout the year, all without turning the classroom upside down."

NCS Learn doesn't just tell schools that the way to remediate problems is to buy more courseware. As part of **Pearson Education** the company is working with its partner publishing companies like **Scott Foresman** and **Prentice Hall** to tie student outcomes from its courseware directly to resources in the curriculum programs that the schools are adopting.

"One of the advantages of convergence is that we can bring the different elements together in a more cohesive way so that teachers are aware of the ways in which different learning tools and curricula work together," Gardner

points out. The combination of resources is very powerful.

State Level Marketing

Gardner says that one of the trends they are watching is increased state-level involvement as decision maker and buyer. States are looking to exert more control and trying to standardize platforms and capabilities across districts. Gardner believes that the ESEA legislation will probably move more states in that direction.

Gardner says that NCS Learn has the breadth of resources that allows them to approach states interested in a more standardized approach. The company can put a system in place that will allow a state to implement and deliver the curriculum, monitor progress and even provide statewide electronic testing services.

Another trend that comes into play here is the convergence of disparate systems. Districts and states find themselves with separate silos of information that don't interoperate. Gardner says that even before ESEA, customers have been pushing NCS Learn to make its systems (which as a result of multiple acquisitions, often come from several companies) work together and to work with other vendors' products. That demand is going to continue to grow.

NCS Learn's goal is to be an open system and to accommodate other products. But Gardner says that they are uniquely positioned to provide many of the elements of a comprehensive solution under one umbrella. Many smaller companies, who have only a part of a solution, will have to partner in order to meet the increased demand for comprehensive, interoperable product.

The Parent Audience

Gardner identifies the drive to more formally bring parents into the picture as another important trend, reinforced by ESEA requirements. Technology can play a big role in that process. NCS Learn has always considered parents as part of their audience and the company's products provide meaningful information to parents about how their children are performing.

But Gardner envisions a scenario that goes much farther. "We are already tracking the instructional calendar and we know when students will be addressing certain skills in the classroom," Gardner says. "We could notify parents that in one month your child will be learning fractions. Would you like to learn them now? And we can use our adult learning product to deliver that instruction." In the same way, the company could send parents to relevant web sites. Parents, children and schools all benefit. ♦

Contact: Steve Gardner, NCS Learn, 888-627-5327