



# Microsoft® Office Specialist

Helps motivate students in the California  
Division of Juvenile Justice

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*Success Story*



## **JOHANNA BOSS HIGH SCHOOL CALIFORNIA DIVISION OF JUVENILE JUSTICE**

### **Location:**

Stockton, California

### **Program enrollment:**

50 per year

### **Success Metrics:**

- Confidence booster
- Technology training to equip juvenile offenders with workforce skills
- Employer-valued credential

## **JOHANNA BOSS HIGH SCHOOL OFFERS INDUSTRY-RESPECTED CERTIFICATION TO YOUTH IN THE JUVENILE DETENTION SYSTEM**

### **CHALLENGE**

The Division of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) provides education and treatment to California's youthful offenders up to the age of 25 who have the most serious criminal backgrounds and most intense treatment needs. DJJ operates an accredited school district, providing youth with the same high school curriculum in each of its four institutions that they would receive in their local community.

Youth attend school each day to achieve a high school diploma, and DJJ considers a diploma or GED a minimum requirement for parole consideration. Certificates in a variety of vocations and college classes are offered to graduates as well. Since 2004, 5,642 youth have achieved some form of academic achievement, and the number of youth completing a high school education has increased 300 percent.

In 2007, Johanna Boss High School technology teacher Chris Lawyer wanted to offer his DJJ students an industry-recognized certification. He began with 22 students on track to earn A+ certification, and ended with just 4 students who completed the course and earned college credit but not certification.

"A+ was too hard and it wasn't a good fit for our program," said Lawyer. "I wanted something that would give these kids an edge in the workforce, but it had to be feasible for them to complete it in a reasonable amount of time for youth without much experience with computers."

Lawyer began to look for a more useful certification his students could earn to teach them real world job skills. The certification needed to be implemented primarily at Johanna Boss High School, with distance learning opportunities for students at other DJJ institutions and reception centers. In addition, Johanna Boss needed an offline solution, since students/wards are not allowed access to the Internet.

### **SOLUTION**

Lawyer attended a technology and education conference in 2007, where he met Certiport and began to research the Microsoft Office Specialist (MOS) certification exams. Certiport could offer Johanna Boss High School the ability to test students offline, which was hard to come by in the industry.

"I was attracted to the Microsoft exams because Microsoft application skills are something employers want to see, said Lawyer. "We knew MOS certification would be something our kids could take with them when they leave."

Lawyer did not have any trouble getting the administration on board with working with Certiport to adopt MOS certification. "We thought the MOS exams would be a great fit, but Chris had to do a lot of work to get the project up and running," said James Shaw, Vocational

# Microsoft® Office Specialist

*"We are working with kids who came to us from terrible situations, destroyed families and who have committed serious crimes. For them to complete their high school diploma or GED and then focus on something as positive as computer application skills and earn certification – it is life changing and helps them make a productive life for themselves."*

– **James Shaw,**  
**Vocational Vice Principal at**  
**Johanna Boss High School**

Vice Principal at Johanna Boss High School.

The procurement process was long since California State government has many restrictions and guidelines, but Lawyer purchased MOS exams for his first class and Johanna Boss High School became a Certiport Authorized Testing Center in 2008. A Perkins Grant funded the program.

The program was set up to have Johanna Boss students who are not quite ready for MOS certification take an Operating Systems course from Lawyer, and those who are ready can take a Microsoft Word or Microsoft PowerPoint course.

"Most of the students in my technology classes have earned their diploma or GED, and they are ready for more advanced training," said Lawyer. "This is not an easy test, and the students have to have very high reading comprehension skills to succeed."

Unlike a traditional school, Johanna Boss has open entry and exit, so students are coming in and out of the courses all of the time. As a result, Lawyer has set up a flexible study plan whereby each student works on the path to certification at their own pace. Students who have earned certification and mastered pertinent Microsoft skills assist others as they study and take Certiprep practice exams.

## RESULTS

During the first year, 10 Johanna Boss students earned MOS certification. Today, more than 60 certifications have been earned and the program is growing. Other DJJ high schools have begun to participate through distance learning, and some students are even going the extra mile to earn their MOS Master certification – which shows they passed four MOS certification exams.

"Chris' course is very popular, there is usually a waiting list," said Shaw. "Most of these kids have only had negative experiences in life, so earning certification gives them something positive to focus on – it truly empowers our students to do better things with their lives."

When Johanna Boss students earn an MOS certificate, they are recognized on campus and at graduation. For many families, earning certification may be one of their child's crowning achievements at this point in their lives.

"When I have families come in for Open House and I hand them a DJJ envelope, I think they are worried about what their child did now," said Lawyer. "When they open up that envelope and see their child earned a Microsoft Certification, the look on their face is priceless. These students and their families finally have something to be excited about."

Shaw adds, "We are working with kids who came to us from terrible situations, destroyed families and who have committed serious crimes. For them to complete their high school diploma or GED and then focus on something as positive as computer application skills and earn certification – it is life changing and helps them make a productive life for themselves."

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