NORTH DAKOTA

SSIS Questions for Phone Testimonies from other States
Rhode Island Department of Education
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Background:

- Where were you before you had a centralized system? Did you have an SSIS before this one?
  We had no centralized system in North Dakota previously. All schools ran various flavors of SIS locally. There was no State SIS.
- How do you define an SSIS?
  An application and database that is used for daily administrative business in the school such as attendance, reporting both local and state, historical grades, transcripts and a teacher gradebook.
- Was there legislation to mandate the SSIS? (Can we have a copy?)
  In the 2009 North Dakota Legislature, House bill 1400 mandated the use of PowerSchool® as the State Student information system.
  House bill 1400 states:
  SECTION 9. A new section to chapter 15.1-07 of the North Dakota Century Code is created and enacted as follows:
  Student information system - Statewide coordination. Notwithstanding any other technology requirements imposed by the superintendent of public instruction, the information technology department, or the North Dakota educational technology council, each school district shall acquire PowerSchool through the information technology department and use it as its principal student information system.

Getting Started:

- What were the political problems you had at the beginning?
  None in the beginning. PowerSchool® was strictly voluntary. Schools came on at their own pace and we had over 100 school districts implemented in the first 6 years. With the legislative mandate, we have 64 school districts to implement and we have not heard any political issues rise from the mandate. At first there was a group that was resistant but that has dissipated for the most part.
- What were the practical problems you had at the beginning?
  Implementation was an issue. We had the vendor doing implementations at first and hired a third party to help the schools cleanse their data. This didn't work very well.
  - How did you resolve them?
    After myself and my staff attended a few implementation kickoffs, I realized that we would be able to do the job much more efficiently. The smaller school districts have very little time to devote to full blown project management so we devised a kickoff and implementation plan that is very friendly to the schools. We also use a very personal approach. The vendor does most everything via phone conference and we decided that a face to face kickoff and setup meeting was a good way to learn how each district did their business and also build relationships so that the schools will feel

comfortable with coming to us with support issues and also use us for training. We have very minimal training fees compared to the vendor. We basically only charge for training matierials in our sessions.

- What is your funding model?
  Our SIS is subsidized by State General funds. The State pays for half of the licensing and maintenance for the schools and House Bill 1400 also provides for adddtional funding intended to offset the School district portion of the license and maintenance fees.

- How long did the implementation/conversion process take?
  Still working on it. Since 2002 we have implemented 114 School districts and we have about 60 left. Each district takes from 60-90 days to implement. We have taken up to a year for our large districts.

Practical Aspects:

- Can you describe the structure (web-based, infrastructure, regional, centralized)?
  PowerSchool® is totally web based. Each school district has there own server and we use virtualization to cut down on hardware cost. All servers are housed and maintained by our Information Technology Department at the State Capitol in Bismarck. The schools don't have to worry about server maintenance as we take care of that. Most of our school districts are rural with very little technical expertise on hand to maintain the servers so this model works very well for us. The biggest issue is that each district also has a separate Oracle database to maintain. It would be easier for our System Administrators if they could combine the databases but the licensing forbids that.
- At the building level, where do people go for support?
  Each building has a designated contact person who either helps with support on site or is able to call our support center with their issues. We handle about 99% of the support issues ourselves and only call in the vendor if it is a severe problem.
- Can you get data in real time?
  Yes. Everything is real time. As soon as a submit button is clicked data is available for viewing.
- Is there a difference between the SSIS's affect on smaller vs. larger districts?
  Not much. We have school district populations from 26 to 10000+ students using the application. The application scales well to the various levels of usage. The larger districts create more customizations but the general usage is the same across the board.

Flexibility:

- How flexible do you find your SSIS to be?
  Very flexible. We have 114 districts using the application and none of them are set up exactly the same. The application is very customizable and there is a very large community nationwide of PowerSchool® users who freely exchange their customizations throughout the community.
- If you have had it for several years, has it adapted well to new technologies and other changes?
  It's a work in progress and there are some pitfalls. We are currently working on automated vertical reporting to the State. When we get that working it will be huge. We also have a number of schools with local datawarehouses and there have been extractions developed to work with that application.

- What modifications have you made, if any, from the original implementation?
  Many modifications have been made. Mostly custom pages that have been added. As mentioned above, the application is very customizable. The vendor also listens to what the community needs and works to provided those changes to the application as well.

Results/Reflection:

- How much more efficient do you feel it is than what you had before?
  Not applicable since there was nothing in place before.
- Do you still have gaps?
  Some, especially with State reporting and elementary gradebooks (standards). However, there has been a lot of progress in the past year with those issues and those gaps should be closed relatively soon.
- Who has truly benefitted from the SSIS? How have the students benefitted?
  I believe it's been a winning situation for all parties involved. More efficient use of administrative time and teacher time. Parents are able to see attendance and grades in real time. Same for students. The system is complex for administrative personnel but very user friendly. It is simple for teachers, parents and students to use.
- What are the long-term requirements to maintain the SSIS as opposed to the implementation?
  Ongoing advanced training opportunities are a must for school district personnel. We have people coming back year after year for scheduling workshops and End of Year Workshops. We provide all of our training on a regional basis except for intial product training for administration and teachers. Those workshops are done onsite just in time to go live with the system.

  Hardware requirements have changed very little over the years but if districts are on a good hardware refresh cycle that shouldn't be an issue. Same with server hardware.
- If you were to do this over again, would you and what would you change?
  I wouldn't change too much. I made sure my staff received all of the training they needed in order to pass it on to the school districts. We were originally going to provide only Tier 1 support to the schools but we quickly realized as we learned the application that we could handle most support issues.

  I think that the State mandate is meeting little resistance because it was previously voluntary for most of the schools. We reached a point of critical mass that way and the schools waiting for implementation now have seen the successes that we have achieved at neighboring schools. The biggest driver of course is funding. We are hoping that the State will fully fund PowerSchool® in the next session, which will happen next January.