STRUCTURE AND GOVERNANCE
INNOVATION AND COLLABORATION WORK GROUP
JUNE 12, 2014
MEETING NOTES

Present: Dr. Cori Mantle-Bromley, Chair; Senator Roy Lacey, Bill Brulotte

Not Present: Don Soltman

Others Present: Dr. Diane Grahek, Roger Quarles and Scott Woolstenhulme

The committee welcomed Dr. Diane Grahek, Digital Content Coach, Joint School District No. 2 (Meridian). Dr. Grahek has a technical background, and has taught both secondary and postsecondary information systems classes. She moved from South Dakota last year and has been with the Meridian School District since January 2014. She is experienced in SchoolNet, an Instructional Improvement System (IIS), and PowerSchool, a Student Management System, both Pearson products. South Dakota previously used PowerSchool as a grade and attendance system. Dr. Grahek said that when Meridian teachers use SchoolNet, they can view their entries and provide assessments online.

Meridian was one of three districts, including Melba and Shelley, who have stand-alone systems under a state pilot program and were able to design their own systems. Pearson has been very helpful and has provided training. Meridian has purchased a maintenance plan from Pearson beginning July 1 which will cost $3/student for support. Meridian has over 36,000 students. Dr. Grahek said that the impact of the J.A. and Kathryn Albertson Foundation's (Albertson Foundation) withdrawal of funding for SchoolNet will not affect Meridian since it has its own contract, but small districts may be affected. Senator Lacey explained that 2014 legislation was passed to help districts continue the contract with SchoolNet or move to another system. Funding to the districts will be diverted from the money formerly paid to SchoolNet. He anticipates that the funding will continue but if the economy were to experience a downturn and sales tax revenues fall, the revenue stream could change very quickly. Meridian will receive approximately 11 percent of the total allotment from the State.

Dr. Grahek stated that SchoolNet performs well for the Meridian District. When Meridian wanted to load curricular items, Pearson provided a solution which teachers and students can access from home. Pearson also has placed a link in Meridian's SchoolNet to Discovery Education[1].

[1] Discovery Education accelerates school districts' digital transition through comprehensive standards-based content, professional development, formative assessment, and community engagement proven to positively impact student achievement. Source: Discovery Education Website.

Dr. Grahek cited an example of the problems with delayed data: Idaho Reading Indicator (IRI) scores from last fall were sent to the State Department of Education's (SDE) longitudinal data system (SLDS) which in Idaho is the Idaho System for Educational Excellence, or ISEE, but when the data came back in January, it was not correct. Meridian sent it back to the SDE to fix the errors and upload it again. Dr. Grahek just received the data back in early June, after school had closed. This was not a Pearson problem; it has been a chronic SDE problem. Bill Brulotte added that he double-enters all of his data in Excel so that he has data the same day; Mr. Brulotte said they experience the same problem with data being delayed at the State level. Dr. Grahek reminded the committee that Meridian has 36,000 students, so double-entry is not feasible. PowerSchool is a powerful component of SchoolNet – it provides 3 years of history on each student plus the current year.

Dr. Grahek said she was unsure if the State should have only one system. Right now, timeliness of data is the worst problem. Dr. Mantle-Bromley asked about transient students and whether their data might be better on SchoolNet or Mileposts. Dr. Grahek replied that basic information is available, but the part that digs deeper may or may not transfer. Until three years ago, students did not have a student state identification number.

When asked to pilot the SchoolNet system, 87 percent of schools said yes, but many already had bought other collaboration modules. The State paid teachers to post lesson plans, but the lesson plans were not vetted, and so the SDE received complaints.

When asked about teacher collaboration methods at Meridian, Dr. Grahek replied that it depended on the grade level. Elementary teachers collaborate every Wednesday for one hour on late start; at high school, teachers have a free period every other day.

The committee discussed adding another superintendent and principal to the group. Dr. Mantle-Bromley said she would invite Becky Meyer and Greg Bailey. Senator Lacey suggested Randy Jensen, Charles Shackett or George Boland.

Dr. Mantle-Bromley, Senator Lacey and Bill Brulotte discussed the problems that SDE is experiencing with SchoolNet and ISEE and felt that a statewide system would be beneficial as long as it was a local option. They supported the idea of attaching PowerSchool to SchoolNet. Any system must interface with ISEE.

The committee welcomed Roger Quarles, now the Executive Director of the Albertson Foundation, for his perspective on ISEE and SchoolNet. Mr. Quarles was superintendent in Caldwell when the State made the decision to choose SchoolNet as its statewide system. At the time, Caldwell was using Mileposts and was part of a startup pilot program. Mileposts had also submitted a Request for Proposal however, the State selected SchoolNet. The transition was not easy. When the State built ISEE, practitioners found it difficult to

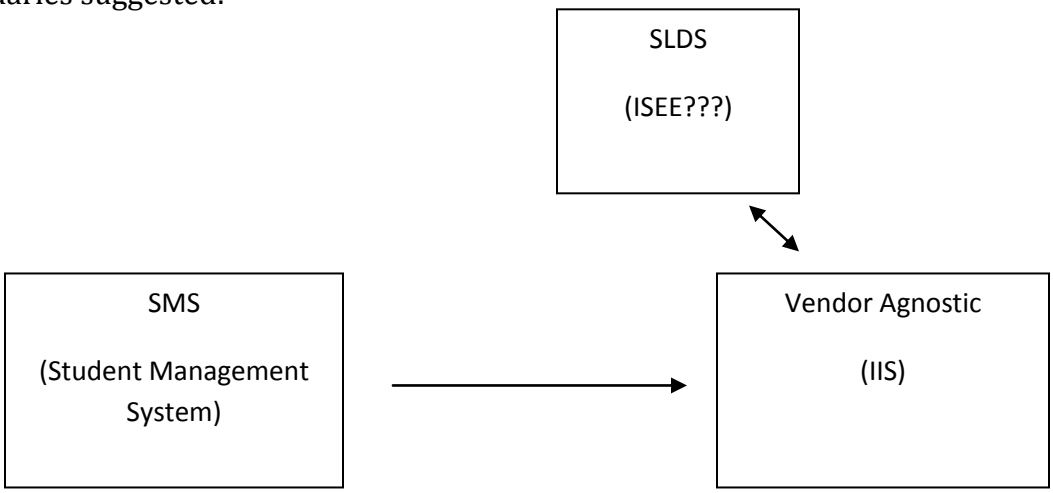
perform an error free upload. Caldwell was not a SchoolNet grant district, and participation was expensive. SchoolNet was implemented in Caldwell after Mr. Quarles left.

Mr. Quarles worked at Boise State University, and then at SDE where he was assigned to SchoolNet. The Albertson Foundation hired a third-party evaluator to facilitate weekly calls and establish benchmarks, and the SDE worked to address technical issues. The Albertson Foundation conducted a third-party evaluation whose conclusions are set out in the memorandum, "Lessons Learned." Every district has an IIS – 90 different ones upload into ISEE. ISEE, itself is difficult for districts, and is a large burden for those without resources.

Mr. Quarles said that superintendents want IISs for assessments, etc., but suggested that the local management system, such as PowerSchool, should be the same statewide because the State cannot build 90 different interfaces to ISEE. ISEE is the technology system by which districts provide reporting and receive reimbursement from the State. Mr. Quarles suggested that the State support PowerSchool to SchoolNet. The challenge lies in building a bridge from SchoolNet to ISEE. ISEE needs additional work to improve its ability to interface.

Why did Idaho build a system like ISEE? Mr. Quarles replied that the State did not want to dictate to the districts that one system would be required for every district. Kentucky works efficiently with PowerSchool and SchoolNet. The hard part is ISEE. The State now owns SchoolNet 16.0, and teachers like Discovery Ed.

Mr. Quarles suggested:



Mr. Quarles recommended a re-evaluation of Idaho's longitudinal data. Even if the ISEE system were perfect in returning data, a manual upload still would be required because the interface is not automatic. Mr. Quarles suggested that the State consider replacing ISEE. Each district could choose their ISS as long as the vendor can ensure the interface to the SLDS.

The committee welcomed Scott Woolstenhulme via teleconference. Mr. Woolstenhulme is the Director for School Improvement and Technology for the Bonneville School District (Bonneville). Mr. Woolstenhulme said that when he came to Bonneville 4-5 years ago, students would take ISATs in the spring, but by fall, the district needed to manually provide scores to the students' new teachers. They initially signed a contract with Mileposts. Then the State announced SchoolNet, and Bonneville cancelled their Mileposts contract and joined Schoolnet. After about 3 months, problems and delays surfaced. When Bonneville hired a teacher, that teacher still appeared 4 months later in Idaho Falls data. Bonneville went back to Mileposts. They spent the first year working on assessment data. The system updated automatically every night. This year, Bonneville is working on creating Individual Learning Plans (ILP), but it is expensive. Only 20 percent of students need an ILP, those at the low end and the high end, but Mileposts requires payment for 100 percent of students because the structure is available for all. The price currently is $5/student, but it may increase to $6 due to the need for programming an interface with ISEE. Mileposts continues to work with SDE to make the interface functional. At this time assessment scores and IRI do not flow and need to be manually input.

When asked about a statewide single IIS system, Mr. Woolstenhulme did not think it would be possible. Ten different reports come from Bonneville's various data bases and Mileposts cannot provide that variety. PowerSchool is the student information system; MilePosts is secondary for discipline, behavioral considerations and assessments. Bonneville has some hope with the Five File Upload from ISEE, but it still is a frustrating experience.

Dr. Mantle-Bromley asked, "If you had PowerSchool and it would interface with MilePosts and Mileposts directly interfaced to the State, would that save you time?" Mr. Woolstenhulme replied that at a technical meeting he attended, the group discussed whether one platform for a student information system should be recommended. They agreed that if it performed well, it would be beneficial. But when parents do not provide immunization records, for example, incomplete data results. Special education plans and ILPs are another area in which teachers need to create plans. A system would need to do everything for everyone, and Mr. Woolstenhulme does not know if that is a reality.

Mr. Woolstenhulme concluded by saying that Bonneville lives with ISEE. They would not want to lose decision making on what is best for their district.

Next Meeting: June 26; Invite Office of Performance Evaluations to discuss its research on SchoolNet and ISEE

Lessons Learned from Idaho's Instructional Improvement System: Executive Summary

May 2014

The Institute for Evidence-Based Change
Lauren Sosenko and Doug Mesecar

The State of Idaho and the J.A. and Kathryn Albertson Foundation (JKAF) have made considerable investments in Idaho's education, technology, and data systems to better serve students. One key JKAF investment has been in Schoolnet, an Instructional Improvement System (IIS) designed to make data and other resources easily accessible and useable by teachers to directly impact classroom instruction, school decision-making, and ultimately student success.

The Idaho State Department of Education (SDE) was awarded a grant from the U.S. Department of Education for approximately $6 million in 2009 to develop a Statewide Longitudinal Data System (SLDS). To ensure the system was of use to Idaho's schools and school districts, JKAF granted $21 million in additional funding to SDE to link an IIS to Idaho's SLDS, which is known as the Idaho System for Educational Excellence (ISEE).

This *Lessons Learned* Executive Summary from the Institute for Evidence-Based Change (IEBC) provides insights from the field about Idaho's experience in the IIS pilot and the state's new direction with the project. The report is based upon feedback from numerous educators' across the state gathered through IEBC's comprehensive review of Schoolnet implementation in spring 2013. This review included interviews and a teacher survey at multiple districts using Schoolnet, as well as interviews with individuals responsible for Schoolnet development and implementation at SDE and Pearson—the company that runs Schoolnet. The report is also based upon IEBC's follow-up facilitation between SDE and Pearson from August 2013 to April 2014 and interviews with school districts conducted by JKAF staff in spring 2014.

What happened?

Through a competitive proposal process, SDE selected Schoolnet as its IIS. Selection committee participants noted that Schoolnet was far and away the most comprehensive and developed system available at the time, especially noting the importance of lesson planning and assessment functions. SDE and Pearson have been working to develop and rollout Schoolnet in the state over the last three years, and they have struggled to meet the expectations and needs of Idaho educators.

Idaho educators and stakeholders described several key implementation challenges:

- This large effort represented Pearson's first foray into implementing the Schoolnet platform at the state level for use by all districts. Prior to this effort, Schoolnet linked only to district student information systems. Many educators in the field believe SDE and Pearson did not fully appreciate the complexity of the project at the outset, set too high expectations, and did not anticipate

challenges well. Many teachers and administrators reported frustrations with resulting product delays and inaccuracies.

- Many educators reported that they couldn't use the IIS because of poor data quality and timeliness of the data. These data challenges also were related to ISEE —users see these systems as one and the same. SDE and Pearson put a lot of effort into strengthening the data flow into Schoolnet and making it more efficient during the 2013-14 academic year.
- Although SDE selected pilot districts, it requested that Pearson roll out Schoolnet to all Idaho districts immediately during the "pilot" phase. This statewide roll-out precluded the opportunity to ensure problems were addressed prior to introducing the IIS statewide. Additionally, districts that received pilot grants reported that they did not have enough time to properly integrate this resource and train their teachers to use it effectively.
- This project lacked strong communications to and from the field to explain progress or assess district needs. Many districts reported that SDE did not understand their needs, especially related to professional development and technical assistance. This perception was further amplified as the districts believed SDE staff had limited experience in teaching and learning, and respondents noted that available professional development resources, such as ISEE navigators, were largely ineffective.
- Another factor in the troubled roll-out was the focus by SDE on making Schoolnet into a "digital backpack." The digital backpack is supposed to be a collection of significant data about each student, including demographics, enrollment information, test results, interventions, attendance, report card grades, and teacher notes. While easy to describe, a digital backpack is difficult to build and implement, even more so when a SLDS is capturing information from multiple student information systems, only select SLDS data would be used for the digital backpack, and data represent different time frames and require different types of validation.

Course Correction

In response to the documented frustrations in the field, JKAF asked IEBC to conduct an independent review of the Schoolnet project in spring 2013. Findings noted several deficiencies and challenges described above. The report also identified action steps to address these challenges to right the ailing—but salvageable—Schoolnet implementation. Thereafter, JKAF asked IEBC to consult with SDE and Pearson teams to course correct the project with attention to the identified critical areas.

SDE and Pearson met in August 2013 to discuss next steps and focus on improving their tumultuous working relationship for the good of the project. Over the next seven months, the teams successfully worked to improve the Schoolnet experience for users. SDE and Pearson prioritized data quality and timeliness as a key to improving the end user concerns with Schoolnet.

The teams focused on improving the teacher experience — a strategic move that set high priority for changes that would have the greatest impact on classroom instruction and student learning; leading, in turn, to increased buy-in. Specific changes included the Five File Format data submission (which could manage nightly uploads instead of monthly) to improve data relevancy and a pilot to directly connect

Schoolnet to a district's student information system (instead of to ISEE) to improve data quality and timeliness. Further, for a brief period, it seemed that SDE was prioritizing leadership with a teaching and instructional background. However, with the Deputy Superintendent's resignation, that perspective was again absent from the SDE team.

Over the last seven months, Pearson engaged its senior leadership, came to the table to problem solve major challenges, and made authentic efforts, often beyond the project scope, to get the project back on track and in a place to make meaningful differences for teachers.

Several success stories about Schoolnet use in Idaho have emerged from the field during this course correction. More educators are accessing the tool, and anecdotal stories about use show some educators are finding value—by saving them time and informing their teaching. Despite these findings, the clock is ticking on the pilot and many educators have still not appreciated the benefits of the IIS.

Lessons Learned

Final reflections about the Schoolnet pilot offer important lessons learned from the project.

- Districts value an IIS platform. While educators reported their frustration about Schoolnet implementation, almost universally, they want an IIS to inform their work. As one superintendent stated, "I have to have an IIS in this district. If we didn't have an IIS, it would be like a ship without GPS, radar, or steering mechanism. We are making this work now and don't want to go back."
- The one-way SLDS to IIS data connection is complex and challenging, and plans to link any IIS to an SLDS should account for this complexity in a realistic approach and timeline.
- To successfully implement an IIS, a high degree of understanding of district needs about how the system should work, its content, and also professional development is necessary. All districts would benefit from a needs assessment to understand what supports are required for implementation and what type of professional development (e.g., content and delivery method) would best meet their needs.
- Successful IIS implementation needs strong leadership from a managing partner that accepts leadership responsibilities, understands its strengths and limitations, is able to evaluate and prioritize with a lens on teaching and learning, addresses staffing gaps, and leverages key partners to fill areas of need. Further, while the focus of a digital backpack is an important goal, it should not conflict with how the IIS supports the needs of teachers in the classroom.
- Staying true to an IIS pilot plan is important to ensure districts get the resources they need, problems can first be fixed on a small scale, and early successes can quell fear of change typically encountered with a new initiative. Instead of setting up a system of haves and have-nots, a pilot would avoid wasting resources everywhere on a system that is yet to be fully developed.
- A statewide IIS implementation needs a strong communications plan that will explain the status of the project and highlight key successes, as well as solicit feedback from districts.

Where do we go from here?

Recent positive developments in implementation have been largely overshadowed by earlier missteps and puzzling future plans. Based on project history, it appears that SDE may be overestimating its capacity to manage this system, and districts that have invested their time and resources into this IIS may be further frustrated after the pilot concludes and as SDE begins to self-host this platform.

SDE has begun to operate and maintain the Schoolnet platform on its own servers. It expects to operate the IIS successfully, meeting district needs, without support from Pearson. SDE purchased a perpetual license to Schoolnet, so legally SDE has the right to self-host this application on its own hardware—but, given what has been learned, it may not be in the user's best interest to do so. As the feedback indicates, SDE has underestimated the leadership and technical needs of this project, and their intention to continue without basic support from Pearson may be shortsighted. SDE will host a stagnant version of Schoolnet that will not receive automated upgrades because the contract with Pearson was not renewed.

Moving forward, there are other concerns about SDE's IIS-ISEE link. Recently, the Idaho legislature adopted language that is undefined and perplexing. As explained by SDE staff, they expect all Idaho IISs (whether Schoolnet or any other system) to "interface" with ISEE, meaning that they must pull data from ISEE and also push data into it.

The implications of this new SDE requirement are confounding. First, no IIS currently has this functionality and ISEE is not currently configured to allow for it. This would be yet another component of an already very complex, unwieldy system. Further, this approach has not been tested, yet it is the likely path SDE will require of districts when integrating an IIS to ISEE. Therefore, if a district would like to use state dollars to invest in its own IIS, either Schoolnet or another system, it is expected that the system will have this functionality. Alternatively, districts can use SDE's static version of Schoolnet that will not receive updates and is no longer supported by the developer. These options are complicating a system that has already struggled to fulfill the potential of a linked IIS and SLDS that yields the desired improvements in teaching and learning.

While JKAF has expressed overwhelming appreciation for the district involvement in the Schoolnet implementation, it is frustrated with the final outcomes and the plan for the future of Schoolnet as a resource for all Idaho school districts, schools, teachers and students. JKAF acknowledges there are several districts finding some value in Schoolnet, and JKAF plans limited support in the final months to provide for the last planned upgrades to the system. However, JKAF is committed to improving the educational outcomes for all students, and will be actively pursuing strategies to support the quality of teaching and learning through technology and data efforts, directly and through their funded partners.

For additional information, please see:

Institute for Evidence-Based Change (IEBC). (May 2013) *A Review of Idaho's Instructional Improvement Systems*. Executive Summary is retrieved online on May 13, 2014 at http://bit.ly/1oMiCi8