

TO: Mike Riggle
FROM: R. Bretag, D. Jakes, K. Ptak, M. Thimm, R. Williamson
RE: Student Information System Recommendation
DATE: September 10, 2012
CC: Board of Education

Recommendation: The administration recommends the approval of a three-year contract with Pearson for the installation of PowerSchool to serve as the student information system (SIS) for all district entities at a first-year cost of \$130,200 and subsequent annual licensing and maintenance costs of \$38,400.

Background

In April of 2009, following an extensive process, the administration recommended and the Board approved the purchase of School Logic by MIG as the new SIS for the district. SchoolLogic replaced SASI, which had significant limitations and was no longer being supported by Pearson, its parent company. In selecting School Logic, a variety of factors were considered that were considered significant in moving the district forward technologically:

- SchoolLogic was web-based, thus providing accessibility from both school and home and was independent of operating system platform (Mac or PC)
- A student/parent portal system existed which allowed for 24/7 access to student information, which was not available to parents and students in previous systems
- There was the potential for developing an integrated special education module to meet the identified needs of the special education staff
- District developers were given access to code which allowed for customizations that would meet the unique needs of various district departments
- Annual cost for maintaining SchoolLogic was significantly less than SASI in licensing, maintenance and service fees
- SchoolLogic was viewed as providing a long-term (5-10 year) solution

Unfortunately, many of the expectations of this system were not realized. Having been “live” on the School Logic SIS for two full school years, the administration concluded after in-depth discussion and analysis that maintaining and managing School Logic is too burdensome and costly in terms of district technology developer time and daily use of the product has negatively impacted employee productivity as well as morale. It is the consensus of all employee groups involved in the discussions that it is necessary for the district to transition to a new SIS.

Selection Process

A group comprised of principals, other key administrators, a GEA representative, and key support staff members served as members of the SIS Review Committee during the 2011-2012 school year. As the selection was narrowed to two finalists, eSchooPlus and PowerSchool, additional staff members participated in vendor presentations and site visits.

- Area principals and assistant superintendents were surveyed regarding the effectiveness of the current SIS employed by their school district.
- Utilizing the results of these surveys, the building technology coordinators contacted representatives from various schools to validate the performance of each system.
- Based upon this validation process, four SISs were identified as viable candidates for further inquiries by the District SIS Review Committee: eSchoolPlus, Infinite Campus, PowerSchool, and Skyward.
- Building technology coordinators established phone contacts for each District SIS Review Committee member’s counterpart at various schools to further explore the relative effectiveness of the SIS in that area.
- Members of the District SIS Review Committee contacted counterparts from various schools and documented the conversations for review.
- Utilizing the results of the phone conversations, the District SIS Review Committee narrowed the potential field to two candidates: eSchoolPlus and PowerSchool.
- Vendor visits were established to evaluate the products by members of the District SIS Review Committee and other selected representatives from the buildings.
- In conjunction with vendors visits, a conference call was made between District 225 and both eSchoolPlus and PowerSchool to assess the technical requirements of each system. The results showed both products were acceptable from a technical standpoint.
- Each staff member who attended the vendor visits were surveyed regarding their concerns, questions, and strengths regarding each SIS.
- Based upon the results of the survey, PowerSchool emerged as an overwhelming favorite.
- Utilizing the survey data from the vendor visits, questions were formulated to clarify and validate the information provided by the vendors. Site visits were established by the coordinators to the following schools: Libertyville, Mundelein, and Addison Trail. Additional phone calls were made to Burlington Central and Grayslake.
- The site visits addressed concerns and validated the viability of PowerSchool as the next District 225 SIS.
- The District SIS Committee unanimously recommended Pearson’s PowerSchool to Dr. Mike Riggle and Dr. Rosanne Williamson.

Cost Comparison: Pearson PowerSchool & Sungard eSchoolPlus

	HOSTED	
	Pearson	Sungard
	<u>Power School*</u>	<u>eSchool Plus</u>
Year 1 – includes first year license/maintenance, hosting, training, implementation	\$130,200	\$147,552
Year 2 – includes license, maintenance, hosting	\$38,400	\$63,000
Year 3 – includes license, maintenance, hosting	\$38,400	\$63,000
*If the district does not host with Pearson, cost is \$14,500 less per year		

Rationale for Power School

As the administration considered a new SIS, it was important to review products that had the ability to meet current operational functions and include the same features identified for a desirable SIS during the selection of School Logic in 2009. At the same time, consideration was also given to emerging technology that could potentially enhance the user experience and better meet the needs of students, parents and staff.

A significant philosophical shift was made by the administration during this selection process that has been formally shared with the entire Glenbrook staff. In selecting any new student information system, the district will no longer seek to “customize” the product to meet the desires of the staff. The district will seek to “configure” the existing software within the prescribed parameters and make the necessary adjustments to existing work flows across the district. The primary reason for this change in philosophy is that customizations are expensive, difficult to manage and are costly in terms of personnel time to implement and maintain.

Customizations are potentially problematic because they can be rendered non-functional when updates are made to the base software. It has been determined by the groups involved in the selection process that Power School can meet the needs of the district as an “out-of-the-box” SIS.

In some cases, the administration will need to change practices in order to work within the requirements of the PowerSchool software; however, there are no unique practices or procedures in District 225 that are so critical that they cannot be modified. The key features that PowerSchool offers as a SIS include:

- A web-based product providing accessibility from both school and home that is independent of platform
- A student/parent portal that allows 24/7 access
- Easy integration with e-Sped, the new special education module selected by the district
- Annual cost of license, maintenance and hosting after the implementation year is comparable to what the district has paid to maintain and manage School Logic on its own servers
- The needs of the district will be met effectively through configurations, not customizations
- Potential for the integration of teaching and learning third-party applications that will create “one-stop shopping” for parents and students
- Option of a hosted solution exists that can potentially reduce district developer time and efforts in maintaining servers and installing updates
- PowerSchool is designated as *State Reporting Code* for Illinois and will meet state reporting requirements
- A robust customer support system and user group exists

Implementation Team

The implementation team will be led by Dr. Williamson, Mr. Bretag, Mr. Jakes, Mr. Simmers and a designated Power School project manager. Our development team has reviewed the data conversion tools provided by Pearson and is confident that it will be a smooth and systematic

conversion process. The implementation team structure will allow for interfacing with the buildings and insures a means to obtain feedback during the data conversion and implementation process.

Cost/Contract Highlights/Timeline

Cost

Year 1 cost for eSped:	\$23,900
Year 1 cost for Pearson PowerSchool:	<u>\$130,200</u>
	\$154,100
Amount in approved tech budget:	<u>\$200,000</u>
Under budget:	(\$45,900)

Contract Highlights

PowerSchool will assign a staff member to serve as a support throughout the entire implementation process. The company will assist district developers with data conversion from the current student information system database. Implementation and final set-up includes time for validation of data prior to a final payment being made, insures confidentiality of data, provides for data back-up and allows the district access to data at any time. There is also a disaster recovery plan in place. The district has the ability to move from a hosted to a non-hosted environment at any time.

Although not anticipated as a short-term need, the PowerSchool contract has an exit clause that provides for a smooth transition to a new student information system that ensures data integrity, accessibility and transfer.

Timeline

The anticipated timeline for implementation, including data conversion, is 90 days which allows time for verification of data by district staff. PowerSchool will provide end-user training prior to the start of the 2013-2014 school year. In addition to short-term implementation support and training for staff, PowerSchool also provides long-term support through telephone and e-mail conferencing, access to an online support website and PowerSchool users group.

Technical Review

Mr. Thimm participated in conference calls with both eSchoolPlus and PowerSchool to assess the technical requirements of each system. His conclusions were that both products were acceptable from a technical standpoint. At the point that it was determined that PowerSchool was the clear choice, Mr. Thimm conducted additional follow-up relative to technical specifications with a particular focus on the PowerSchool hosted solution.

Power School Hosted Solution

In a service provider hosted solution the PowerSchool SIS is running on servers in Pearson PowerSchool data facilities. The PowerSchool technical staff maintains the required server and storage hardware and related data center resources. PowerSchool also manages software updates (currently monthly update cycle) and software fixes, as well as performs daily system back-ups.

A significant percentage of PowerSchool customers utilize the PowerSchool hosting services at this time.

The district already utilizes a large number of hosted solutions such as Google Apps (including Gmail), Follett Destiny Library, LibGuides research catalogues, RevTrack fee collections and payments, MyLunchMoney cafeteria payments, Skyward Financials and HR, eSPED, Vimeo video distribution, Glenbrook Shape-Your-Life and Payflex, as well as Global Compliance Network and GeneralASP for HR.

In general, using an external hosting provider eliminates the need to maintain and operate specialty software and hardware systems internally, thus avoiding hardware expenditures, maintenance and support costs due to required time commitments and training of internal staff. Hosting systems externally requires Internet connectivity and adequate bandwidth to ensure continuous access and proper performance of the systems in question. Since these hosted solutions are web-based, they behave and function like any other web site.

The district has tools in place to ensure that critical systems receive proper priority. During implementation we work with each service provider to determine required bandwidth needs, security configurations and network settings to ensure these applications function to their full potential. The district will review settings and priority orders for network bandwidth allocations to these systems across the wireless services in our district network as well as across the available Internet connections.

After additional follow-up with PowerSchool's manager of hosting services relative to technical specifications, Mr. Thimm recommends the PowerSchool hosted solution as it eliminates the ongoing patch and upgrade efforts and allows the district's developer staff to support and maintain other systems while leveraging a standardized service from Pearson.

Benefits of Externally Hosting

- Eliminates the server and storage equipment resource needs to run the SIS database and web application.
- Eliminates required support time to apply monthly patches and other updates from internal tech support staff.
- The SIS system resides in a Pearson data center facility with high availability backup and Disaster Recovery features. (within the current two-week window the system can be rolled back in minute increments due to the snapshot backup technology used. After two weeks it defaults to daily full backups)
- Performance and sizing of servers and storage is based on enrollment and performance data and is the responsibility of Pearson.

- Automatic updates and patches ensures staying current and up-to-date with system.
- Tech staff can focus on system integration and support of other internal systems that cannot be outsourced.

Downside to Externally Hosting

- Internal tech staff has read-only access to database system (ensures consistency of system, clear accountability of Pearson support for stability of system)
- “Customizations” come at a cost and require contracting with Pearson (district does not want to customize but “configure” the system within the existing software)
- Integration with other district systems may take longer to implement due to connectivity to and security requirements of Pearson’s data center and possible access restrictions. (Once completed there will be no difference to internal systems operation)
- Internet Connectivity required for access to SIS application. (District has redundant Internet connections to ensure always-on connectivity)
- Internet bandwidth needed to access PowerSchool. District monitors Internet bandwidth usage and adds capacity or prioritizes traffic if bottlenecks arise. Current peak usage is 170 Mbit/sec at 300 Mbit/sec available capacity.

The district tech staff will monitor external hosting provider performance and put a plan in place to bring the application in-house if performance issues are identified and unresolved due to external hosting service issues. This will ensure proper access and operation of this critical system and avoid hosting provider lock-in. The agreement with Pearson includes the option to maintain internal test/development server instances to gauge the efforts and processes of maintaining the PowerSchool systems internally.

The SIS software is typically integrated with other applications and requires internal tech staff to be able to program those interfaces and integration components. The PowerSchool system requires skills in the Oracle Database and Java programming languages. The required professional development for our applications programmers is funded in the technology department’s professional development budget line item. The current developer team has extensive background in Oracle Database programming.

Benefits of Internally Hosting

- full access to the database and web application (but we do not want to customize)
- access via Internal network, no additional Internet bandwidth requirements (only small portion of Internet bandwidth required for these systems)
- no hardware costs due to using district’s virtualization platform and new servers and SAN systems, and DR facility

Downside to Internally Hosting

- responsibility to update and patch the web application and database system at least monthly, requires technical resources, may require downtime and cause overtime costs due to off-hour work.

- granularity of backup/restore will not be the same as PowerSchool hosting provides.

Implications for Teaching and Learning

Beyond the identified benefits for users during the selection process outlined above, there are additional implications for teaching and learning:

- PowerSchool is Internet-based and accessible on current platforms: Mac, PC, and tablet technology from Apple and Android.
- Pearson offers a data analytic, synchronization, and warehouse tool known as SchoolNet with integration into PowerSchool.
- Pearson offers a learning management system known as OpenClass with a developed roadmap for integration with PowerSchool. This would create a seamless experience for our teachers between our learning management system, student information system, and Google Apps. For example, the gradebook would be the same in both PowerSchool and OpenClass allowing teachers to function more efficiently.