



DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE EDUCATION ACTIVITY

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DoDEA TO REVIEW STUDENT INFORMATION SYSTEMS (SIS)

Over the past school year, the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) implemented a new student information system, Student Management Solutions or SMS. DoDEA transitioned from the previous software program, WinSchool, to SMS under a modification to the contract for the school year 2005/2006.

WinSchool and SMS are products developed Chancery Software, Ltd. www.chancery.com. SMS is a web-based solution, developed on a platform that was built to support future school district needs and growth.

The fielding of SMS in school year 2005/2006 was met with technical, scheduling and cost difficulties. There have been complaints from parents, as well as DoDEA employees in the field, stemming from these difficulties. "It's no secret that we have not been fully successful, said Dr. Joseph Tafoya, DoDEA Director. "We have heard complaints from just about every segment of the agency and our key partners."

Schools faced a number of setbacks and problems from the implementation. "Although a team of hardworking and competent staff aggressively worked with the program developers and contractors to remedy problems and to improve the system, the success ratio we have achieved in some critical areas is not what we had hoped nor is it acceptable" according to Dr. Tafoya.

DoDEA is not alone. School systems across the country are struggling with school information systems that can meet the unique needs found in every district or system. (See NY Times, May 15, 2006, *States Struggle to Computerize School Records*, by [Sam Dillon](#))

In April 2006, in response to a Hotline request, the DoDEA Director commissioned an independent fact-finding report to review the way in which SMS

More...

was procured and to highlight areas of concern with respect to planning and decision making surrounding the system. "After studying these developments I have concluded that we did not have the right game plan when we started this transition", remarked Tafoya.

The fact finder conducted interviews with key DoDEA officials involved with SMS planning, procurement and implementation and reviewed relevant information. There was no evidence suggesting the presence of willful misconduct or intent to engage in fraud, waste or abuse during the procurement and execution of the SMS acquisition.

There were, however, areas of concern with respect to planning and decision making within the DoDEA system's acquisition process. These concerns were:

- No evidence of a comprehensive risk analysis to support the decision to fully implement SMS;

- No comprehensive acquisition strategy to include detailed post award and execution planning;

- Poor definition of the contract requirements were made in the Statement of Work;

- Problem with mixing the roles of the Functional and Program managers; and
- Predisposition to regard SMS as an upgrade from Win School rather than a new program that needed to be field tested.

According to Dr Tafoya, it is critical is to construct a framework for DoDEA senior management to develop a strategy and action plan for future internal decisions on student information. Due to an inadequate work statement, the contractor was only required to deliver the system and provide the licensing, which they did. The fact finder concluded that the contractor is in compliance with the current contract.

As a result of the report and the continuing challenges, Dr. Tafoya has convened a management task force under the direction of the DoDEA Chief of Staff to find appropriate solutions to the student information management system. "The fundamental question for us," said Tafoya, "is what do we need an information system to do for us? Then we need to conduct market analysis".

The bottom line for the next school year is that we will have to continue SMS. The current contract has been extended and officials are in the process of rewriting a new contract with performance requirements. Officials are mobilizing resources needed for a systemic solution to bring unified and consistent procedures and processes that make the system work effectively. "It is our responsibility as a school system to be absolutely accurate in tracking and reporting of student information and student progress. We owe that to our employees, students, and their parents," said Tafoya.

More...

Officials concede that reaching a solution will not be an easy task. According to Dr. Tafoya, "There is no quick fix. We have learned that we cannot change an entire school information system overnight as we tried to do with SMS. To protect the data that we have on current students, it will take time to find solutions. There will be continuing inconveniences. But as quickly as possible, we'll deliver a system for our employees, students, and parents that can do the job."

Tafoya expressed appreciation for the hard work and long hours of the staff who aggressively worked SMS problems in the field and at headquarters. "We are going to add some horse power to their efforts to remedy problems and to improve the system once and for all. We deeply regret that the implementation has not gone as planned," said Tafoya.

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