



**U.S. Department of Education  
Grant Performance Report (ED 524B)  
Executive Summary**

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**The Alaska Department of Education & Early Development's Unity Project:  
Data Mining for Student Success, a year in review.**

After successfully competing in the IES competition, Alaska, one of fourteen states, was awarded a \$3.5M dollar federal cooperative grant. The seven phase Unity Project's effort steps beyond building a mere data warehouse. Unity is designed to deliver the next generation education information management system to Alaska. Three of the seven Unity Project phases are directly funded through this cooperative grant award. They are: Construction of a Data Warehouse, Web-based Portals developed with stakeholder input, and finally the Implementation of a SIF Vertical Infrastructure across the state to tie Alaska School District's Student Information Systems together using Unity as the foundation.

In January of 2006, Deputy Commissioner Karen Rehfeld appointed Chris Letterman as Unity Project Director. Until that appointment, Mr. Letterman was a key visionary of the idea for a new statewide education information management system and was instrumental in the grant application development and promoting the project within the department. Appointing Mr. Letterman as Project Director was decidedly in the best interest of the department and the project. Mr. Letterman's immediate tasks were to hire the personnel required, as discussed in the grant application, author and award the phase two Data Warehouse RFP, and begin building initial Stakeholder Public Relations.

**Hire Required Personnel:**

Prior to Alaska being awarded the cooperative grant, the previous gubernatorial administration had instituted a plan to centralize all Human Resources. This plan encompassed all human resource activities which had occurred at a department level, such as, creation of new positions and overall management of the hiring process. Due to this centralizing effort being in flux, the creation of new positions denoted in the state's grant application took significantly longer than anticipated. This resulted in the delay of staff hiring until after June 2006. The first Unity Project staff member started on July 31<sup>st</sup>, followed sequentially by hiring other staff members on August 7<sup>th</sup>, August 14<sup>th</sup> and August 21<sup>st</sup>.

Although the delay in hiring staff was significant, existing department staff were able to contribute to the writing of the phase two Data Warehouse RFP and the actual work which occurred from April through August, until Unity Project staff were employed and assigned.

**Phase II Data Warehouse:**

Building off the foundation of the phase one Data Dictionary, which was completed in October of 2005, the phase two Data Dictionary Request for Proposals was crafted as a cooperative project with various components of cooperative work assignments. It also contained expectations for knowledge transfer from contractor to department staff. The phase two RFP was released in February 2006 and was awarded to Computer Task Group of Anchorage, Alaska and ESP Solutions Group of Austin, Texas in April 2006. There are nine major deliverables of the RFP, these include:

1. Project Management Plan
2. Current environment finding and recommendations plan
3. Infrastructure Mitigation Plan
4. Master Data Element Matrix
5. Data Warehouse Schema Design
6. Extraction, Transformation and Loading Plan
7. Functioning Development Data Warehouse
8. Production Warehouse Mitigation Plan
9. Functioning Production Data Warehouse

During this reporting period the first four deliverables have been accomplished. However, during deliverable four efforts, an issue was discovered concerning a tremendous number of undocumented data elements. In August 2006, a two day review was conducted with contractors and department staff to address possible paths moving forward. The department was offered three solutions and decided upon a hybrid of the proposed solutions - the work of which became Change Request 001. The change request issue was refined and proposed to department executive management. Upon executive management's approval, the original contracted work, which was the phase two Data Warehouse, was placed on hold while department staff and contractors performed data consolidation and issue mitigation work. It was estimated this work, above and beyond the original contract, would add an additional \$97K to the overall cost of the phase two Data Warehouse. In terms of schedule, it was anticipated to require a schedule push of approximately twelve weeks. As of the reporting period, this work has been finished allowing department staff and contractors to resume the original phase two Data Warehouse activities. Although unfortunate, the time spent on data consolidation was well worth the benefit it will yield as the phase two Data Warehouse work progresses forward. Even though this issue impacts the overall timeline, department staffs have taken necessary steps to ensure the issue does not negatively impact the remainder of the phases being funded by this cooperative grant.

#### Stakeholder Public Relations:

During this reporting period some initial public relations and stakeholder marketing has occurred. Specific to this activity, Mr. Letterman, Project Director, has traveled to two separate events to meet and market directly with stakeholders about the department's overall plan and the work being funded by the cooperative grant. In August 2006, Mr. Letterman attended the Powerschool Summer Institute held in Delta Junction. There he presented on the Unity Project in whole and focused on how the project will help provide relief to school districts reporting data to the department. In October 2006, Mr. Letterman attended the annual Principal's Conference held in Anchorage. At the Principal's conference the message was tailored for an administrative/instructional leader audience and was well received. There was immense interest in the project with specific awareness to how data could be used at a school level to drive instructional decisions which positively affect student achievement. In November, Sidney Fadaoff, the Unity Project Program Coordinator, traveled to Anchorage. She presented to the department's Assessment Advisory Working Group – a cross section of superintendents, teachers, principals and department staff – about the Unity Project as a whole. As this is a working group, Ms. Fadaoff utilized the group's expertise to brainstorm on effective stakeholder development and activities planned to occur over the remaining years of the cooperative grant. In conjunction with these presentations to various audiences, Ms. Fadaoff has begun soliciting nominations for stakeholders and out of a desired number of thirty stakeholders, has filled twenty-two stakeholder positions. In February 2007, the department will host its first stakeholder meeting.

Overall, and in summary, this reporting period finds the Alaska Department of Education & Early Development behind schedule; due in part to the HR and Data Warehouse issues described above. As the continuing work of the phase two Data Warehouse progresses, it is anticipated some ground can be regained so as to not tremendously impact the overall timeline. Additionally, as an effort to stem potential schedule impacts, work is progressing currently on the development of the phase three Web-based Portals RFP for release in late winter or early spring 2007; under the original timeline the RFP was not anticipated to be released until August 2007. There have been adjustments in other various activities as well, in order to offset the slower than anticipated progress during year one.

The outlook for the next annual report will find phase two Data Warehouse completed, phase three Web-based Portals well into piloting and testing, and phase four SIF Vertical Infrastructure RFP awarded with work occurring under the resultant contract.