

Oklahoma Report on Personnel Exchanges

by Patti High

Oklahoma's Personnel Exchanges

In December 2002, funding through the NCES Personnel Exchange Program enabled the Oklahoma State Department of Education (OSDE) to conduct personnel exchanges with Mississippi and Florida to share information on statewide student record systems. The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) managed the process and facilitated the exchanges. Each personnel exchange was a great success.

Mississippi - December 10, 11 and 12: six Oklahoma state, local education and business members of Oklahoma's State Student Record System Study project team (three were funded through NCES) traveled to Jackson, Mississippi and visited the MS State Department of Education and Jackson Public Schools.

Florida - December 17 and 18: three Florida state and local education representatives traveled to Oklahoma City, Oklahoma to visit the OK State Department of Education.

Background

Oklahoma currently relies upon aggregate statistics on students reported by school districts to satisfy numerous state and federal reporting mandates. With the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), it became apparent that a statewide student record system would be necessary to provide a data warehouse with sufficient detail to respond to the vigorous reporting and accountability provisions in NCLB. In response to the NCLB requirements and a desire to reduce the ever-increasing reporting burden for schools, the Oklahoma State Department of Education (OSDE), in partnership with the Oklahoma Business and Education Coalition (OBEC), formed a task force and a project team the summer of 2002 to explore the feasibility of a Statewide Student Record System (SSRS). The task force's charge was to have a proposal, complete with specifications and recommendations for the design of a statewide student record system, ready to present to the legislature by January 31, 2003.

Evaluation Software Publishing, Inc. was retained in August 2002, as consultants on the project. They led both the project team and the steering committee in researching the needs and uses for such a system in Oklahoma. The project team, with its diverse membership, met every three weeks from August through January.

Need for the Personnel Exchange

Oklahoma's student record system project team members had many questions and decisions to make regarding the management of a student identifier system, the composition of data collected, legal issues, the timing of submissions, technology options, analysis capacity, training and more. Personnel exchanges were chosen as the preferred way to tap other states' expert experiences with statewide student information systems. *The personnel exchanges proved to be by far the most valuable activities undertaken by the project team.*

The Mississippi Personnel Exchange

The Mississippi State Department of Education (MS DOE) offered an opportunity to learn from their very recent experiences in the design, development, training, implementation and support of the Web-based Mississippi Student Information System (MSIS).

Oklahoma sent a team of six persons from the SSRS project team. The NCES Personnel Exchange Network underwrote the travel expenses of three representatives from education.

Mississippi Agenda:

- Tues., Dec. 10 Oklahoma team members flew to Jackson, MS arrived that evening
- Wed., Dec. 11 Team visited MS DOE; full day (9 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.) of presentations and discussions; dinner afterwards with further discussion

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Florida Personnel Exchange

Florida was one of the first states to implement a statewide student information system. While their older technology was not a model Oklahoma wanted to emulate, Florida (FL) was selected because of the extensive expertise they have to share in areas such as student identifiers, data content collected, timing of submissions, staffing levels, staff retention, data quality checks and legal challenges.

Florida sent a team of three persons with significant experience with Florida's student record system to Oklahoma. The trip provided opportunities to influence several groups of Oklahoma stakeholders.

Personnel for the Florida Exchange

Visiting Team from Florida:

Travel funded through the NCES:

- Lavan Dukes Bureau Chief, Education Information and Accountability Services
Florida DOE
- Martha Haynes Senior Educational Program Director
Bureau of Education Information and Accountability Services
Florida DOE
- Annette Barwick General director, Management Information Services
Hillsborough District School Board
Tampa, Florida

Agenda for Florida in Oklahoma:

- Tues., Dec. 17 Florida team members flew to Oklahoma City, OK
Arrived late morning; met with OK DOE staff and SSRS consultants
that afternoon; discussion over dinner
- Wed., Dec. 18
 - a.m. SSRS meeting - full Project Team plus other invited guests
Florida group presentation and discussion included:
 - Overview of the FL Student Information System (FSIS)
 - Content of Data
 - Student Ids
 - District resistance
 - Casualties
 - Timing of data submissions
 - Strong Points of the FL System
 - Major SIS Challenges and solutions
 - Security and Legal issues
 - Training
 - LEA Perspective and Benefits
 - noon Florida group – break; Project Team - working lunch
 - p.m. Steering Committee Meeting:
Project Team co-chairs and Consultants attended
 - Florida group presentation (topics similar to morning presentation)
 - Questions and discussion
 - evening Dinner and Wrap-up with FL Group, Project Co-chairs, Consultants
and OBEC director

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Impact on Oklahoma

The exchange with Florida was energizing and convincing for a wide audience. The entire project team, steering committee, SEA staff and invited guests were able to hear and benefit first-hand from Florida's experience with their state student record system. Legislators and educators questioned Florida personnel on perceived problem areas – potential lawsuits over confidentiality, accuracy of data, burden on school districts, etc. Florida was very convincing: only one lawsuit early on over confidentiality, ruled in favor of the SEA; student level data levels the playing field - distortion of aggregate statistics by districts not possible; detail student level data enables SEA to generate all state and federal statistical reports on behalf of schools and districts; new legislative inquiries don't require surveying schools for additional statistics. Student data enables the SEA to examine trends, tie funding to courses and provide a wealth of information to the public, relieving the districts of that burden. LEA representative Annette Barwick's testimony was very helpful. Her district has over 175,000 students. SEA mandates what, but not how LEAs keep data. Districts have the autonomy to have their own student system, can conduct research and analysis as they choose; are saved the trouble of filling out hundreds of state and federal forms because they provide unit level records for students, staff and finance at periodic reporting intervals.

Impact points from Florida:

- Encourage districts to pool funds to form data processing consortiums and share resources
- Recruit "champions" to promote system when starting
- Having confidentiality policies and procedures in place prevents legal issues
- Uniform definitions and standards generate comparable data
- Standardize as much as possible: courses, transcripts, grading structure
- Quality data = informed decisions
- Communication is key:
 - Required annual budget for training
 - advance notification of new or modifications to data elements with adequate lead time
 - annual training conference
 - separate training focus for school clerks, counselors, teachers, administrators
 - on-going site visits to schools
 - SEA assistance to improve data quality
- Districts own data and correct own data
- Allow time frame for correcting data
- Refer requests for individual student data back to home school

Student Record System Plans

After the insight provided by the personnel exchanges, the SSRS project team met one additional time to revise the software requirements for Oklahoma's State Student Record System. The report was finalized in February 2003. House Bill 1646, with requirements for a state student record system was passed by the Oklahoma legislature and was signed by the governor on June 9, 2003. The system will be phased in over a few years. School districts must have XML and SIF-enabled student information systems by 2005 – 2006 school year. The Oklahoma SEA intends to issue a request for proposal (RFP) for the development of an XML and SIF-enabled State student record system in the summer of 2003.