

# South Orangetown Central School District

160 Van Wyck Road • Blauvelt, NY 10913 • (845) 680-1000

## Student Information Management System Q&A

For the past six years, the South Orangetown School District has used PowerSchool Pro to manage student information – demographics, attendance, and grading. While the system has many features, the district has relied on it primarily for the purpose of tracking attendance, collecting student grades, generating report cards, and managing the student schedules in the middle and high schools. When the program was first introduced in 2002-03, families were provided with information about a feature that would allow parents to sign on to the district website for the purpose of monitoring their children's attendance and grades. The feature – the parent portal - was designed to enhance strong home-school communication, which is one of the hallmarks of effective school systems.

Unfortunately, the portal's implementation did not match the expectations of the community. In addition there has been dissatisfaction with how well the current student information management system matches the needs of the district. The following Q & A will provide information about the situation and related district plans to address the matter:

### **Why is the district dissatisfied with the current system and what kinds of revisions are being sought?**

In addition to other technical needs, here are some of the more significant concerns that the current system does not provide but that the district requires:

... a data structure that helps ensure the standardization and integrity of the data;

... a data structure that forces mandatory fields and data elements;

... a system that will easily allow users to extract data from the database;

...a system that includes built-in reports that match our district's data reporting needs or that can be customized to do so;

...a system that allows us to move large amounts of data for student scheduling purposes;

...a system that allows us to inactivate courses from one year to the next;

... a system that provides for a family data field;

...a grade book that allows teachers to customize communication to parents in a manner that aligns with their management and scheduling of student assessment.

# **South Orangetown Central School District**

160 Van Wyck Road • Blauvelt, NY 10913 • (845) 680-1000

## **What is the district doing to find a program that is more compatible?**

Earlier this year we received notification from Pearson - the company that owns Powerschool - that the PowerSchool Pro version of the product will no longer be supported after August 1, 2009. More troubling was the knowledge that support for New York State reporting would discontinue effective August 1, 2008.

While there have been reports that the district will be abandoning PowerSchool because of this news, the fact is the district will be assembling a task force of teachers and administrators who currently use the system and have ideas about what will meet the needs of staff at all levels. This assessment will include a review of our functional needs and the product options that are available. Such products must be compatible with New York State's reporting system.

In addition to reviewing product options, we will be trying to identify products that will be supported by local technical resource centers and products that similar districts are using. The networking opportunities when certain products are more commonly used have great potential to enhance the success of our implementation.

## **Does the district have the option to stay with the current program?**

The district does not have the option to stay with the current version as discussed; however, the company that owns that version has upgraded versions that will be reviewed. It is possible that should a newer PowerSchool version have the features that the district team will identify as priorities, it may be selected.

## **Why has the district not used the parent portal as it had been promised?**

Having the portal open during specific reporting periods has been problematic. As teachers are entering information and making corrections, some parents are calling the school because the grades they see have not been finalized. Many teachers provide students with options such as make-up assessments or additional credit experiences. The system is not designed to handle such customization.

Some teachers do not like the features of the PowerSchool's electronic gradebook and prefer to use their own version, some of which are more customizable. Having teachers enter grades into two systems is duplicative and a waste of their time.

Teachers have instructional and assessment approaches that vary. That is an aspect of the art and craft of teaching. With a standardized gradebook that does not allow for teacher customization, there is an expectation that all tests within a particular program of study should and will occur at the same time and the same schedule. This is not only unrealistic but would not reflect good assessment practices.

The current system does not allow teachers to publish their grades on their own schedule. This is problematic.

# **South Orangetown Central School District**

160 Van Wyck Road • Blauvelt, NY 10913 • (845) 680-1000

## **What is being done to address these questions?**

The plan for this year will involve the following key activities:

- Upgrade to the most current version of PowerSchool (Premier)
- Assemble a student management system review task force
- Identify the most critical functional needs and requirements
- Conduct an initial review of leading student management products
- Conduct site visits and reference checks
- Review of a final set of identified system(s)
- Decide on a solution that best meets the needs of our district

## **What is the schedule for this plan?**

The schedule for the student management system review and assessment is as follows:

### **Analysis and Review:**

- Upgrade – Nov 2008
- Review task force – Nov - Dec 2008
- Needs and requirements – Nov - Dec 2008
- Initial review process– Jan - Feb 2009
- Site visits / reference checks – Feb 2009
- Final review and analysis – Mar – Apr 2009
- Decision – Apr 2009
- Recommendation – Apr 2009

### **Implementation – TBD (if necessary):**

- Bid Award – June 2009
- Procurement – Summer 2009
- Data conversion – Fall 2009
- Implementation – Winter 2009
- Scheduling – Spring 2010
- “Go Live” – Fall 2010