



VERMONT ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL BUSINESS OFFICIALS

SERVING EDUCATION THROUGH SOUND BUSINESS PRACTICE

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February 12, 2019

Dear House and Senate Education Committees:

Re: Request to extend Statewide School District Data Management System (SSDDMS) Mandatory Implementation date to 7/1/22

The members of Vermont Association of School Business Officials (VASBO) continue to support a Statewide School District Data Management System (SSDDMS) to “improve the comparability, consistency, and timeliness of school financial data...” per Act 11 of 2018. However, we are compelled to share significant problems that cause us to believe it is not possible to conform to the mandate to transition nearly all Vermont school districts to a new Data Management System by July 1, 2020, as expected. Your immediate attention is needed to address this urgent issue.

The following problems exist at this time:

1. Business Rules are still not complete.

- a. The Uniform Chart of Accounts (UCOA), an essential component of the SSDDMS has not been finalized and early deployment has outlined problems.
- b. The business rules associated with the UCOA define how districts must utilize the SSDDMS, and they are not complete
- c. Revisions and changes to either the UCOA or the business rules have major system design and conversion implications.
- d. Many key software modules, as identified in the bid, are not available.

2. Despite school districts’ commitment to “go live” dates in October 2018 and January 2019, only two school districts have implemented limited modules, such as payroll and accounts payable. The system as a whole is untested in Vermont. The districts currently “live” have experienced technical difficulties in their efforts to fully utilize the PowerSchool eFinance software. Without evidence that Vermont’s unique UCOA can become operational throughout all business cycles in all modules of the SSDDMS, it raises the risk of failure to meet various statutory obligations of an employer.

- a. Seven months have lapsed since the beginning of the eFinance implementation and there remains no successful converted operating system that would serve as a scalable model for the rest of the State. Given these conditions, it is urgent that more time be given to assure success.

3. Some Vermont Public School/Supervisory Union Governance Structures are transitioning and are subject to further action by the State Board of Education and the Courts; because they currently do not exist in a legal sense, they need time to implement a financial and human resource system that is aligned to their new consolidated membership. **To be clear, deferring**

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the State Board of Education's decision to merge school districts would further complicate the implementation timeline for SSDDMS because it perpetuates an uncertain legal status.

To ensure successful implementation of SSDDMS and the accuracy and integrity of our essential school business office functions, we are asking for the following considerations:

1. **Revise the Act 11 implementation deadline conditional on the AOE, System Vendor and a pilot group of districts, meeting key targets.** The new timeline would extend both the UCOA and SSDDMS deadlines and include SSDDMS onsite software conversion support. We recommend consideration of July 1, 2022, based on current data.
 - a. We fully support any SU/SD that wishes to engage in the current implementation timeline, and request they continue to receive full support from the AOE and PowerSchool to resolve the many system failures that have prevented others to reach operational status.

2. **Before migrating all SU/SD to this SSDDMS, provide 8-9 fully implemented Vermont SU/SD as pilot programs to ensure all modules are functioning correctly over a reasonable period of time:** ideally a fiscal year.
 - a. The pilot group has already been self-identified and contains at least one SU, one SD, and one technical center

The members of VASBO wish to reiterate our support for a Statewide School District Data Management System and to assist with the conversion project that will manage the approximate \$1.6 billion in public school finances. We would like the opportunity to address any questions you may have and to further explain the risks and urgency of our request.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Frank Rucker, Ed.D.
VASBO President

Cc: VASBO membership
Daniel French, Secretary of Education
Emily Byrne, Chief Financial Officer, Agency of Education

Statutory References:

2014 Acts and Resolves No. 179, Secs. E.500.1-E.500.3 as amended by 2015 Acts and Resolves No. 58, Sec. E.500.1. Also Act No. 11 (2018 Special Session) Secs. E500. Applies to both the Uniform Chart of Accounts and SSDDMS/eFinance Plus implementation timelines.