

SECTION IV

INFORMATION SYSTEMS ADVANCEMENTS

The 2008-2009 school year has been another busy one for the District's Information Systems staff. The major highlights include the implementation of a new student information system grade book, a new special education management system, a new web content management system, improvements in data protection and retention, an upgrade to a portion of the District's network and improvements in how teachers, staff and administrations are made aware of student alerts.

Upgrades to the District copper circuits that support Dawson Elementary School, Davis Hill Elementary School, Dr. Leroy Mayo Elementary School, Mountview Middle School, Paxton Center School, Naquag Elementary School, Glenwood Elementary School and Central Tree Middle School to fiber were completed with nearly no interruption to service. This change puts the District in an excellent position to take advantage of advanced web-based training and technologies currently being developed. Work still must be accomplished to improve network communications at Thomas Prince, Houghton and Chocksett. These are more complicated and more costly. The planning is being done now, to allow for execution when the District is ready.

The improvement that was the most visible involved the implementation of the new PowerSchool student information system gradebook, used by teachers. The new gradebook is significantly different and is totally web based, allowing teacher access from anywhere inside or outside of the District. To insure that teachers were ready for this change, a number of training sessions occurred during the summer. The end result was an excellent rollout of the product, with very few problems. The District solicited comments from users and has worked with PowerSchool, resulting in improvements to the gradebook that will be implemented in a major upgrade to be performed during the summer of 2009. This upgrade will incorporate many of the changes that teachers requested.

The Citrix system, fully implemented in the 2007-2008 school year, continues to provide the District with computer system related cost containment, while still providing the administration, staff and students with the software applications necessary to perform their daily tasks. It has made support response faster and more effective as well, and has allowed the District to put older computers, that were not capable of running today's applications efficiently, back in service. Secure external access, which allows the user to

use the same applications and data, as if working from the desk, has been especially welcome by those that have chosen to take advantage of this feature.

Other major improvements included:

- The implementation of a new Special Education System (Esped), which incorporates a daily feed from the PowerSchool student information system that keeps Esped data in line with PowerSchool and reduces user keystrokes, both saving time and effort. Additionally, a data feed from Esped is in the planning stages that will allow IEP information to be available to teachers via PowerSchool.
- Incorporation of a new web management system that makes it much easier to maintain the content of the District and school web sites.
- A feature has been added to the teacher portion of the PowerSchool student information system that allows teachers to easily access alerts for students in their classes.
- Data backup and retention procedures, for administration, staff and student files, have been significantly improved. The current processes allow for multiple recovery sites that will make loss of data almost impossible and will make restoration much quicker than in the past.
- A firewall upgrade has been completed to improve protection of District computers, limit spam, etc..

The District Information System staff is currently in the process of evaluating the following items for the future.

- A major release of the FirstClass email system, this summer, is currently being evaluated. This release will add significant features to the FirstClass email system, but will also bring some challenges as well.
- Options for replacement of the Professional Development software are being reviewed. These options include in-house development, as well as purchasing from an outside vendor.
- A major upgrade to the Munis financial and human resources system is being evaluated. There are a number of options offered by the vendor.
- The District Information Systems staff is working with MECnet, the District's internet service provider to determine if there are cost effective options to improve the network infrastructure for Thomas Prince, Chocksett and Houghton.