

NEWS RELEASE



Office of Performance Evaluations Idaho Legislature

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Idaho's Instructional Management System (Schoolnet) Offers Lessons for Future IT Projects

Full report and one-page highlights are available on the OPE website:

<http://www.legislature.idaho.gov/ope/>

(BOISE)—“Poor management, poor decisions, and poor system functionality compounded themselves and prevented the goals for a statewide instructional management system from being realized,” said Director Rakesh Mohan of the Office of Performance Evaluations. “The net result is that the project has sunk costs of about \$61 million, and the Department of Education and the Legislature are left with few options to consider when deciding the future of the program.”

In a meeting of the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee today, the Office of Performance Evaluations released its report on the Department of Education's implementation of a statewide instructional management system.

The department hoped to use a statewide system to bring together resources and data for multiple districts' curriculum, professional development, standards, and student assessments. The department applied for a federal grant to fund the project but was rejected. The department then turned to the J. A. and Kathryn Albertson Foundation for funding. The foundation rejected the department's request twice with concerns about a lack of support from the state and weaknesses in the department's plan. After the second rejection, the Legislature passed the department's Students Come First legislation. When the department requested funding from the

foundation a third time, the foundation saw the Students Come First legislation as a significant financial and policy commitment by the state and granted the department \$21 million for the project.

The department's vision for a statewide instructional management system was overly ambitious given the capabilities of the product it selected to use. At the time the contract was signed, the vendor's software was not designed as a statewide platform. The vendor agreed to redesign its existing product to function as a statewide system, but ultimately the delivered product had functionality issues, such as data quality, timely access to data, inaccurately displayed data, and delayed implementation of some features. Although the vendor should share responsibility for the functionality challenges experienced, it was the department's responsibility to verify the potential vendor's capabilities before signing a contract.

The project was rolled out to all districts, but only those districts designated as pilots received training, professional development, and technical support. Without dedicated support from the department, nonpilot districts did not know how to use or leverage the tools available to them. Because use of the statewide system was optional, many districts chose not to use it at all.

The department is now hosting the system and some districts have started to see their educators and administrators consistently use the system. However, the department needs to reassess its strategy to increase use among districts and educators if it intends to continue its support of a statewide instructional management system.

Referring to the prior administration's management of the Schoolnet project, the new administration of the Department of Education said, "It was not only said internally, but became part of the discussion amongst districts and the department alike that we are unfortunately 'trying to build a plane while flying it.'"

One of the lessons offered by this report is that state agencies should learn from past mistakes. Many of the problems with the Schoolnet project were similar to the [ISEE](#) project, and both projects could have benefitted from OPE recommendations discussed in the 2006 [ISIMS](#) report.

The Office of Performance Evaluations is a nonpartisan, independent office that evaluates whether state government programs and agencies are operating efficiently and cost-effectively, and are achieving intended results. OPE conducts all reviews in response to direction from an equally bipartisan committee of the Legislature, the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee. OPE's reviews are used by the Legislature to make policy and budget decisions, and by agencies to improve performance.