

BC government's new initiative - One Common Student Information Computer System for BC schools.

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As in many other Canadian provinces, schools in British Columbia are mandated to use school administration software that can digitally collect and report student information based on provincial requirements. In BC the required format and content of the student data collected and reported seems to change regularly. The new standardized BC provincial report card format and the new graduation program are just two examples of modifications that schools must get their present software vendors to make to their product.

Our provincial government is now promoting and supporting the use of one common student information system to be used by their public and independent schools. Starting this summer service is accessible through the internet. It is used to fulfill the requirements for the collection, management and reporting of student data to educational authorities in government and church.

Some B.C. public school districts are adopting this service this summer. Many others are already signing in for the service but decided to fade in the transition with more appropriate planning and training time before the full implementation.

The provincial CSI (Common system initiative) team has worked very hard evaluating many issues relating to the selection and integration of a common system of data management across the province. After reviewing dozens of school administration products it chose to go with a product called BCeSIS. The original eSIS is a school administrative tool that tracks all aspects of a student's K-12 educational career, including, but not limited to: demographics, schedules and grades, attendance, discipline, and special education. eSIS was created by AAL (Administrative Assistants Ltd.), located in Ontario, Canada. It serves school districts all over North America.

Here are a few features that I found quite appealing.

1. Government Requirements and Reporting built in

The main assignment of the BC version of esis is to serve BC schools and their government authorities. The service is therefore designed to automatically fulfill all format and content requirements. No more worries about getting a software vendor to try to keep up with the frequent required changes. The Ministry of Education will continue to work with the vendor of BCeSIS to ensure Ministry information requirements are met.

2. Off site management

One of the major benefits of this centralization is the use of specialists taking care of offsite servers' maintenance, backups and security.

3. Online (Internet) access

All registered parties will have secure access: The provincial education department, the district (or conference) office, the school administration, the teachers, the parents, and the students. The teachers for example could have access to the grade book feature from home and set the

assignments and grades to be viewed by their students. The parents and students could access their secure account and see the attendance and assignments grades or permanent records through the internet at any time as well.

4. The Total Cost (one place shopping)

At our K-12 day school (FVAA) we currently use Trevlac's "School Administrator" as our main student information system. We are quite satisfied with the stability of the product. It is a flexible and powerful database but it cannot be labeled as "user friendly". We are also using products from Jackson Software. They are compatible with our main student information system (Trevlac's). We find Jackson's "GradeQuick" to be a great product. It is a popular and easy to use gradebook application for teachers. Another Jackson Product that we truly couldn't live without is "Edline". It is a secure internet service that posts current student information on the internet for students and parents to see. This would include updated detailed student grades and attendance information. Parents and teachers love this capability.

It presently takes extra effort to make these different products and services work and communicate with each other. This makes the idea of having all the needed features packaged into one single effective online service very attractive. The total cost of those services should also be considered looking at the price of the BCesis system. BCeSIS presently costs 10.00 CAD per student per year

5. Training and Support Simplified

All BC conference education personnel would be able to get unified training and support. Moving from one BC school to another would not require any extra effort relating to the system.

6. Adventist Data Collection

Our own Adventist education authorities also require our school to collect and report data. While attending a BCeSIS information session a programmer informed me that it is possible to add fields and reports that would permit us to use the same system to satisfy our own church requirements (ex. opening report).

7. Much More

Many more interesting features are included in this online system. BCeSIS provides for all of your information systems needs - everything from student records and attendance to fees management.

What about the risks of a transition?

Any change of a school administrative system also includes risks. Keep in mind that more and more demand is put on schools to increase effective communication with authorities and their community. Note that the personnel would need to learn and adjust to the new way of doing things. This means that sufficient funding for the training and daily support of the personnel is essential to the functional success of the new system. Planning for a reasonable pace for a transition is also vital - watch out for too much too soon.

Getting on board.

BC's SDA conference education office is now only considering adopting this system. If they chose this system its schools would then register under the conference umbrella. Please do not register your school individually. Contact me or the conference office for questions or an update on developments.