

## New System Could Ease Headaches

Posted: Thursday, February 16, 2012 12:00 am

by Kyle Herschelman

Parents in the Panhandle School District could have a better way to keep track of their children's grades, fees and lunch habits if the board decides to pursue a new student management system that was presented to them at Monday's board meeting.

Members of the Panhandle School Board heard from Marty Bennet of Common Goal Systems, which provides the School Insight and Teacher Ease systems that help track everything from a student's attendance, to their fees paid and owed, to their health records and other pertinent information.

Lincolnwood Principal Chad Langheim said that the current student management system is not very user friendly and takes a lot of manpower to maintain.

In its current format, each school in the district has a different system, meaning that when information changes, it must be changed in each system.

Langheim said the new web-based system would allow administrators to make changes for all schools at once if need be and could set up a system that would allow parents to pay fees or for lunches online.

After Langheim's introduction, Bennet gave a brief overview of the company, which provides the second largest student management program in the state, servicing 120 Illinois school districts.

Bennet said that while other vendors offer a software system that requires a dedicated server housed at the school or somewhere offsite, his company is a "cloud computing vendor," meaning that the school's information, and that of their other clients, would be housed on their servers in the Chicago area.

In addition to allowing the district to change information for multiple schools, the cloud system also allows Common Goal Systems to update their software instantly to all of their clients if something like a state required form would happen to change.

Bennet went on to talk about the benefits to parents that the system featured. In addition to being able to see what fees the student owes or has paid, the parents can also look at how their student did on their homework, tests and other items, similar to the school's current Edline system.

School announcements, calendars, menus and the ability to email teachers instantly also are features of the system.

Board member Kathy Johnson expressed concern over the teachers not utilizing the grade book system. Lincolnwood teacher and technology coordinator Robert Straub said he thought the system would actually be less cumbersome than Edline for the teachers.

Langheim said there were more options the teacher could use in addition to the grade book, including a function to download worksheets in pdf form.

As for the benefits for the schools, the administrators would be able to change and access information for students in multiple schools (if they have access), something they can't really do now.

There would also be one system for PBIS (Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports), allowing the teachers and administrators to track and prevent destructive behavior and send instant reports to the parents and administration. Bennet said that the system is web based, the administrators will be able to act instantly, even if they are not at the school.

Langheim mentioned that the new system would greatly reduce the manpower needed to look up medical info, which is now done in file form, and in tracking attendance, which is done by going from class to class.

Johnson asked about transferring information over to the new system. Bennet said that would be part of the installation and the school would send info in spreadsheet form to Common Goal Systems, which would then convert it to the new system.

Johnson also asked about the information that cannot be done that way and whether there was an FTP site the district could use rather than the email, due to possible security concerns.

Bennet said that info would have to be entered in manually and that there was an FTP site available, but most districts used the email.

Johnson asked about sending the required SIS forms to the state through the new system. Bennet said that the system can export information and can show what information is missing before they are sent. He added that it would be possible to do a mass edit for a large group of students if the state changes the information required.

Johnson asked whether the system would be compatible with the schools' current lunch keypad system. Bennet said it would and would also show if the students had any food allergies and the parents what their child ate.

District bookkeeper Tammi Mixen added that she would have access to that part of the system, which would give her instant information for the free and reduced lunch program.

Board member Mike Meisner expressed concern over the security of the system, worrying about whether a student or parent would attempt to hack into it.

Bennet said the company had a denial of service attack recently and the system shuts itself down to prevent information from going out. He added that if the school went with another company with a dedicated server, the district would have to take the same security measures that Common Goal is currently doing on their own servers.

The cost of the new system would be \$6,300 per year. Bennet pointed out that if the school went with another company, the cost would be greater and spread out over a longer period of time, but the district would be locked into the system. With Common Goal, the district can opt out of the system after a year if it doesn't meet their needs.

After Bennet's presentation, the board discussed the matter, with Meisner saying that he would be inclined to agree with the purchase of the program, but would like to look into it further and bring it back next month.

Langheim said that was part of the reason for bringing it before the board now, so if they do purchase it, it would be ready for use when the master scheduling is done at the end of March.

Superintendent Connie Woods added that they would also like to train the new guidance counselor on the system at that time, if the board decides to make the purchase.

In other business, the board voted 6-0, with board member Terri Payne absent, to approve the consent agenda and the certified seniority and non-certified date of hire lists as presented. Superintendent Woods mentioned that there would be three retirees at the end of the year: Verne Pinkston, Becky Cherry and Joy Criner.

The board also discussed the public forum held in Litchfield in January, which discussed consolidation and shared services.

The general consensus was that there was more interest in shared services than consolidation. Superintendent Woods said that the districts involved are planning on forming two work groups, one for educational shared services and one for operational shared services, through the Litchfield superintendent's office.

Board member Dana Pitchford asked if the principals at the schools ever met, because scheduling might need to be looked at before any of the educational shared services plans could go into effect.

Woods said that plans might have to be aimed more at the 2013-14 school year, rather than the 2012-13 school year.

The group also heard the technology report from Straub, who said the district's internet connections had been upgraded to metro ethernet, which has increased download and upload speeds.

Straub also praised the high school's distance learning program, in which three students have been taking a CNA class in Hillsboro via a camera system in the Lincolnwood library.

Board member Bret Slightom asked if the distance learning could be expanded to other classes. Straub said it could and currently the school can connect with Hillsboro and Litchfield.

Straub added that while the current set up could hold about six kids, the equipment could be moved to other classrooms to accommodate more students.

Straub also mentioned that he was in favor of the new student management system and didn't believe there would be a great deal of trouble with its security.

The proposed calendar for the next school year was also discussed. Johnson brought up a possible issue with the graduation date being before the students in the Capital Area Career Center finished their program.

Langheim said that other schools go through their graduation ceremony, but do not give the diplomas to those students, which allows the students to continue with the program.

The CACC program wraps up a week after the Lincolnwood graduation date of May 18.

In principal reports, Langheim highlighted the schools' PBIS New Year Kick-Off, which included students acting out the proper way to act in the main areas of the school.

Langheim also mentioned the FASFA meeting held on Jan. 28, the 50th anniversary celebration, which was held on Feb. 4, and the National Honor Society induction, which will be at 7 p.m. on March 13.

According to Langheim, the school is currently exploring ideas to strengthen its curricular offerings. Plans are in the works to meet with Lincoln Land Community College to discuss dual credit options.

Langheim said the goal is to offer nine hours of college credit for seniors next year, with three to six more hours added a possibility down the line.

The board then went into closed session at 8:55 p.m., reconvening at 9:48 p.m. After the session, the board voted 6-0 to accept the letters of retirement from Nancy Schoenherr, effective after the current school year, and Don Reid, effective at the end of the 2015-16 school year.

The board adjourned the meeting at 9:50 p.m. They will meet again on Monday, March 19, at 7 p.m., at the main office in downtown Raymond.

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