

TO: Ed Weisenbach and Beth Juillierat, ODE
FROM: Geoff Andrews, co-Chair, SSDT Oversight Board
RE: SSDT Oversight Board Recommendations
DATE: June 8, 2016

In summer 2015, ODE issued its annual grant to NWOCA/NBEC for various applications associated with the State Software Design Team (SSDT). As a condition of the grant being issued, ODE required that an Oversight Board be established to monitor the redesign of USPS/USAS. Subsequently, Ed Weisenbach requested a list of candidates for that board from OASBO and the Management Council. 10 Treasurers were recommended by OASBO. As a condition of participation on this Oversight Board, all of the Treasurers were required to be experienced users with and supportive of a future for state software. The Management Council also provided 10 candidates, with the same criteria – among the ten were five ITC Directors and five ITC fiscal specialists. Additionally, OASBO Director David Varda, NWOCA Director Marc Robinson, Management Council CEO Geoffrey Andrews, ODE Technology Director Ed Weisenbach and MC CFO Greg Buddelmeyer served in ex officio capacities. Ed and Geoff co-chaired the board.

The Board met in November, December, January, March, and May to review the progress of the Design Team. By January it was evident that there would be more visibility into the project needed, so ODE provided grant funds and the Management Council contracted with an experienced software development firm to provide industry-standard context into the process and product (“Redesign”) being executed and developed by the Design Team. The consultant, Chuck Mackey, reported to the Board in March and in May. His report is attached. In summary, he concluded that the process and product are both flawed.

Through the Winter and Spring, various ITCs have stood up the Redesign application in its preview phase and encouraged school district and ITC staff to work with it. The Treasurers on the Board have all had training and trials with the Redesign. All of these treasurers began the academic year with optimism for state software, but have developed deeply held reservations that have been confirmed through additional meetings the treasurers held with the consultant.

On Friday, May 13, the Oversight Board heard from Chuck Mackey about his observations and from the Design Team about the current state of the software and their version of the “Road Map” forward, which the Design Team leadership had been tasked to prepare several weeks prior. Following the morning presentations, the Board met with no outsiders present. They developed two unanimous recommendations for the Department:

1. It is imperative that the Department continue to support the original version of state software (referred to as “Classic”). Many school districts rely on this software and find it meets their basic needs; most districts supplement Classic with third party applications to enhance functionality, but the close ties between Classic and the state audit rules is a highly valued feature and the Oversight Board urges the Department to sustain this application, while acknowledging that it relies on some aging technologies.

2. The Board unanimously recommends that the Department support the reallocation of grant resources to effect the hiring of a Project Manager to lead the Redesign project. The Design Team on May 13 acknowledged that they would be seeking to hire additional programmers in the coming months. The Board feels these resources would be more effectively allocated on a Project Manager to manage and oversee the work of the design team. This project manager shall be in charge of all communication, leadership, and management of the work on the redesign project. The Project Manager will review all processes and product development currently in place and develop a true road map forward, including metrics with key performance indicators to be measured and evaluated. This manager will be accountable to the Oversight Board and be employed on a consultant basis by the Management Council (all Management Council personnel abstained from discussion and voting on this element of the recommendation). This consultant will, within a year's time or less, recommend to the Board and the Department whether to shut down, outsource, modify, or continue with the Redesign effort.

In addition, the Board considered a recommendation to completely shut down the Redesign project. While there were supporters of this concept, a straw poll of the membership produced an inconclusive determination, and the Board instead elected to unanimously support recommendation #2 above.

I wish to close by conveying my gratitude to all of the participants of the Oversight Board for their sincere and substantial efforts, to the SSDT for their work on the fiscal package, to Chuck Mackey for his invaluable insights, and to Ed and Beth at the Department for the opportunity to pursue this worthy endeavor.