

The Next Student Information System: Bringing it All Together

Opinion piece by Scott B. Crowder, CEO, Educational Vistas, Inc.

Since computers were first introduced into public schools, administrators have been grappling with the same challenges and issues. Namely, how to input valuable data, link multiple systems, allow users access, organize information, get reports on-demand, and then archive it from year-to-year!

Student Information Systems (SIS) or Student Management Systems (SMS) emerged early-on as essential solutions that every district needed. These powerful products can easily be identified by the three things they do well: scheduling, attendance and grade book.

Over the years these products have become much more user-friendly and moved from client-server multiuser distribution to direct-to-the-web hosted remote or local solutions. Attempts have also been made to add additional features and functionality (such as discipline)

with mixed results. The cold, hard, fact is that the half-life of any particular program within a district is 4-6 years. Many New York schools are not completely satisfied with their current system and are yearning for the next “latest-and-greatest” SIS!

What if a dramatic shift or if you will, quantum-leap, were about to take place in the SIS marketplace? Well, it is just over the horizon. The next generation of student management systems will in fact function as district management systems! This means that all major areas of school/district data management and reporting will now be internal to the SMS. Census, IEP, AIS/RTI, APPR, assessment data, surveys, on-line forms and assessments, dashboard analytics, HR, and scheduling/attendance/grade book all in one package. The new systems will then easily link directly to any transportation, lunch, and library program to close the circle! All RIC and state reports will be built-in and any other necessary database(s) may also be connected.

That IS the future. These new district management systems - DMS (you heard to here first), will be dramatically less expense to purchase and maintain, and will serve as mini data warehouses functioning as an efficiency process that over time will pay for themselves. The promise of technology will finally be realized in the world of public education. Powerful information, at your fingertips, in real-time! ■

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THE WORLD WITHIN REACH

An Educator's Journey

by SAANYS member, Peter M. DeWitt, EdD

In December I took a leave of absence from my position as Poestenkill Elementary School principal to become a Visible Learning trainer. Visible Learning is based on the work of New Zealand born John Hattie, director of research and professor of education at the University of Melbourne.

A few weeks ago, Cognition Education, the company that owns Visible Learning Plus, brought me to New Zealand to do some consulting, meet up with John Hattie, visit some Visible Learning schools, and attend the Auckland Education Festival. The festival was one of three education festivals that took place around New Zealand. John Hattie and Michael Fullan provided keynotes at the festivals.



Peter DeWitt with Hekia Parata, New Zealand Minister of Education

Besides spending the day with John, I had several conversations with Hekia Parata, the New Zealand minister of education, who has great pride for the school system, hence the festival. I suddenly found myself in the position of being a special guest of the Ministry, which is not what I expected as I travelled to New Zealand.

Walking away, there is a lot I learned from the experience, and it is a time I will not forget. However, one of the best lessons came from Michael Fullan. Michael said, “Just because we are stuck with their policies, doesn't mean we need to be stuck with their mindset.”

Here are five other observations that I take away from this journey, that I would like to share with my American colleagues:

Culture counts - Many Americans are patriotic, but too often we don't celebrate diversity and culture as much as we segregate it to happen only at home.

Celebrate education - The Festival of Education in New Zealand focused on all that was good about their educational system. They agree that they have issues to work on, but they want to solve those issues together. Over the past few decades, the US seems to focus on everything that is wrong about education.

Student voice – At the festival, and in every school I visited, student voice was encouraged and celebrated. Students can enlighten us if we let them.

Tea time – Every day, teachers, students, and other professionals have tea time for 20 minutes in the morning. They get a chance to sit together, have tea or coffee, and talk socially. We need to take more time to relax, slow down, and get to know our colleagues.

Visible Learning matters – Although I'm a VL trainer, the more I read John Hattie's work, and spend time with him, the more I believe we need to make sure that we are making learning visible to our students, parents, and ourselves. In addition, feedback isn't just about the direction we give to students, it's about the direction they can provide to us. ■

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