

MEMO's M/T News

NEWS for School Media & Information Professionals

March 2004

A publication of MEMO's Information Technology Special Interest Division

Welcome to M/T News

Marc Johnson, Editor

This edition certainly has a "data" theme. Read on for stories about data-driven decision making, recent developments in the Schools Interoperability Framework (SIF) and professional development opportunities related to data. I don't know that each edition of M/T News will have a theme, but it might not be a bad idea.

M/T News is only published twice a year, so your next opportunity to "get published" won't happen until next fall, but if you have any ideas for a theme or other content, it's not too early to contact me.

Enjoy the information provided here by your colleagues related to data and other topics relevant to our professional lives.

Research and Statistical Skills Needed for Effective Data-driven Decision Making

Doug Johnson, MEMO President

If the plans many Minnesota school districts are making to implement data warehousing and data mining come to fruition, teachers and administrators will soon find themselves confronted by a sea of numbers.

Technology alone can help educators use data to increase their personal and

institutional effectiveness, but only in a rather limited way. Good databases and analytic tools can:

- Provide reliable, complete, timely and convenient access to vast amounts of student data including demographic information, test scores, and histories of student participation in specific programs.
- Help users select and sort data for specific, disaggregated cohort groups.
- Help users display the results of data sets graphically.
- Automate complex mathematical calculations.

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M/T News is a MEMO publication.

Articles may be submitted in most common word processing formats, or as text or PDF files. Please submit to Marc Johnson, editor, for publication in November or March.

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What technology *cannot* do is give educators the skills they need to interpret and use data in accurate and meaningful ways. If staff development only includes the skills of retrieving specific information within a data warehouse, sorting it, and then creating graphs to represent the findings, the effort and resources expended to create these data mining tools may not only be wasted, but may actually do harm. Teaching anyone to use a spreadsheet and then expecting him/her to make good use of data is like teaching a person to use a word processor and then expecting him/her to be a proficient writer.

Except for teachers or administrators who have recently taken a course in educational research and statistics, it is unlikely most educators will be able to make good “data drive” decisions and planning with their current level of statistical ability.

These are among the skills that should be a core part of staff development efforts in improving the use of data in improving instructional practice:

1. Establishing statistical significance.
2. Understanding the difference between correlation and causation.
3. Necessity of control groups and single variable experiments.
Hawthorne effect?
4. Knowing the uses of specific types of graphic data representation (pie charts, bar graphs, plotted graphs, etc.) and the principles of accurate data representation.
5. Knowing how to create and interpret surveys, including creating useful Likert scales.
6. Knowing the purpose and function of specific types of test (normed,

criteria referenced) and purpose and function of specific scoring and recording methods (raw score, percentile, quartile).

Knowing how to numerically record the results of authentically assessed worked (checklists, rubrics, journals

Now I am not claiming I have expertise educational statistics. I am sure I’ve left out plenty of important skills from the list above. In fact as an English major, I probably fall well outside the standard deviation on any numeracy measurement (and not on the high side). Maybe that’s why the effort data-driven decision making efforts send up lots of red flags for me. I am afraid our technology departments will build lovely buses that few in our schools have the ability to drive. If data is to drive our planning, driver’s education training should a required course.

MEMO – MEMO-IT Calendar

March 15	Deadline for submissions for the next edition of MEMOrandom. Send to: maryalicea@mac.com
April 23	MEMO-IT General Meeting Metro Location TBA
June 3-4	MEMO legislative forum in St. Joseph
June 21-23	NECC in New Orleans
July 21-23	MEMO Leadership Conference in St. Paul
Sept 30 – Oct 2	MEMO Fall Conference in St. Cloud



The Maturing of SIF

*Larry Fruth II, Ph.D., Executive Director
Schools Interoperability Framework*

“Not mature enough...”, “Vendors have not bought into it...”

As the new Executive Director of the Schools Interoperability Framework (SIF) Association I have heard these and various other published rationales from vendors, consultants and even state agencies in describing why interoperating educational software applications and SIF has not “caught on” in schools.

There is no nice way to put it – they are wrong.

In the past six months over two dozen vendors and schools, five states, and even the US Department of Education have joined SIF bringing membership to over 110. More than twenty applications have now achieved the “SIF Certified” testing stamp of approval for interoperability – ten in the past six month alone! Formal agreements for partnerships are also being finalized with Australia and Canada who are identifying similar data transport needs as the states. The majority of this growth is directly attributable to schools being asked to “do more with less”, requests for proposals requiring SIF Certified applications and the next specification version providing mechanisms for state and federal mandated reporting. Vendors understand the immediate and long term business value to becoming involved in the initiative.

But I am a left-brained, concrete educator by

trade. To me, the best gauge of progress can be measured through the usage of the specification and the number of successful implementations. SIF is a true “initiative and not a product” so I have to depend on our membership to provide me data on their implementations – and the results are “maturing”: *An estimated 1.5 million students and teachers are currently being served through a “SIF-based” application!*

These applications range from transportation, communication, library and cafeteria systems interoperating with student information and data warehousing systems. SIF strategies have been used for identity management, user account generation and active directory development.

Why SIF? These schools, states and even the US Department of Education are looking to SIF as a solution to help with local district business usage as well as mandated federal reporting via:

- ✓ Streamlined data entry increasing accuracy
- ✓ Resources dedicated to service rather than data input and maintenance
- ✓ Improved timeliness of service to students, families and staff
- ✓ Providing immediate flow of information to other agents
- ✓ Leveraging of existing infrastructure and connectivity
- ✓ Allowing schools choice for authentication methods and encryption strengths
- ✓ Enabling “Best of Breed” approach to software acquisition
- ✓ Seamless reporting – ability to move data from school to district to state to federal levels
- ✓ Increased capability for data driven decision making

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The SIF web site (www.sifinfo.org) provides more specific school implementation information we entitle “Success Stories”. The SIF membership will be unveiling the 1.5 Specification in March 2004, a benchmark document that will contain three times the amount of interoperable data objects as well as mechanisms for vertical reporting. The initiative will be updating and expanding the Certification Testing process, developing a long term versioning projection for upcoming specification development and initiating additional support strategies for implementations.

SIF is real and gaining strength through the hard work and dedication of a unique blend of vendors, schools, government agencies and other vested educational partners. Ideally this maturation will continue – current pressures on K12 education are depending on it.

The Schools Interoperability Framework (SIF) is a non-profit membership organization comprised of over 100 software vendors, school districts, state departments of education and other organizations active in pK-12, who have come together to create a set of rules and definitions to enable software programs from different companies to share information. This set of platform independent, vendor neutral rules and definitions is called the "SIF Implementation Specification."



Some SIF School Districts	Student/Staff Served
Ballston Spa Central School	4,400
Los Lunas School District	8,500
Upper Dauphin Area School District	1,400
Johnston Community School District	4,400
Orange County Public Schools	170,000
Brownsburg Community Schools Corp.	5,200
Milton Area School District	2,500
Duval County Public Schools	135,000
Nassau County Public Schools	11,000
Indian River Public Schools	17,000
Irving Independent School District	35,000
Lee County Public Schools	63,000
Mukilteo Schools	14,000
St. Lucie County Public Schools	33,000
York Region District School Board	106,000
Toronto Catholic District School Board	117,000
Amarillo Independent School District	32,000
San Francisco Unified School District	63,000
West Chester Area School District	13,000
New Albany Floyd County Schools	13,000
Holmen School District	27,000
Charleston County School District	51,000
Anoka-Hennepin School District	41,000
Ocoee Middle School	1,600



The TIES Coordinator Conference drew 106 attendees from 44 school districts for two days of exploration and information sharing in St. Cloud on February 19 and 20.

Sessions included topics such as networking, workstation management, testing and assessment in the classroom and many more.

Photos courtesy of TIES

NEWS From the Legislature

Elaine M. Keefe, Capitol Hill Associates

Now that the February economic forecast has been released and the Governor's budget is due out later today (a press conference is scheduled for 2:45pm), the mood at the Legislature has become much more serious. One of my colleagues commented that it felt more like the 12th week of session rather than the 5th week.

State Economic Forecast:

On March 1st I attended a special briefing on the February forecast for education organizations. The briefing was sponsored by MASA, the superintendents' organization. The mood was very grim, as it was clear that the state not only has no money this year, but is unlikely to be able to increase funding for education in the next biennium. The state economist, Tom Stinson, emphasized that the February forecast, which projected a \$160 million deficit at the end of the biennium (June 30, 2005), was quite aggressive. It assumes very strong growth in the economy over the next four years. If the growth in the economy falls short of those aggressive projections, the state will face larger deficits. Stinson wound up his remarks by speculating that perhaps the state should look at ways to reduce the volatility in the current tax structure so that the huge swings we have experienced lately could be leveled out somewhat.

Also on March 1st, Commissioner of Finance Peggy Ingison spoke at a meeting of the Minnesota Government Relations Council (the lobbyists' professional association). She said that the governor's budget would be released on Thursday. The governor and legislative leaders have said

that they do not want to use the state's budget reserve to solve the projected \$160 million deficit because they are concerned about the potential impact on the state's bond rating.

Telecom and Library Funding

Governor Pawlenty has released his budget proposal. Details can be found on the Department of Finance web site: <http://www.finance.state.mn.us/> The Governor's press release can be accessed via the following link: http://www.governor.state.mn.us/Tpaw_View_Article.asp?artid=840

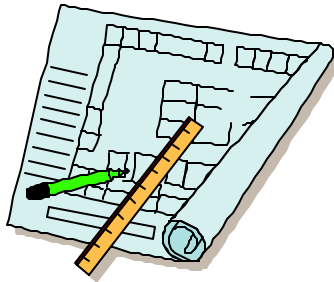
No cuts to any library appropriations were recommended. As we had previously been told, the governor is recommending \$4.5 million in funding for telecommunications aid for schools. This is the largest new expenditure in the education budget. The state will reimburse schools for 90% of their costs that exceed \$15 per pupil. We are hoping to convince legislators to provide more funding than the governor has recommended.

The telecommunications funding bill is HF 2195 and SF 2123. Please contact your local legislators and ask that they support not only the bill, but also an increase in the amount allocated.

Other bills of interest:

SF 2048 – wireless computing device bill
HF 2109 – online curriculum library
HF 1947 – revised funding for online learning options
HF 1999 – School innovation and cooperative planning grants

Dale Carrison, Jan Feye-Stukas and Judy Bull supplied information for this story.



Technology Planning

With the first “deadline” now past for schools and libraries to submit technology plans to the MN Department of Education (MDE) for approval, many school districts are still in the working stages.

Districts that still need to get started or need assistance can contact Nancy Walton or Mary Mehsikomer at MDE. Contact information is listed below. Also, see the MDE Technology Planning Guide, which can be found at:

http://education.state.mn.us/html/intro_schtech.htm

The planning guide contains detailed information on components required for E-rate and NCLB compliance as well as a checklist that will be used in the approval process.

Remember that technology plans need to be in place and approved in order to complete the final requests for E-rate funding for the year beginning July 1, 2004. Therefore, the absolute deadline for submitting technology plans (for school districts) to MDE is May 15, 2004.

For more information:

Nancy Walton (651) 582-8881
nancy.walton@state.mn.us

Mary Mehsikomer (651) 582-8827
mary.mehsikomer@state.mn.us

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A Flood of Computer Viruses

According to Symantec Corporation, maker of Norton Antivirus and other popular security software titles, eight new virus strains or variants that were rated as moderate or severe threats were released between January 26, 2004 and March 2, 2004. In addition, many others with lower threat ratings were also deployed.

The current “epidemic” is keeping IT departments busy and everyone on edge with every new message that comes to an e-mail box with an attachment. Of course, most people know that they need to be sure their computers are protected with an antivirus software program, but many do not realize that continuous updates are necessary. Many of the products available now provided for automatic updating but if yours does not, remember to update it at least weekly.

Find more information on the latest virus threats, including removal information, at the following web sites:

<http://securityresponse.symantec.com/>

<http://vil.nai.com/vil/default.asp>

Making Connections

Making Connections, a joint project of the Minnesota Office of Technology and the Department for Children, Families & Learning, contains useful information for Minnesota schools on the integration of technology into classroom learning. Learn about volume purchasing opportunities for schools, join the Making Connections listserv and read about current technology initiatives in Minnesota.

<http://www.makingconnections.state.mn.us>

Greater MN Data Institutes

The Greater Minnesota Data Institutes (GMDI) are a series of two-day workshops and training seminars intended to assist schools in Greater Minnesota with their data-driven decision-making needs.

Sponsored by regional service cooperatives and delivered by the University of Minnesota, the institutes are an opportunity for Greater Minnesota educators to receive timely, relevant professional development around school accountability issues.

Two of the institutes are still coming up on March 25 and 26 in Thief River Falls and April 29 and 30 in Fergus Falls. A statewide conference will be held on May 4, 2004 in St. Cloud.

For more information, see the GMDI web site at:

<http://www.education.umn.edu/datainstitutes>



Free One-Year Subscription to eSchool News

ISTE is offering a new benefit to its members. Interested members will receive a free one-year subscription to eSchool News, a monthly print and online publication covering technology issues and news for K-20 educators. According to Don Knezek, ISTE's CEO, the agreement with eSchool News furthers ISTE's mission to advance the effective use of technology in classrooms. Take advantage of this special offer at:

<http://www.eschoolnews.com/freesubiste>

Annual TIES Conference dates change – Call for presenters

Mark your calendars now for the 2004 TIES Education Technology Conference. The dates have shifted a bit later than the traditional pre-thanksgiving time period. The 2004 conference will be held December 4 – 7 at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Minneapolis.

TIES is currently accepting presentation proposals for the conference. The deadline for submitting proposals is May 7, 2004. Go to the conference web site to download a proposal form.

<http://www.ties.k12.mn.us/ties2004>

School Technology Leadership Initiative Taking Applications for Next Cohort

The University of Minnesota School Technology Leadership Initiative (STLI) is addressing the nationwide shortage of school administrators who can effectively facilitate the implementation of technology in schools and school districts. The only academic program in the country based on the National Educational Technology Standards for Administrators (NETS-A), the STLI is at the national forefront of technology preparation for K-12 school leaders.

Applications for the next cohort beginning in July 2004 are currently being accepted and are due by April 12, 2004. The application process includes online and written components. Information can be obtained at the STLI web site.

<http://www.schooltechleadership.org/>

MEMO Fall Conference 2004

Call for Presenters

September 30 – October 2, 2004
St. Cloud Civic Center/Kelly Inn

The Program Committee for the 2004 MEMO Fall Conference is seeking individuals or panels to speak, share strategies and best practices, present research or entertain relating to the theme, **“Information Power Boosts Student Achievement.”** We are seeking presentations in two strands: Library/Media or Technology.

Proposal deadline is May 1, 2004. Notification of acceptance of proposal will be made no later than May 15th.

Title of Session: _____

Presenter: _____

Address: _____

City _____ **State** ____ **Zip** ____ **Phone** _____

E-mail: _____

Co-Presenter: _____ **Co-Presenter:** _____

Strand focus: Library/Media Technology

Description of Session, including how it relates to student achievement:

Preferred date of presentation:

- Thursday, September 30
(2-3 hour workshop only) Friday, October 1
(45 minute session) Saturday, October 2
(45 minute session)

Are you willing to offer your session more than once? Yes No

Equipment needs:

- LCD projector Internet connection TV/VCR Other

Special needs:

Please submit this form via e-mail to mekunkel@bwig.net or by mail to:

Monica Kunkel, 1195 Barton Ave NW, Buffalo, MN 55313