

## **LEGISLATIVE REPORT**

# **SHARED SCHOOL DISTRICT DATA MANAGEMENT SYSTEM**

Report by the Vermont Agencies of Education and Digital Services pursuant to  
Act 185, Sec. E.500.5  
to the House and Senate Committees on Education

**December 16, 2022**

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Secretary of Education**

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## Executive Summary

The Shared School District Data Management System (SSDDMS) is a project to implement an enterprise resource planning (financial and human resources) software system designed to function together with Vermont's Uniform Chart of Accounts (UCOA) financial accounting structure. In 2018 the Vermont General Assembly made adoption of this system mandatory for all Vermont Supervisory Unions. Previously, the SSDDMS program had been a voluntary initiative developed in partnership with Vermont's school business managers.

Implementation of the SSDDMS software project has been difficult for school systems, and the software system has often not worked as intended nor met the financial, accounting and human resources needs of Vermont Supervisory Unions (SU/SDs). Accordingly, General Assembly has passed several extensions of the implementation timeline in previous legislative sessions and most recently granted the request of the Agencies of Education and Digital Services (AOE and ADS) for a pause in the implementation process for new SU/SDs. Currently, 21 SU/SDs (just above one third) use the SSDDMS project's software system, while others use pre-existing accounting and human resources systems.

The Agencies have been working in concert with a stakeholder group of school business managers and human resource professionals to assess the capability of the system and the challenges their colleagues have experienced with implementation and operation, as well as develop recommendations for improvement and additional legislative action. This report, required by the General Assembly in the FY23 budget, provides the following:

- A summary of the background of development and implementation of the SSDDMS project's software system and its current status and still-outstanding functionality issues
- A survey and analysis of perspectives of SU/SD business managers, human resources professionals and other relevant staff on the utility of the SSDDMS project's software system, its challenges, and potential future approaches
- A recommendation for legislative action and summary of additional action steps the Agencies will take to support school systems and ensure access to important school financial data.

The Agencies and the stakeholder group surveyed Vermont school business officials and human resources professionals, as well as other relevant staff who use the SSDDMS project's system regularly. The Agencies and stakeholder group also surveyed staff working in Supervisory Unions that have not yet adopted the SSDDMS project's system on their experiences with their current system and perspective on migration to the system. The group found:

- Approximately half of current users reported that the SSDDMS either does not meet or only partially meets the needs of their SU/SD.
- Only 5 (of 20 surveyed) SU/SDs currently using SSDDMS wished to continue using the system. Several of these respondents wished to remain for logistical or budgetary reasons, rather than because they found the system useful.
- Of users not currently using the SSDDMS project's system, over 85% were satisfied or mostly satisfied with their current system.
- Of 33 SU/SDs not using the SSDDMS project's system, only one expressed interest in migrating to the new system, if given the option.

Based on the survey data from the field and with the unanimous consent of the stakeholder group, the Agencies recommend that the General Assembly strike the underlying mandate in

Act 11 of 2018 (Special Session) to require SU/SD adopt the SSDDMS project's system. This will allow districts currently using the system to change to a new system if desired and allow SU/SDs not using the system to migrate to the SSDDMS system if they decide that it works best for their district(s). The Agencies recommend the continued mandate of a Uniform Chart of Accounts to ensure good comparability of financial data across systems. The Agencies will continue to find ways to support better and more effective reporting of school financial data.

## Acknowledgements

The Agencies of Education and Digital Services are very grateful to the members of the Path Forward Group for their contributions to this report. The Path Forward Group includes school business managers representing the Vermont Association of School Business Officials (VASBO) and school human resources administrators belonging to Vermont School Human Resources Professionals, Inc. (VSHRP). The Group's membership represented both SU/SD using the SSDDMS software system, and those who have not migrated. For more about the Path Forward Group, see the [Establishment of the Path Forward Group](#) section of the report.

Path Forward Group Membership:

- **Michelle Baker**, former Business Manager of **Harwood UUSD** and VASBO Past President.
- **Heather Bushey**, Business Manager of **Essex North SU**
- **Jim Fenn**, Business Manager of **Windsor Central SU**
- **Brenda Fleming**, Business Manager of Rutland NE Business Manager
- **Tisha Hankinson**, Business Manager of **Kingdom East SD**
- **Rick Pembroke**, Business Manager of **Springfield SD**
- **Megan DeVinny**, Human Resources at **Grand Isle SU** and VSHRP President
- **Amanda Butler**, Human Resources at **Bennington-Rutland SU**
- **Germaine Cross**, Benefits Coordinator at **Maple Run SD**
- **Nancy Griffith**, Human Resources at **North Country SU**
- **Bill Bates**, Chief Financial Officer (CFO) at **AOE**
- **Sean Cousino**, Deputy CFO at **AOE**
- **Ted Gates**, Support Specialist at **AOE**
- **Tim Holland**, Project Manager at **ADS**
- **Tracey Delphia**, Agency IT Director for AOE at **ADS**

## Legislation

This report is submitted pursuant to [Act 185, Sec. E.500.5](#). This legislation requires the Agencies of Education and Digital Services (AOE and ADS) to report on the status of improvement and implementation of the Shared School District Data Management System (SSDDMS) and a recommendation to continue or suspend implementation.

The Agencies are required to consult with Vermont Association of School Business Officials (VASBO) and the Vermont Chapter of the American Association of School Personnel Administrators (VSHRP).

## Background

This section includes an overview of the SSDDMS Project. This section also outlines efforts to improve the functionality of the SSDDMS system and previous reviews and analyses of system functionality, and the review process used to prepare this report.

## Establishment of the Path Forward Group

The Agencies established a “Path Forward” Group in October of 2021, to help guide the review and improvement process for the SSDDMS project. The Path Forward Group includes membership from both Agencies as well as business managers and school HR professionals. The Path Forward Group worked as a collaborative team to guide the review process reflected in this report. The work of the Path Forward Group meets the consultation requirement outlined above.

## SSDDMS Project Overview and History

In March 2018, the Vermont Agency of Education (AOE) contracted with an Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system provider, PowerSchool Group LLC (PowerSchool), following a cost-benefit analysis, requirements gathering, Request for Proposals (RFP) bid selection, and independent review. The ensuing implementation project, known as the SSDDMS Project, was to include the voluntary migration of supervisory unions (SU/SDs) from their varying ERP environments into the PowerSchool eFinancePlus system (eFinance).

The SSDDMS system was intended to complement the adoption of a standardized Uniform Chart of Accounts (UCOA) for all Vermont schools, with the goal of better tracking and understanding trends in education spending. The idea for a UCOA was discussed in the General Assembly as early as 2009, and legislation regarding it evolved over time. In 2016, the AOE considered three options to develop state systems to support the implementation of UCOA and commissioned a study by a consulting firm to recommend one of the following three options:

- A. Modify or replace existing systems to facilitate UCOA and state reporting requirements
- B. SU/SDs choose from list of state contracted/compliant vendors
- C. SU/SDs all use a single centrally managed state system

The consultants initially recommended option B, but after a vote at an early 2017 VASBO meeting, Business Managers were unanimously in favor of option C, which ultimately changed the recommendation of the consultants. AOE adopted option C which became the SSDDMS. It was also understood at this time that adoption of the SSDDMS was voluntary.

The Legislature mandated SSDDMS in [Act 11 of 2018](#) (Special Session). Most districts planned on migrating their accounting charts to the UCOA upon converting to eFinance, but there have been two significant legislative pauses to SSDDMS that have contributed to the delay of the comprehensive adoption of the UCOA.

A timeline of SSDDMS legislation:

- [Act 66 of 2021](#) – Most recent SSDDMS legislation, extended the statutory implementation deadline to January 1, 2023, paused implementations until January 1, 2022.
- [Act 72 of 2019](#) – Extended deadline from July 1, 2020 to July 1, 2022.
- [Act 11 of 2018](#) (Special Session) – The original SSDDMS mandate.

As of the date of this Report, 21 of 54 SU/SDs have migrated to eFinance (over the timespan of January 2019 to July 2021). As the SU/SDs implemented eFinance, it became increasingly evident that significant and necessary functionality features were missing from or not fully developed in eFinance.

The Agencies made a recommendation to the General Assembly to pause further SU/SD migrations to eFinance until June 30, 2021. This was intended to address training needs, outages, reporting enhancements, and to allow PowerSchool to address certain high-priority gaps and implement them with the Version 20.11 upgrade of eFinance. While the 20.11 upgrade of eFinance did solve *some* of the high-priority problems, there were still many key functionality gaps and the timeframe for filling many of those gaps was projected to be several years out. The SU/SDs also experienced technical difficulties and temporary loss of functionality because of the 20.11 upgrade.

The Agencies therefore recommended the General Assembly delay further migrations of SU/SDs to eFinance in a report dated January 26 of this year. The Agencies, and the SU/SDs established the Path Forward Group mentioned above, using this time to survey practitioners in the field and develop recommendations that would best serve the State and Vermont's school systems. This Report provides the Path Forward Group's analysis of SU/SD levels of satisfaction with eFinance and the recommended options.

## Path Forward Group Process

The Path Forward Group engaged BerryDunn (the Contractor) to:

- Plan for the Path Forward facilitation efforts
- Analyze SU/SD levels of satisfaction with eFinance
- Identify and analyze the potential recommendations
- Draft and present this report to the PathForward Group for feedback

This report includes the current state of the SSDDMS Project, analysis of SU/SD levels of satisfaction with eFinance, and the Path Forward Group's recommendation.

## SU/SD Satisfaction with eFinance

This section includes background and context regarding eFinance, an analysis of SU/SDs' satisfaction with/interest in eFinance, and the degree to which eFinance functionality meets SU/SDs' needs.

### Context and Current State

As of the date of this Report, 21 of 54 SU/SDs have migrated to eFinance (over the timespan of January 2019 to July 2021). Out of the remaining 33 SU/SDs, below are the current systems they are using:

- 12 SU/SDs are currently using Tyler Technologies' ADS Profund
- 14 SU/SDs are currently using Tyler Technologies' Infinite Visions (now called School ERP Pro)
- 5 SU/SDs are currently using NEMRC
- 1 SU/SD is currently using Sage 50
- 1 SU/SD is currently using Tyler Technologies' Incode IX

The Agencies developed a Governance Group, which included SU/SDs alongside AOE and ADS staff, to guide and provide direction and decision making throughout the SSDDMS Project. The Governance Group identified necessary or desired features/functionality that were not part of the core eFinance. The Governance Group then worked with PowerSchool to prioritize the feature/functionality request list based on a balance between PowerSchool's current road map and resources available. PowerSchool determined whether each feature/functionality would be developed as a customization and paid for by the State (and at what cost and when it would be developed) or would be included as a new feature/function in a future product release at no additional cost to the State.

Below is an overview of the SU/SDs' necessary or desired features/functionality that were not part of the core eFinance, plans for their completion, and current status:

- The Governance Group identified a total of 99 feature/functionality requests for PowerSchool and rank-ordered them iteratively
- PowerSchool has analyzed and grouped 43 of the 99 features/functionality into categories based on the estimated amount of effort expected for development and has not analyzed and grouped the remaining 56 features/functionality. Below is a breakdown of the categories in which PowerSchool grouped the 43 features/functionality it analyzed:
  - 1 feature/functionality is expected to require a very low amount of effort (36 to 48 hours per feature/functionality) from PowerSchool for development
  - 5 features/functionality are expected to require a low amount of effort (104 to 184 hours per feature/functionality) from PowerSchool for development
  - 17 features/functionality are expected to require a low-medium amount of effort (224 to 456 hours per feature/functionality) from PowerSchool for development
  - 6 features/functionality are expected to require a medium amount of effort (472 to 904 hours per feature/functionality) from PowerSchool for development
  - 7 features/functionality are expected to require a medium-high amount of effort (984 to 1800 hours per feature/functionality) from PS for development
  - 6 features/functionality are expected to require a high amount of effort (2600 to 5000 hours per feature/functionality) from PowerSchool for development

- 1 feature/functionality is expected to require a very high amount of effort (3904 to 7200 hours per feature/functionality) from PowerSchool for development
- PowerSchool and the Governance Group have reviewed payment expectations for 81 of the 99 features/functionalities. Out of these 99 features/functionalities, PowerSchool has already committed to adding some of these features/functionalities to their product release roadmap for development and release at a time of PowerSchool's choosing. Upon review of the State's contract with PowerSchool, some of the features/functionalities were identified as contractual obligations which PowerSchool will provide to the State free of additional charge. Other features/functionalities the State will need to pay for PowerSchool to develop.
- PowerSchool has provided a release time frame for some features/functionalities to add to their product release roadmap, with delivery dates through 2025.
- As of the date of this report, approximately 13 of the 99 requested features/functionalities are in the completion phase of PowerSchool's development release roadmap.

The Governance Group also worked with PowerSchool to develop a list of necessary and desired reports. This list consisted of reports that would be developed in eFinance as well as in IBM Cognos, which the SU/SDs have been using to supplement eFinance reporting capabilities. Below is an overview of the SU's/SD's necessary and desired reports that were deemed not part of the base eFinance, plans for their completion, and current status:

- The Governance Group submitted a total of 120 report development requests to PowerSchool.
- The Governance Group prioritized 112 of the 120 report development requests, as outlined below:
  - The Governance Group identified 35 reports as "High Priority"
  - The Governance Group identified 77 reports as "Low Priority"
- PowerSchool provided a release time frame for 51 of the report development requests, ranging through 2022.
- As of the date of this report, approximately 54 of the requested reports are in the completion phase, 5 of which were system reports and 49 of which were Cognos reports.

## Analysis of SU/SD Satisfaction

The subsections below contain summary tables and graphics of the results the Contractor compiled for the Path Forward Group via surveys and interviews with key SU/SD finance and HR/payroll staff to gauge the:

- Level of satisfaction with eFinance functionality (for SU/SDs that have migrated to eFinance)
- Level of satisfaction with current non-eFinance functionality (for SU/SDs that have not migrated)
- Desire of SU/SDs to use eFinance (both those that have and have not migrated to eFinance)



## eFinance Functionality Survey

Key users for SU/SDs that have migrated to eFinance provided their perspective via survey on the level in which eFinance functionality meets their business needs in the general, finance, and HR functional areas.

The contractor surveyed respondents on the following general functionality areas:

- Drill-down functionality
- Note-taking/note fields
- Workflow and Approval Process
- Data Import
- Data Export
- System Admin, Access and Internal Controls
- Ability to customize fields
- Warehousing
- Ability to interface with other systems

The contractor surveyed respondents on the following financial functionality areas:

- Fiscal year data management
- On screen account displays (Budget, Actual and Encumbrance)
- General Ledger
- Financial Reporting
- Accounts payable
- Cash receipts
- Cash processing
- Grants tracking
- Project tracking
- Change order processing
- Receiving orders
- Purchase order processing
- Requisition processing
- Check processing
- Vendor maintenance
- Mass close purchase orders
- Purchasing and encumbrance reports
- Budget preparation
- Budget reporting
- Personnel budgeting
- Fixed assets
- Depreciation and asset disposition
- Adding and updating customer information
- Customer billing and payment history
- Invoicing
- Credit memos
- Vendor bidding
- Vendor bid tracking
- Student activities
- Check processing



The contractor surveyed respondents on the following Human Resources functionality areas:

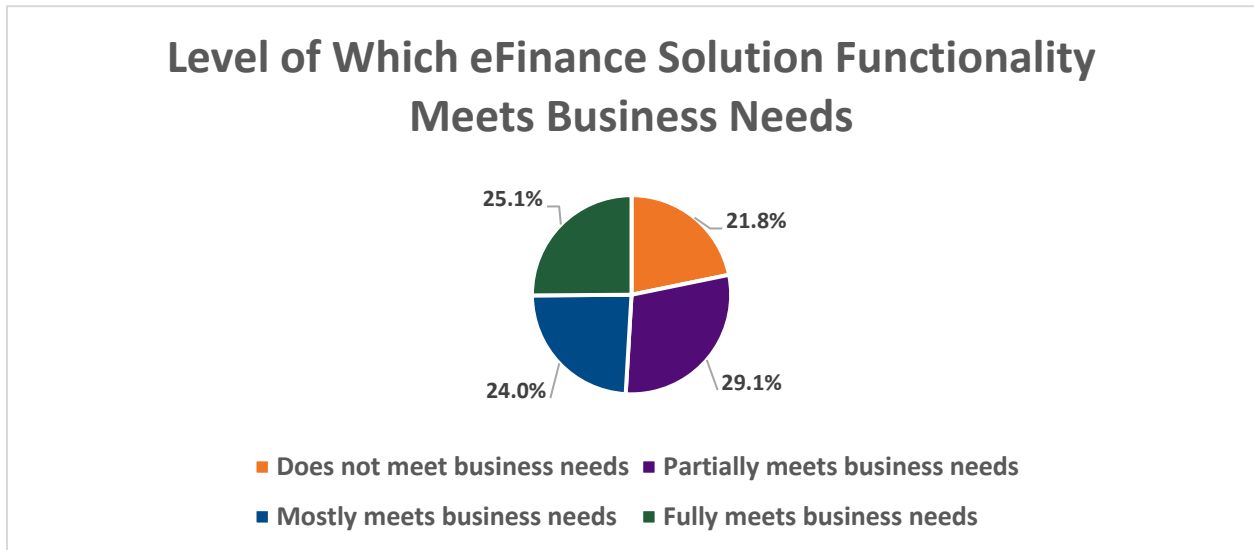
- Activity Log (record of changes to HR data)
- Payroll processing
- Substitute teacher assignment system
- Timekeeping
- Position tracking
- Employee portal
- On screen displays of employee information (incl. pay rates, deductions, personnel info, check history)
- Professional development course and benefit tracking
- Employee contracts
- Attendance/absence tracking
- Recruiting
- Payroll reporting
- Electronic employee records and forms
- Salary negotiating
- Personnel reporting
- State and federal reporting
- Affordable care act reporting
- Check processing
- Benefits (deductions, beneficiaries, dependents)
- COBRA information

### **Analysis of eFinance Functionality**

This subsection summarizes the results of the survey of eFinance users on general, financial and HR functionality. Figure 1 and Table 2 contain a summary of the total responses received across all survey questions regarding the level of which key users (for SU/SDs that have migrated to eFinance) feel eFinance functionality meets their business needs.

**Please note:** In some instances, the Contractor collected survey responses from multiple key users from a single SU/SD to obtain feedback on all eFinance functionality (as SU/SDs differ in which roles leverage the different functional areas of eFinance). See [Appendix A](#) for the number of survey respondents for each SU/SD.

**Figure 1: Level of Which eFinance Functionality Meets Business Needs**



**Table 1: Level of Which eFinance Functionality Meets Business Needs**

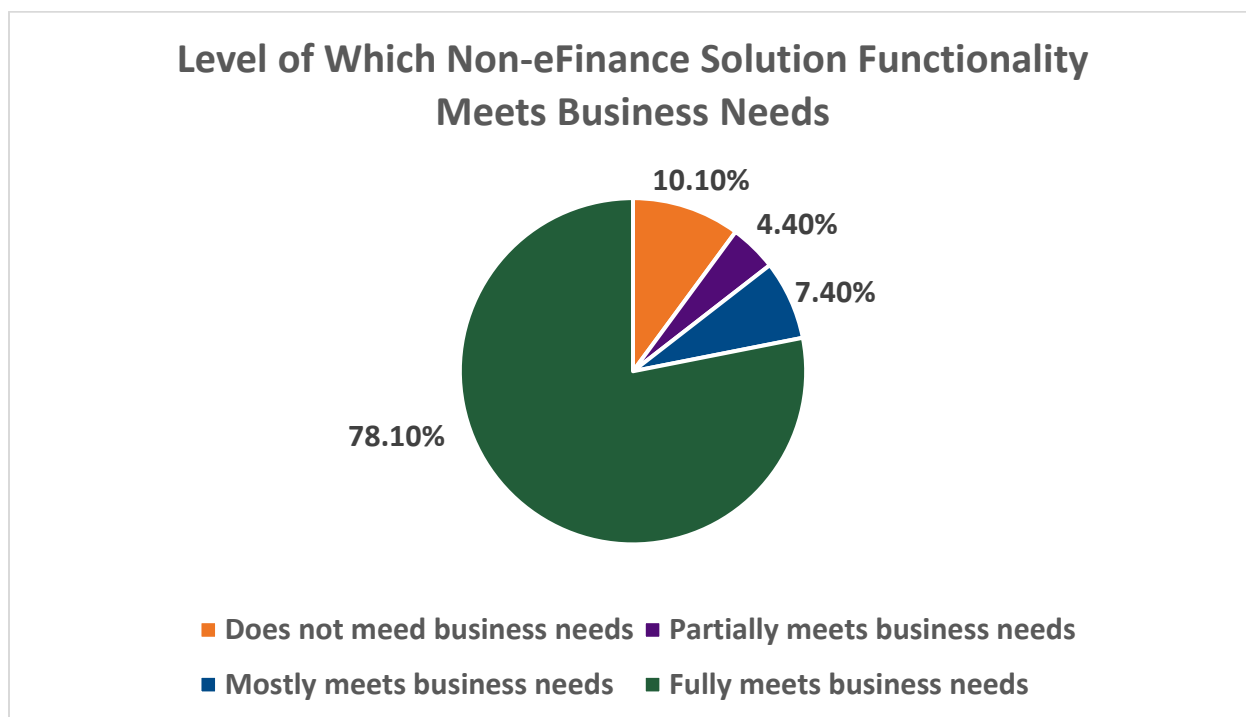
Does Not Meet Business Needs	Partially Meets Business Needs	Mostly Meets Business Needs	Fully Meets Business Needs	Total
151 Responses	202 Responses	166 Responses	174 Responses	693 Responses
21.8%	29.1%	24.0%	25.1%	100%

**Analysis of Current Non- eFinance Systems Functionality**

Key users for SU/SDs that have not migrated to eFinance provided their perspective via survey on the level in which their current systems meet their business needs in the general, finance, and HR functional areas, as listed in previous section. Figure 1 and Table 1 contain a summary of the total responses received across all survey questions regarding the level of which key users (for SU/SDs that have not migrated to eFinance) feel their current systems meet their business needs.

**Please note:** In some instances, the Contractor collected survey responses from multiple key users from a single SU/SD to obtain feedback on all current system functionality (as SU/SDs differ in which roles leverage the different functional areas of their current systems). See [Appendix A](#) for the number of survey respondents for each SU/SD.

**Figure 2: Level of Which Non-eFinance Functionality Meets Business Needs**



**Table 2: Level of Which Non- eFinance Functionality Meets Business Needs**

Does Not Meet Business Needs	Partially Meets Business Needs	Mostly Meets Business Needs	Fully Meets Business Needs	Total
181 Responses	78 Responses	132 Responses	1,395 Responses	1,786 Responses
10.1%	4.4%	7.4%	78.1%	100%

### Desire to Use eFinance

During surveys and interview sessions, the Contractor worked to gather information on behalf of the Path Forward Group to understand the desire of SU/SDs to use eFinance.

Table 3 summarizes the responses the Contractor received from 20 SU/SDs (represented by key eFinance users) that have migrated to eFinance regarding their interest in (if given the choice) remaining on eFinance.

**Table 3: Interest of SU/SDs in Continuing their Use of eFinance**

Interview Question for Consideration	SU/SDs Responding “Yes”	SU/SDs Responding “No”	SU/SDs Providing No or Uncertain Response
If given the option to migrate off eFinance to a new system, would your SU/SD prefer to remain on eFinance?	5	7	8

**Please note:** Three of the SU/SDs that responded “Yes” to this question attributed their responses to the recent level of effort they made to migrate to eFinance and the anticipated level of effort that would be required to migrate from eFinance to a new system. One additional SU/SD that responded “Yes” attributed their response to concerns about ability to fund a new product procurement and implementation.

Table 4 summarizes the responses the Contractor received from 33 SU/SDs (represented by key system users) that have not migrated to eFinance regarding their interest in, if given the choice, migrating to eFinance.

**Table 4: Interest of SU/SDs in Migrating to eFinance**

Survey Question for Consideration	SU/SDs Responding “Yes”	SU/SDs Responding “No”	SU/SDs Providing No or Uncertain Response
Would your SU/SD prefer, if given the option, to migrate from your current system(s) to eFinance?	1	26	6

### Path Forward Group’s Recommendation

This section includes the Path Forward Group’s recommendation for the best course of action for the Agencies and the SU/SDs (based on the group’s analysis and research) and the expected impacts of proceeding with this recommendation.

### Legislative Recommendations for SSDDMS and the UCOA

While access to good financial data on school system operations remains a critical and worthy goal, adoption of a single statewide ERP system is clearly not working, as the surveys of the field demonstrate. Accordingly, the Agencies recommend removing the mandate for SSDDMS, while continuing the requirement of a unified accounting structure.

### Recommendation; SSDDMS

With assent of the Path Forward Group, the Agencies of Education and Digital Services recommend that the General Assembly repeal the underlying mandate (see Act 11 of 2018 (Special Session) for a single SSDDMS platform. Upon repeal, the options for SU/SDs will be as follows:

- SU/SDs that have already migrated to eFinance may either migrate to a different system or remain on eFinance.
- SU/SDs and school districts that have not migrated to eFinance shall not be required to migrate to eFinance.

The Agencies will continue to pursue more efficient and automated methods to collect and process supervisory union and school district data.

### **Recommendation: Uniform Chart of Accounts**

Upon the unanimous agreement of the Path Forward Group, the Agencies strongly recommend a continued requirement for the adoption and use of the Uniform Chart of Accounts (UCOA). The Agencies are confident this can be completed without a single financial system used across all SU/SDs.

### **Additional Considerations:**

Both AOE and ADS are committed to continuing to support the eFinance system for those school systems that prefer to continue using it. To assist SU/SDs that choose to remain on eFinance, AOE will:

- Maintain its existing contract with PowerSchool for the remaining contract period and any allowed extension(s) (which based on options listed in the contract, can be extended to March 31, 2027 if agreed upon between the State and PowerSchool), contingent upon adherence to the terms set forth within the agreement.
- Continue to provide eFinance support to SU/SDs (e.g., business rules, data management, and PowerSchool vendor/contract management) for the remainder of the contract period.
- Provide contract transition assistance to SU/SDs (e.g., providing necessary information, insights, and support in transitioning the PowerSchool contract to SU/SDs that choose to remain on the eFinance after the current contract period).

Supervisory unions that have not migrated to eFinance are not required to migrate to eFinance and can choose their own system. If these SU/SDs choose to migrate to eFinance:

- AOE will fund any migrations during the current procurement period
- AOE and ADS will not support the migration with State project management resources, but project management services will be provided by PowerSchool as included in their current contract with the State.

While the Path Forward Group recommends each SU/SD be allowed to make their own individual decisions regarding their respective business system(s), the Path Forward Group strongly recommends that AOE and ADS and key stakeholders (including VASBO, VSHRP, the PFP Group, the eFinance Governance Group, and the Handbook Committee) continue to consider potential collective benefits from utilizing common systems and business practices, and pursue group procurement strategies, where practical, to minimize total systems costs.

AOE and ADS will pursue data collection methods to obtain SU/SD data, which may include but not be limited to:

- Setting up an Application Programming Interface (API) to directly connect the supervisory union and school district systems to a State data warehouse.

- Setting up Operational Data Store(s) (ODS) and related processes to directly connect to SU/SD finance systems.
- Developing a data standard for all SU/SD system vendors that meets requirements established by the Agencies for mandatory reporting.

## Appendix A - Number of Survey Respondents for Each SU/SD

Tables 5 and 6 list the number of key end-users from each SU/SD (both those that have and have not migrated to eFinance) that provided responses to the Contractor's survey regarding the level in which the functionality of their current systems meets their business needs.

**Table 5: Number of Survey Responses from Key End-Users: SU/SDs that have Migrated to eFinance**

SU/SD	Responses from Key End-Users
Addison Central	2
Burlington	1
Champlain Valley	0
Colchester	2
Essex Westford	3
Franklin Northeast	2
Harwood	0
Maple Run	6
Mill River	1
Montpelier Roxbury	2
Mt. Mansfield	1
Rivendell	1
Rutland Northeast	4
Slate Valley	2
Springfield	5
St. Johnsbury	0
Southwest Vermont	2
Windham Central	2
Windham Northeast	0
Windsor Southeast	2



**Table 6: Number of Survey Responses from Key End-Users: SU/SDs that have not Migrated to eFinance**

SU/SD	Responses from Key End-Users
Addison Northwest SD	1
Barre SU	1
Bennington-Rutland SU	2
Caledonia Central SU	2
Central Vermont SU	1
Essex North SU	1
Franklin West SU	1
Grand Isle SU	2
Greater Rutland County SU	1
Hannaford Career Center	0
Hartford SD	1
Kingdom East SD	1
Lamoille North SU	2
Lamoille South SU	1
Milton Town School District	2
Missisquoi Valley School District	1
Mt. Abraham SD	0
North Country SU	3
Orange East SU	2
Orange Southwest Unified SD	1
Orleans Central SU	1
Orleans Southwest SU	2
River Valley Tech Ctr	1
Rutland City Public Schools	0
South Burlington	1
SW Vermont Regional Technical SD	1
Two Rivers SU	5
Washington Central SU	2
White River Valley SU	0
Windham Southeast SU	1

<b>Windham Southwest SU</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Windsor Central SU</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Winooski SD</b>	<b>1</b>