

Student Information Systems

Issue Brief

March 2019



To help schools and districts better identify the right student information system to meet their needs.

It is critical that school and district teams have feasible, systematic ways to know how students are responding to the academic, social, emotional, and behavioral services and supports they receive. Having data systems in place that can inform student progress in school-based services allows teams to make decisions about how to match students to services, make changes as needed, and summarize progress and outcome data to understand the impact of the services provided. However, the actual practice of monitoring student progress and outcomes in relation to the wide variety of services and supports provided – for the entire student body – can be challenging and complicated. One of the primary barriers to using more data to inform school and district decision making is not having a workable data system to collect and use student data (Parke, 2012). This issue brief describes the practice of data driven decision making in schools and reviews commonly used student information systems.

Student information systems (SISs) are “electronic information system(s) to assist in the organization and management of student data” (US Dept. of Education, 2008, p. 2). Typically, SISs house data that are manually entered and then consolidated by the system. This creates a more efficient process than paper files.

This issue brief is designed to help schools and districts better navigate how to identify the right SIS for their system¹. Although results cannot be guaranteed, using an SIS to track

student progress and outcomes in school mental health services and supports can increase the likelihood of being able to capture student success.

¹This brief does not contain a comprehensive list of SISs.

SISs can support school teams in monitoring student progress by:

- ✓ Promoting early identification of students who need additional supports
- ✓ Supporting decision making about how to match student needs to services
- ✓ Making it easier for a school or district to identify where gaps are in services that may need to be filled
- ✓ Ensuring students do not continue to receive a service or support if it is not helping them

The Big Picture

Data Driven Decision Making

Selecting, implementing, and using an SIS is one step that can support data driven decision making (DDDM). DDDM is a critical aspect of operating a high-quality school mental health system. DDDM is the process of using observations and other relevant data/information to make decisions that are fair and objective. DDDM can help inform decisions related to appropriate student supports and be used to monitor progress and outcomes across multiple tiers (mental health promotion, prevention, and intervention). A DDDM-focused approach uses student and school level data to help educators better understand student progress. Saying that a

student is doing better or doing worse after service provision does not have much meaning if there are not data to support these claims. Not only do the data help to clarify the student concern or challenge, data can inform potential strategies that could support the student in the classroom, can be used to share information among team members, and can inform the team on how to adjust services and supports as needed.

DDDM is also a component of the School Mental Health National Standardized Performance Measures, which can be found on www.theshapesystem.com. DDDM includes four performance measures that reflect system’s capacity for making data-informed decisions about its school mental health services.

Data Driven Decision Making Performance Measures
1. Use of data to determine mental health services needed by students.
2. Use of a system for monitoring individual student progress.
3. Use of a system for aggregating student mental health service and support data to share with stakeholders and make decisions about mental health service planning and implementation.
4. Use of a system for disaggregating student mental health service data to examine school mental health system level outcomes based on subpopulation characteristics.

Figure 1. Data Driven Decision Making Performance Measures

Benefits of Using an SIS

SISs can connect parents, teachers, administrators, student services personnel, and community partners, making communication more efficient.

On a larger scale, SISs maybe also be useful for schools to report to districts and districts to reports to starts on the effectiveness of various services and supports provided. In turn, this is

helpful for recognition and resource allocation requests or decisions. Additionally, SISs allow for a comprehensive and succinct picture of students at an individual and aggregated level, enabling schools to implement prevention and early intervention strategies based on the did in the SIS. For example, data on students’ school connectedness based on responses to a universal screening survey could quickly inform school support teams about needed intervention strategies across tiers.



Selecting a Student Information System

What makes a suitable SIS depends on the needs of your particular school or district. There are many systems available, with each offering different features. Some important questions to consider when selecting the best SIS for your school or district are listed below:

- How is the system accessed?
- What kind of security does it have?
- What is the cost?
- What type of customer service does the company provide?

The following sections provide guidance about these questions and will equip you with the information you need to select an SIS that can best meet the needs of your school or district.

Clarify What Data You Want to Monitor

SISs can be used to collect a wide array of information. It is important to ensure the SIS

you select can collect the type of data your team wants to monitor. Data managed within an SIS could include attendance, grades, discipline referrals, test scores, observed or reported student behavior, campus environment surveys, student progress (in response to services or supports provided), medical records and personal information. SISs can also include additional features such as seating charts, academic planners, and ways to monitor campus activity or specific risk factors of individual students, such as course failures and behavioral incidents leading to office disciplinary referrals. See the appendix for a chart which outlines a variety of SISs, the type of data they collect, and additional features they include.

Key Questions to Ask When 'Shopping' For A Student Information System

1. How Is the System Accessed?

A school or district may have to download new software to access a SIS. In contrast, some SISs operate as web-portals which require internet connection to be accessed. There are several features that some SISs support that can enhance their accessibility. For example, some allow parents to view their student's profile via an application or alert email. Also, some SISs are updated in real-time for parents/caregivers, youth and/or school staff.

The accessibility of a SIS may depend on the geographical location of the school or district. For example, an area that has poor or unreliable internet connection may find a SIS that has downloadable software to be more useful, as opposed to a web-portal. Other considerations include how a software system is implemented, the cost of purchasing the software, and the frequency of updates.

2. What kind of security does it have?

SISs may comply with various standards of security. Some common security standards are consistent with the Health Insurance Portability

and Accountability Act (HIPAA) or the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). A different form of security may be a Secure Sockets Layer (SSL). Understanding the different between HIPAA, FERPA, and SSL can help a school or district choose the best system for their needs.

HIPAA ensures the privacy of protected health information. HIPAA applies to health care providers, health plans, and health care clearinghouses. HIPAA's rules for security apply to information that is in any form—hardcopy or electronic². For SISs that incorporate student medical records, HIPAA would be especially important.

²<https://www.hhs.gov/hipaa/for-professionals/security/laws-regulations/index.html>

Similar to HIPAA, **FERPA**, protects the confidentiality of personal information. FERPA is “a federal law that protects the privacy of student education records.”³ Under FERPA, parents of students under the age of 18 maintain rights to their students' records. A SIS that is FERPA compliant may be attractive for schools, districts, and parents alike.

³<https://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/ferpa/index.html>

An **SSL** is relevant to web-based SISs. SSLs are safeguards for online systems that create a secure environment by using encrypted connections.⁴ An SSL can be created by various organizations but a valid SSL is issued by a trusted Certificate Authority (CA). An SSL “verified that a trusted third party has authenticated that organization's identity.”⁵



In the case of web-based SISs, it is important to be aware of the trustworthiness of the CA that has issued the SSL.

⁴https://www.digicert.com/ssl/?&gclid=CjwKEAjw--DLBRCN_bW36taJkhwSJABSMEduig-rdK1-IEYym4w1UNkaVwpq8MQ8Hg6PQ70aCxvbZyhoCSerw_wcB

In addition to SIS security features, you can ensure you are using your SIS in a HIPAA and

FERPA compliant way be closely monitoring who has access to the SIS. Parents/caregivers should always be informed about the SIS, data it contains, and who has access to it. If a community partner is granted access to the SIS either in full or in part, parent/guardian consent and release of information forms should be used to ensure your team is operating in a HIPAA and FERPA compliant manner. HIPAA and FERPA should not be a deterrent to collaborative team planning and data driven decision making. While it may take some effort to meet the needs of all regulations, it can be done. Be sure to consult with your legal offices and with other schools and districts who have figured out how to make this work effectively.



Program	Contact Information
Power School	(887) 873-1550 www.powerschool.com
Infinite Campus	(800) 850-2335 www.infinitecampus.com
Aeries	(888) 487-7555 www.aeries.com
Maxient	(434) 295-1748 www.maxient.com
Hero	(800) 396-1615 www.herok12.com
SWIS Suite	(855) 455-8194 www.pbisapps.org/applications/pages/SWIS-suite.aspx
Early Warning System	www.earlywarning systems.org
Maestro	(954) 453-9705 unbouncepages.com/maestro-sis-software
Gradelink	(800) 742-3083 www.gradelink.com

3. What is the cost?

Generally, the cost of purchasing a new system varies. It often depends on how many users will

access the SIS. The cost can be better estimated by contacting the SIS provider directly and consulting a representative. Typically, as users of an SIS increase so will the price. It is important to consider what the initial cost of the system is and what the ongoing cost to maintain the system each year will be.

4. What Type of Customer Service Does the Company Provide?

Do not forget to inquire about whether customer service is included in the price of the SIS or an additional cost, as well as what type of support is available. For example, you might want to learn how to customize the SIS to collect specific data points of interest, generate targeted reports needed by your school team(s), and/or edit permissions of different school-based staff. For example, student behavioral health data should only be entered, viewed and queried by approved team members based on HIPAA and/or FERPA regulations and active releases of information or business agreements.

Conclusion

School and district administrators face mountain accountability requirements and federal policies to incorporate data and evidence in their decision making for student services and supports (Honig & Coburn, 2008). This brief is deigned to support school and district administrators and teams by providing guidance for selecting an SIS. Although only one piece of the puzzle for schools and districts, data driven decision making cannot be achieved without a functional SIS. There are many options, but it is most important to find an SIS that best fits the needs of the school or district.

Recommended Citation

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Appendix

Name	Basic Information	Type of Data Collected	Special Features
Aeries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A software system that manages student information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attendance • Seating charts • Test scores • Grades, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connects students, parents, administration, counselors, and teachers
Early Warning System	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A web-based tool that helps identify students who are at risk of dropping out 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifies students who are at risk of dropping out • Tracks student progress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows for early intervention by matching students to appropriate interventions
Gradelink	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An information system that contains data and monitors students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collects attendance • Discipline and medical records • Report cards • Grades 	<p>Accessible anywhere there is internet</p>
Hero	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A web and mobile application that captures a campus's environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitors student activity, including student behavior (warnings and consequences) • Attendance, etc. 	<p>Can report student information to states and parents/caregivers Administration can give instant feedback concerning referrals</p>
Infinite Campus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An information system platform for consolidating student information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attendance records • Grades • Student behavior 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tracks class schedules • Parent portal access • High security standards
Maestro	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An information system that creates individualized plans of study for students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic progress • Discipline records • Grades 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tracks individuals or student population progress
Power School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A web-based system that manages teachers' tasks and student information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Behavioral data • Classroom performance • Attendance • Grades • IEP processing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creates multiple versions of tests • Information displayed in real time
SWIS Suite	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Web-based information system that summarizes student behavioral data for decision-making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student behavior data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows schools to track data over 3 tiers—universal, targeted, and intensive