

Mr. Chairman and members of the House Education Committee:

In April of 2012, the Spring Hill school district converted our financial software to a web-based product called Skyward. It was a grueling process and the learning curve was steep, but in discussions with my colleagues, there is no such thing as smooth conversion when you are dealing with thousands of account codes and hundreds of data fields. Our district staff invested hundreds, if not thousands of staff hours involved in the process from product selection to product implementation. Our new software essentially touched the lives and daily responsibilities of nearly everyone in the district from electronically capturing hours worked to electronically processing purchase orders. We changed countless processes in an effort to become more accurate and more efficient, which we are very confident we achieved. Along the way we nearly missed our first scheduled payroll with the new system, which has never happened in our district, and I had staff threaten to quit struggling to adapt to a whole new way of life. The point is conversions are painful, costly, time-consuming, and contain plenty of surprises along the way.

If your goal of switching all school districts to a uniform accounting system is simply to achieve transparency and uniformity, there is no reason why that can't be achieved right now. School districts have an annual budget document they are all required to complete. It contains plenty of account codes for us to utilize. Depending on whether you feel we have too few or too many, I would ask for an open discussion so we can provide you with the data you need to properly analyze our revenues and expenditures. Most districts have very sophisticated software capable of producing nearly any report you can imagine. Tell us what you need, and if we can't provide it, then we will demand results from our current software providers.

Our software companies are already required to adapt when new changes come about from the Affordable Care Act to KPERS pay-period reporting. The nice thing about the variety of software options currently available is that it provides competition and opportunities for districts to compare functionality. What happens when we standardize, and the company forces a 20% increase on us because of additional programming costs associated with new federal mandates? With no competition in the marketplace, I'm very concerned how responsive the company will be in providing excellent customer support and meeting our programming needs.

In conclusion, the cost of converting everyone to a uniform accounting system would be enormous. Some districts may be in long-term contractual agreements and would suffer early termination penalties. Some districts simply don't have the staff or the time to go through the pains associated with a conversion because they have already streamlined staff to achieve operating efficiencies. I know firsthand that conversions don't happen overnight, and they affect far more than the people at the board office. On the surface a uniform accounting software might seem like a simple solution. Please take the time to visit with those who have been through the process before blindly forcing such a drastic change with potentially drastic consequences.

Respectfully submitted,

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