Technical and Communictaions Recommendations:
In support of the Technology Tools for Teachers Program

The Florida Associiation of Management Information Systems (FAMIS – formerly SDCCMIS), March 21, 2006

The FAMIS organization supports the Technology Tools for Teachers proposal. Providing ready access to information and resources; providing communications and collaboration options; and providing a readily available mobile tool that fits the work style of teachers can enable many significant improvements for our teachers and students – in terms of productivity, learning and in terms of the quality of their work and outcomes.

FAMIS is the professional association representing the educational information and technology professionals in all Florida school districts. Consistent with the primary mission of this association for sharing and encouraging best practices among all school districts relating to information systems and communication, following are considerations and recommendations which – based upon the experiences of the technical leadership and staff involved – will be important, if not essential, to the success of this program. These recommendations were developed through close work with DOE administrators and staff at the last meeting of the FAMIS Steering Committee, March 21, 2006.

These considerations are organized into four areas:

1. User Requirements
2. Equipment Requirements
3. Communication Requirements
4. Security Requirements

1. User Requirements

- The specific equipment features and options must be consistent with the requirements for common software applications tailored to the objectives of the teachers and curriculum.

This means that each district should be able to tailor the equipment options to match the instructional, information, and communication requirements for specific teachers and software application requirements. While standardization is essential for training and support, some situations will dictate the need for greater storage or processing capacity, larger screen sizes and communications capabilities. Further, individual teachers may have special conditions requiring certain assistive technology modifications. It is understood that the districts would cover the costs for upgrades above and beyond the DOE standard.

- Orientation, Training and Continued Support – consistent with the T3 plan, teachers must be trained and have access to continuing support in order to use and apply the technology and resources.

2. Equipment Requirements

- Reliable performance and connectivity of the equipment dictates that the equipment meet specific infrastructure, information exchange, desktop management and desktop control requirements already established within the district.

Specific guidelines for schools and school districts, if not already in place, should be developed. However, the equipment must match the equipment repair, warranty, insurance, and information and management tools already in use within the district. The laptop is the end user interface, connectivity and reliable support must be assured. Things to be considered are:

Warranty – most districts have a three year standard, needs to be expandable to four or
     five as an option
Insurance - to cover accidental damage, again standard in many districts
Parts and repair options - assuring replacement or fix within 5 days
Battery and charging requirements – convenient electrical connections; battery replacements
Network connectivity – wireless, wired and other options (e.g, docking)
Synchronization with user directories, profiles and data files/folders (essential for user security, and differential access appropriate to the type, level of user)
Tagging and "on board" security options, e.g. automatic strong password sign-on and files/program encryption – for security and tracking purposes

Again, as above, adding to the DOE standard to meet existing district equipment requirements would be an expense that the district would cover. The ability to extend these requirements does need to be part of the program.

3. Communications Requirements

- User sign on and security profiles must match the district's existing directory services and automated wired/wireless identification schemes.

- Computer must be readily capable of wired or wireless connection consistent with the requirements of teacher's environment (PE vs labs vs classrooms, etc.)

4. Security Requirements

- User authentication – directory services based; immediate user authorization updates and changes – as relates to access and student data rights;
- Each district must have policies and procedures in place for transferred equipment cleansing of confidential information
- Machine lock – passwords based and data encryption
- Desktop controls and management
- Files protection – restricted access; no shares
- Password protected screen saves – set at a specific time period

Continuing input and shared best practices from curriculum specialists, instructional technologists, staff development and information systems specialists is imperative. It is strongly advised that a standing oversight committee, including district representatives, be established as part of the implementation of this program at the state level. Major vendor reps should also be involved for their feedback and expertise in guiding the project and suggesting enhancements.

Each district should also develop such a committee to oversee implementation within their district and report back to the state.