FAMIS: Florida Association of Management Information Systems – K-12 School District CIO/CTOs…
FAEDS: Florida Association of Educational Data Systems – K-20 Education Institutions CIO/CTOs

POSITION PAPER (Draft):

FIRN – consolidated, shared services for all School Districts and other Education Entities

ISSUE: There are discussions and proposals to **terminate statewide FIRN services for school districts**.   FIRN provides essential Internet & communication services at a cost and at a service level that would be much more costly, and not as consistently feasible, for schools and educational programs, K-20, statewide.   These services include:

- Internet bandwidth (at substantially lower costs than individual districts can negotiate; including higher federal Erate discount levels than are available to the majority of school districts);
- Internet filtering for students/schools (fully CIPA compliant; with 24x7 technical support);
- Networking & communications services and technical support – ranging from caching, network security and intrusion detection, virus protection, network monitoring, VPN services…);
- Emergency and disaster communications support;
- Connectivity for student & teacher access to: FCAT Explorer, FASTER transcripts, FACTS on-line, distance and virtual learning, bright futures, new state online assessments, online instructional content correlated to state standards, etc…
- Mandated state and federal data reporting transmissions, including data encryption;
- Email & web site hosting option for districts – essential to many smaller districts and consortia, which would have a significant financial impact for school districts.

FIRN provides essential, mandated, centralized, shared commodity and technical services at a cost level that is far less than what individual districts can match. More important, many of these are specialized, highly technical support services that would be substantially more expensive – if even available – at the level of consistently high quality that is essential for mission-critical services that must exceed 98% availability. Initial study indicates that the proposed cuts would cost school districts – depending upon size and technical staffing – between $6 - $9 per networked computer (approximately $265,000. annually for a medium sized school district).

FIRN is an example not only of an effective cost-savings strategy for mandated critical services, but ensures a consistently high-level of service continuity and quality that could not be provided by most school districts individually. The new requirements for K-8 virtual schooling increases the need for cost-effective and reliable online access for districts.

We strongly encourage that legislative staff, school district Superintendents, as well as K-20 Chief Technology Officers or Chief Information Officers make contacts and communicate the importance of continuing the FIRN2 network as it exists at present, leveraging the Erate federal funding for the entire state.

Without action on this item, the individual district costs to replicate the current level of services provided by FIRN will be much more expensive for school districts, and will likely require significant technical staff support and training, along with new contract management and monitoring. In this time of major budget reductions, the loss of the state level FIRN2 network will result in a lower, and less reliable, level of access to online resources for Florida's students and teachers.

Sincerely,

On behalf of:

FAMIS – Florida Association of Management Information Systems
        (http://www.famisonline.org/Home/tabid/36/Default.aspx)

FAEDS – Florida Association of Educational Data Systems
        (http://www.faeds.org/)