Idaho's Instructional Management System (Schoolnet) Offers Lessons for Future IT Projects

Report highlights

The Department of Education's project is one of many recent large IT projects that struggled to gain district support and prove itself as a valuable resource.

$61 million
Total project costs

$10 million
of the total project costs were spent on software and maintenance for Schoolnet

$2.5 million
in ongoing annual maintenance costs

What went wrong?

The department pursued funding for its IT initiatives, ignoring outside concerns that its plan was overly ambitious and lacked needed details.

In assessing project risk, the department did not sufficiently consider the potential vendors' ability to produce the product the department expected.

Rather than pilot the project as originally intended, the department gave all districts access to Schoolnet but only provided financial support and technical training to pilot districts.

The department minimized the significance of implementation problems, which led policymakers and the J. A. and Kathryn Albertson Foundation to believe Schoolnet was useful to districts.

A review commissioned by the foundation found that, in addition to problems with project management and system functionality, the ISIMS failure in 2005 affected districts' willingness to accept Schoolnet.

The department has no meaningful analytics to determine use or value of a statewide instructional management system among districts.

Lessons for the future

Careful contract risk management can prevent performance problems such as contracting with a vendor unable to deliver the expected product.

For large projects involving IT systems, attention needs to be given to the advice and concerns of relevant or qualified parties, such as the Albertson Foundation's concerns expressed in its rejection letters to the department for funding.

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