

# SKYWARD EDITS

By Kimi, for Michelle

After receiving negative feedback from staff across the district and ~~being disappointed by~~ the lack of responsiveness <sup>from</sup> of the Skyward management, the Department of Teaching and Learning has decided to explore other <sup>lowercase</sup> Student Information Systems (SIS) to replace Skyward <sup>more</sup> for the Newton Public Schools (NPS).

According to Assistant Superintendent of Secondary Education & Special Programs Toby Romer, when the district realized that it would need to find a new SIS to replace Powerschool SMS <sup>at</sup> the start of last year, Skyward stood out because it had "a really strong blend of functionality for both teachers and students and it added really good parent access through the parent portal, ~~family portal~~ and had really good data access capacity for our staff."

Student Center Coordinator Rachael McNally said, however, "The old system was much more flexible and much more user friendly," <sup>new P</sup> she added. "From my point of view, the problem with Skyward is that it is not flexible enough in terms of letting the district technology people customize it for our needs," McNally said.

Romer agreed that NPS has been struggling with "the ability to build a schedule well given all the complexities of the Newton North and South schedules" to be customized and have the look, feel and information we wanted for both students teachers and families... to make other customizations and updates that we needed and to make it work for us given all of the different things we do in Newton."

**★ MOVE LATER PORTION HERE! (where Star is)**

McNally agreed with Romer and said that the <sup>System's</sup> program's inefficiency means that teachers are wasting valuable time trying to accomplish simple tasks. For example, searching a student's name is far more difficult than it was <sup>with</sup> in SMS where teachers only needed to enter a <sup>portion</sup> little bit of the name and the software would find the student even if it wasn't spelt correctly. <sup>added</sup> Also, Math teacher Hayley Teich <sup>can't</sup> said that teachers <sup>a</sup> cannot "flag" a student on weekends or days when the class doesn't meet. "Flagging" <sup>or</sup> is for teachers to alert <sup>in a class.</sup> guidance counselors if students are in danger of failing <sup>or</sup> and need extra support so that that student can get the support they need.

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"There's just so many bad things, it's hard to remember the one good thing," McNally said. ☹️

Although Romer said that these issues were <sup>due to</sup> caused by the inadequate <sup>JK, keep</sup> capacity of the product to meet the schools' needs and ~~not by poor implementation~~, math teacher Hayley Teich said that teachers were <sup>taught</sup> never able to learn how to use Skyward in an efficient manner.

Teich said, "the transition [to Skyward] was was a little weird and I still don't know how to do everything regarding grades and comments <sup>fully</sup>," Teich said that she's concerned because implementing a new software takes a <sup>not added,</sup> long time to get used to. <sup>while</sup>

"For some of us who are younger and used to technology it's not as bad but some of more veteran teachers struggle with technology sometimes, and constantly changing things is probably harder for them, or for anyone who's just not as tech savvy as some of the younger teachers may be," she added. <sup>[th]</sup> <sup>said.</sup>

Spanish teacher Viviana Planine agreed with Teich and said, "Talking to someone who is not comfortable generally with the new technology... <sup>T</sup> the features are too many, too sophisticated and then when you ask a very simple thing, the system doesn't seem almost able to do it. It's not very intuitive."

When McNally first heard about the decision to stop using Skyward, she said she was relieved, "This change cannot happen soon enough for me. It has been extremely frustrating and hours, days, weeks of time have been wasted because of how rigid it is."

Although any changes will <sup>be</sup> impact the whole district, Vice Principal Candice Beerman said that it will <sup>would be the most impacted.</sup> impact Newton South and North more. "The high schools are the ones where there's a lot of interaction between the people in the school like the teachers and everybody and Skyward," she said. <sup>wide</sup>



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MOVE TO ~~the~~ <sup>a specific</sup> ~~descriptions of the issues~~  
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Due to ~~Newton~~ South's abnormal schedule with two or four day a week classes, semester or year long classes, various course levels and other complexities that many other high schools don't have, the schedule "doesn't translate very well into Skyward", Beerman said. <sup>vice principal candice</sup> "Because of [that], it's harder to get reports out of Skyward about attendance and track ~~their~~ students. ... ~~It~~ has a lot of implications sort of all over the place."

English teacher and Student Center Coordinator Emma Leslie said, "The user interface on Skyward is abysmal, it looks ugly, it's hard to navigate your way around," ~~Leslie~~ said.

<sup>any changes are in the early stages.</sup>  
Romer said that ~~right now~~, "I've just been working with our technology departments to work through troubleshooting different issues that we've had and work with the Skyward company, to make sure we get individual problems resolved," ~~he~~ said.

Members of the Teaching and Learning Department are starting to form a small Student Information System (SIS) committee with representatives from stakeholders across the district. The committee will be review Skyward's issues and investigate other products that are being used by surrounding districts.

<sup>[the new system]</sup>  
~~McNally~~ said, "I hope ~~it~~ is nicer to look at and not so cluttered on the page and ~~more intuitive~~ ... because every time you have to do a multi click process for accomplishing one small task, time is being wasted," ~~she~~ said, "Technology should serve us so that we can meet our lofty goals and not thwart us."

~~Similar to Teich, Planine said, "I would like to have attendance be easier," she said, "There's almost too much information so that you zero in on a very tiny part but don't have the big picture there."~~

<sup>Planine</sup>  
~~Planine said she hopes to see~~ ~~improvements on~~ ~~proof of~~ ~~a attendance system.~~  
<sup>a simplification of the</sup>

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*Should not*

The process ~~shouldn't~~ take quite as long as it previously did because, according to Beerman, "they're just going to do a narrower search ... ~~So~~ it won't be a huge undertaking but they'd still have to go through a bidding process because this is an expensive venture to get into."

Beerman estimated that the earliest NPS would be able to transfer everything over to a new software would be ~~near~~ <sup>*she said*</sup> January 2018. The district doesn't want to implement a new system in ~~September~~ <sup>*at the beginning of the year*</sup> because, ~~It's~~ <sup>*she said*</sup> scary to start a new system in September, "If something goes wrong and you don't have schedules for kids, that's not good."

McNally said she is glad that the school is recognizing that there's a problem and choosing to adapt. "I think it's great that NPS is willing to move to something new when it is so clear there's no way it will ever be good enough <sup>*she said*</sup> sometimes you just have to say, 'OK, that was a mistake, let's move on.'"

~~Beerman said, "It's okay, it'll be worth it. We just need something that works a little bit better for us."~~

*Does this need to be cut? If so, I can help!! 😊*