New technology database could provide education reform a chance

August 5, 4:55 PM · Wamara Mwine - White House Examiner

U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan and President Obama announced new funding to support Race to the Top Fund which will reward states for innovative education reform. The program is designed to fund state grants that produce data which ties student achievement to teacher performance. This funding will support innovative programs that provide longitudinal data systems that track student progress in grades K-12, communicates results, and provides assessments aligned to state standards.

Secretary Duncan and Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius are also pushing for Congress to approve a $10 billion plan to boost early learning education reforms. The program is based on the premise that students need a focus on pre-kindergarten education to be successful students in their later grades. The proposed Early Learning Challenge Fund is designed to "advance standards and outcomes-driven framework" to improve early childhood programs in America.

But how does this national effort effectively utilize technology to monitor and advance these goals? Even Bill Gates agrees: "We don't know the answers because we're not even asking the right question and making the right measurements. The way I see forward is to use measurement to drive quality." "As a company, Vantage Learning recognizes the importance of integrating technology into classroom curricula," says Robert Patrylak, President of Vantage Learning.

Iseek Supercruncher, Vantage's educational, data and information management system is a potential answer. It is a database system designed for administrators, parents, counselors and teachers to track and manage data within their school districts. The system, developed by Vantage Communications has already been tested successfully in several states.

The Vantage learning initiative program will kick off funding for schools in Florida, Nevada, Massachusetts, Louisiana, New York and Colorado. "We are happy to provide grants to the first 10 districts, and to others that wish to apply, to further help each reap the benefits that MY Access! technology brings to the classroom in boosting writing proficiency and proven results on state tests," Patrylak said.

The idea is based on a model called "School Intelligence System" or "SIS". Iseek Supercruncher is web-based software that enables real-time data flow and reporting on students. It is searchable and teachers and school administrators can see scores and analysis on students in districts, drawing back information that can be used to help students learn better than traditional methods. The program will allow stakeholders to "inspect" what they "expect" from both teachers and students 24 hours a day with the click of a mouse. The searchable database provides teachers with new tools and insights to help them be more effective in the classroom by collectively analyzing attendance, grades, discipline and parent communication.

Vantage Vice President of Accountability Ltanya Simmons put this concept into practice in Gadsden Public Schools in Florida. Armed with a handful of $10 Walmart gift cards and Vantage's MyAccess program, Simmons addresses an auditorium of students. The Vantage on-line writing program scores student essays immediately with graphical and written feedback and provides site based training to teachers in over 32 states. After reviewing a variety of A-D graded papers the PHD educational instructor challenged the students by "giving them some insight into what they need to say

and how they needed to stay it." The program was successful "because it provided the children with different incentives and data that could lead to success," Simmons said. L'Tanya was impressed that both high and low achievers experienced success in the pilot writing program.

Secretary Duncan is in a position to change the controversial Bush Education program "No Child Left Behind" with real measures of teachers and students. NCLB mandates all students be proficient in reading and math by 2014 through standardized tests. The program requires school systems to show steady progress toward meeting that goal or face sanctions. This has created an environment that is 'test' not 'learning' oriented. Statistics show the focus has been in many districts to pass students vs. educate them. President Obama has increased funding for NCLB programs to increase teacher training and better testing. Meanwhile, district schools continue to run with legacy systems which hinder their ability to take advantage of new techniques and technologies. Iseek Supercruncher could help on both accords, providing results oriented data and accessing how a system and teachers are performing on an individual basis.

Duncan's supporters credit him with improving student achievement, graduation rates and college-going rates in the nation's third-largest school system. Now, with a national database, Duncan can monitor the progress of school and district management across the country. His goal is to turn around the 5,000 worst performing schools in the country. Iseek would provide course schedule management, attendance, report card, teacher and student/parent portals for information. This can ensure a new basis for education, performance and teaching reforms setting a new standard for school systems in America.