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SCHOOL BUSINESS BULLETIN

Bulletin No. 9

January 1999

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TO: Superintendent of Schools, Chief School Business Officials, Other Interested Persons

General Financial Management Matters

1. THE DEPARTMENT IS IN ROSEVILLE!

The Department of Children, Families & Learning has moved to its new office in Roseville. The address for all staff in the Department is 1500 Highway 36 West, Roseville, MN 55113-4266. A directory of the Division of Management Assistance Staff appears in this bulletin along with the new office/cube numbers, phone numbers and each team's fax number. Please refer to the list and use the new location and numbers to make contacts. Also included on the reverse side of the directory is a listing of the Financial Management, Transportation and Accountability Team job assignments. This listing is on our team page and will be periodically updated. Please note that the e-mail address for every state employee is as follows: first name . last name @ state . mn . us (all lower case).

The building that now houses the Department of Children, Families & Learning is the Old State Farm Insurance Building near the southeast corner of Highway 36 and Snelling Avenue in Roseville.

2. 1998-99 UFARS manuals are still available for sale from the Department. Please send a check for \$6.00 made payable to the Department of Children, Families & Learning. Send to Yvonne Wilkes, 1500 Highway 36 West, Roseville, MN 55113. (No district purchase orders please). The manual is also available on the Department's web site and may be printed from this location. If you need further assistance, please call Yvonne Wilkes at (651)582-8477.
3. 1997-98 Profiles Data - The preliminary 1997-98 profiles data is on the State Department web page. Some of the data is unaudited at this time. Please review the data for your district and make any necessary corrections to your UFARS data in the usual way. Final data will be run and put on the net early in February. If you have any questions, please call Mike Enman at (651)582-8770.
4. UFARS Compliance Table - We now have the Compliance Table on the Internet on our home page. Please note that in order to use this form your browser must be either Explorer 4.0 or Netscape 4.0. Please note this is an on-line active database and entries will change your numbers at the Department level. Your district or CPA will be responsible for entering data on the compliance table for FY 1998-99. The 1998 audits that have been received by our office have already had their compliance tables entered by Department staff.

Once you have made the connection to our home page, follow the steps below to enter your compliance table. Click on the red button "District Information" located on the left side of the screen.

1. Scan down the page and click on "Uniform Financial Accounting and Reporting Standards (Compliance Table)."
2. Enter User Name: comp (use all lower case letters).
3. Enter Password: Gr3en (the G must be upper case and yes it is the number 3).
4. Click OK or Enter.
5. Go to "Select District".
6. Click the down arrow.
7. Scan and click on your district.
8. Click in the General Fund Revenue box on the form.
9. Type in the dollar amount number.
10. Use your tab key to go to the next box; the shift and tab keys used together will take you backwards.
11. Repeat steps 10 and 11 until complete (you must use the tab key to advance to each box).
12. Click Submit Data at the bottom of the page.

Print

1. Click the "Print Page" button.
2. Click the print icon on your browser (due to a browser problem, you may get 2 additional pages).
3. Click the "Return to Form" button.
4. Close or select home.

To Update Data

1. To update data, repeat steps 1-8.
2. Click in the box that needs to be changed.
3. Make your change.
4. Go to the bottom of the page and click "Update Data."
5. Use steps above to print.

If you do not have access to the Internet or you have problems or questions with the form, please contact Debra Firkus at (651)582-8775.

5. Two new credit enhancement forms, School District Credit Enhancement Application for Program Participation (ED-02110-03) and Notification of Potential School District Default (ED-02111-04), are attached with this Bulletin. See Attachment 2.

UFARS Manual Update

1. Changes have been made to the UFARS MANUAL in the Chapter 10 restricted code section. Refer to Attachment 1 for the new revisions that have taken place. The main objective of the changes was to open up the restriction of finance codes in the 700 series to all organizations 001-999, instead of just 005.

School Facilities

1. Age and Square Footage Report - For January 1999, the Building Age and Square Footage report (ED-2031-05) will be reported over the Internet instead of via hard copy. Website access instructions were mailed to districts the week of January 11th and they have until February to complete entries. Contact Phil Allmon at (651)582-8748; fax: (651)582-8873.

In addition to the basic age and square footage information requested of each building, there is a Part II where districts are requested to provide simple information about each facilities' project exceeding \$10,000 over the next ten years. The 1999 Legislature is poised to make (possibly) profound changes to the facilities maintenance funding formula, and it is interested in doing so with good planning information from the districts. Both chambers are aware of the survey and legislators and

their aides are looking forward to this agency's summary report by February 22 (thus the February 15 deadline). This is an opportunity for districts to "tell their story" regarding their facilities' maintenance funding needs. A series of workshops on this subject have been scheduled statewide throughout January in order for us to give details and answer questions. We earnestly solicit your support and participation.

General Information

1. Evaluation of Electronic Certification System - So that we can make the process even better for school year 1999-2000, the Department is evaluating the first year of electronic certification of students for free school meal eligibility. Almost all school districts received electronic certification packets in July 1998. Each district's database listed the students in the district who were certified for free school meals based on their participation in the Minnesota Family Investment Plan or Food Stamp program. These students then did not need to have approved Applications for Educational Benefits in order to receive free school meals and to establish their 'economic indicator' on the student MARSS record.

The only districts that did not receive an electronic certification packet were those that had not submitted their end-of-year MARSS data by June 30.

Based on discussions with districts, we have identified the following concerns about the electronic certification process. If you have any other concerns or ideas, please let us know (contacts at end of this article).

Concerns Ideas About Electronic Certification

a. Timing and Mailing of Data

Problem: The electronic certification packet arrived at districts in mid-summer. If no staff were in attendance, the packet had to be tracked down later.

Plan for 1999-2000: Since most districts want the data mailed as early as possible, we plan to continue to do so, probably in the second half of July. The packet will be addressed to the district and not to the attention of the food service. District staff should be alerted so that the packet can be routed to the correct person.

- b. Importing Certification Data into the Accountability System Problem: In some cases school districts could not import the certification data into the district's accountability system. Manual data entry from the electronic certification database was then the only option.

Plan for 1999-2000: We will once again request input from the software vendors and provide vendors with samples of the data sent to districts. We are also planning to include, in the district packet, any vendor-specific instructions.

c. Generating School Meal Approval Letters

Problem: A hard copy of the approval letter (to send to households) was provided, but not a copy on the diskette. Some districts used the database to address approval letters to the DHS parent/guardian, who may not be the correct person to receive the approval letter.

Plan for 1999-2000: A copy of the approval letter will be included on the diskette. The parent/guardian name on the DHS records should not be used on approval letters and may be deleted from the database.

d. Unmatched Siblings

Problem: For many households that did receive MFIP or Food Stamps, not all of the siblings were successfully matched. In these cases, an "Application for Educational Benefits" was still required from the household for the unmatched sibling(s).

In the vast majority of cases, the unmatched sibling could not be matched because the student was not yet listed on the MARSS data. This happens for all kindergarten students and students transferring into the district. In a much smaller number of cases, not all of the siblings from a household matched even though they were all on the MARSS data.

Plan for 1999-2000: There will be a small percentage of students/siblings that electronic certification will not be able to match in all qualifying households. We know that any students who were not on the district's last MARSS submission, such as kindergarten students and students transferring in, will definitely not show up on the electronic certification data.

e. Eliminate Inaccurate Matches

Problem: A small number of households notified their district that they had no involvement in MFIP or Food Stamps, yet they had received electronic certification approval for free school meals. This happened primarily when the matching method used only name and birthdate.

Plan for 1999-2000: We will eliminate any matching method that appears to have resulted in inaccurate matches.

If you know that you had any inaccurate matches, please check your records and let us know the matching method listed for those students. (The number of the matching method for each student is shown on the database.)

For concerns or ideas that you have about the matching process, call Mary Pat Olsen, Data Management, at (651)582-8624.

For concerns or ideas that you have about how we package and send the electronic certification data and materials to you, call Joseph Lee, Food and Nutrition Service, at (651) 582-8542 or (800)366-8922.