Data Transport Business Workgroup

DRAFT

Purpose: The purpose of this group is to recommend a business direction for "Data Transport" and define the business requirements for that process that can be used across multiple business sectors supported by Guarantors, Lenders, Schools, FAMS vendors and FSA.

Participants: The group is composed of representatives from Lenders, Schools, FAMS vendors, Guarantor and FSA representing a wide variety of business processes within their organizations.

Background: Below is a high level synopsis of the current state of "data transport" in the higher education community that led to the formation of this group:

- With the advent of Common Record: CommonLine? XML process, the NCHELP's Electronic Standards Committee (ESC) needs a standard way to send real-time information. The current standard for sending data in a real time mode within ESC is the High Performance Channel Protocol (HPCP). The current protocol or set of standards has not been widely adopted and the only reference implementation is Meteor.
- FSA current transport process is closed and can only be used to transport FSA business related data.
- FSA has begun the process of evaluating its needs to standardize transport across all business applications as part of their Data Strategy Framework.
- Financial Aid Management Systems vendors have expressed an interest in the development of a common transport process for both batch and real-time requests that could be used for all business processes (ex. CR:CommonLine?, CR:COD, Transcripts, etc.).
- SCT is currently evaluating their various methods of exchanging data across all business applications and plans to consolidate down to one new process for exchanging data.
- Recently, the Post secondary Electronic Standards Council (PESC) finalized the Transcript schema and plans to release this document to the education community by the end of 2003. This group is looking for a transport method to recommend to users of the XML Transcripts. Users of the Transport process will include schools and FAMS vendors.
- The current standards utilized by the Higher Education industry do not support the needs of all users and require the support of multiple transport solutions. Due to the size of CR documents, e-mail is no longer a practical solutions for transporting data. Additionally, timeliness, manageability and

sequence of the data are all current issues being experienced with e-mail transmissions.

- FTP requires technical knowledge and support to be adequately implemented and maintained. Many smaller institutions do not have the ability to implement or support FTP transport solution.

Current Efforts of the Data Transport Business Workgroup:

In August, this work group requested the NCHELP's Electronic Exchange Advisory Team (EEAT), continue work on the High Performance Channel Protocol as a proposed common transport option. The High Performance Channel Protocol is a collection of software components that provide a secure, efficient, open methodology for moving data (batch, real-time, near real-time).

The current protocol specification is designed to be a layer on top of SOAP. The EEAT is recommending an alternative approach to use SOAP as the basis of the transport

SOAP is a lightweight protocol for exchange of information in a decentralized, distributed environment. It is an XML based protocol that consists of three parts: an envelope that defines a framework for describing what is in a message and how to process it, a set of encoding rules for expressing instances of application-defined data types, and a convention for representing remote procedure calls and responses.

The benefits to adopting a SOAP transport protocol are speed, extensibility and standards conformance, tool integration and simplicity.

The EEAT is planning the development of reference implementations for Apache, IIS, and Netscape web servers. They expect this effort not only to serve as a proof of concept, but also to yield a transport product or the basis for one to any who want to use it.   This product will be generic enough to handle all of the transport-layer details and therefore will save each entity the trouble of developing their own. Of course, work will still be needed by each to link this layer to their business application. But having the transport layer completed at least in prototype form, should make the effort much more manageable.

Summary: The current landscape of the industry offers a unique opportunity for the higher education community to promote a common data transport standard. Many in the higher education industry are either looking to develop a transport process (FAMS vendor and schools) or streamline and consolidate transport by the adoption or creation of new transport process (FAMS vendors and FSA). The industry can be proactive and develop a standard that can meet the needs of multiple business sectors within our industry. Or it can be reactive, as each sector develops its own solutions for data transport. Since we all share a common points of interaction, the schools and FAMS vendors, the Data

Transport Business workgroup was formed to develop a common solution for data transport with representation from each of the major players in the education industry.