May 11, 2016

Dear OARS Districts:

I have some exciting news to share with you. A few weeks ago, Red Schoolhouse Software--the company that provides OARS--was acquired by Illuminate Education, Inc., a leading education company that creates tools educators can use to promote student and educator success. Illuminate has a strong presence in the K-12 education market, currently assisting 1,297 school districts across the United States.

Let me share with you how I made the decision to join forces with Illuminate. Over the last few years, the introduction of Common Core standards, the shift to new ways of assessing students, and the advent of Smarter Balanced testing have resulted in a massive shift in what our customers needed from an assessment platform. While we made great strides in meeting those needs, I started to grow concerned about our ability to adapt and upgrade quickly enough. Teaming up with a larger company would mean we would have the resources and tools necessary to meet our clients' needs.

As background, Illuminate was founded by Lane Rankin, whom I have known for almost 15 years. We've been friendly rivals for a long time, dating back to when he founded DataDirector. While I never wanted to lose a contract to Lane, I secretly knew that customers choosing his products were in good hands. That's largely because Lane and I share similar backgrounds in education, and our roots go back to the classroom. We also share a similar passion for building products that are instructionally focused and useful to educators. At Red Schoolhouse, just like at Illuminate, we believe in letting educators drive the evolution of our products. After all, teachers, principals and district administrators know best what they need in a data management platform.

You may be wondering how this change will impact you, our OARS districts? Our entire OARS team looks forward to joining the dynamic Illuminate team as we all work together to ensure as smooth a transition as possible for our school districts. We are excited to introduce Illuminate to our current OARS districts as there are many features that have been requested by many of you that are already part of Illuminate, such as:

- Continued availability of the three Item Banks in OARS, with expanded availability of technology enhanced items such as drag and drop, drawing and graphing.
- Text to speech for online assessments (and many other tools for students needing accommodations and modifications).
- Early Warning System features, identifying students who may be at risk.
- Expanded CAASSP Reports.
- A stable infrastructure with expanded hardware and redundant Internet providers.
- User-friendly "Hybrid" assessments that allow the user to administer almost any assessment online by uploading a PDF of the test and having students respond online.
- Access to optional Computer Adaptive assessments provided by FAST Bridge Learning.

Though you will not see an immediate change, plans are being made so that over the next school year we will transition from OARS to Illuminate DnA. We will work with each district to address their unique needs. OARS will continue to exist as a stand-alone product at least through the end of the 2016-17 school year and some of the features you love in OARS will probably make their way into Illuminate. You do not have to rush to change over to Illuminate if you don't feel quite ready. However, when you are ready to make that transition, we are ready to work with you and to migrate over as much needed data as possible.

Over the next few weeks, we'll be reaching out to all of our customers personally to start the conversation about what these changes might mean for you, and how we can assist you in the transition.

For the last 14 years, we've used an analogy to describe OARS: it's the paddle you need when you're on a rowboat in the rapids. We help you steer and navigate through the complex waters of data and assessment. With the transition to Illuminate, you're getting upgraded to a speedboat--and the ways in which we can support you in your work are about to get so much better.

All my best,
Axel Shalson
Founder, Red Schoolhouse Software, now a division of Illuminate Education, Inc.