



Cloud-Based vs. On-Premises SIS

As cloud-based information management systems become faster, easier and more accessible, schools of all sizes are weighing the move to a new student information management program.

Cloud-based student information systems (SIS) and on-premises programs perform the same job. They make operations possible by tracking, managing and creating reports from student data and other school information. The difference is where these programs “live,” and how well they work for your needs.

Cloud-Based SIS vs. On-Premises Programs: What’s the Difference?

On-premises programs only operate on computers at your school, and are linked through an on-site server.

In contrast, cloud-based SIS, like other Software as a Service (SaaS) or cloud-based systems, are appli-

cations that are made available over the Internet. These applications can be hosted on a local server or vendor server “in the cloud” depending on your school’s needs.

Administrators will have to decide for themselves if the time is right for switching to a cloud-based SIS. Before making that decision, it’s important to understand the benefits that a cloud-based SIS can provide in comparison to an on-premises program.

Our Top 8 Benefits of a Cloud-Based SIS

1] Access from Anywhere

Arguably the greatest benefit of a cloud-

based system is the ability to access it from any internet-equipped device. Everyone, from teachers and administrators to parents and students, can use their individual login to reach the information they need from anywhere.

Your SIS should make it easy to view class and assignment grades, due dates, upcoming homework, attendance records and more. Also, parents and students can download file attachments posted by the teacher, including worksheets, permission slips, study guides, and class curricula with the right system.

Moving your SIS from on-premises to the cloud also means that if a fire or other disaster affects your on-site data center, your school’s vital information would not be lost.

2] Lower Initial Cost

Traditional on-premises systems require a major investment in com-

puter hardware and software that can cost your school thousands of dollars. (In fact, this “sunk cost” is a common reason for putting off upgrading to a cloud-based SIS—school administrators want to squeeze every last bit of use out of their old programs, even if they are breaking down and providing less functionality than a new system.)

In contrast, SIS users pay a monthly or annual subscription fee to use the program of their choice, and the programs are designed to work on consumer-grade products like tablets and smartphones.

3] Easy Setup

Installing an on-premises system only begins with the initial purchase—an IT professional will have to set up the computers, as well as a server to run them. This infrastructure needs to be in place before installing the software, and your team will need to be trained to use it when the system is finally ready.

The setup for a cloud-based SIS is much simpler. In most cases, the user need only access their provider’s website to log in, or install an application on their tablet or smartphone. Since these platforms are designed and extensively tested by the SIS provider, they are both easier to set up and more intuitive to use, reducing training needs for your staff.

4] Simplified Communication

A cloud-based SIS makes it easy to connect with individuals or select groups, such as parents of 6th graders, the whole staff, or the entire school. Email integration lets principals, administrators and teachers send messages or announcements to keep busy parents updated with their child’s academic development. Automatic grade monitoring even notifies parents when their child excels or underachieves in a class—without any extra effort from the teacher.

5] Responsive, Immediate Tech Support

Fixing an on-site system requires an on-site person—either in the form of a full-time IT professional or an on-call technician (who may or may not be available right away).

A cloud-based SIS removes this obstacle, because tech support can access the system as easily as you do. School staff can speak with customer service on the phone, walk them through the problem, and get real-time solutions for their issue. Also, connecting directly to your SIS vendor removes the possibility of a third-party technician showing up and not knowing how to fix it.

6] Built-in Updates

Committing to a cloud-based SIS means that you’re signing up for a service, not just buying a product. On-premises systems closed off from remote access are a product, which means they don’t “improve” on their own. An on-premises system is only updated when an IT person manually installs a new version of the program.

The best cloud-based services have people constantly working behind the scenes to make their software better, which includes updating their programs to fix problems and improve functionality. And unlike on-premises systems, cloud-based SIS rarely has to be shut down to implement these updates.

7] Stronger Data Security

As we mentioned in #6, the team behind your cloud-based SIS is constantly working to improve their system, and looking out for security issues is a huge part of that service.

Cloud-based SIS is flexible enough to stay ahead of customer needs, which includes making updates to security mechanisms and policies as they become necessary. A locally-installed

on-premises system might offer occasional updates by an IT person, but these updates are less frequent and less reliable.

On-premises computers also store all of their data in one location, which can include sensitive or confidential information that is vulnerable to a breach. A cloud-based SIS with SSL encryption keeps the connection between the server and the client secure, and other tactics like complex passwords will keep would-be hackers away.

Furthermore, the fixed storage capacity available to an on-premises system means that eventually either more storage will have to be added (at significant cost) or data will need to be removed to create more space.

Since cloud-based SIS stores information in the cloud, essential data can be stored indefinitely; nothing has to be deleted to keep the system operational.

8] Software That Adapts

As we’ve mentioned already, an on-premises system is a product that isn’t designed to change easily. Customizing assessments, report cards, and other components can be so labor-intensive that it feels counterproductive.

This simply isn’t the case with a cloud-based SIS. Cloud-based systems are designed to be flexible and adapt to each school’s needs. And once the SIS is configured the way a teacher or administrator likes it, those settings should be easy to migrate from term to term and year to year.

Leaving behind an old, familiar on-premises system can be a difficult transition. But the benefits of cloud-based SIS platforms continue to grow, and schools are making the switch to become more efficient and successful. In many cases, when the transition is complete, school staff and parents alike wonder how they managed to get by for so long without so many modern and useful tools. ○