

Pete Deyo

Technology Plan Review

In creating this review I first found the task rather daunting. Not for any reason of creative shortcomings or perceived lack of ability but simple in comparing my own district's technology plan against the MDE educational technology plan approval checklist my district measured up just fine. Point of fact, in looking at how the Traverse City Area Public Schools (TCAPS) formatted their technology plan it seems rather obvious that they created it simply by going through the checklist and describing what they were already doing. As such much of the content of this review entails a detailed account of the plan itself and its actual enactment with some personal opinions and suggestions.

TCAPS has created an accurate picture of their current technology infrastructure. Including some 4,500 student computers, 1,100 staff computers, and 550 mounted projectors and doc cams. In addendum to that TCAPS also provides all school buildings with 1GB fiber or 400-800Mbps point to point wireless connectivity. The interior of each school has complete wireless coverage connecting to a 600Mbps internet connections shared the the ISD. All computers (PCs, Laptops, Tablets) are on a three year scheduled replacement cycle. While the wiring is replaced on an as needed basis. TCAPS strives for efficiency in all of the systems it deploys in support of education. Active Directory is the foundation that is used to provide access to most systems within the district. While not all systems can authenticate through Active Directory or LDAP at this time, it is the goal that it will be a single source for authentication in the future. In addition to a single authentication source, TCAPS evaluates all new requests for systems and functionality for redundancy within existing

solutions. One of TCAPS's core beliefs is that extending existing systems to fill new roles is preferable to adding additional systems which require additional training and support.

In spite of TCAPS's detailed professional and organized plan there is little in the way of consideration for emerging technologies. That said it also does not appear that in conjunction with the Educational Technology Plan Approval Checklist that it is an item of much importance and I will say that TCAPS has at least addressed this in that their plan makes it clear that the guiding philosophy of the plan is that curriculum will drive technology needs. To my mind that indicates that if a technology were to emerge that was in the best interests of teachers and students then it would be acted upon.

In 2001, 2004 and 2007 TCAPS passed bond issues that provide for the updating of technology until 2017. Evaluations and prioritization of technology replacement purchases are made on an annual basis, approved by the Executive Team, bid out and implemented. Technology lifespans are varied and equipment is expensive to replace. With the limited resources, prioritization becomes an important task in this process. By pursuing additional grants, lengthening the life spans, reducing quantities, TCAPS achieves a financial balance. They note that the introduction of cheaper NetBook and tablet technology holds promise in the respect that it has the potential to reduce workstation costs.

TCAPS believes and make it know in the district's technology plan that the curriculum decision-making process needs to drive the technology decision-making process. This should encompass technology related purchases (hardware and software), as well as the commitment to professional development and training initiatives. The "yardstick" used to determine a technology related decision is loosely based on that of Tom

Watkins, former Michigan Superintendent of Education. The basic question asked is this: "How does this Plan help administrators lead, teachers teach, and students learn?" This Plan, evaluation is based on both on-going and periodic measurements. This plan will undergo periodic review from several levels. On-going evaluation will be accomplished by procedural changes in the process of technology spending. In addition, all eighth graders will be assessed annually to measure progress towards technology literacy. Students should make steady progress towards meeting all technology standards. As mentioned above, evaluation is based on both on-going and periodic measurements. Depending on the instruments used, evaluation may be done weekly or monthly, others may be from 6 months to 2 years. As is evident in any part of this or any other plan, technology is driven by curriculum. The Director of Technology works with curriculum coordinators to compile and communicate results from evaluation efforts. The Technology Leadership Team re-examines unmet goals. They will determine whether any particular unmet goal needs to be modified in terms of desired outcome, timeline, etc., and resume the above process.

Currently, we have a computer technician assigned 40 hours per week to each secondary school and technology assistants at each main high school. Two technicians and an assistant share responsibility for the elementary buildings, Traverse City High School and administration. Two systems administrators cover our centralized operations at the data center. We have a Technology Supervisor that coordinates and assists on all technical support operations of the district. Additionally, the district's web page is maintained with pertinent frequently asked questions and advice on various technology issues and there is a wiki with tutorials and self-help materials. To coordinate technical service, each staff member uses a web-based service, School

Dude, at <http://www.schooldude.com/> to log their problems. This service keeps a record of technology work orders. To support the needs of online learners there is a need to have an immediate technical support option for staff and students who rely on the online tools (Moodle, etc...). Routine needs are still be handled through the SchoolDude work order system, however, for urgent needs users can call the main technology office. These items will either be resolved by office staff or have the appropriate personnel dispatched. Technicians use remote assistance tools to expand the types of support they can provide including full remote control. As the online programs grow and with it the number of students who are accessing learning materials at non- traditional times increases, the support hours and/or options may need to be extended. Careful monitoring of student requests, help desk workload and new program offerings will be needed to identify when expansion should be considered. Ideally, a help desk for an online program would be available 24/7. One solution to this might be to collaborate with other institutions with the same needs. TCAPS is currently pursuing a collaborative implementation with the intermediate school district. In addition, technicians and training staff will make use of screen capture utilities to create training videos that can be accessed in a self-serve format online at <http://web2.tcaps.net/techsource>.

The district has developed an Acceptable Use Policy (AUP) that details technology use for students and staff, and incorporates federally mandated requirements through the Child Internet Protection Act (CIPA). TCAPS states that as technology changes, and new challenges arise the Technology Leadership Committee will review the AUP. Any changes will be communicated to the school board at an appropriate time.

In all TCAPS has created a very complete plan that accounts for all the principal

factors involved in creating a school system that incorporates current technology fully into education. In particular the move to fund technology with local bond money is particularly admirable, ensuring that student will have access to the technologies they will need in a particularly volatile and destitute education system.