



Connections

Management Council of the Ohio Education Computer Network

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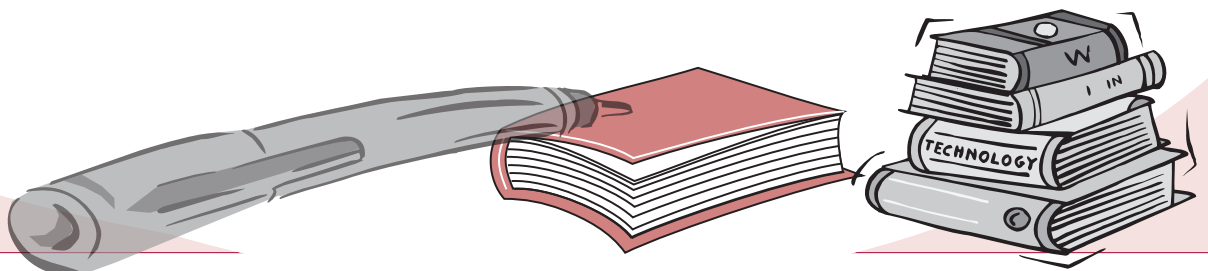
From the CEO...

By Bruce E. Hawkins, CEO

Like much of our nation, the State of Ohio is experiencing difficult financial times. As a starting point for the next biennium budget process the Governor has called for state agency budget requests to be only 90% to 95% of current fiscal year levels. Two considerations come to mind as our state follows this course of action. First the obvious – reducing expenditures will allow the state to operate within its financial means. More importantly, these restraints provide motivation for agencies to seek ways of delivering services with greater efficiency. This is not the first time our state has experienced budget shortages over the past several years. When faced with budget reductions, the typical response aimed at becoming “more efficient” is to trim operational costs – close locations, reduce hours, cut staffing – and in turn offer less service.

The OECN, however, may be unique in its response to reductions in state support. While sharing the burden of reduced state funding, the OECN has actually **increased** services provided to school districts over the past five budget cycles. While experiencing state funding that has been flat at best, the OECN ITCs have increased the number of schools being served, increased the capacity and reliability of the network, and increased the quantity of services being offered. The OECN ITCs have been able to, “do more with less” by working cooperatively to offer services, by using group purchasing to reduce the cost of acquisition, and by partnering with other agencies and entities to expand resources and service offerings. In this way, the OECN has demonstrated fiscal responsibility and has proven to be a good investment for state funds.

This newsletter contains a letter from one of our customers, a superintendent who has worked with three ITCs over the past 30+ years. It also contains some statistics on the services ITCs provide to Ohio school districts. As you will see, ITCs are more than just a network; they are more importantly service providers to our schools.





Library Automation: The INFOhio-OECN Partnership

INFOhio partners with the OECN to provide library automation services to more than 2,400 Ohio K-12 buildings. Recent improvements include a new online catalog (OPAC) that improves searching of building and district library collections, installation of the newest available version of the library management module, new and improved reports written by INFOhio staff tailored to Ohio needs, and updated training materials – print and video – produced by INFOhio and ITC staff for our customers.

INFOhio Technical Support staff work closely with ITC providers to ensure automation software is properly installed from the ITC servers to the desktops in local libraries. INFOhio trains ITC staff who train and support their end users. Many ITCs conduct regional users group meetings to explain new automation features and gather suggestions for future improvements. INFOhio Users Council Representatives – two from each ITC – strengthen our communication between the customers and all levels of support staff. “INFOhio has been working closely with the OECN for more than a decade to develop our library automation delivery model,” said Theresa M. Fredericka, INFOhio Executive Director. “We believe we have an effective service that delivers high-quality software at the lowest cost possible, all to improve teaching and learning in our schools. An added benefit is the increased accountability for local library materials with the automation software circulation and inventory modules. INFOhio could not have succeeded without the OECN.”

Electronic Resources: Changes to Core Collection for 2008-2009

The start of the 2008-2009 school year brings many changes to *INFOhio's Core Collection of Electronic Resources*:

- *Biography Reference Bank* by H.W. Wilson Company replaces *American National Biography*.
- *Science Online* by Facts On File replaces *AccessScience*.
- *World Book Web Complete Suite* replaces the Britannica resources with *World Book Kids*, *World Book Online Reference Center*, *World Book Advanced*, *Enciclopedia Estudiantil Hallazgos* and *L'Encyclopédie Découverte*.
- EBSCOhost has a new search interface for our *All Database Search*. And *Consumer Health Complete* joins the resource.
- *LearningExpress Library* has added computer skills tutorials and more practice tests.
- *SchoolRooms* now searches much of the *Core Collection*, along with thousands of great Web sites that have been selected to support Ohio's Academic Content Standards. And, for those school libraries automated with INFOhio, local catalogs can be searched through *SchoolRooms*.

The INFOhio Web site, <http://www.infohio.org>, now links to these new resources within grade level pages (K-5, 6-8, and 9-12) and the *Core Collection* page. You can read more about changes to the *Core Collection* at <http://www.infohio.org/FallUpdate2008/Toolkit2008new.html>. All *Help Resources* pages include the tools INFOhio staff has found to help use and teach *Core Collection* resources. Our series of *Getting Started Guides* is updated, with new *Guides* for the new resources and revisions to the others. *Multimedia Tools* links to plug-ins needed to get best use out of the 2008-2009 resources, and *Webmaster Technical Information* is revised for the new *Core Collection* resources. The *INFOhio Toolkit for 2008-2009*, including our *Slide Library* and *Supply List* of promotional materials is online at <http://www.infohio.org/Toolkit.html>.

While most Ohio schools can access *INFOhio's Core Collection of Electronic Resources* without a username or password, some schools and home users will need to enter a username and password, at least until their computers set cookies for INFOhio. Last year's username and password will not work after September 15, 2008. To guarantee access through June 30, 2009, your school's library media staff has been sent the current username and password. Your library media staff can give you tips on using INFOhio and help solve problems using the *Core Collection*.

The *Core Collection* is funded in part through an Institute of Museum and Library Services LSTA grant awarded by the State Library of Ohio to Libraries Connect Ohio, a consortium that includes INFOhio, OhioLINK and OPLIN, the academic and public library networks. As a result of this arrangement, K-12 achieves substantial savings. The resources cost approximately 45 **cents** per student compared to 45 **dollars** per student, if individual schools purchased the resources on their own. INFOhio's *Core Collection* never closes; it is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week through June 30, 2009, and serves the entire K-12 community – public, nonpublic, community schools and home schooled students.

Current OECN Collaborative Projects

By working cooperatively the OECN ITCs have developed or acquired common software tools which in turn have drastically lowered the cost and increased the consistency and quality of services provided to Ohio school districts. Here is a partial listing of current collaborative projects managed by the OECN to promote greater efficiency and conserve financial resources:

- Internet Bandwidth Purchasing
- Anti-SPAM Filtering
- Audio/Web-Based Conferencing
- INFOhio Shared Server
- D3A2 Data Warehouse & Electronic Resources Repository in collaboration with ODE, eTech Ohio, INFOhio, ORC, and other
- Shared business continuity services and centralized disaster recovery site
- Professional Development Efforts
- Ohio K-12 Network provided in collaboration with OARnet, ODE, and eTech Ohio
- INFOhio Electronic Resources provided in collaboration with OhioLINK, OPLIN, and the State Library of Ohio
- Telephony, web conferencing, and parent access to their child's academics
- Shared software applications including:
 - EMIS – Education Management Information System (state data reporting)
 - USAS – Uniform School Accounting System (school fiscal software)
 - USPS – Uniform School Payroll System (school payroll software)
 - INFOhio – Library automation
 - DASL – Data Analysis for Student Learning (student management software)
 - eSIS – Student management software
 - SSEM – Special Services Education Module (individual education plans, or IEP)
 - ProgressBook – Teacher grade book with lesson plans and parental access
 - CA-USD Helpdesk – shared issue reporting and tracking
 - HR Kiosk – Employee self-service kiosk software
 - D3A2 – Data Driven Decisions for Academic Achievement (data analysis)
 - IdM – Identity Management (account management and single sign-on)

One of the best examples of increased efficiency is the Internet Bandwidth Purchasing. By leveraging the buying power of Ohio's schools, the MCOECN has been able to purchase, on behalf of Ohio's schools, four times as much bandwidth for the same amount of money. This has allowed the Ohio K-12 Network to handle the increased demands for Internet bandwidth without expanding the budget.

Other examples of collaborative projects and efforts that benefit Ohio's schools include group purchasing of software from Microsoft, Adobe, and the INFOhio Electronic Resources. Collaborative efforts to provide software development and support for student data software come via the DASL and eSMOC groups. The MCOECN Technology Solutions Group (mc*tsg) supports several statewide projects including D3A2 and identity management. The State Software Development Team (SSDT) provides development and support resources for fiscal software, EMIS, employee kiosk, and the statewide Help Desk. Each of these efforts help to provide a better product and a higher level of support at a significantly lower overall cost.

Services by the numbers

A partial accounting for the most recent fiscal year (2008) demonstrates the level of services provided by the OECN ITCs. During the past year, the ITCs have assisted Ohio's schools to use or produce the following:

An Accounting of Service Usage for FY 2008

Paychecks or Direct Deposits	5,513,890	Parent Access Accounts	963,152	ITC Staff Hours Worked	779,874
Employee W2's	297,713	Library Books Checked Out	19,473,401	Internet Bandwidth	2+ Gb/Month
Warrant (Vendor) Checks	1,835,498	Professional Development Events	3,715		
Purchase Orders	1,565,279	Attendees at PD Events	73,464		
Report Cards or Interim Reports	6,860,658	District Support Inquiries	1,234,717		



Explain it to me – What is the OECN?

The Ohio Education Computer Network (OECN) is an organization of 23 regional Information Technology Centers (ITCs) that provide connectivity, technical assistance, state-required reporting, and information processing services to over 700 school districts, educational service centers, community schools, and career centers in Ohio. Each ITC is a governmental entity owned and governed by the districts that it serves. With guidance from the state, the local districts determine the budget, staffing, and menu of services provided by their ITC.

Created by the Ohio Legislature in 1979 to support schools' fiscal operations, the OECN ITCs have grown to support over 30 unique services actively used by schools in Ohio. Each ITC supports a menu of common "core" services for fiscal processing, library automation, EMIS reporting, student services, and network connectivity. Expanding on this core, ITCs can provide additional services such as online grade books, parent access tools, video and distance learning support, electronic mail, content filtering, spam filtering, web-based conferencing services, telephony, document management, and data-driven decision support. By working cooperatively, the OECN ITCs have developed or acquired common software tools, which in turn has drastically lowered the cost and increased the consistency and quality of services provided to Ohio school districts. In addition, the OECN has partnered with other statewide entities such as the Ohio Department of Education, the eTech Ohio Commission, OARnet, OPLIN, and OhioLINK to expand available resources and services.

Ohio schools range in size from large urban districts with 20,000-plus students down to community schools with fewer than 100 students. While a few districts are of sufficient size and financial means to be self-supporting, the vast majority of Ohio's educational entities are totally reliant on their ITC for the technical capacity to handle information processing and state reporting needs. The State contributes less than 20% of the funding to support ITC operations. Local districts support the remainder of operational costs. While the local share as a percentage of the total ITC budget has grown, this investment still represents an incredible value for the services provided. For the vast majority of schools, it would be impossible to replace the quality and quantity of services provided by their ITC without significantly increasing expenditures needed to build local capacity or acquire services from other sources. Equally important, the OECN ITCs provide a vital link between the State and the districts. ITCs are the sole conduit for districts to provide State reporting to the Ohio Department of Education. Without the ITCs and the underlying Ohio K-12 Network providing connectivity to Ohio school districts and buildings, the ODE and the State would have no avenue to collect information from Ohio's schools.

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To Whom it My Concern:

I have been an administrator in Ohio schools for over thirty years and have been served by three different ITCs: HCCA, NCOCC, and TRECA. My purpose in writing this letter is to stress how important ITCs are to school districts, and to lobby for more, not less, support.

First, what is our ITC? Let me try to explain. As a school we have to conduct the "business" of the district. For example, in our treasurer's office we have to account for the finances of the district and follow the rules set by the Department of Education and the state auditor. We have to keep track of our revenue and expenses. We have to pay vendors and keep records of those transactions. We have to track the hours or days that our employees work, their sick days or other benefits, pay them twenty-six times per year, and do the required payroll reporting to the retirement systems, the state, and the federal government.

In our high school, junior high, and elementary, we have to register students and schedule them into classes. We have to monitor their attendance and keep track of discipline incidents. We chart their educational progress, record grades, and distribute report cards. There is additional monitoring and reporting required for special education students - to do IEP's (Individual Education Plans). And, on top of all of this, we have to report data to ODE several times each year for EMIS. These activities are the "business" of the district.

Obviously, this work is all done on computers. As a school district, we can decide locally how we want to manage these services. We can buy our own computers and software, then, set everything up "in house" to do this work. Or, we can contract with a third-party company and have them do the processing for us. But, we don't use either of those options.

Many years ago the administration and school board made the decision to join other districts to create a central data hub shared by all of the schools in our area. This is our ITC. We actually own a part of the ITC along with all other member districts; it is like an extension of our school district.

Administrators and staff from our district serve on boards and committees to provide the ITC with governance and advice. We pay our fair share of the operational costs; costs that are much less expensive than if we did it "in house". We can never duplicate the depth and breadth of services for the money we pay to participate with our ITC.

But, there are other ways the ITC helps us to reduce costs. For example, because we have a membership in TRECA (our ITC) we save on staff needed to manage computers and software; we don't have to become experts on every application these things are done for us by the ITC.

For example, our ITC provides a teacher grade book application that is shared by many schools. Teachers can use this to record grades instead of doing it by pencil or having to install a program on a hundred individual computers. Building principals can access the information electronically. Grades are automatically transferred to the student information system. And, as a bonus, this grade book application has a parent access feature so parents in our district can log in from home to check on their child's grades.

Our ITC installed this program and provided training for our teachers. They also manage the server, the security, and the updates! Our district can't pay for this service on our own - we just don't have the time, personnel, or funding to do it ourselves. And, if some other district has a good application, and our ITC can supply that application, it becomes available along with support and training to us as well.

Now I could stop right there and the ITC would still be a great deal for us. But there is more! Our ITC provides a high-speed connection to the Internet. They worked out a deal with local phone companies and cable companies to get our schools connected with fiber optic cable. This costs less for us because the unit price is distributed over the group.

Just this summer, they were able to add Internet-2 services to our connectivity at no additional cost. They handle electronic mail, filtering, spam protection, security, and manage. And, because they spread the cost among a group of districts, the unaffordable becomes ours to use.

We also get other services like library management and access to electronic magazines and periodicals. All these services would be unavailable if not for the ITCs in the state. Simply put, we have no capacity to provide these services to our children without the help of our ITC.

We depend on our ITC!

Sincerely,

Sam Martin, Superintendent
Mohawk Local Schools

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ITCs Providing Vital Services to Ohio's Schools

OECN ITCs provide connectivity, technical assistance, state-required reporting, and information processing services to over 700 school districts, educational service centers, community schools, and career centers in Ohio. A partial listing of services provided to schools includes:

- Accounting, payroll, and inventory management services
- Employee Kiosk
- Student scheduling, report cards, and attendance reporting
- Special Education Management and Reporting
- Teacher grade book, teacher lesson plans, and elementary (standards-based) report cards
- Parent Web-Access (over 963,000 accounts)
- Library automation (patron management, catalog, circulation)
- Access to INFOhio Electronic Resources
- Internet access (and bandwidth purchasing)
- Electronic mail
- State reporting (EMIS)
- Content filtering and SPAM filtering
- Local and wide area networks (physical layer, routing, monitoring)
- Web site hosting services
- Interactive video conferencing and Web-based conferencing services
- Telephony services
- Video/media content
- Document management
- Remote backup and off-site storage
- Disaster recovery
- D3A2 (data analysis of student testing and performance instruments)
- Identity management
- CA-USD (help-desk/issue tracking/reporting)

In addition to these services, many ITCs offer specialized services tailored to the needs of their member-owner school districts. Examples of these services could include software development or custom computer programming, visual/multimedia development, group purchasing, virtual schools, and professional staffing. Once again it is important to remember that the local districts determine the budget, staffing, and menu of services provided by their ITC within guidelines provided from the state. Each ITC develops a menu of services to meet the specific needs of the member-owners school districts of that ITC.