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Baltimore, Maryland

BUILDING HUMAN CAPACITY FOR A DISTRICT'S DIGITAL LEAP

By Keith Krueger

Educators, school board members and parents agree that learning is enhanced and will be increasingly delivered through technology.

“Digital leaps” are happening in school districts nationwide, moving from small pockets of innovation to systemic transformation. These shifts are equipping classrooms and students with devices, high-speed connectivity, digital content, blended and virtual learning, maker spaces, and other emerging technologies.

Yet, the greatest challenge we face around education technology is not technical or even technological.

The “big, hairy problem”: human.

Addressing the Human Capacity Challenge

Does your school system have the right team leading the right strategy to execute these highly effective, but visible and costly initiatives?

As human resource leaders, the challenge today is building the capacity of school system leaders so they can move from old education models to individualized learning models. This requires developing leaders who know how to transform the learning environment with technology.

CoSN (the Consortium for School Networking), the national association of school district technology leaders, has thought long and hard about how we might address this challenge. It takes a total team effort. Superintendents and principals must set their visions for making this “digital leap.” Teachers must be willing to adapt, and school

boards should support the clear policies and budgets that enable this transformation.

Equally important are the new roles of school district staff in charge of technology – commonly known as, Chief Technology Officers (CTOs).

Identifying and Understanding Today's CTO

According to Price Waterhouse Coopers, in 1990, about 80 percent of the technology leader's role was technical. Today, managing the technical aspects of the job is less than 20 percent. However, districts mostly advertise and recruit these district education technology positions on the basis of technical skills.

What does a high-performing district technology leader need to know today?

To answer that question, CoSN created our *Framework of Essential Skills of the K-12 CTO*. The Framework's body of knowledge was built and updated by expert CTOs, and validated with support from the National Science Foundation. It defines 10 essential skills that can be grouped into three buckets: Managing Technology (the



FRAMEWORK
of Essential Skills of the K-12 CTO

traditional role of CTOs); Understanding the Education Environment; and Leadership & Vision.

Three years ago using the Framework body of knowledge, CoSN launched the Certified Education Technology Leader (CETL)[™] program. This is the first-ever aspirational certification for education technology leaders. More than 160 education technology leaders, from large and small school systems nationwide, have passed this rigorous program and earned their certification, with more in the pipeline.

Shifting from Technical to Transformative Tech Leader

Technology leaders can no longer be “in charge” of all technology – some refer to this as the “consumerization” of technology. Likewise, technology can no longer be a silo if it is to be effective. CTOs must see their job as using technology to enable the modern learning enterprise, not simply installing, maintaining and locking down the network. By becoming a CETL[™], those who are credentialed demonstrate a commitment to that vision and have the skills to be an indispensable leader.

Knowing What Superintendents Need From Technology Leaders

For superintendents, district technology leaders often provide guidance and instruction on how technology can improve learning. Yet in too many districts, CTOs do not have the complete leadership skills and experience to be a part of the visionary, leadership team.



Compounding this challenge is the new data from CoSN’s 2015 IT Leadership Survey, which found that 20 percent of all district technology leaders will be retiring within the next 5 years, and 50 percent over the next decade. This forthcoming exodus of senior education technology leadership from the field creates a compelling need to scale professional development for those aspiring to be CTOs.

The Framework CoSN has developed can be used to recruit and evaluate the skills needed by the CTO, and there is a trend toward identifying candidates that are, in fact, CETL[™] certified. The Framework can also be a performance rubric for evaluating CTOs. CoSN has developed free sample CTO job descriptions, questions for interviews and more tools surrounding what district technology leaders should demonstrate

Your CTO will be working with Chief Academic Officers, Chief Financial Officers, Chief Operating

Officers and others at the district level, as well as principals, teachers, parents / guardians and the School Board. This person must have the leadership skills to effectively communicate and work with these various stakeholders.

Now that you understand today’s education technology challenge, begin building the human technology capacity of school system technology leaders. The sooner you do it, the sooner your district will be able to make a successful “digital leap.”

Keith Krueger is the CEO of CoSN. For more on CoSN’s Certified Education Technology Leader (CETL)[™], please visit: <http://cosn.org/value-cetl-superintendents>