



www.mcoecn.org

Mt. Vernon Office:
1365 New Gambier Rd.
Mt. Vernon, OH 43050

Columbus Office:
8050 North High Street
Suite 150
Columbus, OH 43235
(614) 840-9810

Bruce Hawkins, CEO
hawkins@mcoecn.org



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Connections

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Another Look at Restructuring Ohio's Regional Service Agencies

By Bruce E. Hawkins, CEO

For the past two years, there have been efforts to restructure the various agencies providing services to Ohio school districts and children.

In the last biennial budget, the State Board of Education was given the responsibility to make a recommendation to the Ohio Legislature regarding the Ohio Regional Educational Delivery System (OREDS). The Ohio Department of Education conducted statewide surveys in written form and in area meetings. In March of 2003, the State Board's recommendation was given to the legislature. It was included in Senate Bill 232, sponsored by Senator Robert Gardner, to reorganize the regional service agencies. This bill had several hearings but did not move out of committee during the legislative session.

This past summer the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) developed a new regional plan for school improvement centers. The 12 new regions are based upon the former 16 Special Education Resource Center (SERCC) regions. Numerous ODE initiatives will be delivered through the new regions in order to streamline delivery of services to schools.

Since the new plan became effective, Representative Setzer introduced House Bill 567, which took a different look at the reorganization of service centers. This bill had several hearings after the November election with numerous people testifying of their perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of the proposed legislation. Although House Bill 567 did not pass during legislative session, Representative Setzer plans to reintroduce a similar bill very early in the new session of the Ohio Legislature.

From the information technology services standpoint, there are some concerns with the language in House Bill 567. The DA Sites would no longer be able to contract with school districts after the effective date of the bill. This would appear to virtually eliminate them, since they would no longer be able to contract with their member districts. If the intent of the bill is to open competition, or allow school districts to contract for services from any DA Site or other vendors, the language could certainly be adjusted to reflect that intent. If the concern is for overlap of services among different agencies, there are no other service agencies actively providing many of the unique DA Site services, such as

scheduling, grade cards, payroll, purchase orders, email, networking, and other locally initiated services.

Another major concern with House Bill 567 is the provision for the State Chief Information Officer (CIO) to rewrite EMIS by July 1, 2005 and make it operational in 2006. EMIS is a very complicated software package having implications for school funding and other operations in the districts. Therefore, it is crucial that EMIS be written to meet needs at the state level that of the Ohio Department of Education and the legislator, as well as to provide information back to the school districts to promote student learning and operational efficiency.

Although not specifically stated in the bill, the elimination of the Ohio SchoolNet (OSN) has been discussed in the reorganization process. OSN serves as a visionary leader of technology in Ohio and has made Ohio a leader in technology education in this country. If the OSN Commission is to be eliminated, who will provide that visionary leadership in technology for Ohio schools? OSN has funneled the funding for programs such as the electronic resources provided for INFOhio and the equipment for ONEnet. Additionally they host one of the nation's largest school technology conferences for educators. If changes are going to be made, it is important that exemplary programs for Ohio schools are not lost.

The OECN is celebrating their 25th Anniversary this year. During the past 25 years, the OECN has provided a myriad of services to Ohio schools. Its DA Sites started out providing fiscal services to standardize reporting at the request of the Auditor of State's Office. The services have grown dramatically since that time, with many services common to all DA Sites. However, DA Sites are locally controlled, and there are many services unique to each DA Site that have been requested by it's own governing board. These boards are made up of superintendents and in some areas also treasurers.

The intent of these regionalization efforts should be to best provide services to the school districts of Ohio. We look forward to working with the legislators and educators in this process and would encourage the reader to follow the regionalization bill in the new legislature session to insure the best interests of Ohio schools are served.



Two New INFOhio Grant Projects To Set Direction for 2005

Theresa M. Fredericka, Executive Director

INFOhio Summit: Leading to the Future

INFOhio applied for and received an LSTA Continuing Education Grant from the State Library of Ohio to help us develop a plan for the future that is based in research and addresses our strategic objectives. INFOhio will use the research as a spectrum to do the following:

- Define and plan for collection development.
- Deliver goods and services.
- Review and execute an effective organizational design within a collaborative environment.

The two studies INFOhio will use to provide the context for future opportunities and achievements are these:

Student Learning Through Ohio School Libraries <http://www.oelma.org/studentlearning/>.

This is the first statewide study to examine the multi-dimensional dynamics of learning through effective school libraries from the student's perspective. It was conducted by Dr. Ross J. Todd and Dr. Carol C. Kuhlthau of Rutgers University and the Center for International Scholarship in School Libraries (CISSL) on behalf of OELMA and the Leadership for School Libraries, a collaboration of OELMA, ODE, the State Library of Ohio and INFOhio. The results provide direction and recommendations for professional practice, educational policy development, tools for school librarians to chart impacts on learning, and areas for further research.

The 2003 OCLC Environmental Scan: Pattern Recognition <http://www.>

[oclc.org/membership/escan/](http://www.oclc.org/membership/escan/). This study seeks to identify and describe the issues and trends that are impacting and will impact OCLC, libraries, museums, archives and other similar organizations, positively and negatively. It is not just a static piece of research. It is dynamic. The online report poses questions and asks for feedback and suggested solutions.

To not use these studies as we look to the future would be detrimental to both INFOhio and our users. For according to one source quoted in the OCLC Scan:

"The ultimate question of life, the universe and everything is: 'How do we together, as a community of libraries and allied organizations, move our trusted circle closer to information consumers at the level of their need?'"

INFOhio to Assist Parents in Learning About New Technologies and Electronic Resources

INFOhio recently received a \$40,000 Reinberger Foundation Grant to develop educational materials to help parents learn about and take advantage of the free electronic educational resources available to students at home.

While each local school is responsible for how it interacts with the parents of its students, INFOhio wants to provide schools with the tools to help them reach out to all parents and their communities. INFOhio wants to help parents to

understand the importance of information literacy, to take advantage of the statewide electronic resources available, and to use school and public libraries to enrich student learning as well as lifelong learning experiences.

INFOhio will conduct a series of focus groups to get input so that the new program, which is expected to be available to local schools by fall 2005, meets parents' needs. Examples of possible offerings include:

- Simple, easy-to-use and -understand guides on how to access the Internet and conduct basic information searches.
- An INFOhio primer on what is INFOhio, how to use it and why INFOhio's electronic resources are such an effective and efficient educational resource.
- Where to go to brush up on math skills, grammar, history, and other forgotten lessons parents learned while they were in school.
- How to expand resources even more by connecting to the public library for additional help.
- The basics and importance of Internet safety.

INFOhio will involve key partners in the project. The Ohio Educational Library Media Association (OELMA) and the School of Library and Information Science, Kent State University (KSU-SLIS), will contribute specialized knowledge, services and expertise.



SchoolNet Conference 2005

Ohio SchoolNet understands that school districts across the State of Ohio are realizing budget constraints. In order for more districts to send attendees to Conference 2005, Ohio SchoolNet is offering a promotion to current or new Hall Pass users.

The promotion, which offers current or new Hall Pass users a discount of between \$25 - \$150, depending on the registration options selected, by them simply signing into their Hall Pass account before registering, is a one-time opportunity for educators across the state to take advantage of special pricing to attend the state's largest annual educational technology event. This offer expires on Friday, February 4, 2005.

Hall Pass provides access to online resources, such as online professional development registration, grant applications, certificates of participation for the State Technology Conference and other continuing education offered by OSNC, access to research information on technology from Gartner and Norex, access to discounted technology products through the Equipment and Services Catalog, and more.

New at this year's Conference, certificates of attendance will be given electronically using their individual Hall Pass accounts. Why not save money on registration and time at the Conference by signing up for a Hall Pass account and registering for the Conference!

Go to [<http://www.osn.state.oh.us/go/conferencehallpasspromo/>] now!

The Ohio SchoolNet State Technology Conference is an annual event funded by the Ohio SchoolNet Commission and is the agency's premier professional development

opportunity. As one of the largest statewide educational technology conferences in the nation, the Conference hosts multiple training and professional development sessions for teachers, superintendents, technology coordinators, principals, administrators and other education professionals.

Per the Ohio SchoolNet Professional Development fund guidelines, districts may use PD grant funds to reimburse for registration fees, substitute salaries and benefits, mileage/parking expenses and up to seventy-five dollars (\$75.00) per night per person for hotel accommodations for administrators and educators to attend Conference 2005.

Although PD grant funds are intended for licensed educators and administrators, districts may use PD grant funds to pay for registration fees ONLY for technical support staff that provide technical professional development within their district to attend the Conference.

Districts may also use federal funding sources, including Title IIA, Title IID and Title I to offset costs of attending the Conference. However, please be sure to review the guidelines for these funds before committing these dollars.

Visit the Ohio Department of Education's website

[http://ccip.ode.state.oh.us/ccip/doclib/doclib_group.asp?DocGroupID=198] for further information about these funding sources and spending requirements.

For more information about the Ohio SchoolNet State Technology Conference, which will take place February 14-16, 2005 at the Columbus Convention Center, visit the Conference website at

[<http://www.osn.state.oh.us/go/stateconf>] or contact our Conference team at 800.644.6761.

Third Frontier Network Update

Andrew Tompkins, CTO

The previous issue of MCOECN Connections contained an editorial calling for the "bigger pipes" of connectivity to the Third Frontier Network (TFN). We are pleased to bring an exciting update to this story. On November 30, 2004, Governor Bob Taft participated with other distinguished individuals in the official lighting ceremony for the Third Frontier Network. The vision of a premier high-speed fiber optic academic and research network has become a reality for Ohio!

The Governor also announced that the K-12 community will be a partner in the Third Frontier Network. With this commitment in hand, the Ohio Department of Education has moved forward to purchase communications equipment for the K-12 TFN backbone. Once this equipment is installed and tested, the OECN DA Sites and large urban districts will begin connecting to TFN. The process of building and lighting the "middle mile" connectivity to DA Sites and large urban districts should be accomplished in the next fifteen to eighteen months. This is very good news, and we hope you share our excitement! The Third Frontier Network brings the promise of much needed bandwidth. With "bigger pipes," the K-12 ONenet backbone can meet the demands of IP video, media streaming, and whatever else our technology future may bring.

However, there are still concerns that warrant careful attention. We ask you to maintain focus on ONenet funding in the next biennium budget. Because this project spans multiple budget years, our legislature needs to continue their commitment to connectivity funding. Another concern is for the "last mile" - high speed fiber connectivity all the way to the building level. As network utilization grows, links from DA Sites to buildings could manifest as our next bottleneck.

While some areas of the state enjoy fiber availability, it is out of reach for many others. With the lighting of the Third Frontier Network came a vision of connecting all the way to every school building in Ohio.

Please make sure the Legislature know you share that vision and endorse continued ONenet funding.



The OECN — 25 Years of Service to Schools

The Ohio Education Computer Network (OECN), established by the 113th Ohio General Assembly in 1979, is a consortium of information technology centers. These school owned Data Acquisition Sites (DA Sites) cooperate to provide comprehensive support services to most schools in Ohio.

After twenty-five years, the OECN is stronger and more capable of meeting the essential needs of Ohio schools.

It is serving more schools' each year with an increasing variety of services not otherwise available within the educational community. Because some of the DA Sites were started before the enabling legislation in 1979, and other areas started their cooperatives several months later depending upon local need, and the capacity to organize the cooperatives. Subsequent reorganization and consolidation of the sites and their service areas has caused some sites to be absorbed by their neighbors. Because member school districts own and govern the DA Sites, funds to operate and provide services come from user fees, state subsidies, and grants. Many districts have large investments in infrastructure and facilities. The 23 DA Sites have become integral to instructional processes in Ohio.

At the start, DA Sites focused on

providing fiscal software and support services. The featured product was the Auditor-of-State approved fund accounting system - Uniform School Accounting System (USAS). Then payroll services were added - Uniform School Payroll System (USPS). A few sites used commercial and/or locally developed software. A decade later Electronic Fund Transfers had become routine processes for receiving state funds and distributing payroll. Inventory services began to be used by the schools to monitor their assets. Ohio Career Information Services (OCIS), purchased by the state, was widely used online and via printouts by the school counselors and students.

Student accounting next appeared on the scene. Student scheduling and reporting of student grades, attendance, and disciplinary actions were provided by the DA Sites to their members. Special education record keeping was facilitated and automated. Today some sites assist schools to provide student information and assignments to parents.

The legislature mandated the Education Management Information System in the second decade of operation. DA Sites quickly became important to the understanding of the process and to the collection of the required data. They helped school personnel who entered the data, verified its quality, and authorized sending it to

ODE to generate state funds for the school operations. Data were also used to meet state and federal reporting requirements.

INFOhio became crucial to student achievement in the 90's. Students and staff benefited from automation of media center services. Research was greatly enhanced by the availability of comprehensive electronic resources. State purchased resources were funneled through the DA Sites to the schools.

Electronic connectivity, between and among the schools and ODE, was offered from the start of the cooperatives. This evolved from simple dialup modems to 24/7 broadband connectivity in the mid 90's. Today, the Internet and its vast resources are provided to the schools. Email became the standard method of communicating for many school activities. Interactive video was developed in the second half of the 90's to support classroom instruction.

The delivery of comprehensive services to schools is growing rapidly. Seven sites were operational by July 1, 1979, serving 69 education entities. These were concentrated in the heavily populated areas. One notable exception was OMERESA, which was started earlier with Appalachian Grant Funds. The list of sites included Cuyahoga Falls City, Hamilton County, Ohio's Mid-Eastern Regional Education Service Agency, South Central Ohio Regional Education Service Agency, South-Western City, Stark County, and Summit County. The Metropolitan Dayton Educational Cooperative Association became operational with 19 entities served in the fall of 1979.

The Metropolitan Educational Council (Columbus Area) was next by February of 1980 with 14 entities served. By July 1, 1980, the consortia were serving 103 educational entities.

Coverage expanded rapidly to 29 sites in the operational, startup, or planning stages by January 1, 1981. 16 Sites were operational

and 206 educational entities were receiving services. By the end of Fiscal Year 1981, 25 sites were providing services to 457 entities in the respective geographic regions. Growth was rapid and demonstrated the increasing need for services. Growing pains were experienced throughout Ohio, but services quickly improved in quality and quantity. The member owner districts continued to request more services to meet their increased needs.

By July 1, 1982, 26 operating centers were serving schools in their regions. 499 school entities were "purchasing" services as a member of the centers. The models of computers hosting the services included a single Burroughs 1985 & a 2721, several DEC PDP 1170's & 20's, three Hewlett Packard 3000/44's & a 3000/III, and an IBM 370. Most of the work was executed in batch mode with dumb terminals being used for data entry. Sometimes a key stroke would take a second or more to show up on the screen. The output printers were large black ink units consuming boxes of tractor feed, lined, wide, and usually light green paper.

Today, the 23 OECN DA Sites provide fiscal, student accounting and reporting, library automation, INFOhio electronic resources, EMIS support, interactive video distance learning, classroom support, email, Internet access, and numerous other services. 848 school districts, JVSD's, ESC's, and community schools in Ohio are receiving services. These schools educate over 1.4 million students each year. The OECN members use a variety of software and hardware to serve their members. Numerous highly qualified staff assist the school users. Twenty-five years of service is a tremendous legacy and demonstrates Ohio's leadership in information technology services.