

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.