From the CEO...
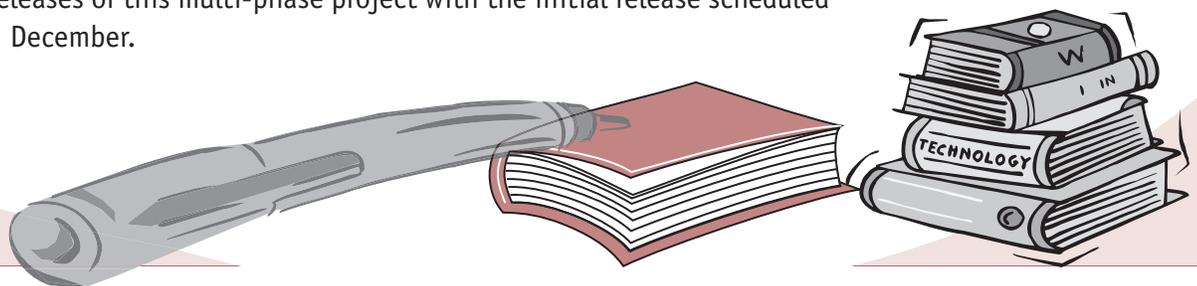By Bruce E. Hawkins, CEO

Technology is Ever-Changing

Last year, the Management Council established a request for proposal (RFP) to determine if it was possible to get better rates for Internet connectivity to Ohio's schools. The proposals came in last spring, and the cost was substantially lower per megabit of connectivity. This will enable the schools through the 23 Information Technology Centers (ITC's) and large urban districts to purchase increased bandwidth for the same amount of money. Late last spring, the Internet provider was changed to Qwest and the new ISP services to schools began.
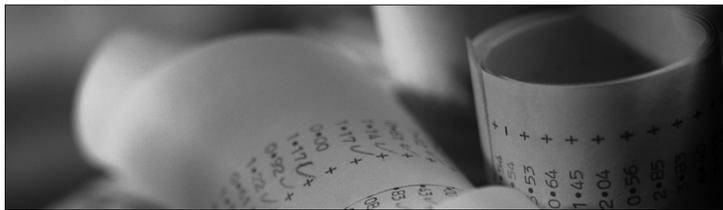
In another cost-saving measure, eTech Ohio became the new provider for video-bridging. On July 1, eTech Ohio began this service to Ohio schools. Both the Internet access and the videoconferencing projects are examples of how the various educational organizations can work together to provide cost-efficient and effective technology services to Ohio's schools.

Another exciting technology initiative is Data-Driven Decisions for Academic Achievement (D3A2). This project is a long-term initiative focused on developing the capacity of educators while improving instruction and student achievement. D3A2 will provide pervasive access to timely data and educational resources aligned to Ohio's content standards. School districts that wish to be ready to participate and release 1.0 of the D3A2 initiative beginning in December 2006 can take several actions now in preparation. Some of these steps include the following:

1. Begin providing your instructional staff, administrators, Board of Education, and public with information about the D3A2 initiative.
2. Encourage your district staff to visit the D3A2 Web site (www.D3A2.org) regularly to keep updated on the latest information regarding the project.
3. Identify a small group of volunteers among your district's instructional staff and administrators to be "D3A2 pioneers" (early adopters) that will be among the first in your district to utilize the D3A2 item analysis tool in 2006.
4. Locate your detailed item analysis data from the state assessment (OGT and achievement) for the past three years and be prepared to work with your ITC to load the data into the D3A2 secure data warehouse.

This fall, four pilot districts will be testing the D3A2 project and working with the Steering Committee to make the initial release in December run as smoothly as possible. It is important to note the D3A2 initiative is a cooperative effort that is being developed and governed by stakeholder groups rather than any single entity. Numerous school districts and professional education organizations are supporting this initiative. D3A2 will provide teachers with access to item analysis data tools to interpret areas needing improvement and links to aligned educational content resources. There will be several releases of this multi-phase project with the initial release scheduled to be operational this December.

INFOhio Receives Building Better Communities Award from SirsiDynix

INFOhio began as a dream of a few educators in Northeast Ohio in the late '80s who wanted to make it easier to share resources within their districts.

This grassroots effort has evolved into a full-scale initiative to provide all Ohio students with equal access to online resources and to promote statewide information sharing through a single library automation system and union catalog.

Now, more than a decade later, INFOhio is the state's virtual library and information network for all PreK-12 schools. It offers a wide range of electronic databases, instructional resources, standardized software and technical support. It is available anytime, anywhere from any Internet-accessible computer at school or at home. Its educational services can be linked to student achievement and performance, standards-based instruction, teacher effectiveness and technological competence.

Today, INFOhio is transforming teaching and learning in Ohio by connecting educational resources with the power of information technology. And, it is doing so by helping school libraries and librarians do their job – as a tool to help students learn, teachers teach, and parents share in their child's education.

Recently, INFOhio received the SirsiDynix Building Better Communities Award for 2006. INFOhio Executive Director Theresa M. Fredericka accepted the award during a special ceremony held at the American Library Association Annual Conference in New Orleans on June 24, 2006. The award includes a $10,000 stipend.

The SirsiDynix Building Better Communities Awards recognize library organizations for innovative uses of new technology to create better places to live, work and learn, while encouraging libraries everywhere to follow the examples of these outstanding institutions. Approximately 130 libraries were nominated for the 2006 awards. An awards committee, consisting of independent library leaders from throughout Canada and the United States, narrowed the nominees to 15 finalists and then to the five winners.

Patrick C. Sommers (left), SirsiDynix Chief Executive Officer, presents the stipend to INFOhio Executive Director Theresa M. Fredericka, included in the 2006 Building Better Communities Awards. Recipients were honored during a special ceremony at ALA's Annual Conference in New Orleans. (Photo provided by SirsiDynix Corp.)

"I am proud to accept the 2006 Building Better Communities Award on behalf of all INFOhio customers and staff," said Fredericka. "This award recognizes our past efforts and encourages us to continue such bold thinking and innovations for the future. I especially appreciate all the efforts of the INFOhio Technical Services staff and all the Information Technology Center providers who work so hard to make the technology fit seamlessly into Ohio's K-12 instruction and learning."

"INFOhio will use the funds from the SirsiDynix award to establish a Users Council. This will help us ensure our traditional emphasis on grassroots participation and continued support for the initial initiatives of our founders," Fredericka explained.

Don't forget...the username and password for INFOhio's Core Collection of Electronic Resources is new for the 2006-07 school year.
Stay connected - contact your local school librarian, Information Technology Center (ITC) or INFOhio at central@infohio.org

Data Backup – As Simple as Buying Insurance
By Andrew Tompkins, CTO

Do you buy insurance to protect your house or your car in case of some unforeseen disaster? The answer is probably "yes." After all, buying insurance is usually pretty simple – just a matter of paying some monthly or annual premium.

Protecting your computer data is a lot like insurance. Making the determination of what data to back up and how often to do it is based on the value of the data and the risks involved. How important is this data? Can it be easily reproduced? Is it stored in more than one location? How often is this data used or accessed? How soon will I need it back? Is the hardware prone to failure? Could it be lost or stolen? What is the cost – in dollars or reputation – if this data is lost?

Protecting data by creating a backup is VERY important. Moreover, it is often required by law. Yet often, this step is not done regularly or successfully because the tools are too complicated or too time consuming or too (insert your excuse here)...

What if this could be made simple just like buying insurance? What if you could pay a small fee and let someone else handle those technical and time consuming details? Well, the answer is YOU CAN! Many of the OECN ITC's are providing computer data backup as a service to their member districts. The ITC handles the technical details and hardware needs. The MCOECN also offers eVault Data Backup as a service available through participating ITC's.

If you are interested in making data backup as simple as buying insurance, please contact your local Information Technology Center for more information.

DASL Update
by David Forman, ITC Director at SPARCC

Some time ago, there was an advertising slogan that went,"You've come a long way baby!" That certainly is true of the DASL software package. We are now in our second full year of use by schools. Last year, there were a handful of schools using the package on the first day of school. At the start of this school year, there are 164 districts using the software. More schools will convert during the school year and approximately 200 districts will transition by December. The software team closely monitors this situation and projects that 600 plus districts are scheduled to convert by March 2008. Ultimately, 1,000,000 students will be served by this software package.

With the maturation of the software package has come a more formalized governance structure. Oversight of the project is provided by an Advisory Board which is comprised of one member elected from each of the 5 regions of the state. This group meets monthly to consider management issues. Several subcommittees (comprised of one member from every participating ITC) provide input to the advisory board in their respective topic areas. Currently, the most active subcommittee is the Student Information System (SIS) committee which considers items related to student administration. Other subcommittees include Decision Support and Special Education.

One very important function of the SIS subcommittee is the prioritization of items for development. There is a democratic process to select software enhancements in which each ITC has an equal say in the decisions. A development schedule has been set for the next school year and revisions are released on a regular basis. The current version is 1.6 which includes enhancements needed for the start of the school year. The predetermined schedule of releases is done to provide districts a predictable access to desired features.

A guiding principle of the DASL project is a dedication to delivering a quality product. This means fewer bugs and more value to schools. The development site includes staff whose primary role is to test the software in order to find bugs before it goes to the end user. Their work comprises an integral part of the development effort. This quality assurance process includes a new programmatic approach to testing which leads to a better product than otherwise possible.

While we've made considerable progress in the DASL project, there is much more anticipated. Stay tuned for further developments...

eSMOC Update

What's new in eSIS for 2006/2007 and the future? We are excited about the successful implementation of the Ohio-designed Special Education module (SPED), the new eSIS roles-based menu, and the development of eSIS on the J2EE platform.

We have been involved in the implementation of the Ohio-designed SPED module that meets district needs in managing students with special needs by tracking parent correspondence, meeting dates, MFEs, IEPs, progress reports, state (EMIS) and federal reporting. The eSIS SPED module allows users to bank and edit their needs and goals to reduce the amount of time spent creating IEPs. eSIS SPED module information is integrated with the remainder of the student's eSIS information, allowing for the access to basic information through web pages used by parents and students, as well as the export to state EMIS reporting programs.

eSIS is taking on a new look for the users. The roles-based menu in eSIS utilizes a tree structure on the eSIS start screen based on user authorization. This is yet another step toward changing the software to utilize modern GUI products. The new menu allows users to go directly to programs and reports and introduces a "favorites" area for eSIS users to add their commonly used programs. This function is similar to the favorites on web browser page. ACCESS, LGCA and NWOCA have implemented the roles based module with the ability for users to go back to the "Classic" eSIS start screen for those users who are not comfortable with change. The roles-based menu prepares eSIS users for the new eSIS J2EE Web version.

What's the future of eSIS? AAL is currently redesigning eSIS on the J2EE platform. The first application to move to J2EE was the eSIS Parent and Student Assist Module. AAL is planning on rolling out the Teacher Assistant Module (TAM) in J2EE during the 2006/2007 school year.   By moving to J2EE, TAM will provide teachers with an increased level of functionality, while continuing to provide the basic functions needed by all teachers, namely grade book, attendance, student information, pictured seating charts, and reports. The full implementation of eSIS on the J2EE platform is currently planned for the 2008/2009 school year. AAL is providing this significant upgrade in technology at no additional cost for its users.

For more information on eSMOC or implementing eSIS at your site, please contact John LaPlante, eSMOC chairperson, at laplante@access-k12.org or (330) 270-7474.

Video Distance Learning in Ohio
by Jon Bowers

Through the Telecommunity and IVDL (Interactive Video Distance Learning) Grants, Ohio SchoolNet provided Ohio schools with over $50 million in funding to create a video distance learning network. Six years later, many of the video distance learning (VDL) consortia are highly successful, delivering full-time classes in core curriculum as well as foreign languages and teacher professional development. Many organizations such as SERRC's and ESC's also depend on VDL to bring participants into their meetings and to deliver training to schools. The VDL Liaisons (distance learning support staff in these consortia) are willing to extend their support and resources to all K-12 entities using video distance learning.

The transition of video services from OIT to eTech has emphasized the need to build a stronger relationship and clearer communication between sites using VDL services and eTech. VDL support staff from Educational Service Centers, Educational Technology Agencies, and IT Centers across Ohio have been meeting to define needs and propose a means of assisting eTech with the transition of video services and communicating new processes and procedures out to schools by creating the website OhioDL.org which would be the primary portal for communication on VDL in Ohio. The further migration of video services from ATM protocol to IP protocol will also require clear communication and attention to detail as video systems are changed to IP video.

The same VDL Liaisons are also organizing an open house at eTech's North Star facility for VDL support staff throughout Ohio's consortia on September 20 to introduce video support staff and discuss the progress of the video services migration.

Jon Bowers is the Operations Director at the Licking Area Computer Association (LACA) and he is a founding member of the Ohio Distance Learning Association. For more information on the Ohio Distance Learning Association, please visit their website at <www.OhioDL.org>.