



Connections

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MCOECN Update *by Bruce Hawkins, CEO*

Funding for School Technology in a Difficult Budget

By Bruce E. Hawkins, CEO

I don't know how many times in my 34 years of education I have heard, "This is the most difficult biennial budget that there has ever been," but I do know that I have heard that statement many times, and this year is certainly no exception. With the combination of a downturn in the economy, new regulations imposed by the federal No Child Left Behind Act, the state school funding lawsuit, and increasing academic and financial demands on our school districts make this a very complicated budget process—one in which there will be much uncertainty until the final version is passed by the legislature and signed by the Governor.

Recently, I had the opportunity to address the House Finance Primary and Secondary Education Subcommittee. In that testimony, I briefly related the history of the Ohio Education Computer Network and the funding it has received to deliver technology services to Ohio schools. It is interesting to note that when the OECN was first formed, its primary role was to provide computerized school accounting and payroll services to Ohio schools. In 1980-81, state funding to the OECN was \$7.1 million.

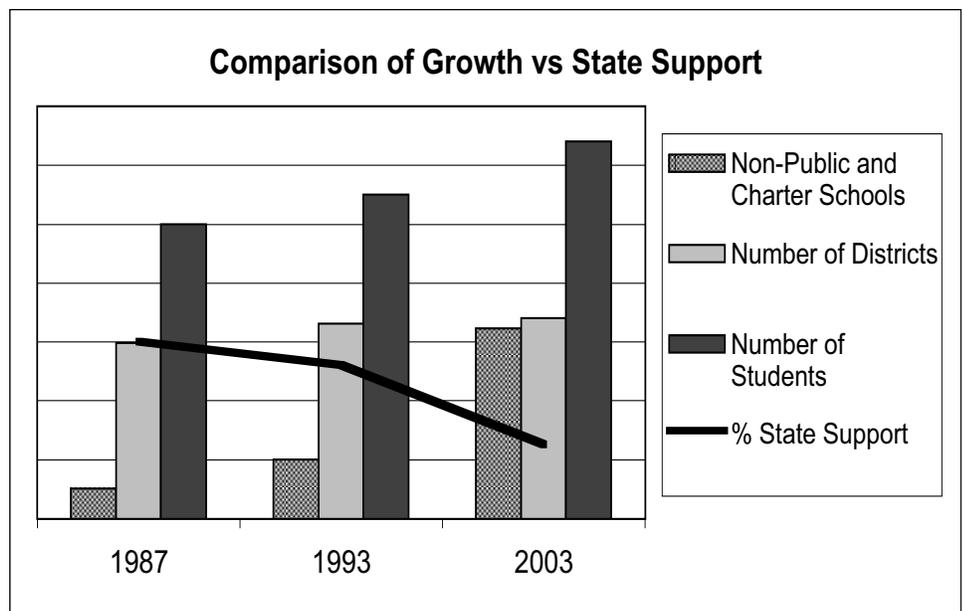
By comparison, today's DA Sites have grown both in size and in service. DA Sites offer a myriad of software and support beyond basic school accounting and payroll. There are nine core services, plus additional programs offered under the direction of each Data Acquisition Site's governing board. Over two decades the Data Acquisition Sites have grown to serve 691 member public

school districts, 544 non-public schools and 125 community schools. After the reductions in this current biennium, the funding to DA Sites for this current fiscal year is \$8.3 million. This is certainly a very minuscule percentage increase from the \$7.1 million in funding 23 years ago when only fiscal services were provided.

Technology has become an integral part of instruction in Ohio schools, and the OECN works in cooperation with the Ohio Department of Education, SchoolNet, the Buckeye Association of School Administrators (BASA), the Ohio Association of School Business Officials (OASBO) and other organizations to provide services to the schools. Technology continues to expand in its impact on student learning. The OECN

is an integral part of this process in supporting the connectivity, hardware and software in Ohio schools. As we face more and more accountability measures through the No Child Left Behind Act, the Education Management Information System (EMIS) rewrite, the local report card and state proficiency test, it is important that everyone works together to provide the necessary tools to students and educators to improve student learning in Ohio schools.

Even in our current tight financial situation and with the difficulties of this budget, I hope the legislators and educators work together to provide quality technology services to Ohio schools as we prepare today's youth to become the leaders of tomorrow.



House Bill 145 - Still Not Good for Ohio's Schools



EDITORIAL

The views expressed in this editorial are those of the CEO and do not necessarily represent MCOECN policies and positions.

by Bruce E. Hawkins, CEO

In the last session of the Ohio legislature, House Bill 482 was introduced. This is a "non-compete" legislation that would prohibit governmental entities from providing technological services that are available from private businesses or industry. In this session of the legislature a bill with similar wording, House Bill 145, has recently been introduced. I still do not believe this is a good piece of legislation. Schools, like other governmental entities, are on a fixed budget and attempt to get high-quality services at the best prices to stretch the funding as far as possible.

For example, in cooperation with OPLIN and OhioLINK, INFOhio purchases the rights for students to access online magazine collections of over 6,000 titles. They also purchase the rights for three current encyclopedias, a research database for elementary and middle

school students and 18,000 biographies. If school districts were to purchase these individually, the cost would be \$41.56 per student. However, under the INFOhio statewide contract, the cost to the state is just \$0.45 per student. In other words, it would cost Ohio's taxpayers over 92 times as much money to provide the same services to students. The bottom line is that most school districts would not be able to provide such services to their students, and Ohio school children would not have the benefit of this vast array of resources.

The same can be said for Internet services, broadband connectivity, and other technological services provided to schools. INFOhio, the OECN, and SchoolNet would all be severely impacted by this legislation in their ability to provide services to our school districts. Other branches of state government such as the State Auditor's Office, the judicial system, the state library and state

universities would also be affected.

Another aspect of this legislation that needs to be considered is the storage of personally identifiable student information by a third party vendor. If private businesses were to compete with governmental entities for storage and relaying of personally identifiable student information, this could potentially violate certain privacy acts. I certainly agree with the concept of allowing business and industry to compete with governmental entities for services. However, I do not believe that there should be a mandate that government be forced to use such services at a significant increase in cost. After all, it is all of our tax dollars being spent, and this money should be spent judiciously and in the best interest of all of Ohio's taxpayers. I do not believe that House Bill 145 is in the best interest of Ohio schools or for the taxpayers of this state.

SchoolNet Should Remain as a Separate Education Entity

by Bruce E. Hawkins, CEO

In the budget proposed by Governor Taft, it was recommended that SchoolNet be moved back under the Ohio Department of Education in FY05. In the next fiscal year there will be a task force formed for the migration of SchoolNet to become a division of the Department. When SchoolNet was first formed, it was under the Department of Education and was later made a commission which reports to a governing body made up of representatives from several departments of state government and appointees from the Speaker of the House and the President of the Senate.

SchoolNet has made great strides in providing services to Ohio's schools over the past several years including wiring

public schools for technology, supporting broadband connectivity, creating a world class technology conference for our educators, funding computer stations in elementary schools, and in technology staff development. I personally believe there are many advantages to keeping SchoolNet as a commission as opposed to a division under the Ohio Department of Education. As a commission, they are not limited by all of the bidding requirements for the procurement of hardware for schools. The flow of funding from SchoolNet to the schools has been more expeditious and has enabled them to cut through the bureaucratic process that is imposed on other state agencies.

I have had the opportunity to express

my opinions to the Governor and legislators regarding the efficiency and effectiveness of SchoolNet and the advantages of keeping it a separate commission. By making every effort to gather feedback and tailor their various programs, SchoolNet has made great strides in meeting the needs of Ohio's schools. If I were to make a recommendation on changing SchoolNet, it would be to look at the process of selecting members to the SchoolNet Commission. I believe there should be more representatives from the school districts so the customers in the field have greater input into the decisions and directions of the SchoolNet Commission.



DASL Student Data Update

by Andrew Tompkins, CTO



In order to avoid confusion with telephone services offered under the moniker “DSL,” we have changed the name of our data-driven decision support software to “DASL” (pronounced “dazzle”). DASL is an abbreviation for “Data Analysis for Student Learning.” But more than a name change, DASL also represents the next generation of our product. We are proud to announce that the new DASL will be released to DA Sites for initial testing very soon. Please make note of our estimated timeline included in the last paragraph of this article.

This release of DASL marks a major change in our software. DASL is being written within the Microsoft .NET framework. It features a new look and improved ease of use and navigation. “Under the hood” the new software runs on a completely revised data structure and uses a new improved security system to protect and control access to vital district data. Increasing speed and performance has also been a prime consideration in developing the new DASL.

In addition to a new data structure and security model, the initial release of DASL will include “Portal” pages that can be modified at the building and district level. This portal feature was designed to display important news and announcements tailored to a district, building, or individual user-type. The initial release will also contain screens and reports designed to help DA Site staff verify the accuracy of the data conversion process.

The biggest change in DASL is yet to come. In addition to the “read and report” capabilities of the DSL software, DASL will also contain data entry and update features. Over the next several months, the functionality of the MCOECN McSIS student data software will be added to DASL. This functionality will include all of the data entry, scheduling and grade reporting features of McSIS. It is important to note that this is not a straight conversion of McSIS to DASL. In creating DASL, our developers have taken advantage of the opportunity to improve, extend, and modernize much of this functionality. Student data experts from our DA Sites have been actively involved in

developing the “wish list” of enhancements, and the changes are very impressive.

Our timeline for moving to DASL will involve an incremental process. DA Sites should be receiving the initial release in the April-May timeframe. However, “behind the scenes” work will need to be done before district personnel can access the software. The first step in DASL will be building district DASL databases from the old DSL structure and verifying that data at the DA Site level. Over the summer, we hope to train DA Site support staff on the new security model. Initial training for district personnel will follow, and this process will be repeated as features are released. Feedback is an important part of the process. As new users are trained and begin testing the software, we hope they will provide the kinds of ideas and suggestions that have helped us make DSL so very successful. The current plan is to start piloting the SIS functionality with a few schools at the development site in early spring of 2004, and then expand the pilots to include schools at other DA Sites as the software is completed and stabilized.

Theresa M. Fredericka, Executive Director of INFOhio, to Receive Outstanding Alumna Award

The University of Kentucky (UK) School of Library and Information Science has named Theresa M. Fredericka, Executive Director of INFOhio, as Outstanding Alumna/us for 2003.

Ms. Fredericka is being recognized for her distinguished career and day-to-day contributions to the significant and evolving role of libraries and information resources in our schools.

“She has worked tirelessly every minute since graduation (and even before) to promote school libraries for all children and I can’t think of a better reason to recognize her,” said Hanna Pickworth, UK alumna from Baltimore, MD, in nominating Ms. Fredericka.

As Executive Director for INFOhio for the past six years, Ms.

Fredericka has led a statewide effort to provide all Ohio’s elementary and secondary school students with the online resources they need via a wide range of databases, instructional resources, standardized software and technical support for K-12 students, teachers and libraries. Previously, she served as an elementary and a high school librarian, a district coordinator for Learning Resources and Technology, and a library media consultant for both the Ohio and Kentucky Departments of Education.

Ms. Fredericka, who will receive the award on Friday, May 2, at a ceremony in Lexington, KY, has a B.S. in Education from Bowling Green State University; a M.S.L.S. from the University of Kentucky, School of Library and Information Science; and the 1993 recipient of the BGSU College of Education Accomplished Graduate Award.

Planning for INFOhio Electronic Resources Next School Year

INFOhio's main operating budget and Electronic Resource funding will be considered by the Ohio General Assembly as part of the Ohio Biennial Budget for FY04-05. Approval is expected before June 30, 2003. INFOhio plans to continue offering quality services and resources for Ohio's K-12 educational community.

This school year INFOhio was able to add the EBSCOhost full-text periodical database to our Electronic Resources working with Libraries Connect Ohio (LCO). LCO, which includes INFOhio, the State Library of Ohio, OPLIN, and OhioLINK, has requested Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) grant funding for additional electronic resources for ALL Ohio citizens. As LCO, the partners work together to achieve the following goals:

1. Guarantee that Ohio citizens will have a core set of information resources necessary to compete in the global economy and improve their quality of life as we move into the 21st century.
2. Provide these resources to all Ohio citizens regardless of where they go to school or live.

3. Maximize the efficiency of the investment in necessary information resources. It is safe to say that without a concerted statewide group action, there is no other way to afford and achieve adequate and equitable information access across the state.

These goals can be translated into more specific objectives:

1. Improve ALL K-12 school districts in meeting core competencies and proficiencies
2. Improve K-12 students readiness for higher education
3. Support undergraduate teaching and information needs
4. Support work force development and life-long learning in the adult population
5. Support Ohioans ability to improve the quality of their personal lives through more informed decisions.

Complete information will be posted on the INFOhio website when INFOhio's funding and any additions to our content offerings are finalized. Thank you for your continued dedication to supply Ohio's students and staff with the information they need.

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