

State, District, and Local Planning for Technology

Technology planning is an activity that has reached near-epidemic proportions throughout the United States. Thousands of schools and communities have engaged in planning activities; however, recent studies have shown that the majority of educators are ill-equipped with the information that will help them see how the acts in which they are engaged fit into a larger picture. Thus, it is essential to present a view of the state, district, and local levels and to examine their interfacing.

In the early 1990's, the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), a professional organization made up of state superintendents of education, released a position paper that has become quite well-known. The CCSSO took the position that all states should develop and maintain a written technology plan. During the years that ensued, many states have completed this goal. With the added incentive provided by Goals 2000 legislation, states that did not have a technology plan previously developed one with the aid of their Goals panelists.

Key Principles

Prior to examining the particular components, similarities, and differences among local, district, and state plans, it is important to understand a few basic principles, or global key concepts, about technology planning efforts. First, planning should include many people in your community. While it may seem like a time-worn cliché, it is extremely essential that planners remember to, “**involve all the stakeholders.**” That probably is the single best piece of advice that you will receive related to technology planning.

Second, establish **timelines** and monitor them often. Planning at any level will be far more successful if the key participants are operating from a mutually-understood timeline. It is a good idea to print the timeline and display it prominently so all people involved can keep fresh in their minds just what kind of progress you are making. The timeline should be addressed and monitored often; this will help keep your group on task and will help to ensure that you attain your goals in a timely fashion.

Third, **subdivide responsibilities** for planning. If the planning activity is being begun “from scratch,” the chairperson of the planning committee should ferret out the various, particular gifts and talents of each committee member. Then, those talents should be applied to a specific component in the overall planning scheme. Many benefits accrue from this strategy. Once you assure that people are given specific responsibilities, be sure you communicate clearly with them what the expectations are for their performance in that role. Now, ...and this is extremely important, be sure to compliment committee members when they perform admirably. Nothing on earth can compare with a positive, sincere word of encouragement!

Fourth, you must **evaluate**. Some noted technology planning experts have been known to say that there are three things to remember when a plan is being built and when implementation follows: “evaluate, evaluate, evaluate.” Certainly, you will want to keep a steady vigil on your activities; this will include a multi-faceted evaluation program that helps to ensure that you understand the relative success of your activities.

Local Planning

Most of the time, local planning is assumed to refer to planning at the school building level. Recently, we have witnessed a sharp rise in the number of educators who are developing technology plans for their particular classrooms and for themselves, individually. Such an activity is especially helpful as it provides a mechanism whereby people can yield written

statements of their mission, vision, and goals. For many years, we have been told by experts that individuals who commit their goals to writing are much more likely to attain their goals than those who do not write them. For purposes of this treatise, we shall claim the traditional definition of “local” to mean a school building.

Local planning will be much more *specific* than district or state plans. An intensified focus will be upon the learner and the associated activities, principles, and materials required to ensure that robust instructional activities can occur. Teachers and administrators who develop local plans will want to pay strict attention to the curriculum issues in the school. Their application of technologies will follow—technologies will serve as a *support* mechanism for curriculum delivery and learning activities rather than the focus for what occurs in that school.

The ideal scenario for building a maximally-effective technology planning strategy is for the local technology plan to be developed first, followed by plans from the district and, then, the state. A local plan will have a mission statement, vision statement, and certain goals for how technology will be used in learning. The technology plan for a district should consider and encompass this information as integral components of a larger, more comprehensive plan.

District Planning

Districts, through their technology plans, provide strategies for incorporating technological solutions embracing the strengths of all local schools in their organization. A district plan, then, should be a composite picture of what local schools desire and dream to accomplish. Planners should not, however, assume that education leaders in state government will frame the state plan as a composite of all districts. The basic functioning of state government differs so significantly that, while such a scenario might be desirable, it is not likely.

District planners should remember to engage a cross-section of leaders from various schools in the district. As progress is made on the development of the plan, the committee should hold periodic “town meetings” to explain the plan and related activities. The district planning committee should seek, and acquire, “buy-in” throughout the process.

The scope of planning is much broader at the district level than at the local level. Curriculum concerns, for example, will span a greater breadth of subject matter. In addition, we will plan for great diversity as we consider the ages of students, delivery methods used in teaching, and assessment techniques. Since there is such a tremendous variance in key elements that impact a district plan, it is essential that planners incorporate the thoughts offered by local schools through their technology plans.

A district plan will include, and address in detail, components that won’t appear in a local plan at all. For example, you might include district funding strategies, administrative networks, transportation issues, food service approaches, guidance and student services, and public relations tactics. The important point here is that the district plan will provide leadership and guidance to the implementation efforts that are so important to personnel in the community who are watching and learning.

State Planning

In a fashion similar to district planning, the considerations for a state plan will be more general and less specific. While there are some parts of the state plan that will have components that are specific, their specificity will deal with principles that are general in nature. The state-level plan will address many issues mentioned in school district plans and may provide a compilation of concerns or dreams that were illuminated by district plans. The state will want to provide support for schools in certain areas as they infuse technologies into instruction and administration.

State governments operate with legislative and judicial expectations that are much different from those placed upon local entities. The state plan, then, will contain considerations that have a greater, more over-arching direction. For example, state departments of education will have to plan for a financial and funding picture that will provide necessary support to districts. Since state legislatures hold state-level groups accountable for the resources given them, such an atmosphere will appear in the state technology plan.

A state-level technology plan should include components that involve oversight of technology implementation efforts throughout the state. It should include specific goals for leadership—leadership provided by state agencies and personnel that will provide encouragement and direction to all school districts.

Dovetailed Elements

We have established the fact that local, district, and state plans are significantly different in certain areas. It is important to illuminate the point, though, that several similarities exist. Many planners use the term “dovetail” to describe the manner in which all these plans should have coordinated components—the way the parts should fit with each other.

State-level planners should decide whether they will adopt a top-down or bottom-up scheme. If a top-down approach is taken, the state will fashion a plan, then ask districts to follow the state’s guidelines for developing their plans. In turn, the district will have to determine which approach will be incorporated there, as well. In some cases, although the state uses a top-down technique, the district will employ a bottom-up method. For example, the district might craft its vision statement only after it has compiled vision statements from all schools within the district.

The state plan will, most likely, define a framework into which district plans should fit. Often, the statewide technology coordinator will develop a handbook that district planners will use as a guide for building their plan. In this way, the district plan will “fit,” or dovetail, into the state plan. The district, then, will take input from local plans and dovetail those elements into the district plan. This scenario is, perhaps, the most desirable; certainly, it is the most practical.

Realities of Planning

State, district, and local technology plans must take into consideration a set of common realities. These realities should be folded into the plans in a way that makes the most sense for personnel at the particular, given level.

Financial—The financial picture extends beyond a mere budget; it should include a plan for funding. The plan should address how much money will be needed, how much money will be spent, how matching money will be sought, how leveraged money will be needed in the future, who will be in charge of financial aspects, the contingency plans if additional funding is secured or if a shortfall occurs, and allowance to pay for planned obsolescence. Planners must remember that any funds employed in the infusion of technologies into instruction are property of all the community; hence, a strong accountability will be necessary.

Technical—As states, district, and local groups consider and include the technical parts of their plan, they should recognize the impact of change, growth, and the technology explosion. Plans should not focus on the technical aspect, but they should certainly include this. Inclusion of a detailed technical plan will help insure that all the bases are covered.

Human capital—No resource is more precious than humans. Plans should reflect the various ways in which people’s talents will be incorporated. Great care should be taken, however, in guaranteeing that people are not abused, misused,

or over-used. Many models exist that show effective employment of human capital. Planners should examine existing technology plans that demonstrate great success in this area.

Architectural—Dreams are wonderful and plans should reflect energetic desires. Reality often strikes us in the face when we encounter architectural barriers that might prevent the easy accomplishment of our dreams. In the event that planners have the privilege of designing structures or areas into which technologies will be placed, careful attention should be devoted to eliminating any obstacles to deploying the variety of technologies to the point of instruction or use. Remember the adage, “The true size of a person is determined by the size of obstacle it takes to stop that person!”

Legal—At all levels of planning, the legal concerns are paramount. Not only do planners have to consider the protections for the “system,” but strategies must be outlined for protection of the students and other learners. Many resources exist to which local, district, and state planners can avail themselves.

Summary

Although technology planning occurs at multiple “levels,” many functions are identical in principle. Planners must engage the services, creativity, and assistance of all stakeholders. Efforts of all participants must be marshalled to meet established timelines, to accept the subdivided responsibilities that are ushering groups into action, and evaluating their implementation all along the way. Planners at the local, district, and state levels are encouraged to craft a mechanism, too, that will ensure their ability to share the work they create. Through this open, willing sharing, all learners will prosper.

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