

Assessing Your School District's Digital Readiness

How do you know if your school system is high performing in its use of technology? What are your strengths and weaknesses? While there are many free, self-assessments, how do you get a rigorous, outside expert assessment?



A first step is for districts to learn about CoSN's new [Digital Leap Success Matrix](#) (Matrix) which outlines the practices needed to be a successful digital school system. And, CoSN has created a new fee-for-service [CoSN Peer Review](#) process using this Matrix to determine how a district aligns to best practices by expert external peers.

The Matrix focuses primarily on ten key areas: Leadership & Vision, Strategic Planning, Ethics and Policies, Instructional Focus & Professional Development, Team Building and Staffing, Stakeholder Focus, Infrastructure, Information and Data Management, Communications Management, and Business Management.

Leadership and Vision: This component sets the tone for the entire transformation. On the inspirational side, the vision that is developed becomes the "true north" by which all policies, procedures, and operationalized innovation are guided. If this vision gets to the heart of improving outcomes for students, the transformation will be pointed in the right direction. If the vision is limited to bringing in technology solely for engagement or to connect with the digital generation, the transformation will likely go astray. In addition to vision, there are many programmatic necessities such as distributed collaborative leadership, data-informed decision making, continual improvement processes, and equity practices.

Strategic Planning: The principles of program management apply to the process of strategic planning including setting goals and identifying success metrics, aligning resources, and planning for technology implementation. Key is ensuring that instructional goals precede technological goals.

Ethics and Policies: Policies operationalize the vision. They will either help or hinder innovation and transformation and must be crafted with care. They include everything from legal compliance to responsible use policies to student data privacy policies, and much more.

Instructional Focus and Professional Development: Supported by standardized processes, infrastructure, and policies, this area is one where ongoing innovation and improvement is core. On the “inspiration” side, instructional practice is evolved by adapting (not adopting) successful practices from the field, engaging in thoughtful action research, and focusing on practices that support students taking ownership of their learning and environments that support the activation of intrinsic motivation. On the “perspiration” side, using data to inform teaching and personalize learning as well as having a formal ongoing improvement process support the development of innovative practices. In addition, there is a need to address the “elephant in the room” of teaching to the test. Systems theory says that when one subsystem (test scores) is optimized, the system as a whole becomes suboptimal. To keep a focus on test scores from driving out other important learning outcomes, it is important to intentionally focus on success skills such as creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, and communication and content knowledge simultaneously.

Team Building and Staffing: New processes require cross-functional organizational structures where obsolete functions are no longer supported. A transformational environment also requires that teachers and staff model the behaviors and skills that they are asking students to learn. As one desired outcome is for students to take ownership of their learning, teachers must demonstrate taking ownership of their teaching (and administrators of their work, and so on). This calls for an environment that supports intrinsic motivation: one that offers autonomy, mastery, and purpose as opposed to one with a top-down command-and-control structure. Intrinsically motivated teams are at the heart of transformed schools – they are the ones who say, “I could never go back to the old way of teaching.”

Stakeholder Focus: Transformation doesn’t happen in a vacuum – it is critical to nurture community partnerships as well as to seek, and act on, feedback from parents, students, teachers, and other stakeholders.

Infrastructure: Transformed teaching requires robust, scalable, reliable networks based on open industry standards. It is not unusual for transformed environments to see 60% year over year growth in bandwidth capacity demand and a network that can’t keep up with that escalation. The inability to keep up with demand can cripple the transformation in teaching that can occur with the digital leap.

Information Management: The district needs to implement and maintain high quality data systems for data integration, security, privacy protection, data reporting, standardized assessments, and IT management.

Communications Management: Modern districts use web technologies and social networks as part of communicating both internally and externally and these need to be thoughtfully managed to set the correct tone and send a consistent message. In fact, transforming districts need to explicitly market themselves to their communities, naming and branding their initiative, and providing a compelling rationale.

Business Management: All business functions need to be maintained as part of the block-and-tackle of managing a transformed district from road mapping technology evolution to aligning resources, sustainable funding, and developing and measuring Key Performance Indicators.

The Matrix is tightly aligned to the CoSN [Framework of Essential Skills](#) created in 2012 to assess the skills required of an educational technology leader which is the basis for the Certified Educational Technology Leader or CETL®. The Framework of Essential Skills focuses on ten specific skill areas encompassing the responsibilities and knowledge needed to be a viable education technology leader.



While the Framework focuses on leadership, technology and instructional skills for an individual, the Matrix focuses on technology infrastructure as a building block for school systems to build 21st century instructional practices. A district requires both a highly skilled workforce and a progressive and scalable technology infrastructure to create conditions for success in this new environment.

CoSN created the Peer Review to align school district information technology processes and policies with best practices as identified in the Matrix. Steve Langford, Chief Information Officer for the Beaverton School District in Oregon summed up the review process, "Moving through a digital conversion is a complex process, requiring transformation not only from IT, but across the entire school system. The CoSN Peer Review offering aligns with CoSN's mission to support school technology leaders with the resources and information they need. Experienced leaders visit and apply their combined knowledge and experiences to assist school districts in assessing their capabilities and planning for a digital conversion."

The Peer Review represents an honest assessment of a district's technology capabilities based on data collected from all of the stakeholders in a school district. Reviewers are practicing ed tech leaders from school districts with very similar challenges.

A typical peer review begins with data collection. In advance of a site visit, reviewers will evaluate key planning documents such as policies and procedures, operating plans, strategic plans and organizational charts. Based

on this information, a survey document is provided to a large number of faculty and administrative stakeholders in the district. This data allows reviewers to be more efficient in identifying who they need to talk with and what they need to focus on when onsite.

Once onsite, reviewers will interview stakeholders to align their beliefs with best practices identified in the Matrix. A typical visit is completed with two to three days of interviews. While onsite, the review team will meet with technology leadership and cabinet members to provide a preliminary high level assessment of findings. This allows for immediate feedback on recommendations before anything is committed to writing.

A full written report summarizing observations and detailing the team assessment is prepared by the group leader and submitted in draft format to the district within two weeks. These reports have been used by collaborative district teams to plan for resource needs and allow them to craft their custom roadmap toward digital readiness.

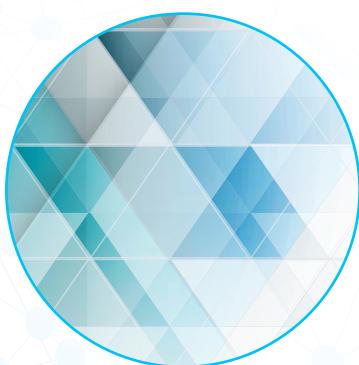
Dr. Veronica Garcia, Superintendent of Santa Fe Public Schools in New Mexico had this to say about a recent review, "CoSN's Peer Review was extremely useful to Santa Fe Public Schools because it gave us high level, externally validated overview on how we are using technology and it tied to the rigorous Digital Leap Success Matrix. It was very timely and provided key recommendations that were realistic, tangible and very much aligned with the realities of our operating environment."

CoSN (the Consortium for School Networking) is the premier national professional association for school system technology leaders.



Keith R. Krueger is CEO of CoSN, a nonprofit organization that serves as the voice for K-12 school system technology leaders in North America. CoSN's mission is to empower educational leaders to leverage technology to realize engaging learning environments. keith@cosn.org.

Will You Design the Digital Transformation Ahead?





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The choices your district makes now will make a difference. That's why the Consortium for School Networking (CoSN) now offers Peer Review. This new consulting program gives your district a rigorous, objective assessment of how you're using technology currently, how you can address gaps and leverage strengths. The goal is to align your vision with strategy and a clear path for implementation.

It's a new way to think about developing a vision and implementing a planning process that works.

It's an unprecedented opportunity to work with a team of well-respected, experienced school technology leaders who have walked in your shoes, and have successfully navigated the move to a high performance digital learning environment.

The Digital Leap Success Matrix: The Foundation of Our Work for You

Peer Review is a disciplined, detailed consulting approach. Based on CoSN's breakthrough **Digital Leap Success Matrix**, Peer Review consulting engagements focus on these core components in your district:

- Leadership and Vision
- Understanding the Educational Environment
- Managing Technology and Business

Your CoSN Peer Review team uses the Matrix to review and audit your current technology implementations. The Matrix also informs recommendations about the next steps in creating the next-generation learning environment that supports your district's mission and vision for equitable, effective technology use.

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—Dr. Veronica Garcia,
Superintendent, Santa Fe
Public Schools, NM

Peer Review: The Process at a Glance

Discovery

Your Lead CoSN Consultant works with your assigned contact(s) to collect information, complete a detailed situation audit questionnaire, schedule interviews, and plan logistics for the upcoming onsite sessions. Most importantly, we identify your questions, priorities, and expectations. With this information, we develop the agenda for our collaborative onsite working sessions.

Fieldwork

We spend focused, quality time onsite in your district. Our experienced technology leaders meeting one-to-one with your project leader to confirm objectives and processes, and then we interview your key leaders and team members. These 2–3 day data gathering sessions give us the information we need to analyze your work using the CoSN Framework for School System Technology Success.

Our last session is an interim presentation of findings for your district's senior leadership to deliver top-line findings, initial thoughts, and areas for deeper analysis.

In-Depth Analysis

Meshing the information assembled from both the Discovery and Fieldwork project phases with the experience of our consulting team members, we then develop a comprehensive analysis and report that typically includes these components:

- Review Objectives and Purpose
- Review Team Overview
- Process
- Summary Recommendations
- Findings Organized to Align with the CoSN Digital Leap Success Matrix
- Detailed Recommendations
- Supporting Documentation
- Review Team Vitae
 - Site Visit Agendas
 - Documents List
 - Interviewee List (Name, Title)

Next Steps

Peer Review is a direct response to requests from CoSN members who wanted the opportunity to tap into the expertise and experience of colleagues. The program was piloted during the 2016–17 school year with excellent results and response. Going forward, we will offer the service to districts who hold CoSN memberships, have 5,000–20,000 students enrolled, and have superintendent approval for the program. Involvement of the participating districts' senior leadership team is critical for success.

Applications for Peer Review are available online at cosn.org/PeerReview.
CoSN will provide a custom quotation for the service.

You Can Design Your Digital Transformation. It Begins with a Call...

For information about the CoSN Peer Review opportunity, contact Robert Duke, CoSN Chief Operating Officer at rduke@cosn.org, or visit our website at cosn.org/PeerReview to download your application.



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PEER REVIEW
ENVISION. DEVELOP. SUCCEED.