



Chapter 8

Thinking Outside the Box

www.summercore.com/button/cio.html

- 1987-1994 • Computer Coordinator, Concord Academy MA
- 1994-2002 • Computer Coordinator, Noble & Greenough, MA
- 2002-2007 • CIO, The Chapin School, NYC
- 2007- • CIO, The Children's Storefront School, NYC

In applying for the CIO job at Nobles (November 2001-February 2002) and the CIO job at Chapin School, I ended up visiting quite a few schools and writing up an application for the CIO job that shared a vision for a model IT (“information technology”) Department. This document below builds on this vision and is an attempt to propose categories for a global approach to examining a school's IT program and making assessments. I would appreciate any suggestions or additions. Steve Bergen, 4/4/2002

Here are several important categories with which any of us can view the technology program of a school. In the spirit of our binary world, my suggestion is that you put down a 1 or 0 for each category, even though some of you will want to use decimals between 0 and 1 ;-)

category 1: e-mail? Does the school have an e-mail system that students and faculty can use aggressively? Mailing lists, conferences, homework assignments, attached files; possibly even an organized system for parent e-mail communication? Although it is a reasonable debate to discuss e-mail accounts for younger students, most people agree that after grade 6 or 7, an aggressive use of e-mail by students and faculty is very important within a school community.

category 2: computer curriculum? Are computer courses required in certain key grades for all students? Is the curriculum recognized as a valid academic subject in its own right? Even more so, does the computer studies department stand on its own feet. Note: computer curriculum is not the same as integration; each has an important place in the school.

category 3: integration? Are teachers engaged and involved in tech curriculum projects in classes? Note: integration is not the same as computer curriculum; each has an important place in the school.

category 4: faculty training? Is there a faculty training program so that momentum is forward and so that there is a constant push forward? This is probably the area in which most schools are lacking. There are three kinds of faculty training: JIT (just in time), JIC (just in case) and, to think outside of the box, JBC (just because).

category 5: hardware access for faculty? Hardware access? laptops, projectors? Are they easily available to faculty and are there any strings attached? Do faculty members have to “risk any

financial liability” to get a laptop and agree to pay the school for any damage? Are they in control of their own machines? Is there a procedure established for repairs, help questions, and usage issues?

category 6: tech infrastructure? Networking infrastructure (hubs, wiring, servers, firewalls)

category 7: humanware? Is there a team of tech people (1 for every 50-100 computers) with job descriptions covering everything from faculty training to network to computer classes to help desk?

category 8: help desk and help procedures? phone, e-mail, and in person; has a help system/help desk been created where students, administrators, and faculty can get appropriate help during the day and/or after hours? Any involvement of students?

category 9: home/remote connectivity? can faculty, administrators and students connect to important files and documents via e-mail or server method from home?

category 10: Web Pages and Web Posting? is there a web tech person or team that takes care of the Web postings? can faculty easily post Web content on the Web? Do the school’s Web pages reflect PR content or functional content (e.g. homework) or both?

category 11: Honesty and Tech Ethics? MP3 Issues/Plagiarism Issues; has the school taken a pro-active stance in terms of students (and faculty) regarding these issues? Is there an acceptable use policy well publicized? Do students and parents have to sign a document?

Category	1 or 0?	current status	how to improve
1) Email System	___		
2) Computer Curriculum	___		
3) Integration	___		
4) Faculty Training	___		
5) Hardware Access for Faculty	___		
6) Tech Infrastructure	___		
7) Humanware ("the tech team")	___		
8) Help Desk and Help System	___		
9) Home/Remote Connectivity	___		
10) Web Presence/Pages	___		
11) Honesty/Tech Ethics	___		

Thinking Outside of the Box:

Although I am not particularly a fan of George Patton, he did once say “if everyone is thinking the same way, then someone is not thinking.” This quote underscores the necessity -- particularly in the tech world -- to engage in non-traditional solutions to problems.

Here are a few:

- * personal trainer program
- * pioneer training
- * weekly faculty training for some or most faculty members
- * computer proficiency requirement for students
- * typing requirement
- * laptops for faculty
- * laptops for students
- * hardware for students with financial need

How does one achieve change? The laws of physics suggest that bodies at rest stay at rest and bodies in motion continue in motion. How do you set your faculty in motion and keep them there? Can you offer hardware incentives (laptops, MP3 players) to help faculty make weekly commitments for faculty training. How can you squeeze more time into the curriculum of students who are already overloaded? Can typing be required as a summer activity in grade 6 or 7, putting the parents in charge in some way? Can faculty be required to post homework on the web?

*These are the questions ... I ask everyday
On my way, on my way on my way*

What follows are excerpts from my CIO applications (just the sections that I can comfortably make public) attempting to share my vision for the IT Departments at a school.

• Part One: Some General Themes

• **TCP** is a tech vocabulary phrase (transfer control protocol), but I use it for Thoroughness, Communication, and Productivity. Although one can say that these three attributes should be part of every professional, it is more important for tech people to buy into this philosophy, since everything we do has ripples (“templeton effects”) and affects many other people. To paraphrase from a tech person that I met at Dalton school, “if you do not have time now to do it right, then when will you have the time to fix it;” or as the signature of another tech director reveals, “The quality of your work is the measure of your character.”

• **Four eyes are Better than Two:** I practice this mantra constantly in my job. This needs to be the mantra of every tech coordinator; ask advice, share responsibility, find helpful and expert consultants.

• **Trees:** There are too many “isolated trees” on tech teams. We need to avoid people doing their job in complete isolation from others on the tech team.