Testimony before the Ohio Senate Education Committee

May 9, 2023

Good afternoon Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Education Committee. My name is Geoffrey Andrews, and I serve as the CEO of the Management Council of the Ohio Education Computer Network (OECN). I appreciate the opportunity to testify today on behalf of Ohio's Information Technology Centers, which make up the OECN.

Briefly, the Information Technology Centers (ITCs) were created 45 years ago to handle several vital information technology operations for schools that would be inefficient or impossible for schools to provide on their own. ITCs are owned by the districts they serve and are primarily funded by those districts, though the ITCs also receive support from the General Assembly through targeted funding that flows through ODE.

The core, required services the ITCs provide to school districts are fiscal (payroll, accounting, HR), student data systems, EMIS, digital teaching and learning tools, and Internet. These services and the data centers that house the data and IT systems were established to provide efficient and secure means for schools to manage their district information. The data housed and managed by these sites is also the basis upon which the General Assembly distributes billions of dollars to schools each year. With one or two exceptions, all schools in Ohio report data and receive services through one of these ITCs. I have included a statewide map of the sites

in my written testimony for reference, along with a more comprehensive list of ITC services.

The Management Council further optimizes this statewide network by promoting collaboration among the ITCs and providing statewide services to them and to ODE, ODJFS, ODHE, and other state agencies. For example, the Management Council maintains a Disaster Recovery site that can, in the face of a disaster, function as an ITC that has been victimized by a disabling event. We provide software applications, backup/data storage services, all manner of technical and educational training, data analysis, optimized purchasing, a web-based statewide education jobs board, a statewide service desk, and other digital tools and resources to help ITCs to help their schools.

Today I am approaching the Senate Education Committee seeking your consideration and support of a particular line item, and that is line 200426 in the proposed budget. _We are asking that the Senate restore the language and amounts submitted in the Executive Budget for line 200426_. We are also asking that 200446 and 200465 remain at the levels that were approved in both the Executive budget and the House budget. Allow me to elaborate…

The ITCs were originally created because schools could not afford to operate some of these very substantial IT environments on their own. The technical complexity and sophistication required dedicated staff, a specialized environment, and expensive technology. The General Assembly has seen fit to provide a subsidy for specific ITC services as a way to help schools with this burden. There is a subsidy for the five core services all ITCs are required to offer: EMIS, fiscal systems, student systems, INFOhio, and Internet.

In the Executive budget, these subsidies were increased for the first time in over a decade. Also, a new subsidy of $1 per student was added to help the ITCs battle the huge increase in cyber security costs and threats. The subsidy for schools to purchase Internet through their ITCs was increased from $1800 per building to $2500 per building. For reference, the statewide

use of the Internet by schools has increased from 23 Gigabits in 2014 to almost 300 Gigabits of traffic this year. That's a 12-fold increase in 9 years, during which there has been no increase in these subsidies. ITCs are expanding their connections to the Internet from 10Gig connections to 100 or even 200Gig connections by the end of this year. We are leveraging ESSER funds to expand those connections; 200426 in FY24 includes a one time expense that will fund a 10 year extension of the fiber leases upon which that traffic runs.

In the House budget that was approved and sent to the Senate, the House sought to provide an extraordinary amount of funding for schools. Speaking as a retired superintendent, I applaud that effort. However, as part of that search for funding to send to schools, the House removed the cybersecurity subsidy submitted in the Executive budget, and the Internet subsidy increase from the Executive was eliminated. No one in the House has acknowledged targeting cybersecurity or safe Internet; I believe it was merely an effort to find more funds in the ODE budget to send directly to schools.

Just as schools are not asked to write fiscal software, or operate student information systems, there are some information technology services and products that are best achieved in a collaborative fashion through a shared financial burden borne by a consortium. Buying safe, secure Internet and pooling resources to build and maintain sophisticated firewalls and cybersecurity defenses definitely fall into this category.

When schools buy Internet through their ITCs, they are receiving Internet through OARNET, Ohio's robust Internet service that serves our state government, our colleges and universities, and other public entities in addition to K12. This service includes a 24-7 Operations Center, optimized traffic within the state to save Internet fees, multiple Tier 1 carriers, power suppliers, and fiber rings for the highest levels of redundancy, access to Internet2, protection from Distributed Denial of Service (DDOS) attacks, removal of bandwidth caps during testing to assure no interference, a private network prioritizing the safety of schools and

government entities, advanced firewall and network security services, domain name hosting, and various managed services. This protects Ohio's children far more than any random Internet provider ever would. This was and remains the rationale for schools to purchase safer Internet through their ITCs, and based on the extraordinary increase in Internet traffic I cited a moment ago, the ITCs and schools truly need this increase in the Internet subsidy articulated in the Executive budget.

Regarding cybersecurity, ITCs are already compliant with the NIST protocols that the General Assembly promoted in a new law three years ago. ITCs work with schools to implement multifactor authentication. ITCs provide simulated "phishing" attacks and offer the subsequent training to school staff and students. The ITCs have implemented filtering, technical training, event monitoring, and a host of services that protect schools, students and staff. That is why the Executive budget included the new, modest subsidy of $1.6M to support the ITC cybersecurity efforts. ITCs urgently need that subsidy implemented in the coming biennium.

In closing, I thank you for the occasion to address the committee and implore the Senate to restore line item 200426 to the level submitted in the Executive budget. On behalf of the ITCs, the schools, and the students across Ohio, the Management Council deeply appreciates the opportunity to testify today. I would be pleased to address any questions the committee members may have.
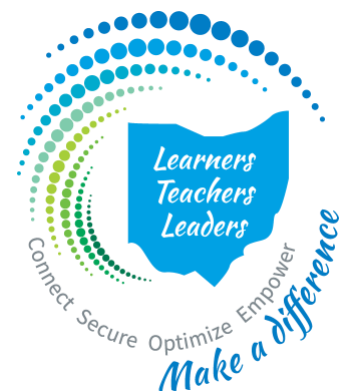
Additional Services provided by ITCs for Ohio

- Backup as a Service
- Billing
- Checks
- Cisco DUO
- Co-location Services
- Connectivity to Municipalities
- Contract Staffing
- Custom Student Data Extracts, Reports, Transcripts
- Customized Forms
- Data Storage Service
- Direct Deposit
- Distance Learning
- District Data Reporting
- District Technology Assessment
- Document Management
- E-Rate Provider Service
- Email Archiving
- EMIS Coordinator Service
- EMIS CrossCheck Support and Training
- Endpoint Detection & Response
- Equipment Inventory
- Event Scheduler
- Fiber Builds & Maintenance
- Firewalls
- Fiscal Support and Training
- Forms Management
- Student Information Systems support and training
- Hosting
- HR Support
- IEP Management/Support
- INFOhio Support and Training
- INFOhio Workflows
- Information Security Services
- Internet Bandwidth
- Internet Content Filtering
- Job Posting
- Kiosk
- LastPass Security Management
- Learning Management System (LMS)
- Legal Services
- Library Automation
- Mobile Tech PD
- Multi-factor Authentication
- Network Support and Management
- OFCC Building Projects/Renovations
- Online Meeting/ Video Service
- Online/Virtual Academy
- Outside Wireless
- Procurement
- Purchase Orders
- Security Services, Training, Updates
- Security/Surveillance/Building Access Control/HVAC monitoring
- Social Media Archiving
- Student Data Analytics
- Student Health Management
- Student/Parent Alert System
- Substitute Calling
- Teacher Gradebook
- Technical Professional Development
- Technology Design/Planning
- Telephony/Voice over IP (VoIP)
- Utility Auditing
- W2 and 1099 Printing
- WAN Support
- Web Hosting
- WiFi/Wireless Support
- Wiring/Cat-n Infrastructure
- Software that reduces energy usage
- Robust Security Measures