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Testimony
Senate Education Committee
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Provided by:
Ben Cech, Government Relations Specialist
Management Council of the Ohio Education Computer Network

Chairman Brenner, Vice Chairman Blessing, Ranking Member Ingram, and Distinguished Members of the Senate Education Committee. My name is Ben Cech, and I serve as the Government Relations Specialist of the Management Council of the Ohio Education Computer Network (OECN). I appreciate the opportunity to testify on behalf of the Management Council and Ohio's Information Technology Centers (ITCs), which collectively form the OECN. My purpose appearing before you today is to express our appreciation for the support that the General Assembly provides the OECN, and to assure you that we will continue to provide outstanding, efficient services while not seeking any funding increases in the coming biennium. We recognize that this is going to be a difficult budget to balance, and we intend to be part of the solution.

Forty-seven years ago, the Ohio General Assembly created the Ohio Education Computer Network (OECN) to provide K-12 school districts with cost-effective access to essential IT services through a shared services model. Today, that mission continues through the work of Ohio's ITCs, which are owned and funded by the school districts they serve, with additional support from the state through targeted funding administered by the Department of Education and Workforce (DEW).

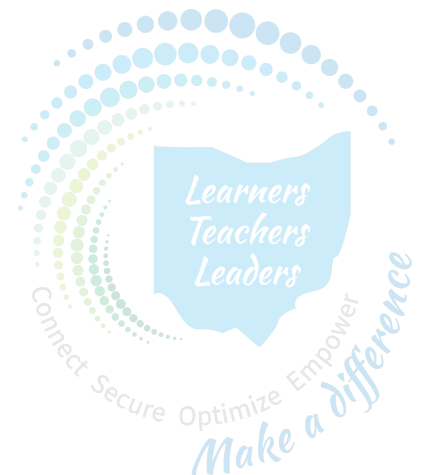
State support once covered over 50% of ITC operating costs in the 1980s; today, it accounts for just 4%. Despite this sharp decline, the OECN has made strategic investments in sophisticated, efficient technologies that allow us to continue delivering high-quality, wide-ranging services to Ohio schools. Services that are increasingly essential in areas like cybersecurity, data management, EMIS, and INFOhio.

We raise this not to request additional funding in the upcoming biennium, but to underscore the continued value and cost-efficiency of this long-standing partnership. Even with limited state investment, the OECN remains a model of fiscal responsibility, innovation, and commitment to the needs of Ohio's K-12 education system.

Through both its shared services model and the optimization of various technologies, the OECN has significantly reduced costs for school districts by providing economies of scale in areas such as network infrastructure, data analytics, security, artificial intelligence, and software solutions. This model allows schools to reinvest savings into classrooms, teachers, and students, ensuring that taxpayer dollars are maximized for educational outcomes. Ohio school districts typically spend a fraction of a single percent of their per student funding on the IT services provided by their ITC.

Under Ohio Revised Code, ITCs are required to provide five core services to schools: fiscal operations (including payroll, accounting, and HR), student data management, EMIS (data transfer), INFOhio (K-12 digital library), and broadband (internet services). These essential services enable schools to efficiently and securely manage critical information, while also supplying the data that informs the General Assembly's school funding decisions. However, these core functions represent just a portion of the wide-ranging support ITCs provide to Ohio's K-12 districts.

The OECN's collaborative efforts extend beyond school districts, fostering strong partnerships with state agencies such as DEW, the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS), the Department of Children and Youth (DCY), the Ohio Department of Higher Education (ODHE), Boards of Elections through the Office



of the Secretary of State, and the office of the Auditor of State. These collaborations facilitate streamlined data sharing, improved resource allocation, secure networks, greater FAFSA participation, increased opportunities, and enhanced decision-making that benefit Ohio students and residents, regardless of where they live or learn.

In conclusion, the OECN's long-standing commitment to shared services, collaboration, and data-driven student success makes it an essential partner in advancing Ohio's education system. Included in my testimony is a supplemental document that highlights the recent successes of the Management Council of the Ohio Education Computer Network over the last biennium, thanks to the support of the Ohio General Assembly. We respectfully urge the Senate to maintain the flat funding levels supporting the OECN in the Executive and House Budget proposals.

Chairman Brenner and members of the committee, thank you for your time and consideration.



Impact Highlights 2023-2025

Management Council of the Ohio Education Computer Network

Over the past two years, the Management Council of the Ohio Education Computer Network (MCOECN) has amplified its commitment to delivering secure, cutting-edge technology solutions to schools across Ohio. The MCOECN works diligently to implement significant advancements that improve educational outcomes for students statewide. Through these efforts, the MCOECN has achieved remarkable progress in enhancing digital infrastructure and support services. Below is an overview of recent accomplishments.

Middle-mile Network Upgrade

Successfully upgraded Ohio's sixteen ITC and urban school districts' bandwidth from 10Gb to 100/200Gb, ensuring robust and scalable digital infrastructure for Ohio schools for the next decade

Cybersecurity Network Enhancements

Led the implementation of the NIST cybersecurity framework across Ohio's ITCs, strengthening school district network security and providing enhanced protection against cyber threats, repelling millions of phishing attempts every day

School and Data Center Resiliency

Provided disaster recovery, business continuity, and back-up services for ITCs and schools across the state

Ohio Education Job Board

Increased visibility through targeted marketing and conference participation, supporting schools in attracting and hiring top-tier educators and staff; typically there are over 4,000 current job postings across Ohio

Collaborative Purchasing Savings

Secured statewide volume discounts for essential ITC products, including a major contract for Zoom, saving Ohio schools over \$1.4M

Cybersecurity Awareness Training

Began implementation of a cybersecurity platform that equips Ohio's schools with resources for cybersecurity training and simulated cyberattacks



Longitudinal Analysis of Student Performance

Assisted the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce (DEW) with longitudinal analyses of student performance data utilizing the Ohio District Data Exchange (ODDEX) and the Education Management Information System (EMIS)

Employee Self-Service (ESS)

Developed an HR application that replaced a paid service, saving schools money, and is now a standard software tool enabling teachers and staff to track leave requests and manage HR functions

INFOhio Support for 1.8M Students

Enhanced educational outcomes by providing resources that support K-12 literacy, digital citizenship, workforce readiness, and STEM exploration for students in all 88 counties, across public, private, and community schools, as well as ESCs, JVSs, and CTCs

**Expanding Access
Enhancing Security
Empowering Educators**



State Agency Support

Artificial Intelligence Roadmap

Served in an integral role on the governor's commission in developing the state roadmap for AI integration in the K12 environment

Governor's Merit Scholarship

Nominated 6,415 students in 2025, with 5,606 awarded, supporting top high school graduates attending Ohio post-secondary institutions

Grow Your Own Scholarships

Nominated 845 candidates in 2025 for a 4-year renewable scholarship, aiming to address teacher shortages in high-need areas

K-12 Network Subsidy

Supported 940 districts and 2,954 school buildings, ensuring affordable internet access for districts relying on the Ohio K12 Network

FAFSA Support

Assisted 581 districts with FAFSA data services, engaging an average of 239 weekly users, leading to millions of additional dollars awarded to Ohio students

Chronic Absenteeism Support

Engaged in several projects to help document causes and ways to address chronic absenteeism

Summer EBT

Issued \$143M in benefits to over 1.1 million families, while responding to 88,418 calls for support

Outcomes that Matter

These highlights underscore the MCOECN's transformative impact on Ohio's education system — strengthening infrastructure, enhancing digital security, collaborating efficiently, and preparing a future-ready workforce. The success of these initiatives is a direct result of strategic state investment, demonstrating that continued support drives meaningful progress for students, educators, and communities across Ohio.

For more information, contact:

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Collaborative Solutions for a Stronger Education System



State Agency Collaboration

Streamlined data sharing and resource allocation through strategic partnerships with state agencies supporting Ohio's education and workforce development initiatives

Boards of Elections through the Office of the Secretary of State

Department of Children and Youth

Department of Education and Workforce

Governor's Office

Office of the Auditor of State

Ohio Department of Higher Education

Ohio Department of Job and Family Services



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