



LEADING EDUCATION INNOVATION

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Chief Executive Officer, CoSN

August 7, 2018

Dr. Karen B. Salmon
State Superintendent
Maryland State Department
Of Education
200 West Baltimore Street
Baltimore, MD 21201-2595

Dear Dr. Salmon:

I am writing in my capacity as the CEO of the [Consortium for School Networking \(CoSN\)](#), the premier professional association for school system technology leaders. We work with school systems in Maryland and around the country to meet the technology needs of over 13 million students nationally and the diverse education systems that serve them.

Based on our expertise in education technology experience, we are writing to help inform the Maryland State Department of Education's (MSDE) new initiative, required by House Bill 1110, to develop health and safety best practices for the use of digital devices in classrooms. CoSN recently issued guidance for our members on this issue. *What You Need to Know About the Screen Time Debate* (attached). We offer these recommendations to assist the Department in developing policies and practices that will advance the use of technology in a responsible and thoughtful manner.

We recommend that the Department consider the following in developing policies concerning the best practices for the use of digital devices in classrooms.

Health and Safety should be Embedded in School Districts' Technology Planning and Professional Development. When used appropriately, interactive digital devices, unlike passive technologies such as television, increase positive student engagement, help educators and students accelerate learning, and expand interactive out-of-school learning opportunities. Achieving these benefits requires effective technology planning and the delivery of well-designed professional development focused on helping educators to use devices to meet

student learning needs and improve, not hamper, their wellbeing. District learning plans should never encourage the use of technology to replace other activities that promote learning and enhance student health, including play, creating art and music, and cultivating place-based experiences. Furthermore, professional development should be available for all educators which recognizes technology's ubiquity in our communities and is designed to help educators strike the right balance between online learning and face-to-face learning, between digital and non-digital learning, and between passive and active learning. The training should also help educators equip students with healthy technology habits and practices, including being good online citizens (e.g. emphasizing the serious implications of bullying and harassment, sexting and other common practices) and helping them understand how to protect their privacy and avoid other real-world dangers.

Leverage Technology's Ability to Promote Student Collaboration and Engagement.

Technology is an inherent part our lives and school districts should not ignore the presence, importance, and impact of digital devices on the learning process. Well used, technology offers exciting ways to bring learners together and build community both in the classroom and during out-of-school learning times. Next generation learning spaces should be designed to integrate technology in ways that promote collaborative teaching and learning, including being strategic about using devices to promote engagement and the sharing of ideas and resources. The best digital devices not only give students access to greater resources and learning insights, but also encourage and facilitate healthy classroom (and beyond classroom) collaboration, stimulate student engagement, and even create opportunities for cross-cultural learning. Districts exploring the use of new devices and software should begin by seeking input from teachers, students and families about the technologies they have used that promote collaboration. They should then engage the private sector in a robust dialog about whether and how their tools encourage collaboration by all students, including English learners and students with disabilities.

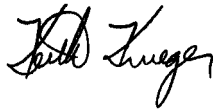
Promote Family Engagement. Parents and caregivers are the primary device access regulators outside of school. A recent *Education Week* interview with principals from around the country and an Oxford Internet Institute and Cardiff University study show just how important family practices are when it comes to device use. Given this context, it is critically important that districts engage families and other stakeholders in a rich dialog about how to promote student health and safety when it comes to using devices for learning inside and outside the classroom. School systems should foster a community dialogue about technology and its appropriate use for learning, and how to achieve balance. Family engagement should also include a strong focus on digital privacy and safety, using technology in an ethical manner, and being a good digital citizen.

The Office of Educational Technology at the U.S. Department of Education has published two documents which the MSDE might find helpful. The [National Education Technology Plan \(NETP\)](#) discusses the difference between passive technology use, which includes passively consuming media or filling out digitized worksheets, with active technology use, in which students use technology to collaborate with peers, design and create media, interact with experts, make global connections, engage in immersive simulations, and code software applications (see attached graphic). In addition, the [Early Learning and Educational Technology Policy Brief](#), released jointly with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, provides guidance for parents and educators regarding the use of technology for early learners.

We strongly urge the Department to work towards a plan that will ensure that health and safety considerations are part of district technology planning, promote student collaboration and ensure the engagement of families in the process. CoSN is ready to assist you and the Department as it develops plans.

Finally, we also encourage MSDE to supplement the new best practices with suggested Maryland and federal resources that might help school districts to develop and implement the strategies described above. For example, district leaders should consider using funding provided by Title I, Title II, and Title IV of Every Student Succeeds Act to develop and carry out these and other related actions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Keith Krueger". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "K".

Keith Krueger,

CC: Val Emrich, Director of Instructional Technology, MSDE