



## Critical CTO Conversations: District Leadership

*Taking the digital leap means changing everything.* Old organizational structures are no longer functional for new organizational needs. Traditional interfaces between departments are obsolete. And the role of IT becomes central to enabling teaching and learning.

The modern CTO should be having critical conversations both inside and outside of the organization in order to be effective in a dramatically evolving environment.

### **School Board Conversations**

The Chief Technical Officer, along with the Superintendent and Chief Academic Officer, communicates to the school board the rationale behind the digital leap including key points such as:

What students need to know and be able to do on graduating into a modern world

How technology enables the kinds of teaching and learning that leads to those outcomes.

The CTO communicates the technology infrastructure required to support such teaching and learning and justify its costs. See [CoSN Infographic](#).

### **Superintendent Conversations**

The CTO discusses his/her role with the Superintendent and communicates the conditions that support a highly functional leadership team.

CoSN recommends that the CTO be a member of the Superintendent's cabinet. Efficient operations in a digitally converted district require the technology leader to be a partner in leadership. See [CoSN's Empowered Superintendent Toolkit](#)

The CTO discusses functional trade-offs versus time, money, and effort when making digital leap policies such as whether to allow student devices or require single sign-on for digital content.

The CTO should paint a picture of how the normally "invisible" infrastructure needs to grow and evolve in order to support current and future demands. See [CoSN's SEND Performance Design Guide](#).



## Community Conversations

The CTO must communicate with press, parents, and the community about the vision for teaching and learning in the district. The implementation should have a brand that helps the community understand why the digital leap is important and how it will be implemented. See [CoSN's Recipe for Success](#).

The CTO should keep the community informed about spending of funds by transparently showing the progress of implementation. See Cypress-Fairbanks' [website](#) where pictures are posted of work being done, such as installing access points.

## Cabinet Conversations

When taking the digital leap, the roles of organizations change dynamically. The district stops doing many things it did in the past and begins doing new things it has never done before. Unfortunately, many districts don't find it easy to identify and eliminate practices that are no longer relevant, and consequently don't find time for the new and important practices and procedures in a digital world.

The CTO should discuss with the cabinet how to make information and communication transparent.

The CTO should participate in cabinet discussions of how decisions are made for the program implementation.

The CTO should hold conversations with the cabinet about critical technology policy decisions such as how to address student privacy, how to keep student data secure, and the approval process for digital resources. See [CoSN's Privacy Toolkit](#).

## Chief Academic Officer Conversations

The CTO should work with the CAO to understand the instructional goals before a technology strategy can be formulated. Learning goals precede technology solutions. Once learning goals are in place, the CTO and CAO work together to identify how technology can assist with strategic or instructional goals.

The CAO and CTO need to explicitly discuss how they will work together.

- What is the model for collaboration between the information technology and instructional technology teams?
- How does information flow and decision making become transparent?
- How and when do decisions in one department become visible to the other department to discuss trade-offs and options?

See [CoSN's Critical Conversations: Bringing Technology and Academic District Officers Together](#).



## Chief Financial Officer Conversations

The CTO and CFO should work closely together to create technology plans that align with funding mechanisms.

- Does shifting cost from capital to Operational expenses for infrastructure and devices make sense?
- What funding mechanisms are available for one-time expenditures?
- What sustainable funding mechanisms are available for ongoing expenses?

The CTO and CFO, along with the rest of the cabinet, should to examine what old practices and processes can be eliminated with the new instructional approaches enabled by technology and to identify old expenses that can be repurposed for new needs. In particular, they need to ask, “What can the district stop doing?”

The CTO and CFO should make a trade-off analysis regarding when/how to collaborate with other districts, RESAs, etc. for economies of scale, standardization, vendor negotiation, expertise sharing, etc.

See [CoSN's Smart IT Leadership Guide](#).



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