EmpowerED Superintendent

The Importance of Interoperability in School Systems

INTEROPER—WHAT?

Interoperability is the seamless sharing of data, content and services among systems or applications. Anyone who's traveled overseas and didn't bring a power adapter understands interoperability, or rather the lack of it. An analogous situation exists in districts' digital ecosystems. Most systems were not designed to work together. IT departments spend a lot of time and their school systems' money connecting systems that need to work together. Michigan did an extensive study and found the lack of interoperability costs the state $163,000,000 per year.*

As districts' ecosystems become increasingly digital, the need for interoperability between systems becomes increasingly apparent— for cost efficiencies as well as teaching and learning effectiveness. The IT world is shifting from a product-oriented to a service-oriented environment while schools struggle to make ends meet. Therefore, it is essential for K–12 leaders to learn how to maximize the benefits of existing enterprise systems while adding new solutions that are cost-effective and scalable.

The key to understanding interoperability is contained in the word itself—"ABILITY." Interoperability is the ability to...

- Roster students on day one
- Readily access data
- Reallocate resources
- Give your teachers (and IT department!) their evenings and Sundays back
- Keep data secure
- Ensure data quality

Unless we solve this interoperability challenge, the education sector will continue to have siloed data, difficulties in student rostering, inaccuracies in data transfer, end-user frustration of managing multiple log-ins, and unnecessary and costly expense retrofitting solutions together, as well as inherently inefficient systems. That's why understanding interoperability is crucial for any edtech leader.

CoSN has developed an interoperability toolkit to support your technology and leadership. **cosn.org/ interoperability**.

*The Michigan Data Hub: A strategic Alignment and ROI Study
https://www.midatahub.org/downloads/data_integration/michigan_data_hub_roi_study_1.pdf

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