Chris M. Smallen, Ed.D., CETL
Chief Technology Officer
Lenoir City Schools
Tennessee
csmallen@lenoircityschools.net
https://www.linkedin.com/in/chris-smallen/

Provide an overview of your professional background and expertise in the field of education technology.

I'm entering my 27th year as a professional educator, and I can honestly say I've enjoyed every single minute of it. During those 27 years, I've worn many hats, starting as a science teacher and moving on to be an assistant principal, Chief Technology Officer, and even the principal of our statewide virtual school. Along the way, I became a Google Certified Trainer, and in 2017, I proudly earned my Certified Educational Technology Leader certification from CoSN.

My fervor for sharing insights and collaborating with colleagues to refine best practices has been a driving force. I've been fortunate enough to be part of various committees for the Tennessee Department of Education, like the Personalized Learning Task Force, Credit Recovery Working Group, and Virtual School Monitoring Committee.

I also have the pleasure of teaching several different instructional technology classes at Tennessee Wesleyan University and Johnson University. Being an adjunct professor allows me to help preservice teachers with the essential skills needed to seamlessly integrate technology into their classroom environments.

Identify the top two priorities that you believe CoSN should prioritize over the next three years.

I believe CoSN should prioritize strengthening its partnerships with state affiliate organizations and in particular assist them with focusing on digital equity, data privacy and cybersecurity. I also believe that an increased focus on artificial intelligence (AI) is needed.

CoSN can play a pivotal role in supporting state affiliates by tailoring resources, guidance, and advocacy strategies to address the unique needs and challenges faced by individual states. This includes helping state affiliates identify and overcome local barriers to digital inclusion and equity, facilitating engagement with policymakers and community stakeholders, and sharing successful models and best practices from around the nation. By offering customized support, CoSN can empower its affiliates to lead efforts toward digital inclusion and equity within their respective regions.

CoSN should also collaborate closely with state affiliates to bolster data privacy and security practices within each state's education systems. This involves providing training and professional development opportunities for educators and administrators on effective data protection measures. CoSN can also assist state affiliates in navigating state-specific data privacy regulations and advocating for robust data privacy legislation at the state level.

Regarding AI, CoSN should establish a dedicated online resource hub that consolidates research, case studies, and practical information related to AI in education. This hub would serve as a readily accessible repository, allowing educators and administrators to explore AI's applications, advantages, and potential pitfalls. Furthermore, CoSN should take a lead role in developing best practices and guidelines for AI implementation in education. Collaborating with AI experts, educators, and policymakers, CoSN can create a comprehensive framework that addresses critical aspects such as data privacy, ethical considerations, and effective integration of AI tools into the curriculum.

Please explain how your diverse background, personal and professional, will help impact the CoSN Board.

My educational journey spans K-12, higher education, and leadership roles, making me a well-rounded candidate for the CoSN Board. Starting as a middle and high school teacher, I gained firsthand insights into the daily challenges faced by educators and students.

Advancing in my career, I served as a vice principal and later became the principal of a state-wide virtual school. These experiences exposed me to curriculum development, student engagement, and technology integration, all critical facets of evolving education.

As a chief technology officer, I dived into the world of educational technology, honing expertise in strategic tech deployment to enhance teaching and learning—crucial as schools increasingly rely on digital tools.

Simultaneously, I taught diverse educational technology courses at the university level, staying at the forefront of emerging trends and pedagogical approaches.

Beyond teaching, I have actively participated in the Tennessee Educational Technology Association, culminating in my role as Chairman of the Board of Directors from 2021 to 2023. This showcased my commitment to educational technology advocacy and collaboration with diverse stakeholders.
Working in a small rural East Tennessee school district provided me with a unique perspective, understanding the challenges of limited resources, tech infrastructure, and the importance of equity in education. Our school district also has the 2nd highest percentage of multi-language learners in the state so that has given me a unique perspective in regard to diversity.

My journey has equipped me to advocate effectively for educators, students, and administrators, especially in underserved regions. I'm dedicated to advancing educational technology leadership on the CoSN Board, ensuring it addresses the distinct needs of all stakeholders in our education system.

Outline your pertinent leadership experience within nonprofit entities (e.g. board involvement, event management, and fundraising). Highlight any notable engagement with state or national education and/or educational technology associations.
In my local community, I've actively contributed to impactful organizations. Serving on the Board of Directors for our local Boys and Girls Club and supporting the Loudon County Education Foundation has been a privilege. These organizations are well-known for hosting vibrant activities and annual fundraising events that have a significant positive impact on our community.

Beyond my local involvement, I hold a crucial position as a member of the Executive Committee for the Digital Learning Collaborative. This committee serves as a platform for state affiliate leaders from across the nation to collaborate and exchange insights on digital learning.

However, my most substantial nonprofit experience comes from my engagement with the Tennessee Educational Technology Association (TETA). TETA is a dynamic entity comprising three distinct regional organizations, each conducting monthly meetings statewide. Within TETA, I've served in various capacities, including regional secretary, vice president, president, and member at large. For the past six years, I've been an active member of the TETA Board of Directors, with the distinct honor of chairing the board from 2021 to 2023.

My role as Chairman of the Board provided invaluable experience in event management and fundraising. TETA annually hosts two significant conferences: one for teachers in the fall and another catering to district technology staff in the summer. Similar to CoSN, TETA relies on advertising sales and event packages with vendors to support these initiatives and year-round activities.

CoSN places a strong emphasis on promoting diversity within the CTO profession and our organization as a whole. As a nominee for the CoSN Board, please elaborate on your strategies for enhancing diversity and share any instances where you have been involved in assessing or overseeing organizational diversity.
Promoting diversity within the CTO (Chief Technology Officer) profession and the organization as a whole is a commendable goal, as it leads to a more inclusive and equitable educational technology landscape. Here are several strategies I would consider as a nominee for the CoSN Board to enhance diversity:

Mentorship Programs: Develop mentorship programs that pair experienced CTOs with emerging leaders from underrepresented backgrounds. Mentorship can provide guidance, support, and opportunities for skill development.

Diverse Speakers and Panels: Ensure that conferences, webinars, and other CoSN events feature diverse speakers, panelists, and presenters. This sends a message of inclusivity and provides role models for aspiring CTOs.
Showcase Success Stories: Highlight success stories of diverse CTOs who have made significant contributions to the field. Sharing these stories can inspire others and demonstrate that diverse leadership is achievable and valuable.
Data on Diversity: Collect and regularly report data on the diversity of CoSN's membership, leadership, and committees. Transparency in data can help track progress and identify areas that require further attention.
Create DEI training resources for CoSN Members and State Chapters, to ensure a deep understanding of the importance of diversity and inclusion. This can help create a more inclusive culture within the organization.
Create a repository of resources, best practices, and success stories related to promoting diversity within the CTO profession. Share these resources with CoSN members to help them implement effective diversity initiatives in their organizations.
It's important to recognize that diversity and inclusion are ongoing efforts that require commitment and continuous evaluation to achieve meaningful results.

Detail your prior engagement with CoSN and/or our state chapters.
Since its inception in 2019, I've been a dedicated thought partner for CoSN's Early CTO Academy, contributing to its continuous growth and evolution. By far, this has been one of the most enriching experiences of my professional career.
My journey with CoSN has been rich and diverse, marked by active participation in various committees. I've lent my expertise to crucial groups such as the Small School District Leadership Committee, the Rural Leadership Advisory Committee, the Emerging Technology Committee, and most recently, the CTO Council. These roles have allowed me to engage deeply with pivotal aspects of educational technology leadership, shaping CoSN's initiatives and strategies.
My commitment extends to the Tennessee Educational Technology Association (TETA), where I've been a steadfast member for the past 16 years. Since 2017, I've had the honor of serving on the board of directors, actively contributing to the organization's mission and growth. Notably, I had the privilege of assuming the role of Chairman of the TETA Board from 2021 to 2023, leading transformative initiatives during my tenure.
In 2020, I expanded my sphere of influence by stepping into the role of CoSN State Chapter Leader, a position I continue to hold. In this capacity, I've effectively bridged the gap between CoSN's national vision and local initiatives in our region.
Additionally, I've had the privilege of sharing my knowledge and insights on a national stage by presenting at the National CoSN Conference on two separate occasions, adding to the collective wisdom and progress of the educational technology community.