



Case Study:

Improving Data Privacy in Illinois With CoSN's TLE State Partnership Program

At a TLE meeting, (L to R): Bryan Tallitsch, DeKalb CUSD 428, Ben Yochem DeKalb CUSD 428, Myra Lolkema, South Holland SD 150, Andy White, New Lenox School District 122, and Trent Schalk, Lisle School District 202

With every new classroom technology comes a potential new risk to student privacy. Recognizing this, the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE), in partnership with the Learning Technology Center (LTC), launched a statewide effort to strengthen student data protection across the state. At the heart of this initiative is CoSN's Trusted Learning Environment (TLE) Seal Program, a framework that helps school districts build and showcase robust student data privacy practices.

Designed by CoSN, the TLE Seal recognizes districts that demonstrate excellence in five areas:

- Leadership
- Business practices
- Data security
- Professional development
- Classroom practices

In 2024, Illinois became one of the first states to adopt the TLE State Partnership Program, embedding a structure designed not just to improve policy but to foster a statewide culture of trust based on district-wide improvements in student privacy practices.

“We wanted districts learning from each other. Peer collaboration is one of the most powerful drivers of change.”—Tim McIlvain, Executive Director, LTC

Starting with a Vision: Why Illinois Said Yes to TLE

Tim McIlvain, executive director of LTC, recalls the turning point clearly: “We saw how states like Indiana were leveraging TLE to bring structure and support to this complex work and knew we needed something similar in Illinois,” he says. “There was already strong language in our school code, but districts needed guidance on how to put policies into practice.”

As a longtime member of CoSN’s data privacy committee, McIlvain had seen firsthand how the TLE framework translates privacy into concrete, actionable steps. “What stood out to me was that each of the five TLE practice areas naturally sparks a conversation within a district. It allows you to begin where you’re strongest or where the need is most urgent. That kind of flexibility is essential.”

These challenges aren’t unique to Illinois. CoSN’s 2025 [National Student Data Privacy Report, Part 1](#) found that 73 percents of survey respondents who were responsible for student data privacy noted that privacy was not mentioned as a responsibility in their job description—and 17 percent have never received relevant training.

In contrast, as noted in part 2 of CoSN’s 2025 National Student Data Privacy Report, districts that have earned their CoSN TLE Seal or indicated that they are working toward obtaining one are far more likely to outperform other districts with respect to the overall breadth and maturity of their student data privacy programs.

73% of those who reported that they were responsible for the district's student data privacy program noted that privacy was not mentioned as a responsibility in their job description.
(Source: CoSN National Student Data Privacy Report, Part 1)



L to R: Daniel Medina, Park Ridge CCSD 64, Matt Tombs, Park Ridge CCSD 64, Micah Miner, Beach Park CCSD 3, Christopher Alms, Prospect Heights SD 23, Temple Murphy, CHSD 128, Jim Batson, Illinois Learning Technology Center, Craig Chatham, Lincolnshire-Prairieview SD 103, Mitch Donahue, East Maine SD 63, Matthew Prins, North Shore SD 112

From Framework to Fieldwork: How the Program Rolled Out

Illinois formally joined the [TLE State Partnership Program](#) in September 2024, launching two pilot cohorts in the densely populated Chicagoland area. Together, these regional groups include 18 districts—from large suburban systems to smaller, resource-strapped schools. The cohort model was intentional. “We wanted districts learning from each other. Peer collaboration is one of the most powerful drivers of change,” McIlvain says.

Illinois' TLE cohort model aims to close district privacy gaps—including gaps shared by many other districts across the country—by clearly defining roles, supporting professional development, and embedding privacy into broader leadership conversations.

Each district began by completing the [TLE self-assessment](#), a detailed diagnostic that helps teams evaluate their strengths and gaps across the five practice areas. The results informed each cohort's focus: One zeroed in on leadership practices, the other on business practices. This targeted approach helped districts build momentum and make immediate progress.

The Facilitator Behind the Scenes: Jim Batson's Role

To support the cohorts, LTC tapped Jim Batson, a retired CTO and veteran of Illinois' EdTech community. With deep experience in district leadership, CoSN engagement, and statewide mentoring, Batson was the ideal facilitator.

“My job is to be the guide,” he says. “I keep the momentum going, especially when the year gets busy or a district misses a monthly meeting. I check in, host virtual sessions, and make sure no one falls behind.”

“We’re not just doing this to check a box. It’s about protecting students and showing our families and community that we take that seriously.”

**—Becky Lim, director of technology,
East Maine School District 63**

One of Batson’s key decisions was to hold the main cohort meetings in person at regional offices of education. “Having people physically at the same table sharing their evidence and asking questions changed the tone. It also built trust,” he says.

Real Impact: Voices from the Districts

Becky Lim, director of technology at East Maine School District 63 in Des Plaines, joined the North Suburban cohort with her district’s new cybersecurity specialist. Just one year into her role, she saw the TLE mini-seal process as both a professional learning opportunity and a public commitment.

“Cybersecurity is one of my biggest priorities, but it’s hard to communicate that to the community in a tangible way,” she says. “The TLE Seal gives us something we can point to. It says, ‘We’re doing the work.’”

She also found the cohort model highly practical. “At one meeting, someone shared a sample policy they were submitting, and I realized that we had something similar. Sometimes you don’t know you’re already meeting a standard until you see how others are documenting it.”

The program has helped Lim reframe internal conversations. “I’ve used what I’ve learned to talk to my board and administration about what data privacy really means. We’re not just doing this to check a box. It’s about protecting students and showing our families and community that we take that seriously.”

Making It Work for All: Rural and Urban Districts Alike

A core strength of the Illinois model is its recognition of district diversity. LTC has long supported rural schools, many of which operate with limited staff and budgets. “They don’t have the luxury of hiring consultants; that’s where our support, as well as CoSN’s terrific resources, come in,” says Batson.

“Once these first mini seals are done, I think districts will realize—it’s not impossible. It’s just good practice.”
—Jim Batson, retired CTO and TLE cohort leader

Nationally, 60 percent of districts cite time and staffing constraints as major barriers to implementing strong privacy practices (CoSN Data Privacy Report). The LTC’s cohort model helps break down those barriers by offering shared templates, regional mentors, and collaborative planning—especially valuable for under-resourced districts.

The TLE framework levels the playing field. Policies developed by a large suburban district with legal counsel can serve as a model for a small rural district in the same cohort. “It’s about shared learning and smart adaptation,” says McIlvain.

Looking Ahead: Scaling for Impact

By mid-2025, several Illinois cohort participants submitted TLE mini-seal applications—a remarkable achievement for a program less than a year old. Plans are underway to expand the initiative statewide, with new cohorts launching in additional regions this fall. Both LTC and ISBE have committed to sustaining the program through at least June 2026.

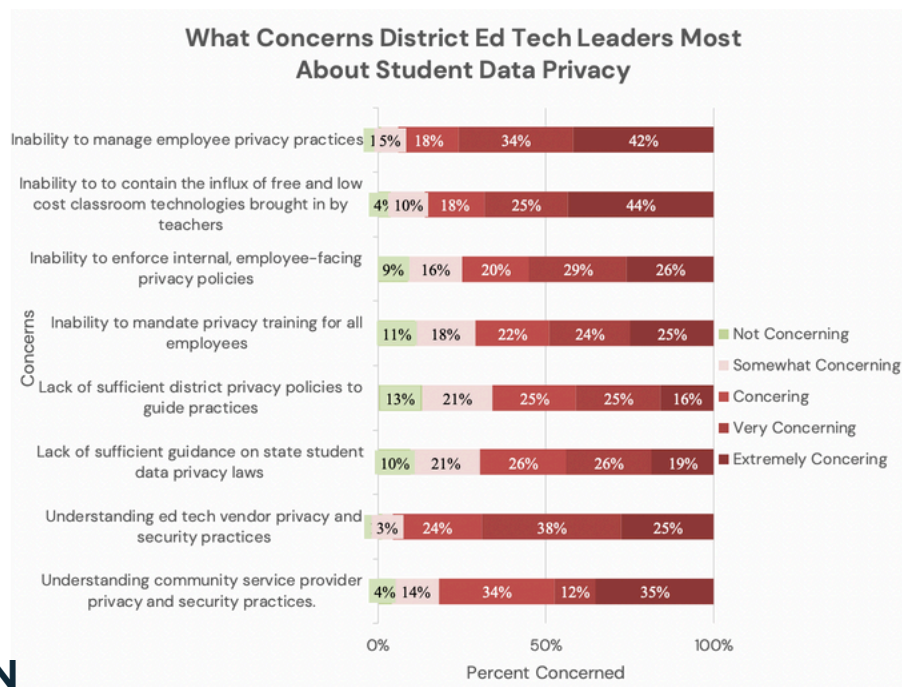
“We see this as a long-term investment,” says McIlvain. “We don’t expect every district to get the full seal immediately, but we do expect them to start important conversations and improve policies. That’s how culture shifts happen.”

Lim agrees: “We’re hoping to have the full seal next year, but I can already say we’re more aware, more aligned, and more transparent. That’s a win.”

More Than Compliance, A Commitment

Illinois’ TLE journey is a story of vision, collaboration, and persistence. It’s about building Illinois’ privacy leaders of tomorrow as district leaders invest in the invisible infrastructure of digital learning: trust.

As Batson puts it, “Once these first mini-seals are done, I think districts will realize—it’s not impossible. It’s just good practice.”



About CoSN

CoSN is the premier professional association designed to meet the needs of K-12 EdTech leaders, their teams and other district leaders. CoSN provides thought leadership resources, community, best practices and advocacy tools to help edtech leaders succeed in the digital transformation. CoSN represents over 13 million students and continues to grow as a powerful and influential voice in K-12 education. [CoSN.org](https://cosn.org)

About the CoSN Trusted Learning Environment Seal Program

The CoSN Trusted Learning Environment (TLE) Seal program is the nation's only data privacy framework for school systems, focused on building a culture of trust and transparency. The TLE Seal was developed by CoSN in collaboration with a diverse group of 28 school system leaders nationwide and with support from AASA, The School Superintendents Association, the Association of School Business Officials International (ASBO) and ASCD. School systems that meet the program requirements will earn the TLE Seal, signifying their commitment to student data privacy to their community. TLE Seal recipients also commit to continuous examination and demonstrable future advancement of their privacy practices. [CoSN.org/Trusted](https://cosn.org/Trusted)

For more information or to get started with a CoSN TLE State Subscription plan, contact Linnette Attai at lattai@cosn.org.



The CoSN TLE Seal Program is supported by lead partners:

