



Middle Cities

Educational Technology Task Force

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The Middle Cities Educational Technology Task Force has convened and discussed the Freedom to Learn Grant with its members and staff from the MVU (Michigan Virtual University) and would like to submit the following appraisal:

Although the task force agrees that the publicized motivation for the grant has some merit on the surface, there are some very serious issues with the requirements and deployment strategies that will have diverse impact on all participating districts. The current economic state that all districts face necessitates sound judgment on the expenditures they make. All districts have already had their state funding cut, resulting in program and staff cuts. Upfront, the minimum cost to a district is twenty-five dollars for every 6th grade student. This does not include any additional costs that may be encountered. It is difficult to predict exactly how much and where these costs may be encountered because the program specifics, as of today, have not been finalized. Considerations are insurance for the laptops, maintenance of the access points, software, parent-student-staff development, virus protection subscriptions, labor resource costs due to the inability to automate desktop maintenance, software installation, administrative oversight, etc.

There are also many concerns about the security of our network data (both districts' and students') in a wireless environment. There has been no information on what, if any, security will be deployed.

Although individual districts may champion this initiative, the committee has concerns that would need to be addressed prior to endorsing a large-scale implementation of the project. What researched-based outcomes have been used for the motivation of this program? What assessment tool will determine the success of this program and at whose cost? What are the measurable outcomes expected from this program and how congruent are they with the expected outcomes of Education YES and NCLB? In addition, how would implementing this initiative facilitate districts in meeting the requirements of Education YES and NCLB?

Liability for the equipment and students is also a concern all of us must consider. What procedures are in place/need to be in place for a laptop that is lost, stolen or broken outside of the warranty? Safety procedures need to be developed and implemented, and training should be provided to our students for the care of the laptop and transportation to and from school. The reality is districts may be loaning some students a district laptop that is worth more than the monthly income of their family, and then sending them out on the streets. Do any of our students potentially participating in this initiative live in a community where a predator may see this as an easy mark? This program has been well publicized, and it is common knowledge that all 11-year-olds in the state of Michigan will soon be carrying new laptops worth \$1,500.00 or more.

The single vendor concept, unlike the TTI (Teacher Technology Initiative), will add additional cost to districts that are trained and supported using a platform other than the state vendor. There will be additional costs (both monetary and labor intense) for those districts that have purchased equipment and software in accordance with their District Technology Plan which is required by state and federal government. What measures will the proponents of this initiative take to aid districts to implement it in such a way that would be within the context of the local (approved) technology plan? What flexibility will districts have with the funds awarded?

The intent of the program is that students will have access anytime, anywhere to educational research via the Internet. Who is going to be the Internet provider at the students' homes? These are local district computers loaned to students; do the federal CIPA requirements apply to these wireless devices when connecting at home? The Middle Cities Educational Technology Task Force believes that all of the questions posed in this document are worthy of consideration by all stakeholders since the way this initiative is implemented and supported can have enormous implications and consequences for the students, parents, employees, and communities of participating districts.

Based on the analysis of current available information, the Educational Technology Task Force asserts that the benefits to a district implementing this program may not outweigh the drawbacks. To some degree, there is a collective feeling by the task force that this program is politically fueled and the political impetus driving this initiative may have resulted in hasty planning and decision-making. This lack of cautious foresight may affect successful implementation by individual school districts. As the project has been communicated, the task force has concerns regarding the level of planning and flexibility inherent in this program, and that, coupled with the economic situation the State of Michigan and local school districts are currently enduring, lends to the task force's position. The MCEA Educational Technology Task Force cannot recommend participation in this program as monies being wisely spent without analysis of the additional information that would result from answers to the questions posed in this document, as well as other questions not mentioned that may be district specific.

In closing, the task force welcomes further discussion and additional information that may assist in reconsideration of the presented position.