

Handouts for:

## Ending the Range Wars: Collaborative Technology Planning and Policy-Making

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**Description:** The best technology policies are ones developed by a wide range of stakeholders. Learn how an advisory committee makes good decisions related to technology implementations.

**Objectives:**

1. The participant will understand the problems associated with technology plans and policies not collaboratively produced.
2. The participant will learn the requirements of an effective technology advisory committee.
3. The participant will understand the power of a committee voice as opposed to a single individual when advocating for technology use and recognize how group decisions are usually better than those made by a single individual.

**Timeline:**

1. Introduction - 5 minutes
2. Discussion/Lecture - 30 minutes
3. Collaborative decision making activity
4. Questions and comments - 5 minutes



American Memories Collection

## So what is with *those* people?

<b>Cattle ranchers (IT personnel, technicians, network specialists)</b>	<b>Shepherders (Classroom teachers, librarians, building administrators)</b>
Highest priority	Highest priority
Greatest fear	Greatest fear
Most annoying attribute	Most annoying attribute
Unique expertise	Unique expertise
Common goals	

### (Edward De bono?) Activity

Imagine a situation in which many students and teachers in your school have laptops or PDAs with wireless capabilities. The question arises about providing building-wide wireless Internet access. Using the form below, jot down some ideas about what may be good, what may be bad, and what is interesting about this scenario. (You must have some ideas in each column.)

What's good?	What's bad?	What's interesting?

## A good policy for policies

*Is there any definitive answer to what should or should not be filtered to meet CIPA requirements? Our technology director has been checking more little boxes on our filter. Just yesterday he decided to block Hotmail-type e-mail that students use to contact each other and experts for projects. – Librarian*

*The administrators in our district have banned the use of cell phones and pagers by all students. I want my daughter to carry her cell phone. With all the school shootings, she needs to be able to call in case of an emergency! – Parent*

*Teachers and students are saving program files in their online storage area. Wasn't this set up to be just for documents? Having programs on that server makes it extremely time consuming to search for viruses. I am just going to delete these kinds of files when I find them- Technician*

Most library media specialists and school staff members realize that technology is double-edged sword. Almost any device can be used in ways that are disruptive, annoying, unethical and even destructive. Technology is neutral: The same hammer that builds the cathedral can be used to break its windows. Just a few examples:

Technology	Appropriate use	Not-so appropriate use
WWW	Source of great information for school projects	Source of pornography, ready-made term papers, and hate group propaganda
Cell phone	Means of communication in emergencies	Means of disrupting classes
Personal digital assistants	Devices used to carry e-texts, schedules, scientific programs, etc.	Devices used to cheat wirelessly
Email	Ability to share ideas with experts, classmates, and teachers.	Ability to harass others, waste time, and share ideas with dangerous strangers

For some reason, many schools have not yet figured out how to create good policies and rules about technology use and that results in complaints like the ones above. Under the worst circumstances poor or non-existent policies have created what seems like a new range war between not cattle ranchers and sheepherders, but between educators (too often librarians) and the technologists. Judging from what I hear, it sounds like the techies are winning by default since they have, as the librarian above puts it, the know-how to check “the little box.” Knowledge of what is possible and not possible with technological devices combined with a carefully selected sharing of that knowledge gives techies power and credibility, and makes rules they would like to set difficult to dispute.

I have a little mantra I often ask teachers, librarians and administrators to repeat in our district - "Technicians don't make school policy. Technicians don't make school policy. Technicians don't make school policy." It sinks in if people say it two or three times with feeling.

Please don't think I am beating up on technicians. They do indeed have knowledge that is critical to the vital operation of technology in schools. Plus they have the responsibility for data security, network bandwidth conservation, and the reliable operations of what are usually far too many machines for a single person to maintain. My sympathies are with them when they wish to make rules that will decrease the likelihood of more technical problems than are already on a *very* full plate.

Yet these hard-working people often do not understand parent, teacher, librarian or student goals and concerns. They may not understand why it so important that kids have access to as wide a range of information as possible. They may not understand that teachers need some flexibility to load software for preview on their computers. They may not understand why it is important that the library catalog and online reference sources be available from the homes of students and staff. They may not understand that the librarian needs the password to desktop security program in the computer lab.

So who in a school *should* ultimately make the technology rules? In our district, these decisions are made by our district technology advisory committee, the same folks that make lots of technology planning and budget decisions. This committee is comprised primarily of educators - teachers, media specialists, and administrators - but also includes parents, students, businesspersons, college faculty members, and public librarians. And of course the committee includes our technical staff for their important input on security, compatibility and implementation issues. And we DO listen to everyone. Building technology committees should work in exactly the same way.

This has worked well for us. On the difficult filtering issue, the committee decided that as a result of CIPA, we would install a filter, but it would be set at its least restrictive setting. Any teacher or librarian can have a blocked site be unblocked by simply requesting it – no questions asked. Adults are required to continue to monitor student access to the Internet as if no filter were present. The technicians now know that it is the responsibility of the teaching staff to see that students do not access inappropriate materials, not theirs. This is a good policy decision that could not have been reached without a variety of voices heard during its making.

An open dialog about concerns, responsibilities and priorities related to technology is essential for its successful use in schools. Not everyone will agree with the decisions made, but at least everyone will have a better understanding of why they were made. Educational range wars aren't healthy for anyone – especially the little lambs we serve.

## Advisory Advice

*Here is the way it should be. When people who decide policy sit down at the table to talk about technology in their schools, the FIRST people to speak should be the educators. "Here's what we need technology to do for our kids..." But, from what I hear, it goes more like this: At that same table the tech specialists (network, security, support, etc) speak first and say "Here, have this cool stuff. Here is what you are allowed to do with it."*

*Big, big difference. Many factors contribute, of course, but this overriding push to be safe is beating teachers down. Let teachers speak first. Then listen, and adapt to THEM. Make security work for teachers, not the other way around.*

*Simplistic and idealistic? For sure. But change this basic conversation, and the prospects for adoption and true technology integration surge to warp speed. – Classroom teacher from WWWedu listserv, March 2005*

No, this month's column is not sponsored by the Department of Redundancy Department. I am advising you to form an advisory committee if you don't already have one.

Such a group can be a great help for the media specialist or technology coordinator at either the building or the district level. My advisory committees have given me terrific ideas, huge challenges, and timely warnings over the years. The first group I formed was just a few teachers and a couple of parents from the high school where I was the media specialist. For a little wine and cheese, these wise folks would leave their families and far more interesting activities to come to my house and talk about libraries and computers and how adolescents learn best. We hammered out an articulated vision of what a media program should do. They helped me set my professional goals, and then listened when I reported my trials and triumphs. It was the best deal I ever made. My advisory committees have become larger and more formal since that time, but they still serve very much the same purpose: to help me make better decisions.

After having been served by and served on a number of these groups, I offer some advisory advice:

1. Keep your group small. Any committee much larger than a dozen is difficult to get together and difficult to bring to consensus. If you need a much larger representation, keep your full meetings few and do most of your work in sub-committees.
2. Work for a wide representation of stakeholders who serve limited terms. My current committee is comprised of teachers, students, board members and administrators, of course. But parents, business people, a multi-type library representative, and post-secondary educators also serve. Our computer coordinator and network manager are permanent members. Next year I would like to add a representative from community education. As our schools work to become more of a whole community asset, this person will be important. We don't have a set selection process for membership, but no one serves for more than 3 years. Remember when selecting your members, that communication is a two-way street. What your representatives learn at your meetings will be taken back and shared with that person's colleagues. Great public relations.
3. Have few, but important, meetings. Advisory committees only need to meet 3 to 4 times a year. A fall meeting is a good time to establish working subcommittees and refine the year's goals. One or two meetings to work on budget or policy issues in the winter and a final spring meeting to review the year's work and set objectives for the coming school year are usually enough. Setting our meeting dates for the year at our first meeting makes them a priority for many members. Take attendance, and include who is there in your minutes. There are several guides to running effective meetings on the market. Buy one and read it. Your committee will thank you, and it beats trying to remember Roberts Rules of Order.
4. Send out good agendas and write clear, concise minutes that are quickly distributed. If members see agenda items which they think are important (how the budget to be divided up this year, for example), they'll be more likely to attend. All my advisory group members use e-mail and we rarely send hard copies of anything through the mail. I e-mail myself a copy of all agendas and minutes for easy filing and retrieval.

5. Finally, give your group well-defined responsibilities. A committee should not be making your professional decisions for you, but it should have the power to shape the direction of the media/technology program. And well it should, since these folks, as well as you, will be held responsible for the program's weaknesses as well as its strengths. My advisory committee works on:
- long range planning and goals
  - setting my department's yearly objectives
  - creating budgeting formulas and procedures, and reviewing building technology plans
  - policy making

And that's about all the work we can do.

Ours can be a professionally lonely profession. In all but the largest schools, there is rarely more than a single media specialist or tech coordinator. Kindergarten teachers, custodians, coaches, special education aides, and administrators outnumber us. An advisory committee is one way of giving ownership of the media technology program to a body of stakeholders in the building. If the goals, the budget, the assessments, the long range plan are known to be important to more than just a single person, when they are presented to decision-makers they will carry more weight. And if your advisory group includes parents, community members and students, it will be seen as a very important body indeed.

<b>Your advisory committee</b>
<p><b>Membership</b></p> <p>Representatives from:</p> <p>Length of service on committee:</p> <p>How chosen:</p>
<b>Responsibilities and authority</b>
<p><b>Meetings</b></p> <p>Number</p> <p>When</p> <p>Chair</p> <p>Agendas/minutes responsibility</p>

## Librarians Are From Venus; Technologists Are From Mars

While it has not quite reached the proportions of the famous feuds between the cattle ranchers and sheepherders, there is definitely tension in many schools between the librarians (and classroom teachers) and the technologists. In case you need help, I've developed a short field guide to help you tell the difference between the species:

	Librarians	Technologists
<b>Primary gender</b>	Female	Male
<b>Background</b>	Frustrated English teacher	Frustrated math/science teacher
<b>Reason for entering field</b>	Likes books and quiet places	Likes gadgets and do-hickies
<b>Hairstyle</b>	Hair in bun	Hair in ponytail
<b>Eyewear</b>	Cat's eye glasses (neck chain optional)	Horn rim glasses (tape optional)
<b>Accessories</b>	Pins and scarves with book motif	Pocket protector which holds small screwdriver
<b>When asked for help</b>	Hovers	Hides
<b>When opposed</b>	Whines	Sulks
<b>When presented with technology problem</b>	Always blames the equipment	Always blames the user
<b>Most often seen by others</b>	Cataloging, reshelving, stamping, shush - ing	Fixing, carrying, wiring, muttering
<b>Seen by administrators</b>	Replaceable by clerk	Replaceable by technician

I expect you can add to this brief (facetious) list. The folks I've known on whom these descriptions are based are rapidly disappearing from schools. In some schools, their places aren't be refilled. Classroom teachers, clerks, technicians, or contracted services are doing the daily work that they once did just to keep libraries open and computers working. These are usually cold, benighted places where small children sit in stock still straight lines, waiting in quiet desperation for the next set of worksheets or computer drill. There is little progress being made toward making these schools places where more children are being taught more important skills in more effective ways.

But in other more enlightened schools, a new professional has arisen. Education has not yet established a commonly agreed upon name for this hybrid breed which has taken the best, most professional tasks from the practices of library science and technology. But I've these folks in action. For the sake of this little piece, let's use the name "Educator X." A field guide for this rare bird might read:

	Educator X
<b>Primary gender</b>	Equally divided between males and females
<b>Background</b>	Librarian, technologist or classroom teacher who has had the confidence and commitment to grow and learn.
<b>Reasons for entering field</b>	Wanting to help students and teachers by improving education. Fascination with information and its uses in all formats.
<b>Accessories</b>	Professional journals, professional network, and competence in technology use.
<b>When asked for help</b>	Teaches
<b>When opposed</b>	Asks questions, builds consensus, and adheres to principles

<b>When presented with technology problem</b>	Looks for root cause and long term solutions
<b>Most often seen by others</b>	Teaching teachers or team teaching in the classroom
<b>Seen by administrators</b>	As leader and indispensable ally in educational restructuring
<b>Important tasks not always seen by others</b>	Constantly familiarizing oneself with new books, audio-visual materials, software, on-line resources. Trying new educational strategies. Working with curriculum committees.
<b>Finds time to get important tasks done by</b>	Delegating duties to an adequate clerical and technical support staff.

These folks bring to the educational table critical knowledge of the issues of copyright, intellectual freedom, and information literacy. They contribute an understanding of the use and potential uses of networks, educational software, and computerized productivity tools. Educator X has a “whole school” view and works to see that information technologies are integrated into all curricular areas.

These folks don’t just magically appear. They are grown (or migrate!) to habitats that have some of these characteristics:

1. The institutions in which they work actually have a desire for change.
2. Their institutions provide Educator X with time to work and learn. That means they do not provide teacher prep time or baby-sit studyhalls. It means that they do not teach six classes and have an “extra” prep time to do technology or library work. Integrating information technologies into the school is their FULL TIME JOB.
3. Educator X environments provide clerical and technical support. Books must be reshelved, software must be loaded, and equipment must be checked out if the school’s daily activities are to continue. If paid support staff is not available, the professional usually winds up doing those tasks rather than the planning, teaching and supervising ones. Fact of nature.
4. These schools understand that Educator X needs staff development opportunities above and beyond those offered to the classroom teacher. Their schools find resources to send them to conferences, workshops, and planning meetings dealing not just with technology or libraries, but also assessment, graduation standards, and other areas of curricular reform with which libraries and technology might assist. Educator X then becomes the in-house support person for broad reform initiatives.
5. The people who do the hiring of all school personnel look at “people” skills first and “technical” skills second when hiring for such positions. Little things like the ability to write and speak clearly, respond to others with empathy, to handle conflict, and supervise others are viewed as more important than being able to catalog a videotape or install a network card.
6. Schools in which Educator X thrives have high expectations of all their staff, but especially of their leaders. Their governing boards expect plans, goals, timelines, and reports. They expect clear and regular communication with parents and publics. They expect responsible, visionary leadership.

The names don’t really matter much. I have know Educator X’s who are called librarians, technology directors, media specialists, information specialists, computer coordinators, information literacy teacher, teacher librarians, etc. Those of you who fill the Educator X role know you are. Those of you who want to become an Educator X or want to hire one know the habitats in which they thrive.

## Keep Your Technicians by Keeping Them Happy

I don't know any place in this country that isn't suffering from the shortage of competent computer technicians. Librarians, teachers, and administrators all know the value of the guy or gal who can get that temperamental, but critical machine up and doing what it supposed to do. But like most school employees, our techs are overworked and underpaid.

Yet we've had the good fortune to hire and keep most of these valuable folks. Here are some practices that might help your school do the same:

### **1. Pay a competitive salary. Or be *very* flexible.**

Administrators don't always understand why a "technician" should be paid more than a beginning "professional" teacher. Well, it's called a free-market economy. When skills, like materials, are in short supply, their value increases. And good techs are in short supply, indeed. New Jersey Institute of Technology maintains an interesting website with the results of salary surveys for computer professionals at <http://www.cis.njit.edu/~moyers/databases.html>. Check to see what the real world is paying in your area.

Clever places can and do compensate folks in other ways as well. Mankato schools don't pay top dollar (we hardly pay bottom dollar), but we can be flexible with hours and days worked. This gives us a larger pool of skilled workers from which to draw, including computer science college students. We also offer comp time so long as it is well documented.

### **2. Provide great training opportunities and encourage professional growth.**

More than most of us, technicians realize that additional training to develop new skills is a real investment – in oneself. In no field does one's skill become more dated, more rapidly than in the computer science field. Generous training opportunities – school financed, of course – benefit both the tech and the institution. Oh, while we pay for the training, we ask that the techs pay for any tests needed for new certifications.

### **3. Supply the tools needed for the job.**

Our techs have their own workspaces, decent computers, and the proper tools for the job. Those tools include not just screwdrivers, chip pullers and line testers, but cell phones, manuals, telephone extensions, PDAs, portable hard drives, and diagnostic software. While as a true Minnesotan I can repair almost anything with duct tape alone, I do realize that the proper tools make the job much easier.

### **4. Give everyone decision-making power.**

There is nothing more demoralizing to a technician than having a Dilbert-esque pointy-haired boss making ill-informed decisions that make the job more difficult than it has to be. There are days that I am sure my techs are convinced that I don't know my ASCII from a hole in the ground, but they also know that I seek, hear, and value their advice. Again, there are more ways of showing people that they have value than just money.

### **5. Keep everyone in the loop.**

If the techs are going to help give good advice, it means they need to be aware of the "big picture" as well as the details. When folks understand the educational goals behind the decisions made, it gives a higher purpose to one's job. For example, knowing that involved parents can significantly improve school performance, maintaining that website or email server becomes important. I believe that education really is a calling, an avocation, and that both teacher and technician can truly be educators.

### **6. Defend and respect your technician.**

Unfortunately, most of us are not in a very good mood when we need the services of a computer technician.

- The computer just crashed and I don't remember when I last backed up my files.
- The printer isn't responding and I need that worksheet for next hour's class.
- The whole class is ready to do research and the Internet connection is down.

Next to assistant principals, I'll bet my techs deal with more unhappy, stressed-out folks than anyone else on staff. My job is to keep people communicating even when a fix doesn't work the first time or when the part is delayed or when an outside contractor lets us down. Any time you as a supervisor can provide a buffer between the cranky user and the technician who is operating in good faith, do it. It'll keep people loyal and on your staff.

## 7. **Keep in touch with reality.**

It's not always easy to remember, but life continues even when not everything is working. A sense of perspective on everyone's part can lead to a happier work environment and happier workers all around. I help my technicians do their best, to strive to provide good service, to use good communication skills, to anticipate problems before they appear, and to meet both professional and personal goals. The reality is that the satisfaction from doing a job well and being perceived as important for many of us is preferable to the higher remuneration in the stress-filled world of corporate America. Capitalize on it.

## from Machines are the Easy Part: People are the Hard Part.

<<http://www.doug-johnson.com/machines.html>>

## 27. A policy mantra.

Every now and again I hear: "I can't do that because our technician said I couldn't." Which usually surprises me as Technology Director since I could not remember having made such a decision.

It's at this point I have to ask that teacher or administrator to repeat our policy mantra:

**Technicians do not make policy. Technicians do not make policy. Technicians do not make policy.**

Policies and rules regarding technology use should come from educators, not technologists. Of course, smart educators will get lots of input from their techies before making policy.

## 28. Keep technicians and paraprofessionals in the loop.

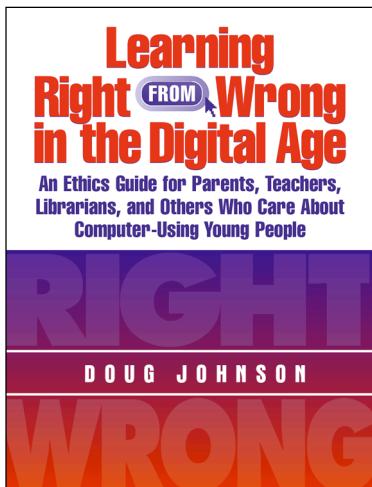
OK, let's be fair here. I just wrote:

"Policies and rules regarding technology use should come from educators, not technologists."

The corollary to this is that smart educators will make sure technicians and paraprofessionals understand the important role they play in the educational process as well. Such an understanding helps these folks prioritize their often-overwhelming workload. It helps them make good technical decisions. It helps give them job satisfaction that their paychecks probably do not.

When a NASA custodian was once asked what his job was, he replied, "To put a man on the moon."

What would your techies say their jobs were?



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