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Envision Your IT Department
as a Strategic Partner

Five Key Indicators of IT Maturity

Improved Service for Students and Faculty
of this Alaska District

IT Service Management—First Steps

K-12 IT By the Numbers

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Work Smarter, Not Harder: Improve IT Maturity to Do More with Less

*Here are **five key elements** that will allow school district IT staff to support new technologies more effectively*

It's no secret that most K-12 technology departments are stretched thin, and this affects how well schools can implement and support new classroom technologies.

According to the latest [TeamDynamix K-12 Pulse Study](#), 45% of K-12 technology leaders say they don't have enough personnel they need to support the EdTech assets they've already purchased—never mind trying to support new systems and devices.

This is a real problem, because the demand for more technologies in schools is only going to increase. In the same survey, roughly a third of IT leaders say they want to implement 1:1 computing in their schools, but they haven't yet accomplished this goal. What's more, emerging technologies such as virtual and augmented reality are poised to make significant inroads into classrooms within the next few years.



Clearly, K-12 IT departments will have to work smarter and do more with less if they are going to support the demand for new technologies. School systems with more mature IT departments are already doing this, using a combination of tools and practices to make more efficient use of existing resources.

This white paper will explore what it means to develop IT maturity in K-12 education. It will explain why this is critical if schools want to be able to implement new technologies effectively—and it will discuss five key elements of a more mature approach to IT management.

Envision Your IT Department as a Strategic Partner

In too many K-12 districts today, IT staff spend the bulk of their time reacting to technical problems that arise, rather than planning ahead to prevent new problems from occurring.

As an example, 59% of the participants ranked their self-service abilities at the low end of the IT maturity scale. While self-service would dramatically improve resource optimization and customer satisfaction, there has not been widespread adoption.

Reactive IT management isn't productive. Putting out fires all day diverts time and attention away from the really important matters, such as helping teachers and students use technology to enrich learning. It also creates a stressful work environment for IT employees.



Justin Michaud

Senior IT Program Manager
Matanuska-Susitna Borough
School District

Taking the time to plan ahead, and investing limited resources into tools that allow IT staff to be more productive, can help turn the tide.

IT maturity is about “moving from a break-fix mentality to having the IT department become a strategic partner” in helping the district meet its goals and objectives, says Justin Michaud, Senior IT Program Manager for Alaska's Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District.

When IT leaders are following industry best practices for using their time and resources more efficiently, they will have more opportunities to plan for and implement new technologies to support teaching and learning.

In other words, Michaud says, “they can demonstrate real value to their organization.”

Putting out fires all day diverts time and attention away from the really important matters, such as helping teachers and students use technology to enrich learning.



Five Key Indicators of IT Maturity

There are many aspects to developing a more mature approach to IT management in schools. Here are five key initiatives that can help IT staff become more effective.



Self-service portals

Does your school or district have a website where students, teachers, and administrators can find their own answers to commonly asked IT questions, as well as service catalogs and request forms for all types of IT services, from a single, convenient location? If not, then you're missing a key opportunity to reduce your service workload.

"Many IT departments end up answering the same questions over and over again," says Andrew Graf, Chief Product Strategist for TeamDynamix. This is very time-consuming—and it's a waste of staff labor. Having users consult a self-service portal before contacting IT with their questions can reduce inbound service requests by up to 70%, a review of TeamDynamix customer data suggests.

Besides freeing up IT staff to focus on other priorities, "self service empowers users. It gives them tools to do their jobs more effectively," Michaud says.

In a survey of K-12 technology leaders commissioned by TeamDynamix, 16% of respondents said their top IT challenge is improving response times and service levels. Yet, 59% ranked their self-service abilities at the low end of the IT maturity scale. Implementing a self-service portal allows users to help themselves where possible, which often leads to a faster resolution of their problem.

Using a self-service portal is also less expensive than having IT staff resolve tech-related issues. An analysis from the Help Desk Institute shows that the average labor cost of a service call is \$22; for self-service resolution, it's just \$2.



Andrew Graf
Co-Founder and
Chief Product Strategist
TeamDynamix



Knowledge-centered service

With knowledge-centered service (KCS), organizations create a knowledge base of articles explaining IT procedures, solutions to problems, answers to frequently asked questions, and so on. This knowledge base feeds the organization's self-service portal, but it also serves as a useful resource for IT staff as they seek to resolve issues.

Developing a knowledge base takes time, and it requires discipline to adhere to the process. But this investment can pay big dividends for school district IT departments over time. "Organizations with knowledge-centered service see a 30% to 50% increase in the number of IT service requests that are resolved at the time of the initial call," Graf says. A knowledge base also reduces the amount of time needed to train new IT staff.

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In building a knowledge base, IT employees create content as a by-product of answering questions and resolving problems for end users. In this way, documenting responses becomes an organic part of a school system's business process. K-12 leaders might be surprised at how quickly a knowledge base can come together if they follow the process with rigor.

"We had one client who started at the beginning of January, with the goal of creating a few hundred knowledge base articles by July 1," Graf says. "By the end of the school year, they already had a few thousand articles created."



Endpoint control and security standards

Cyber security was the second biggest concern of participants in the TeamDynamix K-12 Pulse Study; 29% of respondents highlighted this area as their top priority. With **at least 300 known security breaches** in K-12 school systems since January 2016, this should come as no surprise.

Schools are attractive targets for hackers because of the wealth of personal information about students and staff they must maintain with limited resources. Making this task more challenging is the number of endpoint devices—from personal computing devices such as laptops, tablets, and smart phones to "Internet of Things" objects such as printers, sensors, and security cameras—with access to school and district networks.



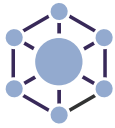
Each of these endpoints creates a potential entry point for hackers, and so K-12 technology leaders need a way to secure and control these devices. An endpoint security system should include full visibility into all devices currently on the network, as well as a method for authenticating devices and provisioning them with appropriate network privileges when they try to log on.



“To have the best shot at avoiding IT problems, compliance with security updates is essential.”

Many breaches occur because a device or server’s operating system has not been kept up to date with the latest security patches. “To have the best shot at avoiding IT problems, compliance with security updates is essential,” Graf says. But IT leaders can’t rely on end users to do this for themselves—and manually updating devices isn’t feasible for IT staff. This is why effective endpoint control should include a way to apply security patches automatically to all school-owned devices as these updates become available.

Mature IT management also includes full data backup. Ransomware works by holding data hostage. This can be a disaster if you don’t have all of your data backed up off site, but if you do, then it’s only a nuisance. To keep data backup from becoming yet another chore for IT staff, the best solution is an automated tool that backs up data from all of your systems into the cloud at regularly scheduled intervals.



Use of the ITIL framework

ITIL (Information Technology Infrastructure Library) is a set of detailed best practices for IT service management that focuses on aligning IT services with the needs of an organization.

The framework consists of five volumes that outline steps for IT departments to understand their organization's goals and the needs of stakeholders; turn their service strategy into a plan for delivering on these organizational goals; develop and improve on capabilities for introducing new IT services; manage ongoing operations; and foster continuous improvement.

Using this non-proprietary framework can help school district IT departments manage risks, mitigate disruptions in service, establish more cost-effective systems for delivering IT services, and improve relationships with end users. ITIL documentation is available free of charge online, and certification is also available for IT leaders.



A focus on change management

About 80% of unplanned downtime is inadvertently caused by IT staff themselves, according to the IT Process Institute. For instance, a technician might be trying to update a switch, but it accidentally brings the entire network down. "The firefighting that ensues consumes valuable IT time, and it might have been avoided through better change management," Graf notes.

Following the change management best practices outlined in the ITIL framework can reduce the unforeseen consequences that arise from improper planning and controls. Change management helps IT leaders think through the potential impact of making a change, then plan an effective pathway that will cause the least disruption.



Improved Service for Students and Faculty of this Alaska District

Like most K-12 school systems, Alaska's Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District finds funding to be a constant struggle.

The district's IT department, which consists of 32 full-time staff members, must support nearly 14,000 devices used by 18,800 students and approximately 2,200 staff in 47 schools and three additional facilities spread across a geographic area the size of West Virginia.

This task would be nearly impossible without improving the maturity of its IT management. But with the help of certain tools and processes, Senior IT Program Manager Justin Michaud and his colleagues are delivering more value to the district—while adopting a “customer-focused” mindset.

For instance, the district uses a self-service portal and knowledge base hosted by TeamDynamix, which allows users to resolve many of their own IT issues—such as resetting their network password.

“IT maturity is not going to happen overnight. It requires process changes. The way you look at things has to change over time.”

Students and staff can search the district's knowledge base for articles or advice pertaining to their question. “We have made it easy for end users to find what they are looking for,” says Michaud. “We're trying to get people the help they need more expediently. Gone are the days of filling out a support ticket and waiting a week for service.”

Matanuska-Susitna has identified a “digital first responder” (DFR) in each school. These are teachers who are paid a stipend to help resolve issues that users can't solve for themselves. If the DFR can't fix the problem, then it gets escalated to an IT support employee.

The TeamDynamix platform helps IT staff keep track of which service requests are still open, so no request falls through the cracks. It also provides valuable metrics that help IT leaders measure their success in resolving issues, so they can set goals for continuous improvement.



“If we’re not meeting our service level targets, it jumps out at us now,” Michaud says. Having the ability to measure success has helped the district’s IT department reduce how long it takes to respond to IT problems.

In moving toward a more mature approach to IT management, Michaud and his colleagues now project costs and manage projects more effectively. In addition, IT staff closely monitor software usage to see if they should renew contracts as they expire. “You need tools in place to help you make those decisions,” Michaud says.

He observes: “IT maturity is not going to happen overnight. It requires process changes. The way you look at things has to change over time.”

IT Service Management—First Steps

Adopting a more mature approach to IT management can seem like a daunting undertaking. School district IT leaders can start by defining the problems they most want to solve.

“Identify problems that are easy to articulate, and then work backwards from there,” Graf recommends. “When you begin with simple problem statements, it’s easy to see what to focus on—and then you can choose the right tools and processes that will help you address these issues.”

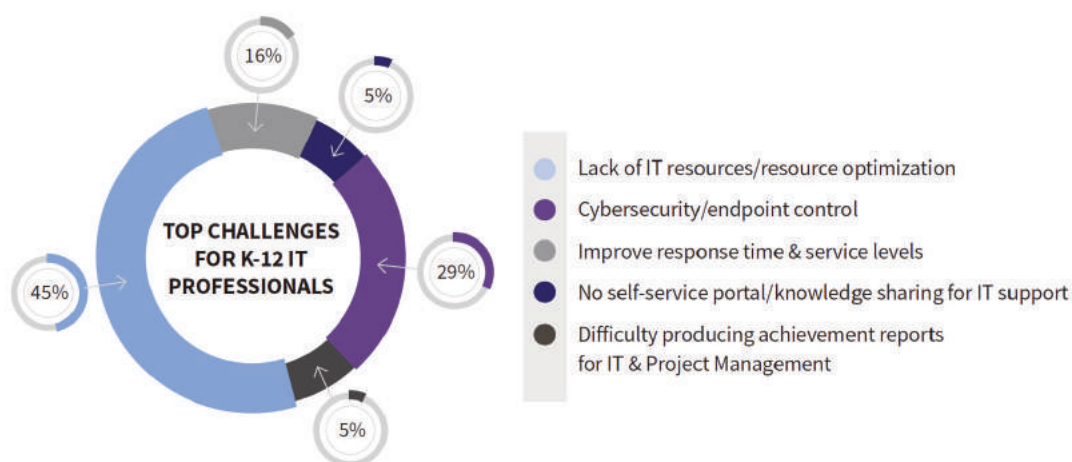
With IT maturity, a lack of resources doesn’t have to stifle the adoption of new technologies for teaching and learning. By optimizing their use of resources, K-12 IT departments can “spend less time on the tasks they are doing now, which frees them up to do many new things,” Graf concludes.



K-12 IT By the Numbers

In many K-12 districts, the number of IT staff have not increased in direct proportion to the number of devices or systems that need support.

These staffing constraints make it difficult for IT departments to meet the technology needs of staff and students. Here is where they struggle the most.



- **59% rank their self-service capabilities as low maturity**
- **68% give their portal 3 stars or fewer (out of 5)**

Improving IT maturity can help school districts solve these challenges by doing more with less. By using resources more efficiently, K-12 IT departments can spend less time responding to problems and more time becoming a strategic partner in teaching and learning.



About TeamDynamix

TeamDynamix empowers K-12 districts, colleges and universities, and state & local governments to work together smarter, faster, and better by aligning resources and processes. With a unified service and project management platform, TeamDynamix customers can focus on their mission to deliver tangible outcomes for their communities.

Learn more at www.teamdynamix.com

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