

## Are You a TCO-Savvy School District?

By Sara Fitzgerald

Is Your School District Savvy about Total Cost of Ownership?

Total Cost of Ownership was a concept developed in the mid-1980s as companies began to wrestle with the costs of moving their business from a mainframe environment to a client-server architecture with a computer on every desktop. Now school districts are also struggling with similar questions concerning the best strategies for managing the long-term costs of operating their computer networks.

The "Taking TCO to the Classroom" project was started to help school leaders understand the long-term costs involved in building and operating a network of computers. That way they will be able to budget adequately to cover all the associated costs-and build and operate their networks in the most cost-efficient way to achieve their technology goals.

TCO includes all of the costs involved in operating networks and computers, whether leased or owned. In the education environment, a better understanding of TCO will help school officials do better budget planning and make smarter choices when they deploy a network. It can be used to help control costs and make strategic decisions.

This chart was developed by the Consortium for School Networking and its TCO project to help school districts determine, at a glance, whether they are following strategies that have proven to be the most cost-efficient. More information is available at the project's Web site (<http://www.cosn.org/tco>).

Email: Contact Sara Fitzgerald through CoSN's TCO Web site (<http://www.cosn.org/tco>).

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## What Is Your School District's Total Cost of Ownership Type?

	The "TCO-Savvy" District	The "Doing the Best We Can" District	The "Worry About It Tomorrow" District
Professional Development	Devotes 15-30% of its budget to staff development	Provides some staff training, but not at times that are convenient or when staff is ready to put the lessons to work	Assumes that teachers and staff "will learn on the job"
Support	Provides computer support at a ratio of at least one support person for every 50 to 70 computers or one person for every 500 computers in a closely managed networked environment	Relies on a patchwork of teachers, students and overworked district staff to maintain network and fix problems. Does not track the amount of time its network is down or computers are not in use	Relies on the "hey Joe" sort of informal support

<b>Software</b>	Recognizes that the greater diversity of software packages and operating systems, the more the support that will be required. Makes provisions for regular upgrading of software packages	Utilizes centralized software purchasing, but choice of application and respective support left to individual schools and/or staff members	Expects support personnel to manage whatever software happens to be installed on a district computer
<b>Replacement Costs</b>	Budgets to replace computers on a regular schedule, usually every five years, whether leased or purchased	Plans to replace computers when they no longer can be repaired	Assumes that when computers are purchased with 20-year bonds that they will last forever
<b>Retrofitting</b>	Recognizes that many school buildings will require modifications of electrical, heating and cooling systems, as well as asbestos removal, to accommodate new technology, and budgets accordingly. When possible, makes these improvements when schools are being built or renovated.	Understands minimum and recommended requirements for electrical and other infrastructure improvements and incorporates them when funding is available	Pulls the wires and then blows the fuses
<b>Connectivity</b>	Plans its network to provide connections that provide enough bandwidth to manage current--and future--needs, especially multimedia applications	Has the bandwidth it needs today, but has no plan for scaling it upward as demand grows	A phone and a modem, what more do you need?