



Chief Technology Officers as Strategic Leaders and Enablers of Education: What Are We Doing to Increase Professional Development and Continuously Improve?

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I started my professional career as a software engineer back in the 80's supporting NASA's space shuttle transportation program. Because the industry was predominantly male, there was a strong push to move women with technical skills into leadership positions. I was at the right place at the right time. Within 10 years I moved up to a program manager of the safety, reliability, and quality assurance contract. Sounds glamorous but I was married with three young daughters and caught between balancing career and family. That's when I decided to start a new career in public education as a Director of Technology. I remember thinking, I'll step down, take an easy job at a school district, be off during the holidays, get the kids through elementary school and then get back in the game of leading complex technology programs. Now 25 years later serving as a Chief Technology Officer (CTO) in public education, I can say this job is more complex than I ever imagined. It's easier to transport and sustain astronauts in space than it is to transport and sustain the technology networks and systems needed to educate students. The role of the CTO is more demanding and more strategic than ever!

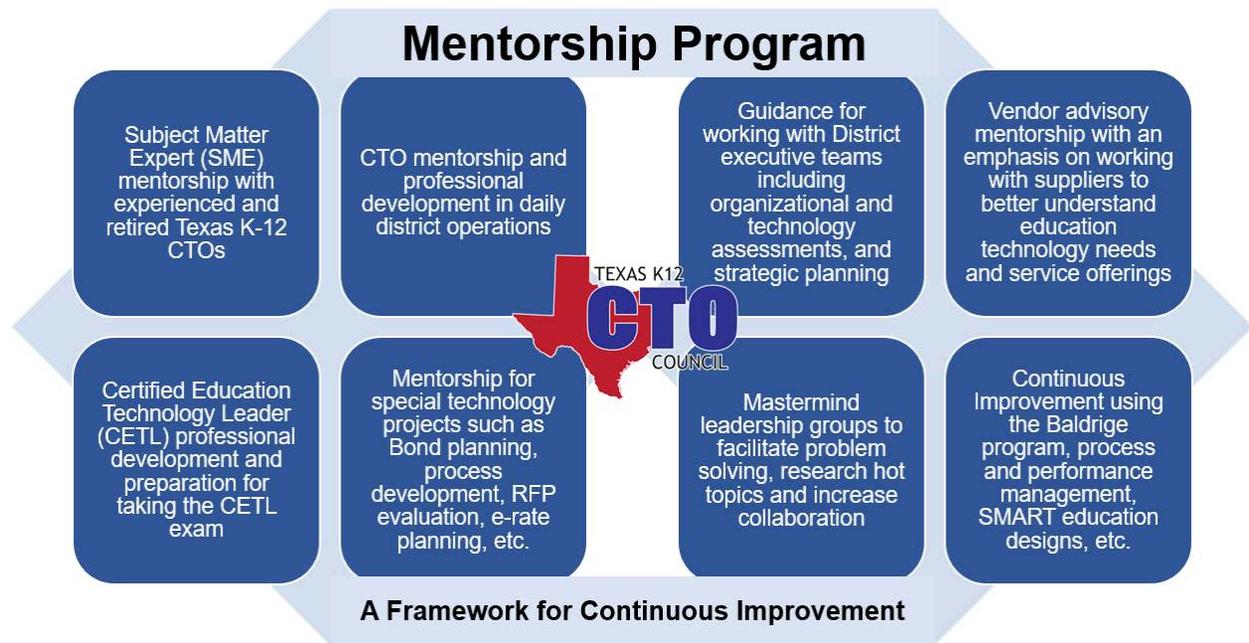
Technology is a key enabler for delivering education. I remember walking into the administration building one morning and I thought, there must be a fire drill. Everyone was walking out. I said, where is everyone going? One of the administrators said, the network is down. We'll return when it comes back up. Really? I thought to myself, how did we get this job done 20 years ago? Now every process requires technology. Administrators can't get their jobs done without the network. This generation of students can't imagine learning without technology. It's an integral part of their lifestyle. Teachers can't envision teaching without technology either. It's a critical component of the learning process. Testing is online. Instructional materials including textbooks are web-based. Business systems are in the cloud. The cost of devices such as tablets, laptops, smartphones, and wearable technologies are affordable both for school and home use. Students and teachers bring two and three devices to school expecting to be ubiquitously and wirelessly connected at all times. Cybersecurity concerns are at an all-time high. While budgets for education continue to shrink, the demand for more technology continues to grow exponentially.

What does this mean for education? Technology leadership is a strategic position. We are enablers of education. With higher expectations, regardless of the amount of experience, education technology leaders need superior skills. We must collaborate and continuously improve if we plan to be successful. We need well-defined strategies to deliver education better, faster, and cheaper. That's why the Texas K-12 CTO Council, a state chapter of the Consortium for School Networking [CoSN], is rolling out a new education technology leader mentorship program in 2018-2019. As a premier organization for CTOs in Texas schools, the purpose of the organization is to assist Texas K-12 school districts in understanding how to plan for the use and successful implementation of information technology in Texas schools and advocate for districts' technology needs to improve student learning.

The Council’s mentorship framework is based on CoSN’s Certified Education Technology Leader (CETL) program which is comprised of three primary categories that sum up the work we do in the education technology field. These categories encompass ten specific skill areas that hone in on the responsibilities and knowledge needed to be a successful education technology leader.



CTOs are innovation officers and security leaders. We are at the core of all major decisions because school districts are powered by technology and the Internet of Things (IoT). Our roles will continue to grow and change. We must elevate our thinking by adding value through knowledge intelligence with high-capacity and high-resiliency services. As technology continues to evolve, the pace is faster than ever before. It will require a greater focus on professional development and a team of experienced mentors working to help one another if we are to survive and continuously improve!



The council's mentoring program will be introduced at the summer conference on June 20-21, 2018 in Austin, TX. www.texask12ctocouncil.org/epages/summerclinic. For more information on the Texas K-12 CTO Council or to become a member, visit us on the web at www.texask12ctocouncil.org.