

Looking Back

Growth

I have had occasion this year to notice how much things have changed within the area of technology for our district. As I have been working on larger projects, I have increasingly relied on my assistants, Joel and Brian. Their diligence and willingness to do whatever it takes to solve a problem have been a godsend to everyone in the district. They handle far more than computer problems. As technology has matured and expanded, there has been a related growth in things that people consider technology but which aren't computers at all. Things like projector maintenance, sound reinforcement for multi-media productions, telephone systems, and adding cabling where necessary are now on the plate in many ways. The flexibility and willingness to take on these new things is a key element in adapting to this new environment.

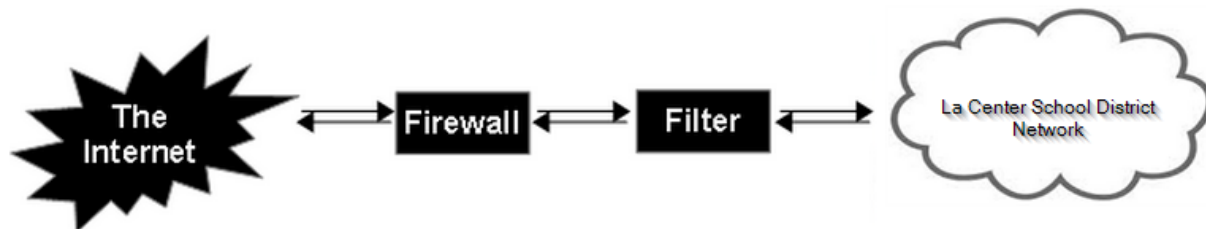
As we have grown, so have the choices available to us in terms of what we can and/or should provide continues to be an opportunity for us to grow, learn, adapt, and meet the complex needs which our teachers are championing. It isn't just getting the computer to print anymore... it's a whole gamut of related things that tie together in complicated ways. Having staff that acknowledges the challenge and are motivated to grow their skill set is a critical piece. We are extremely fortunate that Brian and Joel continue to build their skills and rise to the occasion. Without that spirit, our learning environments would be far less capable and far less progressive than they are now. It's easy to forget what it takes to make so many complicated and idiosyncratic systems work together. Luckily we have great people on board to help take the inevitable sting of growth out of the process as much as possible.

What's Current

Something up now

The most recent project I have worked on that may have caught your eye would be the replacement of our Web filtering solution. It's quite a sordid story with much anguish felt by both Mark and me. In the end, we arrived at a solution that takes into consideration both the need to control costs as well as to implement a truly key piece of our networking infrastructure. The importance of the role played by the filter would be hard to overemphasize.

Our filter sits "in line" on the network. That means it has a critical job within the network and touches every electron flowing in or out of our data network.



Given the critical nature of this device, it was important to me that, as unfortunate as it was that our current hardware failed, it did provide the opportunity to upgrade this critical component with more capabilities and more overall capacity for handling the amount of traffic we have currently and anticipate having as we grow.

Looking Forward

What's the plan

The upcoming SBAC testing is going to be a huge “high stakes” challenge for the entire state this year. While I’m sure that some other report touches on this, I mention it here because so much of what is happening in that arena is based on the expectation of nearly flawless technology implementations.

To prepare for this, we have identified the need to be able to provide students with an Internet-capable device. From the feedback we’ve gotten on our efforts to date, the Chromebook concept seems to have the most energy behind it. At this month’s board meeting, you will have a chance to meet and listen to Stephanie Holmes who is working in our Middle School to provide technology instruction to classes using Chromebooks. I think you’ll find her information to be interesting.

The SBAC testing is going to require a lot of wireless devices to be available for extended periods of time to complete the testing. In the last couple of weeks we have added another 90 Chromebooks to our “fleet” to support our Math program. These new Chromebooks will help take some of the demand off the eCarts we’ve acquired over the last few years. In addition, these will serve double duty by helping meet the demand created by SBAC testing. With our current devices, the newly purchased ones, and the ability to deploy thin client solutions where needed, we are in a much better position to provide the kind of access students will need.

Access to devices is just the start of making this complicated chain of events come to fruition. There are a lot more obstacles, er, excuse me, challenges that we’ll need to meet but providing sufficient equipment on which to take the tests is well underway.