Technology Director
Board Report
March 27, 2012

Looking Back

I was fortunate enough to attend the Northwest Council for Computers in Education (NCCE) conference in Seattle this month. This conference is a great place to see what is happening across our region on a wide variety of technology initiatives. There were sessions relating to iPads, one-to-one computing, discussion groups, curricular uses of technology and more. I appreciate the opportunity to attend something like this because of the breadth and depth of the conference scope but also because it provides time to network with others who face similar challenges in their schools.

What's Current

I mentioned last month that I had a contractor come and work on our wireless network. The upshot of that seems to be that during the time when we initially installed the wireless network, we did not have a V-LAN configured for our network. The network was set up with a security structure based entirely on Firewall rules (rather than basing security on our V-LAN). The significance of this may be a bit arcane, but perhaps an analogy would help. Let's imagine you are the curator of a museum. When the museum first opens, your security model is based on motion sensing devices and locks. Whenever there is a motion detected in a given location, an automatic locking system will clamp down on the relics displayed so that nobody can get at them. Well, after awhile you realize there may be a better way. A way where security isn't such a hassle with all those locks and motion sensors and keys, and keeping it all straight in your head about which zone should have which alarm - heaven forbid you would ever move something! So you change your whole structure so that the museum patrons can't walk wherever they want... you develop walkways through the museum which won't allow the patrons to get at things inappropriately. This new system is WAY easier to manage and understand (after it is set up) as well as the same method that other biggerer museums have been doing things. Nice. Well, pretty nice. The thing is that after you have that new walkway installed, you have to dismantle the old motion sensor/lock configuration. Which you'd think is pretty easy except that all your tools are for motion sensors and locks; your new walkway doesn't use those. Now what you need is to understand how the electric works for the lighting on the walkway. So I guess it's time to go get some new tools and read the manual for a bit. And of course, there are people packed into your museum, most of them well behaved but vandals might show up any minute. So you realize you better read fast and figure out if it is better to worry about how fast people are moving through the museum, how well lit the walkway is, or whether someone has figured out a way to sneak off the walkway and prowl around without your knowledge.

This is something like where we are with the wireless network. We have the walkways available but continue to use the old-style security until we can successfully transition between the two.

Looking Forward

The old security system (firewall rules) needs to be overhauled to take advantage of the V-LANs that we now have. I use contractors to help configure these complicated systems and then do my best to manage those systems using what knowledge I have and a whole lot of carefully applied common sense. I will probably be working with some vendor to overhaul the base configuration of our wireless to take advantage of our V-LANs. Until then, the current configuration can serve a lot of what we do. People have come to count on the wireless access being available on a daily basis and so before I take the leap, I want to make sure I've had a chance to look and see just where I might find myself landing. Hopefully, it isn't in hot water.