

MSOC LEA Member Profile Part III: Full Narrative

Carroll County Public Schools: Off to a Quick Start

As a first year participant in the Maryland Students Online Consortium during FY 2004-05, Carroll County Public Schools is in the initial stages of the implementation of student online courses, planning procedures and practices and reviewing online courses for students. CCPS currently has one student enrolled in an online geometry course; the student is an 8th grader who moved into the district from another county and who had already completed algebra but needed geometry because it wasn't required or offered in the student's former school. Plans are to expand course offerings for Summer, 2005 and the 2005-2006 school year and online courses have been included in the upcoming 2005-2006 program of studies. Proposed course offerings will be geared to SAT Prep and AP courses as identified areas of need; in particular AP Art History, AP U.S. History, and AP Computer Science that are not offered across the county high schools since enrollments are too low in some schools to warrant a classroom-based offering.

Some of the biggest issues to the implementation of online learning within Carroll County Public Schools are:

- 1) Online learning hasn't been fully recognized as an alternative solution for K-12 students. Prior to the MSOC project, exposure to online learning, was not fully developed and limited only to the conceptual level. Accordingly, Educational Technology representative, Mr. Bob Cole met with many administrators over the past six months to demonstrate how online learning can meet the needs of Carroll County students and teachers.
- 2) Online learning is not as high a priority right now because most courses are not directly related to reading or math, which are high priority areas to meet No Child Left Behind legislation.
- 3) Online learning is not in the current budget for FY05. Educational Technology has recommended that a position to help coordinate online learning be considered for the upcoming budget.

A large issue facing Carroll County Public Schools in the expansion of online courses is administrative and budget support. Educational Technology's strategy had been to present "online courses as a distance learning package: infrastructure, student online courses and professional development" as well as making sure that all stakeholders budget accordingly to support future online initiatives.

A benefit to Carroll County's participation in MSOC is that it has helped get online learning moving in the district. While networking with fellow grant leaders of other MSDE-funded projects, Mr. Cole saw what the MSOC project was doing and realized its potential benefits of Carroll County's participation in the project. Through conversations with MSOC Grant Supervisor, Thea Jones and Grant Facilitator Ryan Imbriale, Mr. Cole was able to learn enough about the workings of the MSOC project to enable Carroll County to get a running start in the project. For example, Mr. Cole put together the *Memorandum of Understanding* for MSDE within a matter of a few days and had it gone through the Carroll County approval process. While Technology Services began the process of planning for online learning, Mr. Cole learned of a need to enroll an 8th grade student in an online geometry course through the MVLO program. In a subsequent meeting with the Direction of Curriculum and Instruction, Mr. Cole was able to offer financial assistance through the MSOC project. The Curriculum Department needed to move forward on their own, so getting their efforts connected with the MSOC project was a nice convergence. In the interest of the student's progress, adopting the Memorandum of Understanding was a higher priority than drafting procedures and guidelines and had to be done first. The adoption process for procedures and guidelines has been postponed from the original adoption date of January, 2005 to later in the spring of 2005 in order to better obtain stakeholder involvement.

Participating in MSOC has benefited all of Carroll County's other online initiatives: adopting a learning management system and beginning the planning stages for online professional development courses.

One lesson Carroll County Public Schools has gathered from its participation in this project: as with other MSDE grant-funded projects, "a lot of this process depends on vision and the funding ability," according to Mr. Cole; whether the system believes online learning can meet student and teacher needs, and can be supported financially over the long term, will determine whether the project has a shot at taking off or being stalled. When asked to characterize Carroll County's prognosis for implementing a viable online learning program, Mr. Cole's response was that "we are transitioning from an unknown to a known area but we are confident that additional progress will take place. It is 'too soon to tell' how these steps will take off, but we are encouraged with the progress that has been made." Mr. Cole presented "Online Learning: Building a New Learning Community" at the February Board of Education meeting. The presentation outlined the expanding role of e-learning, the need for e-learning, and e-learning opportunities that are available to Carroll County Public Schools. Mr. Cole's presentation, was followed by a report from Mellenbrook Policy Advisors, titled "The Carroll County County High School Program: An Evaluation and Recommendations on Key Educational Policy Issue." which recommended, "Carroll County Public Schools should explore other steps to increase the availability of AP and other rigorous courses. One possible solution is to examine ways in which AP courses could draw upon student enrollments from more than one high school. The possibility of students enrolling in distance education classes offered by universities should be examined. Courses that are offered in an asynchronous model would not be at all constrained by the current class schedule".

However, developing broad-based support for an online learning program is even more important. To date, Mr. Cole has met with the Director of Curriculum and Instruction, Staff Development, and Technology Services, as well as presented at meetings of content supervisors. The success of these efforts may be realized once an online learning procedures and guidelines manual is adopted and disseminated and students are enrolled in online courses.

Other lessons learned to date include the importance of inviting key stakeholders to participate in the process from the start, and the need for a more systematic process to identify online courses needed in the county. As Mr. Cole notes,

During the review process, it was determined that the school system did not want a review team, but wanted the guidelines presented to the high school principals, content supervisors, and guidance counselors at their monthly meetings in Jan-March to gather feedback. In retrospect, I would have invited the stakeholders to participate in the process from the beginning, but our county began the process before we even approached them as part of the grant...

A process [to identify needed online courses] does not currently exist and therefore, I would recommend that stakeholders from staff development, technology services, and instructional supervisors meet to review these. I am on the agenda to attend a meeting in April that reviews and builds the Program of Studies.

Also, because the student was enrolled in the geometry course before the school-based mentor was able to take the "mentor" course; Mr. Cole notes that "ideally, we would have had the training in place ahead of time." CCPS will identify possible candidates for the mentor module to enroll before online course options are available to students.

In short, Carroll County Public Schools has gotten off to a quick start with online courses. Activities and decisions in the first year will help determine whether online learning will take off in Carroll County during the next school year.