**The Miami Valley Educational Computer Association, Regional Council of Governments: Continuous Improvement Plan Narrative for Fiscal Year 2019.**

Prepared by Thor Sage, Executive Director

## What is the status and progress of your continuous improvement plan for this past year? Briefly describe your goals, current status, and an overview of your ITC's efforts towards completion of your plan and activities.

MVECA continues to adhere to four-hour response and eight-hour problem resolution SLA metrics and received an average customer satisfaction rating of 3.69 out of a possible 4.0 for all service categories including communications, professional development, support, system reliability, technical leadership, and overall value.  This was a slight improvement over survey results from FY17.  Most notably, MVECA ranked in the top three among all ITCs in all categories.  Rankings included nine 1st place rankings, ten 2nd place rankings, and four 3rd place rankings across a total of 23 total categories.  The MVECA Student Support Team earned rankings that were particularly high and helped MVECA's overall ranking.  MVECA completed a new implementation of the Cherwell IT Service Management solution in FY17 in order to provide more granular measurement of our support processes and responses to client organizations.  MVECA provides an exceptionally strong suite of ITC core and foundational communications services and has continued to receive high marks in overall quality of service on all surveys.  One reason the quality of our service is so highly rated is that the MVECA staff understands professional development is the foundation of a successful support structure.  MVECA offered more than 190 training opportunities to its client organizations in FY18 and continues to expand its offerings.

In FY19, MVECA will add more technical and cyber security trainings and briefings in order to address a significant increase in cyber-attacks and phishing scams.  There may be no more important undertaking for any ITC at this time than addressing the current cyber security climate in a meaningful way that will protect the operations and data maintained by ITCs.  In addition to increased trainings, MVECA is reviewing all security policy and adopting new policies that will help solidify our security practices.

Cross training of the MVECA support staff has continued to be an essential part of the overall improvement of our software support services.  We have worked to diminish lines of separation between various support areas so that there are only limited lapses in continuity and coverage in instances in which there are extended absences or changes in staffing.  We have continued to utilize combined service request areas, collaboration tools, and teamwork to encourage our support analysts to seek a broad understanding of the full suite of services we provide.  We have also created collaborative support models in partnership with other ITCs (discussed in response to question 4 below).

In FY17, MVECA delivered to member organizations more than a 25% decrease in fees for core services and has created one of the most efficient and affordable Internet service offerings to be found (for instance, MVECA's standard price on a 1GB fiber Internet service is less than $1500/month before discount!).  These dramatic reductions in costs were only possible through the hard work of building better and more efficient services and through broader adoption of the MVECA shared-service model.  In fact,

at the heart of MVECA's plan for continuous improvement is the expansion of all our shared-services so that public schools and other governmental agencies continue to find ways to save money and time as they modernize.

MVECA's diversity of offerings also drives the organization forward and provides considerable added value to the overall quality and affordability of our services.  In addition to traditional core services that feature a well-supported student information system and its associated student applications, MVECA also provides and supports the following applications and services:

| | |
|---|---|
| OnBase Document Management | Internet Content Filtering |
| PowerSchool eFinance Plus | RAM Requisition Management |
| CAMS Campus Management | Citrix Application Delivery and Desktop Services |
| Server Hosting | Remote Backup Services |
| Email and Web Hosting | Managed Wireless Services |
| Hosted Phone Solution | Access Control and Surveillance Services |
| Infrastructure Development and Consulting | Roster Verification Support |
| Workstation and Network Management | Office Applications Training |
| Onsite Technical Contracted Support | Contracted Fiscal and Payroll Support |

Many, if not all, of these services were mentioned in previous CIPs and continue to be of primary importance as MVECA works to find and develop new revenue streams that have allowed our regional ITC to avoid fee increases entirely since 2011 while simultaneously absorbing price hikes and funding cuts, reinvesting in datacenter technologies (firewall, network core, border routing, storage, call manager, virtual environment, etc.), and more than quadrupling the size of our technical support staff.  Even more significantly, during this time of growth, reinvestment, and cost increases, MVECA has increased its annual carryover by more than 273%.  In short, MVECA has decreased costs for all ITC services while increasing support staffing and infrastructure spending!

Two primary areas of focus responsible for the bulk of MVECA's recent success are the enhancement of existing network services and business development in the non-K12 sector.  In FY15, MVECA recreated and launched its own managed phone and wireless services.  By restructuring and internalizing the support of these existing services and investing in additional professional development for the MVECA staff, MVECA was able to generate significantly more revenue while reducing the overall cost of these services to schools.  For example, after displacing the contracted support vendor and buying-out an expensive phone support contract, MVECA was able to reduce the startup costs associated with its phone solution by more than 25% and its cost per standard wireless access-point by 27%.  This effort provided schools with critical services at a lower cost while allowing MVECA to keep modest revenues to subsidize other K12 services.

Additionally, because of the increased volume in direct hardware purchases that MVECA is making on behalf of client organizations, we have been able to negotiate with Cisco to receive consistent and continuing discounts on all equipment.  This has resulted in an increased ability to win more network upgrade business, pass deeper discounts on to schools, and provide consistent pricing on all Cisco-based

services.  Now, in an effort to generate even greater value for our client organizations, MVECA is working on becoming a Cisco Authorized Partner.

Perhaps one of the most significant changes that occurred at MVECA in FY18 was our addition of two new member districts and multiple community and parochial schools.   Because of our reputation for outstanding support and our exceptionally competitive fee structure, MVECA continues to prepare for growth and has added five new member districts in the last three years.   MVECA now serves more than 85,000 school children throughout Ohio.   We increased our staffing levels over 172% since 2011 and have invested in datacenter resources that will support our growth in years to come.

Since 2011, MVECA has actively engaged all interested collegiate, governmental, and non-profit organizations and has established itself as a regional leader in IT shared-service delivery.   We've saved organizations hundreds of thousands of dollars, provided them with essential tools for modernization, and increased their overall effectiveness. **This effort drives directly at the spirit and intent of "Beyond Boundaries: A Shared Services Action Plan for Ohio Schools and Governments."**  MVECA believes that through shared-services and greater collaboration between educational and governmental agencies, ITCs can leverage the only viable, non-profit, regional IT service delivery mechanism in Ohio and help government and education to become more efficient.

In FY19, MVECA will continue to expand services and drive business development for the benefit of both MVECA members and southwest Ohio at large.   The shared-services model works and is our most effective tool for delivering savings to public education.   Adhering to a simple, shared-services model has allowed MVECA to dramatically change the overall health of our organization.   When managed properly, shared-services work!

*Diagram: MVECA Annual Cash Carryover*
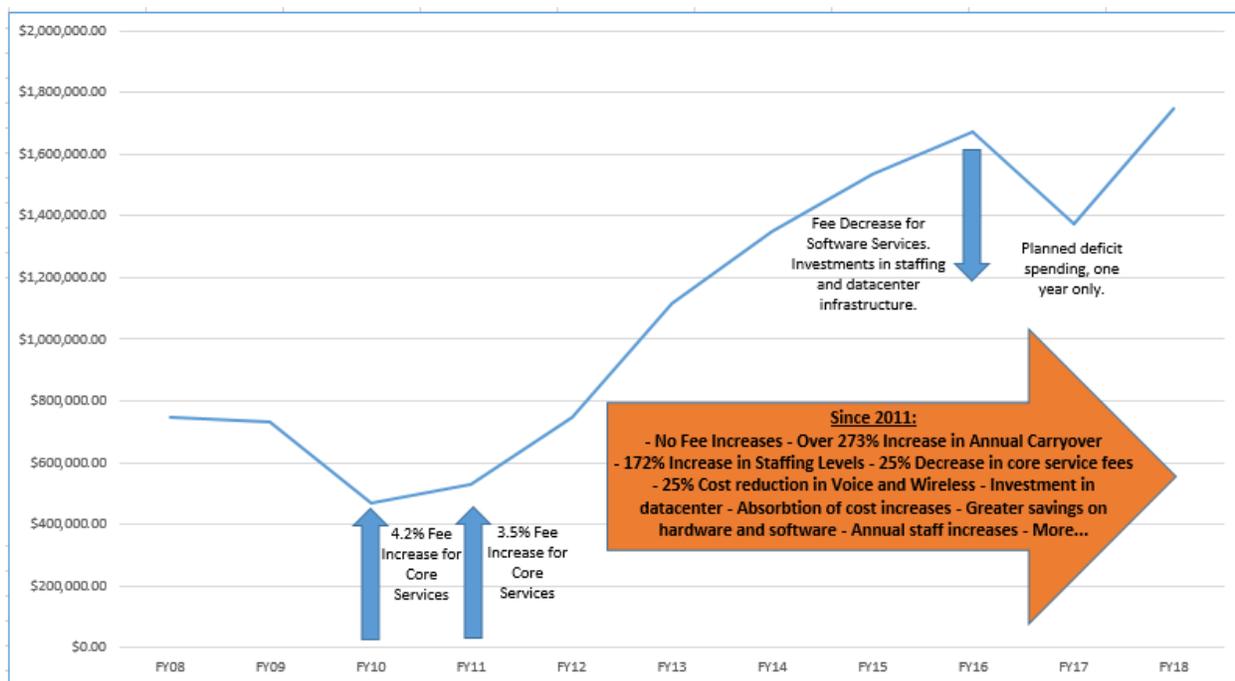
**What are the key areas of improvement you plan to address this coming year? Why were these key areas included? Were any needs identified in your local survey? Provide an overview of the activities and professional development planned to address these key areas and describe what you hope to accomplish this year with those activities.**

In FY19, it will remain important for MVECA to continue to develop new revenue streams in order to provide subsidization of traditional ITC core services through business development. Software licensing costs continue to rise, and investments in infrastructure and hardware continue to remain a recurring necessity. However, schools cannot be expected to bail out service organizations each time operational expenses increase. Instead, schools must be able to depend upon stable fee structures and establish predictable budgets for IT services. This is why subsidization is critical from an operational standpoint and remains a big part of MVECA continuous improvement plan.

To support business development, MVECA has expanded administrative support staff to address areas associated with contract management, document retention, and accounts receivable. This is expected to allow other administrators to develop new business relationships and offer more proposals to existing customers that will help our bottom line.

Another area of improvement that MVECA will continue to address in FY19 is collaborative fiber network construction. By bringing multiple stakeholders together in a community it is possible to build dark fiber networks at a lower cost than any one entity could achieve independently. MVECA has successfully leveraged new Erate rules on dark fiber services for the benefit of schools. In FY17 and 18 MVECA built over 43 miles of fiber optic infrastructure in the cities of Springfield and Beavercreek and is currently working on a project for municipalities in Montgomery County. MVECA will continue to look for more opportunities for grant and loan dollars for the financing of construction projects and will continue to build relationships with all local stakeholders throughout communities in which schools are interested in fiber construction.

It is important to note that MVECA does NOT wish to destabilize other ITCs by focusing our efforts on adding additional K12 school districts to our membership. MVECA does not market to, or initiate contact with, school districts outside our current membership. We understand that partnership and collaboration with other healthy ITCs is critical to our success. However, as public servants dedicated to supporting public education in Ohio, we cannot ignore requests for assistance from districts currently served by our partner ITCs. In all instances, MVECA will work with other ITCs and schools in an effort to stabilize and support the OECN as a whole. MVECA would, in turn, urge the governing boards of ITCs throughout the State of Ohio to ensure that they are staffing their ITCs with administrators that are proficient in IT service delivery. Only with savvy and experienced technology program administrators can we fully develop our unique and effective lines of business and retain our most important clients. Further, it is critical for ITC governing boards to understand that ITCs are not school districts and cannot be managed in the same way as a public school or, for that matter, any other type of public agency. Placing a former school administrator with limited technology experience in a leadership role at an ITC will stifle growth and limit ingenuity and opportunities for effective collaboration with other service organizations. The OECN as a

whole must, through experienced leadership, redefine itself in terms of modernization and the broadband economy in order to effectively serve education.

Finally, MVECA must continue to demonstrate to all stakeholders in FY19 that the shared-service model is effective and that ITCs can continue to function as a stable and dependable service delivery mechanisms that save money. MVECA is one ITC that will continue to be operated efficiently, effectively, and responsibly. It will be critical that MVECA and all other ITCs continue to deliver exemplary service and value for public school systems.

MVECA has set a few broad goals for the growth of our organization:

# Three Goals

- Establish MVECA as the premier technology services provider for education, government, and non-profit organizations in the Miami Valley.
- Drive down costs, improve services and support, and invest in critical facilities and infrastructure specifically for the benefit of the MVECA Regional Council of Governments membership.
- Save all associate member organizations money through the delivery of efficient and cost-effective shared-services.

These three goals represent the establishment of a sustainable model for ITC operations that has already been prescribed by the Kasich Administration in "Beyond Boundaries" and, before that, by the Strickland Administration via their Greene County Shared-Services Initiative in 2010.

In order to achieve its broad goals and create sustainable revenue streams that will ensure MVECA's long term viability, MVECA will continue to address the following areas of improvement in the coming year:

- Continued training and education focused on the current cyber-security landscape for all client organizations.
- Significant development of access-control and surveillance service offerings to ensure that schools and governments are adequately protected and secured.
- Significant progress toward migration of all schools to alternative accounting and payroll solutions.
- Development of video distance learning solutions for schools that will help organizations increase the quantity and quality of classroom content associated with foreign language instruction, AP classes, and college credit plus opportunities.

- Continued improvement of internal voice-over-IP support structures through ongoing professional development: Additional Cisco voice classes will be provided to the MVECA technical staff.
- Continued development of the network support team: Cisco networking classes will be provided for technicians and advanced MPLS and next generation firewall and security classes will be provided for two senior level network engineers. Understanding these technologies is critical as MVECA continues to help schools and municipalities develop local fiber-optic infrastructure.
- Development of local and regional fiber-optic resources: MVECA will continue to educate governmental stakeholders about the value of owning fiber-optic infrastructure, the emerging trends in network development made possible, in part, by the FCC, and the function of fiber-optic resources as a driver of economic development initiatives.
- Business development and outreach to all not-for-profit agencies. MVECA will educate as many regional agencies as it can about the benefits of shared-services, the goals of the MVECA Regional Council of Governments, and the various business services that are available.

Additionally, MVECA will work to improve the following solutions and services:

- New state software accounting and payroll package: MVECA has continued to remain involved in the implementation of a viable ERP package that will meet the needs of Ohio's schools. We applaud the work of the SSDT oversight board and project manager over the two years and encourage the ODE to continue to invest in and oversee state software development projects. While MVECA must establish a path forward for schools that may have outgrown limited-function applications, we must also continue to help schools leverage subsidized solutions to the fullest possible extent. MVECA will support effective development projects for state software solutions that make fiscal management and reporting affordable for anyone.
- IEP Anywhere: To address the diverse needs of districts, MVECA has grown its support of the IEP Anywhere solution and has trained our staff on the application's use and implementation. Multiple new districts have begun using the solution. Continuous professional development will be planned and provided over the next many months for new adopters of the solution.
- DataMap and VirtualClassroom: Having access to learning management systems, assessment data analysis tools, and instructional design solutions that are fully integrated with student information systems is critical for schools. MVECA will offer a 7.5% decrease in cost for the integrated DataMap and VirtualClassroom solutions and will increase training associated with these ProgressBook modules.
- Cherwell IT Service Management Solution and Alternative Solutions: MVECA will continue to utilize the Cherwell solution while simultaneously working toward offering helpdesk-as-a-service to all of our client organizations. We will seek out and provide to our staff additional training on Cherwell reporting capabilities and the support of the solution as a service offering. At the same time, however, MVECA will evaluate other helpdesk solutions and consider their usability in our environment. Many MVECA customers and staff members have expressed disappointment in the overall user experience associated with Cherwell.
- Traditional Core and Student Services: MVECA will continue to provide the highest quality support and training to our K12 clients and will adhere to ALL previously established SLA metrics.

- Technical Leadership:  On a previous customer satisfaction survey, we received some feedback that technical training events were not plentiful enough for some of our end-users.  MVECA will provide additional technical trainings in FY19 in an effort to address this.

## How do you obtain input from customers, governing board, and staff in identifying the key areas of improvement? Did you do anything new or different in developing your new plan?

Annual Customer Satisfaction Survey

Each May we conduct an annual survey of MVECA school districts.  In this survey we provide administrators, technology coordinators, and core service area personnel an opportunity to anonymously provide feedback on our existing services and MVECA's overall performance.  In FY18 MVECA, and all other ITCs, utilized a survey tool developed by the Management Council of the Ohio Education Computer Network (MCOECN).  The survey was helpful in measuring the satisfaction level of our customers as it relates to the delivery of services by MVECA personnel.  MVECA, however, will continue using additional, local survey tools in order to get more targeted data associated with our customers' specific needs for new services.

Previously the annual survey listed 21 possible new technologies and possible services that MVECA could provide and attempts to gauge the interest of respondents for each one.   Items such as "Contracted Support Services" and "Fiber Optic Infrastructure Projects" were called out by our customers in years past and helped to drive significant growth at MVECA.  As a result, the last five years have seen dramatic increases in activity in both of those areas.  MVECA has added more than fifteen full-time employees to provide direct service to school districts in the last five years and has successfully demonstrated the value of our own ability to manage IT professionals so that school districts can focus more energy on developing educators.

Input from the core service area MVECA staff and Board of Directors

Another key item in understanding our customer's needs and shaping our goals is the excellent input and feedback that we receive from the various core services departments at MVECA.  Our groups do an exceptional job of providing various types of professional development opportunities to district personnel.  In addition to annual refresher courses and new training events, we also offer user meetings, roundtables, and open labs throughout the school year.   These events are consistently evaluated with a very high percentage of "Excellent" ratings.  Many times, it is from personal interactions occurring during the course of these events that we discover what is working, what is not, what needs additional work, and what future needs are on the horizon.   MVECA also has a very informed and vocal Board of Directors that helps by providing insight into the needs of school districts.

Visits to member schools

The Executive Director offers to meet individually with each district Superintendent, Treasurer, and Technology Coordinator at their location.   While not all districts accommodate these meetings, there have been many very successful and beneficial discussions surrounding MVECA services and the needs of the school districts involved.

**Highlight examples of new or recent collaboration with other entities, or new products or services where collaboration could be valuable. Do you anticipate these efforts will directly contribute to your ITC's service improvement? If so, explain.**

Collaboration with educational, governmental, and higher-education agencies is at the very heart of MVECA's continuous improvement and is the fundamental purpose of all Regional Councils of Government, as defined by Chapter 167 of the Ohio Revised Code. As discussed previously, MVECA has made huge strides in creating sustainable revenue streams, saving schools money, and subsidizing services provided to the K12 community, all through collaboration with our regional community.

MVECA has continued to engage other ITCs regarding enhanced partnerships, staff augmentation, and more. It is important to note that the underlying intent behind these efforts was to elevate our level of collaboration across the Miami Valley and southwest Ohio, find efficiencies, and engage ALL governmental and non-profit agencies for the benefit of public education.

Two great examples of previous collaboration with other ITCs was the consolidation of the INFOhio support teams across three ITCs in southwest Ohio and MVECA's partnership with WOCO for eFinancePlus support. These collaborations have allowed multiple sites to expand the depth of their support coverage, share technical and training expertise, and reduce the need for additional investments in local staffing while improving the overall quality of service for schools.

In FY18, MVECA worked with Southern State Community College to continue internship programs in our region and has continued to engage all regional organizations to assist with workforce development initiatives that can positively impact communities. MVECA is now a broker for all Southern State interns in our region and assists college students with placement in schools.

MVECA is actively involved in local initiatives to help two communities plan for fiber-to-the-home (FttH) implementations and the establishment of city-wide fiber rings in two other municipalities to provide services to dozens of sites. In the last 36 months MVECA; through a collaboration with the City of Springfield, the Advanced Technical Intelligence Center in Springfield, Springfield City Schools, and the Global Impact STEM academy; was able to light a fiber ring in Springfield that now provides service to more than a dozen sites at a cost that is a fraction of traditional leased fiber. MVECA is also working with Clinton County, Clinton County Port Authority, and Wilmington City Schools to develop a network in Wilmington. We are also the proud Internet service provider to Antioch College and WYSO Public Radio. Finally, MVECA has remained an active member of the Global Institute for the Study of the Intelligent Community based in Dublin, OH in an effort to remain engaged in regional discussions about infrastructure development.

The MVECA model for ITC operations, service delivery, and regional activities intended to foster cooperation will help governmental agencies, schools, and communities; promote collaboration among diverse organizations; help municipalities develop new revenue streams and services that can benefit all regional stakeholders; and drive economic development. MVECA can help support public education both directly, through the provision of affordable and efficient services, and indirectly, by lifting up entire communities and assisting them with their development and participation in the new broadband economy.

MVECA would also like to again invite all of Ohio's policy-makers to join us in driving regional shared-services forward for the betterment of communities across our state, and in continuing to protect and support the Ohio Education Computer Network as a whole.  As discussed earlier, there is no more developed and effective IT services organization in Ohio than the OECN.  The need for local support, collaboration between all types of public agencies, and modernization of IT infrastructure in every public building and organization in Ohio make ongoing support of ITCs critical.  Today, every political subdivision in Ohio urgently needs more assistance with IT operations, economic development, and cyber-security.  ITCs have more to give and can answer the needs of governments while simultaneously saving schools money.  Elected officials in Ohio's state government should consider meaningful legislation and funding directly tied to securing networks and developing infrastructure that will ensure safe and equitable access to the modern broadband economy for all Ohioans.

For more information, contact us directly:

Thor Sage
Executive Director
Miami Valley Educational Computer Association
937-767-1468  x3101



*Not-for-profit Technology Services for Education and Local Governments*

# A New Model for ITCs

- **MVECA's continued growth, <u>for the benefit of public schools</u>, is priority number one!**
- **MVECA's goal of becoming a regional, shared-services organization for ALL educational and governmental organizations is <u>THE</u> business model for ITCs in the future. ITCs that do not take advantage of opportunities to generate additional revenues will not compete with ITCs that have growing and robust service offerings and revenue streams.**