

DataBus Chats with Kelly Calhoun

By Lisa Kopochinski, *DataBus* Editor

What are your responsibilities as Chief Technology Officer for the Santa Clara County Office of Education? How long have you been there?

KC: After 11 years in another district, I just started as the CTO of SCCOE on September 1. It was a big change to a big new organization, but an opportunity I just couldn't pass up. The county superintendent (Chuck Weis) had the vision to create a new Technology Services branch, which brought together, at last, all the county's technology services into one unified team. From an organizational design view, it really represented exactly what we talk about a lot in the CTO Mentor program: tightly integrating our efforts across the organization.

This new branch brings together all our IT operations (our Regional Technology Center), educational technology (including the Technology for Learning Partnership, formerly known as CTAP Region 5), and communication services, which includes all Web, video, broadcast and print services. It's an amazing, talented team, and I'm extremely excited about the opportunity to bring them all together in new ways to ultimately better serve the districts, schools and our students.

How long have you been in the computer industry?

KC: Education was actually a second career for me. I was working as a paralegal for a few years and was one of the team that started using all that new-fangled computer equipment to do our work (a Wang)! It made perfect sense to me, so much so that I quickly grew impatient that everybody wasn't doing their work in this clearly faster, better way! I then got my first degree from SDSU thinking I'd write screenplays. Education was an idea to get chunks of time available to write in the summer, but you can see how this plan worked out! I got hooked in education. I still had my passion for computers and was sucking up everything I could learn about them everywhere I went. I was assigned to teach them, then assigned to support teachers. Next thing you know, I'm pulled into the district and put in charge of it all. The rest was history!



What drew you to this industry? What do you like most about it?

KC: I hate to sound like a corny flag waver, but I genuinely do believe that public education is the bedrock of what makes this country great. Unlike much of the rest of the world, anybody here has the opportunity to become anything they want to be. The world is rapidly changing, but it's still America the world turns to for innovation and creativity. How can you not be excited about being a part of creating that future? The people in education are a diverse bunch, but what they all have in common is a passion for education and a desire to make a world that's better for our kids.

When did you join CETPA and why?

KC: It became clear to me fairly early on that, when it came to strengthening my own knowledge about IT in the education profession, there was only one organization in California where you had to be, and that was CETPA. But it's about so much more today than it was when I started 10 years or so ago. The development of the organization, how it's changed and grown to capture the broader, richer, more complex world of education that we operate in today, is a testament to the quality of its members and all the dedicated people who've served on the board over the years to make it all happen.

What is CETPA's greatest strength?

KC: It's an outstanding network of professionals willing to freely and openly share what they've learned, and use that to the benefit of others. That knowledge base builds exponentially and comes back to all of us in the form of ideas, best practices and innovations that make us all better at serving those we serve. The whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

Where does CETPA need to grow?

Now at its 50th anniversary, I see CETPA as an organization standing at the edge of a precipice of huge opportunity. We've spent a half-century achieving remarkable things as just a "grassroots" organization of volunteer members. And there are aspects of that which I'm sure we're never going to want to lose—CETPA is and always will be its members. But the challenges facing us in the next half-century are big—too big to passively just let

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roll over us. I believe CETPA should bravely expand our vision to create an organization well designed to use all the assets at our disposal effectively, most of all our members, to truly be the premier organization of our kind in the state, and in the nation. This may call for us to look closely at all our assumptions. What are the implications for how we see “membership”? How do our vendor partners fit into this picture? What about our funding models, governance, staffing? These are all possibilities we need to explore to make a robust, healthy organization ready for that future.

What is the greatest challenge facing this industry and how can it be overcome?

KC: Well I see two of them. The state's budget and inability to sufficiently fund what it is demanding of education has been and is obviously continuing to be the pain point for a lot of our member organizations today. We are all creative, innovative professionals doing

“more with less” every day (and one of the cool and invaluable things about technology is how it can help us do that). But there comes a point in time where it's just—less! We need to come up with better ways to get our message where it needs to be, and champion support for solutions that can help us help solve these problems. And the second is the increasing complexity of our profession. There is so much being demanded of us, and we need all the support we can get. That's where an organization like CETPA comes in!

How is the state's deficit affecting you?

KC: All of our districts are suffering mightily. I'm so new here that it's taking me some time to get the “lay of the land” and build this new branch, but I'm looking forward to throwing a great deal of effort into figuring out how we can better support our districts in this terrible time and join forces to the extent we can to help each other survive it.

Where do you live and what do you like to do in your spare time?

KC: Well, I'm in an unusual situation now. My home is still in Folsom, but I have an apartment where I live during the week in Santa Clara. It's only a two-hour drive if you don't go in rush hour (or actually a really nice train ride on the Capitol Corridor), and so far, I'm really loving it! I'm not familiar with this whole “spare time” concept, but I love music and sing in a band that plays in church and some other little events around when time allows. I am married, have two dogs that I adore, and absolutely love exploring wine regions around the state. Oh yeah, and drinking the wine too! ■

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