Renton Technology Coordinating Council (RTCC)

Meeting Minutes
October 14, 2025

ATTENDING

Dr. Ellen Dorr, Justin Booker, Alex Castro-Wilson, Dr. Bob Ettinger, Kristine Farwell, Jennifer Hefford-Anderson, Aleta Konkol, Lizz Quinlan, Woody Sobey, Susan Talley, and Kerrie Thornton

AGENDA

- Welcome and Introductions
- Start of Year Feedback
    - Cell Phone Guidance Review
- Focus for 2025-26
- Celebrations

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Ellen welcomed the council and thanked them for their attendance. She shared that the role of RTCC is to serve as a forum to review technology decisions, consider how they align with the district core values, support the strategic framework, and ensure they maximize student performance and achievement.

Ellen went over the agenda and asked everyone to introduce themselves by sharing their name, role, and a technology they are excited about because of a specific problem it has helped to address.

See addendum for individual responses.

Core Values and Strategic Framework

Ellen grounded the meeting with a reminder that our work is in service of students: to ensure they have the resources they need for learning. She highlighted one of the presentation slide images of a student working on a classroom panel and invited Bob to share more about the image.

- **Bob**: The teacher had taken a photo of the student's work and projected it onto the board. Then the teacher had the student share his strategy with his classmates.

Ellen noted that all departments in the district are working in alignment with the District Core Values and Strategic Framework and outlined how that alignment looks for Technology Services (TS).

- **Service:** providing a strong foundation
- **Excellence**: improving systems and support
- **Equity:** right support for each and every learner

Minutes Review

Ellen gave the council time to review the May 2025 Meeting Minutes, and asked for questions, corrections, clarifications, or additions.

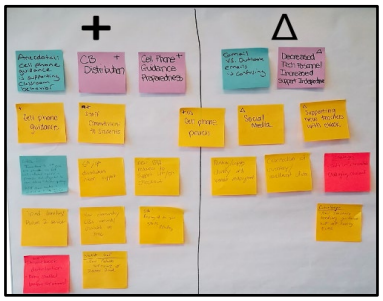
- There were none.

START OF YEAR FEEDBACK

Ellen invited the council to participate in a Plus/Delta exercise. On post-it notes, the members were asked to write down:

- What went well at the start of this year?
- What challenges or pain points were there?

The members captured their ideas on post-it notes, and then each table group shared what they had discussed.



Plus

Table 1	• Our school was fully staffed prior to the start of the school year. • Chromebook distribution went well. • We did a new software roll-out at Renton Academy for our Arduinos (robots). Renton Academy is doing more with the Arduinos than anyone else in the district. They have already completed Sumo Bot and have begun working with the IR (infrared) sensors. • At Seattle Public Schools, the first day went well and the student numbers are in a good spot.
Table 2	• Students got their 1:1 devices on time. We had a lot of concerns relating to supply chain issues, so it was very exciting to be able to accomplish this. • Our 9th Grade Success team went to the middle schools and identified kids who were struggling. They gathered these students and trained them to lead the 9th Grade Orientation. To have those kids in a leadership role as they entered high school and getting other students to buy into school culture was very cool. As a result, our attendance is up this fall. • From a parent perspective, the first day at Kennydale was a big success. They had "K-Pop Demon Hunters" on blast in front of the school.
Table 3	• The cell phone guidance shift was both a plus and delta. The pouch was great until kids found a workaround. • Budget cuts hit elementary schools very hard this year, but the staff still seems happy, and teachers are ready to support students. • We did a training with New Teachers on eWalk and were able to think through better ways we can support teachers. • One positive was cell phone guidance preparedness. There were slides ready for teachers to present the new guidance. Posters were created for secondary schools that requested them. The guidance was accessible to everyone on the website and there were support resources available. ○ One school leader told me that the guidance has supported classroom behavior. • One other positive is that TS was able to retain our summer interns for a little longer to help set up a super efficient distribution process to get students their devices on time.

Delta

Table 1	• At Seattle Public Schools, we have had some challenges with the arrival of the new Kindergarten class, whose early education and development were significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. • We were one of the last schools to move away from COW (Computers on Wheels) carts and start sending devices home with the 4th and 5th grade students. The TS team supported us significantly with this process. I was able to help front load some of that work for teachers, but there was a lot

	of resistance. ○ Ellen noted it was a district standard to have 4th and 5th grade students take devices home as an equity issue. Some schools had a harder time making this transition. ○ Susan asked whether students had to turn in their devices at the end of the year, and Ellen clarified that only elementary students needed to return devices. In secondary, students keep their devices over the summer and will get a new assignment in 9th grade. ● We also experienced challenges with the arrival of the new Kindergarten class in the Renton School District and are doing everything we can to support our youngest learners. ● We had a bunch of new teachers in Career and Technology Education (CTE) this year and their schedules changed significantly all the way up until the start of school. As a result, there were several situations where the teacher was preparing to start school in just a couple of days and didn't know anything about the subject they were asked to teach. So, there was a big lift getting them ready for the first day.
Table 2	● At Renton High School (RHS), we only had two counselors working at the start of the year. Luckily, we were able to borrow a counselor from Talley High School (THS), and that really helped. Our principal pushed to ensure there were no holes in schedules, so the counselors worked really hard to make that happen. It ended up working out, but it was a heavy lift. ● In TS, we have noticed our inventory data is not currently in alignment with our enrollment data, which has created a good opportunity for exploration. We also made some adjustments to our printing and copying districtwide to make it as efficient as possible, but there are challenges making sure the changes are clear to everyone, working with our vendor partners, etc.
Table 3	● One challenge that has come up is the effect social media has on kids, and how it spills over into the classroom. We are seeing some obedience issues. ● It is weird that we have a Google and Outlook email address. ● One challenge (and maybe eventually a plus) is that with decreased technology personnel, there is an increased need for all staff to learn and troubleshoot how to support students with their technology.

Ellen thanked the council for their insights.

CELL PHONE GUIDANCE 25-26

Ellen reviewed RTCC's recommendation regarding the cell phone guidance and explained the iterations that took place after the final RTCC meeting of 2024-25.

- **RTCC:** In May 2025, RTCC finalized a guidance draft, recommending full day restriction at elementary and bell-to-bell restrictions at high school. However, the middle school recommendation was less clear and required further consideration.
- **Middle School Administrators:** The guidance was brought to middle school principals to determine the best recommendation for that grade band.
- **Cabinet Discussion:** The guidance was then reviewed by Cabinet, whose focus was more on the implementation. What would a roll-out ultimately look like in schools? What would the consequences be? It was during this discussion that the idea of using the pouch was introduced.
- **Secondary Administrators**: The idea of using pouches to enforce the guidance was then brought to middle and high school principals for review. In previous discussions, we had said we wanted to come up with strategies that avoided power struggles with students and decreased the likelihood of the cell phone going missing while

not in the student's possession (i.e., in the office, lockbox, phone hotel, etc.) In addition, we wanted to ensure the consequence was immediate and directly related to the behavior: misuse of a phone would result in lack of access to the phone. The pouch proved a good solution to meet those criteria.

Multiple pouch options were reviewed, and ultimately a locking pouch was selected. The model purchased has an open slot at the bottom for charging, and a notification window. The notification window serves two purposes:

- Urgent notifications from parents are accessible
- Ensure that the phone inside the pouch was not a burner phone

Ellen acknowledged that the pouches are not perfect, but emphasized the pouch alone is not the whole solution. A principal had mentioned to her that one of their staff was building a pouch that is indestructible but clarified that we do NOT want them to be indestructible. We want students to be able to get to their phones in the event of emergencies. The pouch is a tool meant to limit easy access and to help teach kids when it is and is not appropriate to be on their phones. She detailed how there were other options for pouches that were even less restrictive (using velcro), and ones that were more restrictive. She described how she talked with Yondr (prominent cell phone pouch company), and they only sell their pouches 1:1 because their philosophy is that all students should not have access to their cell phones during school. At RSD, we want something a little more balanced, that maintains safety, limits distractions in classrooms, and helps kids develop skills for cell phone management.

Ellen shared the cell phone guidance resources that were put together for students, staff, and families.

Site Location	Description
District Website Cell Phone Guidance for Students and Families	Includes student/family facing cell phone guidance and resources (many of which were provided by Director Bergquist) on social media policy, online safety, and developing a family tech plan.
RSDnet Cell Phone Guidance for Staff	Includes the cell phone guidance, updated board policy, and resources for staff to support implementation of the guidance.

Prior to the meeting, Ellen shared an article: Banning Cell Phones: Quick Fix or False Hope? which comments on how cell phone restrictions alone will not resolve the overall problem, because the issues that arise with cell phones are not limited to school buildings. Ellen noted that this was something we talked about at RTCC last year: that our efforts are limited to what we can actually control, and what problems are within our scope to solve.

Preparing Schools for Implementation

In August, Ellen shared logistics and implementation strategies with Secondary Schools:

Logistics:

- Management or location for unlocking of pouches at exit - magnets and pouch collection, including plans to bring the magnet for evacuation.
- Strategy for daily reallocation of pouches
- Use of cell phone violation reporting form (shared via Google - add other editors for backend access, add anything additional you need, share with your staff)

Implementation/Teaching:

- Review and customize presentation, then share with staff (when/how to share with students): Secondary - Cell Phone Guidance Presentation

Ellen detailed that pouches and the unlocking magnets were prepared and delivered to Secondary schools prior to the start of school. Schools were given the flexibility to determine how to manage their new resources: where they would set up their unlocking stations, how to manage the delivery and return of pouches, etc. However, they would all use a specific violation form to report when a pouch was provided to a student. By creating a uniform template, we would be able to gather implementation data for review and analysis. Where are we seeing the most pouches distributed and where are we seeing the least? Are these differences due to the method of implementation, or are there drastically different needs at some locations?

In addition to providing the pouches and unlocking magnets, the following supports were provided to secondary schools:

- **Teacher Presentation Slides**: A set of slides were created to help teachers explain the guidance to students and set classroom expectations.
- **Guidance Posters**: Kerrie designed posters that schools could order and post in classrooms and hallways. These were delivered along with the pouches.

Ellen clarified that these supports were put in place for secondary only, as there was no change to cell phone guidance in elementary schools. Elementary schools have an established full-day restriction policy, which has proven successful.

Cell Phone Guidance Implementation Reflection

Ellen met with high school principals on September 30, 2025, to gather details about how implementation was going, what their process was, and where they placed their unlocking stations. Some of the strategies schools employed were:

- mounting the unlocking magnet on a big piece of wood that comes out at the end of the day
- mounting the unlocking magnet in the main office
- attaching the unlocking magnet to a table which is put out near the buses at the end of the day along with a place for kids to drop off the pouches
- using a numbering system on the pouches so that if one becomes damaged, staff can more easily identify which student had it and follow up with them

The school leaders also talked about their communication efforts and how to ensure they were enforcing the policy consistently across classrooms. One thing they noted was how helpful it was for the guidance to be districtwide and not just school directed. They didn't get a lot of pushback about the guidance, because it was the standard for everyone.

Ellen shared the pouch data collected at the September 30th meeting of a single day at schools (9/29):

School	Number of Pouches Given to Students
HHS	29
LHS	52
RHS	37
THS	15

At Lindberg High School (LHS), they created a proactive step for students who required pouches on multiple occasions. With this approach, if a student had 2-3 infractions, they would automatically be assigned a pouch for 3 days, instead of waiting for the pouch to be assigned during class time again. In these instances, the principal would meet with the student at the start of the day to give the pouch himself. Ellen noted that this type of strategy is listed as an escalation option within the guidance.

The principals also discussed some of the concerns/considerations of implementation management.

- **Earbuds:** In August, when Ellen shared the guidance, there were many questions about how to manage earbuds. Someone even suggested a pouch within a pouch. However, when Ellen followed up about the earbuds, the principals had found it was effective to just ask students to put them away.
- **Pouch Damage**: Pouches have been destroyed at schools, so they discussed an appropriate amount to fine a student if it becomes necessary. Ellen gave an example of a student who forced open a pouch, and when they got in trouble for that, they ran away from home. So, schools will use their discretion on when to apply this fine.
- **Other Impacts/Issues:** The principals reported that some students are remaining in the hallway after passing or stepping out into the hallways during class time to use their phone, which has been messy. They grounded themselves in the reminder that any use of the phone during class time is against the guidance, regardless of whether they are in a classroom.

Ellen turned the floor over to the council for reflection. She asked them to spend 5 minutes in table groups to discuss the following:

- **How is the experience in schools?** She emphasized that she is particularly interested in any feedback and insights that are different from what she shared from the principals meeting.
- **How should we evaluate the implementation and impact of the guidance? What are the next steps?** Ellen elaborated with examples such as: surveying students and families or gathering observational data via walk-throughs.

Ellen brought the council back together by sharing the rationale behind the pouch selected, in response to a council member's query about the design. Ellen explained:

- Some of the complaints about pouches were around students' resistance to putting their phones into a pouch and being unable to charge it. The students were concerned that by the end of the day their phone would be dead. So, the pouch we selected has a slot for charging.
- The other major complaint came from parents who were concerned that if they needed to send their child an emergency message, their student would not be able to see it. So, that is why there is a notification window. It is also useful for determining if a student placed a real phone in the pouch.

Ellen acknowledged that students could absolutely maneuver their phone out of the notification window and/or destroy the pouch entirely. And some students will try to do this. It is part of their development to push boundaries. However, she reminded the council that the pouch is not the full solution; it is a tool to help build better practices.

Ellen asked the council to share the ideas they discussed in table groups. She commented that we have a lot of anecdotal data, referencing feedback she has heard from different team members that has been really positive. But how else might we assess?

- **Aleta**: I really liked the way we launched it, where we got input from everyone at every level and I think when we are evaluating it, we should do something similar. You may also want to do a survey for all students to see what they say.

    - Ellen clarified that last year our process had been to survey staff and families, bring the guidance to community focus groups, and to hold student focus groups at all the levels. So, we could replicate some of that for gathering feedback.
- **Jennifer**: I would be interested in quantifying some of that anecdotal feedback from teachers. What is working for them? What are the pain points? Are the pouches being used? If not, why not?
    - **Ellen:** We did a survey to staff last year, so we could do something similar. We also might consider adding a focus group, like secondary Technology Integration Specialists (TIS).
- **Aleta**: It is really interesting that the preponderance of students who need pouches are male.
    - **Ellen:** I also think it is amusing that schools are using the word "pouch" as a verb to describe when they must remove phone access from a student: "the student got pouched."
- **Justin**: Could it be that the frequency of pouching goes down?
    - **Ellen:** I hope so! We can review the pouch data to see if there is a reduction over time.
- **Bob**: Is there a way to gather data about how frequently cell phones are actually out. I don't know exactly what that would look like, but maybe there is one date where every school designates someone to go around for 10 minutes and count the number of students in a given classroom who have phones out and the number that don't.
- **Alex:** Maybe it is something teachers can do. Like when they take attendance, they also do a spot check for phones and mark it in Skyward.
    - **Ellen:** We do want to avoid entering things into Skyward to keep it disaggregated from Skyward discipline data. So, we would probably want to do it somewhere else.
    - **Alex:** I was thinking about it more like lunch counts instead of discipline. It could be helpful to have something like a form pop-up in Skyward so that teachers don't have to go somewhere else to do it.
- **Bob**: I would also want to do something like this for identifying when students are engaged in learning! I know it was my idea in the first place, but is the cell phone more important than whether or not the kids are engaged in the classroom?
- **Aleta**: Going back to the pouch data, I would also like to know if there are certain times of day that are more active than others.
    - **Ellen**: There is a way to do this! The form does ask for the date and class period, so we can narrow that information down.
- **Alex**: Since implementation varies by schools and they can have different approaches to pouch management, would that skew the data?
    - **Ellen**: Consistency in implementation is always challenging, but the administrators have worked to align their practice within their grade level (middle school/high school) at the administrator meetings. I think, as they rolled-out the guidance in August, individuals may have executed the guidance differently - some being more pouch heavy than others. But I also think schools have been able to identify the places they may need to reign in the "pouching," as the goal is to teach the kids about appropriate use and support them in learning.

RTCC PRIORITIES

Ellen asked the council to extend the meeting for five minutes to start crowd sourcing the priorities for RTCC in the 2025-26 year. She gave the council access to a Padlet where they could either write in their ideas of what we should focus on and/or up-vote ideas submitted by others.

Ellen brought the council back together to close the meeting. She named some of the trends she noticed at first glance and encouraged the council to continue to add to the padlet after the meeting if they thought of something else.

CELEBRATIONS

Before closing the meeting, Ellen shared some important updates:

- Cybersecurity Awareness Month (October)
- Digital Citizenship Week (Oct. 20-24)
- PlayLab AI Grant: The AI professional development application is coming soon!

Ellen opened the floor to celebrations and appreciations. She started by thanking the new RTCC members for joining our council.

- **Alex**: Thank you to the TS Field Support Specialists and Interns for their work this summer.
- **Susan**: I want to thank Jay Gray, even though he is not here, for setting me up with facial recognition.

MEETING ADJOURNED

5:56pm

ADDENDUM

Dr. Ellen Dorr, *Chief of Technology and Strategic Initiatives*
I am excited about a piece of technology our department recently purchased called Abnormal. Abnormal is an AI platform that monitors our emails. There have been a lot of phishing attempts in our district where people will send a fraudulent email in an attempt to get people to reveal personal information, such as passwords and credit card numbers. This program uses AI to detect and quarantine these kinds of emails, and then members of our team will review them for accuracy. We should see a lot fewer phishing emails circulating this year.

Alex Castro-Wilson, *Special Education Teacher and Building Technology Assistant, Bryn Mawr Elementary*
I have been playing with an AI software called Tango. I am mentoring two new ILC staff members who have not worked with IEP Online, which is not a super user-friendly system. When I am unable to support them in person, I can model how to do something on my computer and Tango will screen grab the steps and create directions they can use to complete the steps on their own. It's a great little add-on in Google.

Dr. Bob Ettinger, Director of Curriculum*, Instruction & Assessment*
We have a new partnership with an organization called PlayLab, who will be doing some professional learning in our district around how to use AI tools to solve real problems that educators have. For example, they have an app to help teachers manage challenging student behavior. We are going to be announcing three optional training opportunities where people can learn about these tools AND we will give them dinner.

- **Ellen**: I played with that behavior tool. It has really good prompting questions. One of the things Bob and I were excited about is that, unlike other AI tools, this program does not pull from the entire internet. It is more targeted, has better inputs, and links to Common Core State Standards. It teaches you the math behind it. AI is math not magic. People will learn how to better engage with AI, and by the end of the first session, they will have been able to build something. We think it could be really exciting for people. We applied for a grant (it is sponsored by Amazon), so we only need a small amount of funds from the Tech Levy to make it possible for our staff.

Jennifer Hefford-Anderson, *District Roving Administrator*
I think the technology that is exciting for me is also AI. It makes my emails a little bit nicer. It polishes them up a little bit.

Kristine Farwell, *Director of Technology Customer Services*

We bought 5500 new elementary Chromebooks this year, which I am excited about. It is awesome to get our elementary students updated devices with more storage and computing power. We are also getting more familiar with a tool from Apple called "Return to Service" which helps us prepare our iPads for student use by remotely erasing all old data and settings from a device so they function the way we want them to, then automatically re-enrolling them into our device management system.

Aleta Konkol, *Assistant Principal, Renton High School*
I recently heard about a program called Scribe, which creates step-by-step instructions as you complete a task on your computer. It was introduced to me by a friend who uses it with her students down in southern Washington, and she loves it. I am interested in trying it but have not yet. What I have tried is an AI tool called Plaud. It is an AI-powered voice recorder that will make a written transcript of whatever it records. I use it during meetings and assemblies to capture what all was said/discussed, and then later I can go back to the transcript and remind myself what was said about a particular topic.

Lizz Quinlan, *Director of Player Experience and Kennydale Parent*
I am a mom to a first grader at Kennydale and a 2.5-year-old, who is currently in daycare in Bellevue. I am a Director of Player Experience at a game studio which involves a lot of technology, especially now with the advent of AI, which is one of the things that I have been interacting with. AI is not necessarily a new technology for me, but I am learning and trying to find new ways to integrate agentic AI along with our human efforts.

Woody Sobey, *Career & Technical Education STEM Facilitator*
Over the summer I went to a conference and got an Inkplate that is programmable with an ESP32 (low-cost, low-power microcontroller with integrated Wi-Fi and dual-mode Bluetooth). You can program it like an Arduino and get it to grab things from the internet and have it displayed on the Inkplate. It takes very little power and updates automatically. Whenever my family and I go out to run clubs or get a bike bus, my daughter always asks what she should wear for the weather. So, I have set up the Inkplate to display the temperature data and give recommendations for what she should wear based on the temperature. I am hoping to put the bus and light rail schedule on there as well. I'm such a nerd.

***Kerrie Thornton**, Information & Communication Specialist*
I also use AI, especially when I am in a time crunch or need to tighten up the way information is presented, which is particularly helpful on the website. The tool I am most excited about for myself, however, is an app called Finch that gamifies building healthy habits and goal setting. So, it reminds me to do things I want to make sure to do daily, like leave my desk periodically and take a walk or drink water. It is very effective.

Susan Talley, *Board Member*
I have been excited about Microsoft co-pilot, because it makes my emails so good. And Woody is such a nerd.