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The conventional wisdom in education is that any school reform is most likely to take hold in schools that have strong leadership. The same holds true for technology. **By Jennifer Demski**



The End of Liberal Arts?

MY HUSBAND recently retired after 40 years in education. He's done everything from teaching (high school and college) to publishing (textbooks and software) to consulting. He's seen every swing of the pendulum—very little impresses him as a true game changer.

But when Harvard and MIT announced their joint online open-education initiative, he made a statement that, in the past, would be the kind of hyperbole he'd scoff at: "This might be the death knell of the traditional college."

Not that the Ivy League is about to collapse any time soon, but my husband was tapping into forces at work right now that are fundamentally challenging the assumptions about and the future of traditional higher education.

The first force, of course, is the technology. If someone in rural Iowa can take an engineering course for free at Harvard, what are the implications for Iowa State?

Skeptics may point out that the course is non-credited, so it has no real standing in the world. But consider: Technology may soon permit "seat-time" credits to be replaced by rigorous demonstration of knowledge and skill, however and wherever these are learned. And that demonstrable skill acquisition may turn out to be more valuable in the real world than a degree based on credits.

Which leads me to the second imploding force in higher ed: the cost of those credits. A private four-year college degree easily runs to \$200,000. Public institutions are not much cheaper. My in-state tuition at the University of Michigan in 1974 was (this is not a typo) \$800 per year; including all expenses, a four-year degree cost then about \$10,000. Today, that same degree runs more than \$100,000. This kind of hyperinflation is forcing young people to

find other—non-credited—pathways to adulthood and careers.

But don't statistics show that people with college degrees have better jobs and more economic security than people without? Maybe so...in the past. And here is force No. 3—right now our college grads, many of whom are saddled with crushing lifetime debt, are flooding an economy that cannot provide them jobs at all, much less give them lucrative careers.

Moreover, it's important to remember that college is not—nor has it ever been—"job training." Even grads with "practical" degrees (like engineering) are rarely trained for specific jobs, but rather given foundational knowledge for their chosen professions. Higher education's true historic calling has been to teach young people how to think and reason; to prepare them for whatever choices life presents; to help them become thoughtful, contributing members of civil society.

Many families value that mission, but weighed against a \$200K price tag with no guarantee of a good job, a liberal arts degree may not seem like such a sound investment. If families start to abandon traditional college pathways, this will put tremendous pressure on K-12 institutions to intensify the part of liberal arts education that we call 21st century skills—higher order thinking, problem solving, critical reading and reasoning, verbal and digital literacy—because many students may not get the chance to build those skills in college.

So if you thought the announcement between MIT and Harvard had no bearing on your job, you might just think again. 

Continue the conversation. E-mail me at tmageau@1105media.com.

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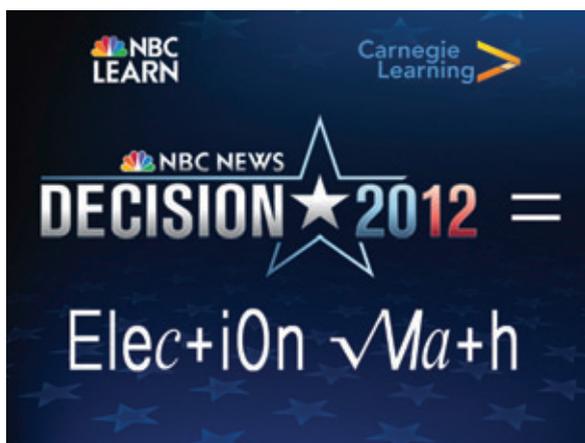
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[news]

New Election Site Breaks Down the Math of Winning in Politics



● NBC Learn and Carnegie Learning will team up to produce a collection of free online “campaign math” resources related to the 2012 election season, developed especially for middle and high school teachers and students.

The resource site, called Decision 2012: Election Math, will feature streaming video from both the current campaign and past election cycles, combined with

Carnegie’s Cognitive Tutor math problems. Students can view statistics that focus on the math of democratic representation, such as how winners are predicted through voter sampling, analysis of voting populations, demographics, turnout, and the apportionment of electoral votes in the Electoral College.

“Our goal is to show that math exists in the real world in a relevant and interesting way,” says Dennis Ciccone, chief executive officer of Carnegie Learning. “Decision 2012: Election Math is a terrific opportunity to engage a generation of learners who we hope will understand that math concepts are meaningful and accessible and that math achievement is attainable by all students.”

The election-themed resources will appear on nbclearn.com starting this summer.

Video Series Explores Digital Citizenship Topics

● Common Sense Media and Teaching Channel have released a nine-part series of videos on concepts of digital literacy and citizenship, designed for middle schools.

Video topics in the series include cyberbullying, “fair use” of digital media, online privacy, and improving digital research skills. The videos were shot documentary style and feature actual classroom footage of educators from New York City and the San Francisco Bay area. Each focuses on a lesson from Common Sense Media’s digital literacy and citizenship curriculum, interspersed with interviews, highlights, and “classroom takeaways.” Eight of the videos tie directly into Common Core State Standards for English language arts.

“We’ve seen through our work with both teachers and administrators that there is an increasing demand for training and instruction on how to teach the key issues facing students in a 21st century world, such as how to evaluate the credibility of information found online,” says Rebecca Randall, vice president of education programs for Common Sense Media. “And with the increasing focus on Common Core standards, it’s imperative that we explore the ways in which to teach students these digital literacy and citizenship skills in tandem with Common Core.”

For more information, visit teachingchannel.org/videos.

[industry update]

For only the second time in history, requests for E-Rate funding topped \$5 billion. According to consulting and compliance firm [Funds for Learning](#), the growing need for bandwidth and internet services helped fuel the spike in demand. Each year, the E-Rate program, also known as the Schools and Libraries Program of the Federal Communications Commission’s Universal Service Fund, provides around \$2.3 billion in discounts on certain services and products for schools and libraries, less than half of the total requested amount for 2012. Requests for discounts on certain available communications services also increased for the fourth straight year.

Professional development instructor and speaker Kathy Schrock joins other educators on the board of the [International Society for Technology in Education \(ISTE\)](#). The new board, which currently has 19 members, also includes new recruits Betsy Goeltz, an elementary school principal in Idaho’s [Pocatello/Chubbuck School District No. 25](#), and Laurie Conzemius, a media specialist at [Independent School District 748](#) in Sartell, MN. The new board members take office at the ISTE 2012 conference and exposition in San Diego June 24-27.

The [Massachusetts Institute of Technology](#) and [Khan Academy](#) are partnering on an initiative called MIT+K12 in which MIT students will create 5- to 10-minute videos for grades K-12 teaching the basics of engineering and science. The students can select the subject or they can generate videos on topics requested by instructors, students, or others. The videos will then be posted online and on YouTube. So far, MIT has completed two pilot rounds of video production and around 75 videos so far. For more information, visit k12videos.mit.edu.

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[findings]

New Report: 'Cloning' Most Problematic Kind of Plagiarism

● Plagiarism detection company Turnitin reports that a new survey it conducted reveals the most common and problematic form of plagiarism is the act of students copying another's work word for word, a practice the company labeled "cloning."

For the survey, the company assigned a clever name to each of the 10 types of plagiarism it identified to make them easier to understand and discuss. Two other common and problematic forms of plagiarism are called "ctrl-c," in which significant portions from a single source are copied without alteration or attribution, and "mashup," where material from multiple sources is copied without alteration or attribution.

The survey found the least common forms of plagiarism to be the "404 error," work that includes inaccurate or fictitious citations, and the hybrid, in which passages are copied with and without citation.

The least problematic forms of plagiarism were found to be the "remix," paraphrasing multiple sources, and the "re-tweet," work that uses proper citation but follows the source's original wording and structure too closely.

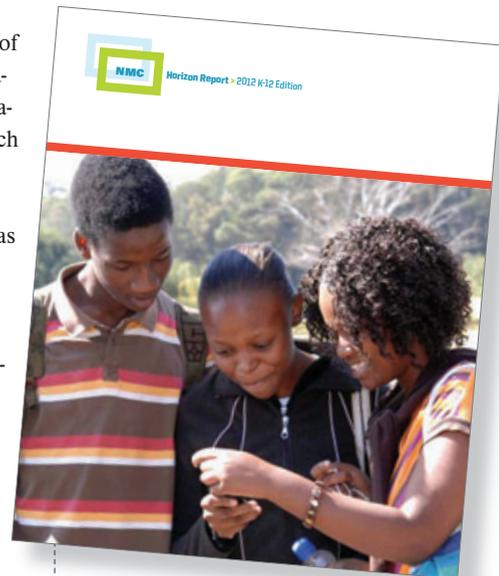
The report offers educators a number of recommendations for dealing with plagiarism. According to Turnitin's report, "academic policies too often take the approach of adopting a one-size-fits-all response to plagiarism." The company suggests that severe forms of blatant plagiarism, such as cloning and ctrl-c, may warrant extreme responses, but lesser forms may simply require better education. In some cases, students may be plagiarizing unintentionally simply because they aren't aware of correct research methods.

To view the complete report, visit pages.turnitin.com/plagiarism_spectrum.html.

Horizon Report Predicts Mobile's Move to Mainstream

● This year, mobile technologies—specifically tablets and apps—are expected to become mainstream in K-12 classrooms, according to the 2012 Horizon Report, an annual publication from the New Media Consortium that predicts trends in educational technology.

The report analyzes input from a global panel of experts who distill dozens of different technologies present in K-12 education down to the top six trends predicted to enter the mainstream, defined as having a

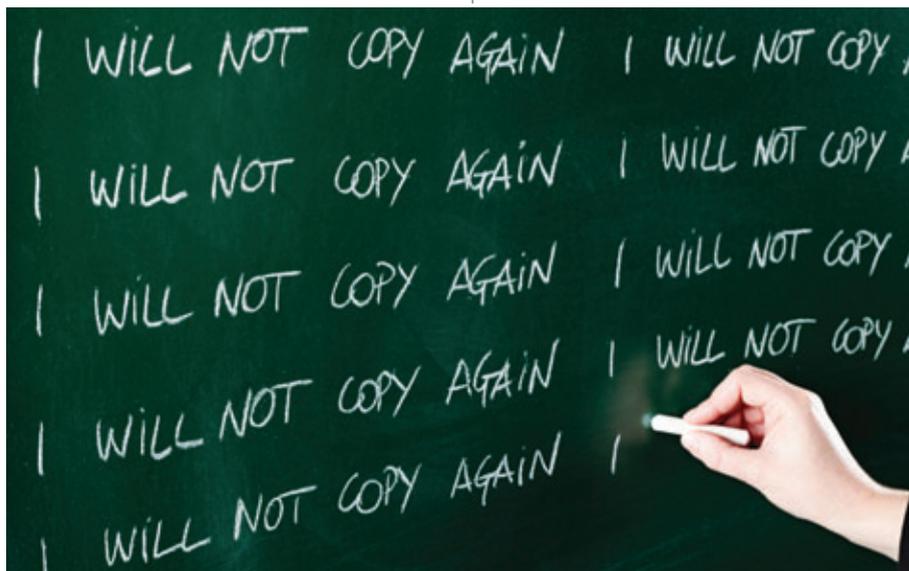


presence in 20 percent of classrooms. The report also lists game-based learning and personal learning environments as technologies that may become significant trends in the next two to three years. Four to five years out, augmented reality and natural user interfaces that incorporate movement-based technology could see widespread adoption as well.

Cloud computing, which topped the list in both 2010 and 2011, dropped off as the report's panel deemed it a genuine mainstream technology and no longer simply a trend. At the other end of the spectrum, open content and learning analytics, listed in last year's report as still several years away from widespread adoption, also failed to make the cut. However, Larry Johnson, CEO of the New Media Consortium, says these technologies are still seeing growth in education environments.

"The report takes a list of 65 technologies and boils it down to six," he said in a recent webinar hosted by the Consortium for School Networking previewing the report. "If we had a list of 12, collaborative environments would have been there—augmented reality, too. The fact is that all these techs are progressing forward. We ask our experts only to ID the six that will [grow] the most over a given period of time."

To learn more about the report, released in June, visit k12.wiki.nmc.org.





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● Chromebooks have landed in K-12. As districts consider Chromebooks for Education for their 1-to-1 computing initiatives, take a look at what these devices promise for today's students and teachers. **Sponsored by Google**

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Nonprofits Partner on New Green Curricula

● Two California nonprofit organizations are joining forces to provide solar power education to K-12 schools. SunPower Foundation in San Jose, and One Million Lights, based in Palo Alto, have developed a program called One Million Students, which provides K-12 teachers with curriculum about solar energy and related topics.

The One Million Students program includes three downloadable lesson plans that show how solar technology is being used around the world, as well as tools for hands-on projects, such as solar LED lights and solar electricity testing kits. The curriculum is organized by school level—elementary, middle, and high school—and can be used as part of teachers' existing lessons in math, science, and environmental studies. Classrooms will also have access to SunPower employees, and inspirational stories from One Million Lights.

"The One Million Students program has touched the hearts and minds of our 270 seventh-grade students," said Curtis Schneider, a teacher at **Egan Junior High School** in Los Altos, CA, which piloted the program. "During a recent three-day lesson, our students were taught the science of creating light with the sun and then learned how One Million Lights is bringing solar LED lights to those who live in an off-grid world."

One Million Lights provides solar lighting to rural communities and SunPower Foundation provides educational materials about solar energy around the world. One Million Students is open to additional partnerships. Organizations that are interested can e-mail educate@onemillionlights.org.

For more information about the program, visit onemillionstudents.org.

{win big!}

Adobe Foundation Offering New \$1M Scholarship Fund

Students from the Adobe Youth Voices (AYV) network can now take advantage of new college scholarships from a fund totaling \$1 million. High school seniors from the network, which supports youth in underserved communities through the use of multimedia technologies, can apply for the scholarships, intended to help offset costs associated with pursuing an academic degree or program in a creative field. The AYV program encourages creativity in students, while they learn software and other technology skills.

The first scholarship application cycle will begin in spring 2013, with awards distributed for the start of the academic year in fall 2013.

"With Adobe Foundation Scholarships we are reinforcing our commitment to closing the creativity gap," says Shantanu Narayen, Adobe's president and CEO. "Our vision for this scholarship fund is to support the next generation of creative thinkers and propel the future careers of those who create."

For more information, visit youthvoices.adobe.com.

Summer Grants for Teachers

Fund for Teachers will accept applications for its summer 2013 grant awards starting Oct. 1. The organization awards fellowships for self-designed professional growth to PreK-12 teachers.

Recently, Fund for Teachers awarded \$1.8 million to 463 grant recipients who submitted applications explaining what they wanted to learn and where. A panel of civic, corporate, education, and philanthropic leaders made the award decisions.

Examples of winning teachers and the development trips they will take included Stephen Howard, Phylecia Ragland, and LaVerne McDonald of **Ossie Ware Mitchell Middle School** in Birmingham, AL, who will explore the British Isles' geography, cultural influences, and historic sites that inspired Byron, Polidori, and Stoker's development of vampire legends to increase students' interest in reading. The **Harris County (TX) Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Program's** Diane Palm and Shunn Rector will visit Senegal to create multimedia and cross-curricular social studies units focused on the legacy of the Atlantic slave trade.

For more information, and to apply for a grant, visit fundforteachers.org/apply.php.



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[Q&A]

Social Media's New Direction

Earlier this year, **Los Angeles Unified School District**, the nation's second largest, appointed Stephanie Abrams, a former television reporter and anchor, as its first social media director. Although budgets are tight, much of the funding for the new role came out of a pitch the district made to the nonprofit Gold-hirsh Foundation. *T.H.E. Journal* Associate Editor Stephen Noonoo recently spoke with Abrams about her new role and how districts can use social media.



Part of your job entails talking to school staff about social media. What are you learning?

STEPHANIE ABRAMS: What I am finding just from personal experience, and that's by no means a measure of what's happening in the district, is that the students are way ahead of teachers and their parents when it comes to the idea of using social media.

For example, a teacher might have a personal Facebook page that they're using to keep their family up to date and all of a sudden they're getting all these personal friend requests from students and they don't know how to handle that because they don't really want their students to see their whole personal lives on their Facebook page, but they don't want to friend the students because they feel like the students should feel included. So they're in this awkward position, which is why we have this social media policy which we just put out that says to the teachers: It's okay to friend students, but not on your personal Facebook site. Set up a separate Facebook page in order to communicate with them about class work only and follow certain guidelines.

Are you noticing increased engagement with parents and community stakeholders on social media channels?

ABRAMS: When we first named and launched the Facebook and Twitter ac-

counts around March 17 there were very few people checking in. We had about 100 people looking at the Facebook page a week. Now we've reached 16,080 a week

and we continue to grow, although our actual "likes" are climbing more slowly. It's been over a month and we have 1,300 likes.

This is a service that was desperately needed in the LAUSD community and as parents, schools, and teachers are learning about it the e-mails are starting to pour in with requests to share news about their activities and school accomplishments.

There's so much to share. Now we need to grow our audience so that the message can continue to be heard.

How are you hoping to do that?

ABRAMS: I am slowly spreading the news about LAUSD's new Facebook page by meeting with teachers, student leaders, parents groups, and interested media. Information about the new sites is also spreading virally. We hope to share information about our social media outreach through our *@LASchools Updates* on YouTube as well. I am doing my best to share the news internally and virally as there is no budget right now for a formal campaign.

We have a total enrollment of 919,930 at LAUSD. I would hope that we could engage tens of thousands more people as the community learns that LAUSD is offering them an independent and continually updated news feed of information relevant to them and their families. I also think that the Facebook page could become a great tool for fundraising for our local schools once enough people are fully engaged with it or start to "like" us.

What are some specific goals you have for growing this presence?

ABRAMS: I would hope that down the road every school sets up their own Twitter or

Facebook accounts enabling the principal or other school leader to send updates to their teachers, students and parents. I also would like to see every school have an independent YouTube account as another tool for teachers to educate with. *YouTube.com/education* is filtered so that the information is student-appropriate. Our filters at LAUSD schools block everything else. We also have a very robust website: *lausd.net*, which is getting a complete makeover. And, we are the only district I know of with an online news magazine, called the *LAUSD Journal*, which features unique articles about our schools written by members of our communications team.

You've mentioned before that you're trying to bring your district into the 21st century. What exactly does this mean?

ABRAMS: What that means is that is we don't depend on outside media to get messages out. We are part of a conversation, and people have full communication with everyone who is making decisions here. There is no longer an "us versus them" mentality. It is replaced with a "we."

It's about communication, and it's no different from communication in the past, it's just a different method for it. I think that in many ways government, or at least LAUSD, has been weeded out of the communication in regular media. There's a lot that cannot get out using the *Los Angeles Times* or NBC News or any particular newscast because they've got a lot of other things to report on that are much more grotesque than what's going on [here]. So it's trying to find a voice in a place where we've been drowned out. Spreading the message is a frustration.

Do you foresee other public school districts creating positions similar to yours over the next few years?

ABRAMS: Yes. In fact we've been in communication with several school districts that are encouraged by the idea of finding an independent voice for sharing news of the district and are seeking to fill similar positions themselves.

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Paying for the Classroom of Tomorrow

BY BRIDGET MCCREA

Today's K-12 classrooms are in a state of flux, thanks to technological advancements and changes in teaching styles — and much of it has to do with the cost of those advancements. What will the final outcome be, and who will be paying for it?

THE NEW TECHNOLOGY being infused into today's classrooms doesn't come cheap, nor is it always easy to install, repair, maintain, and upgrade. Physical facilities take time and money to upgrade and replace, and teachers must be trained on how to use any new equipment, software, or applications that are introduced into the classroom. For the 21st century classroom to operate at an optimal level, it takes money.

Tim Uhl, principal at **Holy Rosary School** in Tacoma, WA, is excited by the thought of running a 21st century school with learning spaces loaded with IT and designed to engage students and promote collaboration. Turning that enthusiasm into reality could be challenging though for Holy Rosary School, which is working with a 120-year-old facility and limited financial resources.

"We don't have wealthy parents or financial support from the community," says Uhl. "A lot of our students don't pay full tuition rates, so we're pretty strapped financially when it comes to purchasing new IT or upgrading existing equipment."

Holy Rosary is one of many schools nationwide that have had to get creative on their way to the 21st century classroom. In many classrooms, for example, whiteboards were installed over existing chalkboards. Upon rolling out a 1-to-1 laptop program

for seventh- and eighth-grade students this year, teachers quickly realized that existing desks were impractical for laptop use.

To afford new desks and IT equipment like whiteboards—currently being installed in some of the school's classrooms—Uhl says the institution often turns to foundations for help. "This is a 120-year-old school with a lot of history behind it," he says. "We're essentially a 'valuable charity' that foundations want to support."

K-12 institutions like Holy Rosary could face significant challenges in their quest to create classrooms of the future. "Budgets are tight, classes are getting larger, and teachers are having to find ways to do more with less," says Anne Yount, founder of the Boston Tutoring Center, which works with K-12 students from public and private schools in the Boston area.

Yount, who envisions a future in which classrooms are more collaborative and centered on project-based and differentiated learning, says the new models could turn current learning spaces "on their heads" if the funding sources exist to support the changes. "Unfortunately, there's an unevenness of financial resources in the educational sector," says Yount. "It ranges from districts where 24 laptops are being shared by more than 1,000 students to those where each student is equipped with an iPad—and everything in between."

Bridging that digital divide will require imagination on the part of the districts, schools, teachers, and even parents. "Schools will have to get creative about raising funds," says Yount. Asking parents to write grants, charging "technology fees," and supporting "sin tax" initiatives (on alcohol and cigarettes, for example) can all help add to the coffers.

Kim Klindt, a fourth-grade teacher and technology facilitator at **Guy Emanuele Jr.**

Elementary School in Union City, CA, says schools with limited funding should look less at the equipment itself and more at the professional development piece of the puzzle.

"What good are all of these whiteboards and laptops if no one is using them to teach class?" asks Klindt, who has seen numerous pieces of equipment languish due to disinterest on the part of the teacher. "Your district doesn't have to be rich to create the best possible learning environment. You can do it if you have a few computers and teachers who know how to integrate and use the technology."

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Skype Takes Students Where No School Bus Can Go

BY BRIDGET MCCREA

THERE WAS A TIME WHEN

public school teachers were encouraged to take their students on field trips to experience the outside world during school hours. Museums, historical sites, and concert halls were just a few of the venues that helped teachers make connections between instruction and “real world” activities.

Budget cuts, time constraints, and liability issues have taken their toll on traditional field trips, but that hasn’t stopped Shekema Silveri from using technology to expose her junior and senior AP literature students to the world beyond their textbooks.

For the last year, Silveri, chair of the English department at **Mt. Zion High School** in Jonesboro, GA, has been using Skype to connect outside speakers and instructors with her students in the classroom. She recently used the web-based videoconferencing software to help pupils meet her course’s service learning requirement. Silveri connected with representatives from the Homeless World Cup Foundation, which supports a network of 73 international partner organizations that use soccer as a catalyst for improving the lives of homeless people, via the web.

Silveri is one of several educators who use the free videoconferencing service to connect with people from all over, even those in the most remote corners of the globe. At **Herman L. Horn Elementary School** in Vinton, VA, 75 fifth-graders recently interacted directly with scientists based at Palmer Station in Antarctica.

Amanda Lusk, a social studies teacher at the school, weaves the interactive sessions into her global studies module, which includes instruction about the world’s seven continents. “With Antarctica being such a scientifically oriented continent, I thought it would be great to put my students in touch with the people



working there,” says Lusk, who reached out to Alexandra Isern, Antarctic earth sciences program director, who at the time was working on several research projects at Palmer Station.

During the call students got a live view of the research station’s interior and its surroundings, listened to a presentation, and asked their own questions of the scientist. “She took her laptop outside and showed students what Antarctica really looks like and what was happening outside,” says Lusk. “They saw a pretty harsh, raw environment that was very different from where they live in Virginia.”

Questions ranged from “What kind of research do you do on a daily basis?” to “What do you eat for dinner and how do you get fresh food?” Student wanted to know what the scientist did in her downtime, when she wasn’t working or doing research. Other topics discussed included the materials that the research stations were made of, the use of solar power in Antarctica, and what it’s like to live for extended periods of time in the frozen tundra.

“It’s a great way to expose students to new environments, experiences, and career choices they may not have considered,” says Lusk. In fact, she says Isern’s parting words when wrapping up the last Skype session were, “Come on, kids, get your education so you can come down here and join us!”

Similarly, English polar explorer Mark Wood, one of eight individuals to ever reach the South Pole unassisted, frequently takes the time to use technology to interact with schoolchildren worldwide.

Wood, who recently wrapped up a solo Arctic expedition, did some legwork before departing on his trip by arranging numerous web-based calls with schools. Teachers would book 15- to 20-minute time slots with Wood, who used Skype every day to attend those online meetings and share his experiences. Once back from his trip, Wood says he will attempt to visit all of those schools to meet the students and teachers he interacted with in person.

Wood says establishing real-time video links from the field and into schools around the world is a huge improvement over traditional methods used by explorers. “Years ago it would take months and months for explorers to get back home and tell their stories,” says Wood. “Nowadays you can tell the story in the moment and let students actually ‘see’ the world around you—instead of just ‘telling’ them about it.”

Silveri’s 5 Classroom Skype Tips

- 1) First, check to see if Skype is blocked at your school.
- 2) If it is blocked, find a work-around (like a flash drive software download) to access the solution.
- 3) Find speakers whose fields of expertise coincide with the class curriculum, current events, or service learning projects.
- 4) Keep classroom time constraints and the guest’s schedule in mind when setting up the calls.
- 5) Test the computer, monitor, projection screen, speakers, and webcam before every call.



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The New Online Assessments: What We Know So Far

Two consortia of states are paving the way for online assessment of Common Core State Standards by 2014. Will your district be up to speed?

THE 2014-15 SCHOOL YEAR is a long way off, isn't it? That depends on your perspective. If you are an eighth-grader, Friday night is a long way off, but if you are a technology leader in a school district or a state, the 2014-15 school year may be here all too soon. That is the year that 40-plus states will implement their online testing programs, and while more than 30 states now do their summative assessments online, these new tests will be different, demanding changes in instruction, and possibly different devices and more bandwidth.

As has been reported previously, the new assessments being created by two major consortia of states, the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC), will be based on the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and will address higher-order thinking skills, problem solving, and other more rigorous standards.

The assessments will be online and will utilize some traditional multiple-choice questions along with different kinds of item types and tasks such as simulations, computer-based items, short answers, and a lot of writing. They will cover all the standards, not just those that are easy to measure. Because they will be delivered online, the results should be available almost immediately, allowing teachers to actually use the results.

Recently, when I explained this to a friend of mine who runs the technology program for a good-sized school district one evening (and asked to remain anonymous), she pummeled me with questions and comments:

- Will the computers I have now work for these tests?
- If my district buys a bunch of iPads, will they work? Should I wait?
- How many computers do I need?
- Do I have enough broadband?
- Computer-based test items and simulations?...I don't know many teachers who are doing that today.

I bought her a drink.

Help of the non-alcohol variety is on the way—for at least some of her concerns. Here is what we know so far.

Known Quantities

Near the end of April, the consortia released a joint press release outlining their approaches to determining what technology specifications will be required for school districts using the next generation tests in 2014-15. The first announcement involved newly purchased devices that will be allowable for testing—not existing, legacy systems.

Desktops, laptops, netbooks, thin clients, and tablets that meet certain hardware and operating system requirements can be used. In terms of speed, processors must be 1 GHz or faster; they must have at least 1 GB RAM of memory; the screens must be at least 9.5 inches in size; and they must have screen resolution of at least 1024x768. Acceptable operating systems are Windows 7, Mac 10.7, Linux (Ubuntu 11.10, Fedora 16), Chrome OS, Apple iOS, and Android 4.0.



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Virtually every type of device sold today meets these standards, so it would seem to be no big deal. But it actually is, especially regarding tablets like the iPad, because of the variety of security concerns that arise. As PARCC notes in its description of the guidelines, devices “...must have the administrative tools and capabilities to ‘lock down’ the device to temporarily disable features, functionalities, and applications that could present a security risk during testing.”

These are not trivial problems if one looks at how tablets are constructed and how interconnected many of the operations are. It is also a big deal because of the timing. The consortia’s struggle to make a decision about tablets has created uncertainty around the devices for some school districts and has had a chilling effect on some school purchases. But both consortia have spoken with manufacturers of tablets, including Apple, who say they understand the issue and are committed to having solutions in place.

Great Unknowns

Here’s what we still don’t know: The consortia have not yet issued guidelines for legacy systems (those devices and their operating systems that you have in your schools now), for bandwidth, or on whether other input devices and accessories will be necessary to handle the tests.

The next announcement, scheduled for late summer or early fall, will cover legacy operating systems and minimum bandwidth guidelines. Additional announcements will address security concerns, accessories, and possible requirements for tests beyond 2014.

Also, both consortia are still in the process of developing test items, determining how many of what kind of test items they will use, designing their testing engine, and seeing how these will work together.

The Technology Readiness Tool, developed under contract with Pearson with assistance from the State Educational Technology Directors Association, should help determine the efficacy of legacy operating systems. The tool now enables districts to take an inventory of the devices in their schools, including the types of devices and operating systems.

The tool is already in the hands of many schools. In fact, the first window of data collection will close June 30. The consortia will use data from that first collection to inform what legacy operating systems will be allowable for the assessments. For example, if 80 percent of the devices in schools use Windows XP, the consortia would probably find a way to make sure it works for the assessments, even though Microsoft has stated it will stop supporting XP in early 2014.

On the other hand, if only 10 percent of the devices have XP, the consortia probably will not allow it, as the lack of support, including security patches, could jeopardize not only the machines’ operating systems, but also the integrity of the tests.

Are You Prepared?

At this point, it is unclear how many districts in the 40-plus states affected will use the Technology Readiness Tool, but my guess is that the vast majority will and the consortia certainly hope that every district will. By late summer or early fall, the consortia will have had time to analyze the data from the tool and be able to provide some guidelines for legacy operating systems.

The Technology Readiness Tool is also due for significant changes in how it is implemented. Starting with the fall 2012 data collection and continuing through the fall and spring of every year, the Technology Readiness Tool will shift from an inventory tool to a planning tool.

The consortia will enter the guidelines (for example, as mentioned above, 1 GHz or faster processor and 1 GB RAM or greater memory) into the tool before districts and states upload their data. The tool will then compare the guidelines with the data and provide reports on the extent to which a school, district, or state is “ready” to administer the tests in each of four categories: devices, the ratio of devices to eligible students, bandwidth and networking, and personnel.

For example, if a school has 100 computers available to use for assessment, but 50 of them have screen sizes of 8 inches and thus don’t meet the guidelines for devices, the school will be 50-percent ready for the

assessments, at least as far as the devices category is concerned. The same school may have increased its bandwidth significantly due to an adoption of online textbooks and find it exceeds the guidelines for bandwidth. That would make it 100-percent ready for assessment in terms of bandwidth.

The tool will be able to aggregate information up through the district to the state level, thus providing technology leaders and policymakers at every level with critical information about steps that still need to be taken to prepare for the new assessments.

The guidelines already issued by the consortia in April, along with the changes in the way the Technology Readiness Tool will be implemented beginning in fall 2012, will go a long way toward answering my friend’s questions without the aid of adult beverages. However, there are still good questions left to answer—many of which have more to do with the human side and less to do with technology.

How does one assess students’ answers to real world problems? Multiple choice—for the most part, the only option currently available—won’t cut it. What can be done to make sure teachers are prepared to address those higher-order thinking skills that the CCSS will focus on? These and other similarly knotty challenges still face us. 2014 is not that far away. [the](#)

Geoffrey H. Fletcher is deputy executive director of the State Educational Technology Directors Association.

LINKS

- **Assessed4ed**
assessed4ed.net
- **Common Core State Standards**
corestandards.org
- **Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers**
parcconline.org
- **Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium**
smarterbalanced.org
- **State Educational Technology Directors Association**
setda.org

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Take a Human Touch, Then Add Guidance

Technology offers opportunities and efficiencies to the school counselors who support students, parents, and educators alike. But few counselors are taking advantage of these resources today. Here's why they should.

SOFT SKILL TESTS, college planners, and neuropsych evaluations are some of the traditional tools of the school counseling trade. Because school counselors have multiple goals—supporting and fostering positive personal, social, academic, and career development in students—they need a variety of resources at their disposal. So you'd think counselors would embrace technological innovation that supports their students' development. But most seem to pass on opportunities to save time and money and to find new ways to reach out to children, parents, and educators by leveraging the technology that is available to them.

According to one academic expert in the counseling field, few K-12 school counselors use technology in their professional lives, despite the numerous digital guidance and counseling resources available. Russell Sabella, a professor of counseling in the graduate program at the College of Education at Florida Gulf Coast University and the academic in question, bases this estimation on years of experience working with school counselors dur-

ing workshops, as a consultant, and through interaction with users of his resource-rich website SchoolCounselor.com.

Sabella says tech-resistant school counselors in his training classes are often intimidated by technology they do not yet know how to use and worry about losing the human touch that has been the foundation of their work for most of their careers.

"I have encountered that fear that technology is replacing something very precious and valuable, which is personal, human contact," he says.

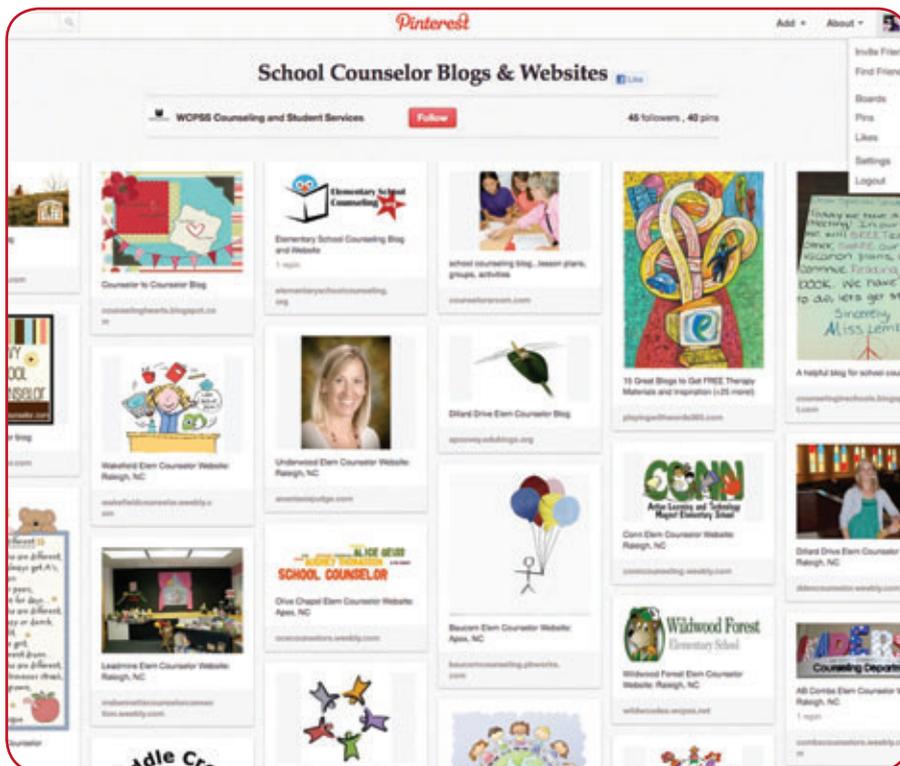
That is not to say there aren't school counselors who find benefit in using technology in their work. There is evidence that counseling professionals all over the country take advantage of Twitter, Pinterest, blogs, websites, and mobile devices—but perhaps just not enough of them.

"Technology is a good fit for counselors," Sabella says. "Like counselors, who exist to help students meet their potential, technology provides us tools to help people achieve even beyond what it is they would have been able to achieve without technology."

School counselors who do not get enough support from their administrators to use technological tools may also fall behind. Julia V. Taylor, dean of student services at **Wake Young Women's Leadership Academy** in Raleigh, NC, believes that leadership in the field of school counseling is sorely lacking, perpetuating misinformation that keeps school counselors from learning how to use technology effectively.

"Unless leaders are providing the professional development for technology and the opportunity to sit down and play with it and tinker with it and find out what goes well in the classroom, it's not going to happen," Taylor says.

In fact, Taylor believes it so strongly that she says school counselors who do not take the opportunity to learn the new methods and means of communication—from Twitter to the iPad—are doing a disservice to their students. "You might not need to know how to program or code the HTML of a website,"



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she says, “but you need to know what direction to point students in.”

The Social Counselor

Taylor learned via trial and error that tools like tablets and the internet can be a boon for counselors, provided they pace themselves and focus on what interests them.

Twitter has a lot to offer, especially through the use of hashtags—clusters of keywords following a # sign—which are used by communities on Twitter to follow and engage in dedicated, specific discussions. School counselors in particular can use the hashtag #scchat to connect with like-minded people around the country and the world on topics of import, sharing, for instance, links to articles in professional periodicals, instructional videos, vetted websites, and how-to tips.

“Twitter isn’t a place I go to say, ‘I walked my dog today.’ Twitter is the place I go to for professional learning,” Taylor says. “I follow educators. I follow administrators and school counselors. We have a chat once a month where we share resources, articles, iPad apps, whatever works.”

Taylor’s goal is to share what she has learned and to learn from others. In addition to her own Twitter account, Taylor maintains a website where she shares a recommended reading list and her favorite school counseling resources. She has also recently started using Pinterest, a site she believes has enormous potential for school counselors.

Pinterest serves as a virtual, visual-centric bulletin board where counselors can “pin” information, typically graphics and links, for others to view. The names of Taylor’s boards reflect her approach to reaching other counselors: Her “Run the World (Girls)” board explores gender bias, empowering girls to achieve their greatest potential, a healthy body image, and more. “School Counseling” offers links to games, projects, art therapy exercises, group counseling resources, and problem-solving tools. “Infographic Geek” lives up to its name, compiling an array of statistic-heavy, colorful posters addressing everything from education (e.g., the number of US colleges by state or the state of global K-12 spend-

ing) to when kids leave school (the role of Generation Y women in the workplace and the effect of education on annual income).

Counselors and students can browse the boards and even “repin” graphics they want to share with their own communities.

Moving to Mobile

Andrea Burston, a counselor at **JY Joyner Magnet Elementary School** in Raleigh, is also a professional development presenter in Wake County (which encompasses Raleigh), teaching her peers about the benefits of technology and helping them navigate cyberspace, even if that means wading in slowly.

“It’s a gradual process,” Burston says. “You start out with baby steps. I tell counselors, ‘Instead of making a website—that’s a lot of work—start out with a blog. Blogs are pretty easy—you write about what you’re doing. You can post, you can go back and edit, and then you can build from there.’”

One of Burston’s favorite tools is the iPad. She and an intern regularly use Google Docs on the tablet to compile data during classroom visits. After meeting individually with each student to do a check-in, Burston makes a survey in a Google Docs spreadsheet with all the questions she still wants to ask. Instead of walking back and forth to the computer in her office, Burston can input answers wherever she goes.

Burston also created a wiki site on the iPad and offers a local professional development class called “How to Use an iPad in Your School Counseling Program.”

The benefit of portable technology extends to working with students too. School counselors assist students with a number of academic, social, and life goals. And there’s more than one app for that.

The app *Middle School Confidential 1: Be Confident in Who You Are* is laid out like a graphic novel and follows six friends learning what middle school is all about. The app *Hannah Rose Knows* encourages kids to improve self-expression, self-confidence, and compassion for others. Still another of Burston’s favorites helps kids, especially younger ones, express themselves.

“We have a student who has a sister who’s sick with leukemia,” Burston says.

“She would get on the iPad and use an app called Puppet Pals, where you can write a story, make characters, and move them around. She made a story about her sister. It was very therapeutic for her to tell this story through this app.”

In addition to providing a comprehensive list of apps on her wiki site, she collaborates with other school counselors to leverage technology. Later this year she’ll participate with Sabella and others in a presentation at the annual American School Counselor Association (ASCA) conference called “School Counseling Web 2.0 and Technology Smackdown.”

To those who can’t attend the physical event, Burston recommends an online forum from the association called *ASCA Scene*. More than 19,000 counseling professionals post and respond to questions daily. Queries about technology are a regular occurrence, and there are a number of downloadable files related to counseling.

As a former ASCA president, Sabella has direct experience with how the forum helps school counselors access best practices.

“School counselors are having daily discussions and sharing resources without the barriers of space, pace, or time,” he says. “School counselors help develop comprehensive school counseling programs designed to help students achieve academically, socially, and in their careers. I see technology as a way for us to achieve and accomplish and succeed.” 

Margo Pierce is a Cincinnati-based freelance writer.

LINKS 

- **ASCA Scene Forums**
schoolcounselor.groupsite.com
- **Andrea Burston’s iPad Wiki**
ipads4schcounselors.wikispaces.com
- **Pinterest**
pinterest.com
- **SchoolCounselor.com**
SchoolCounselor.com
- **Julia V. Taylor**
juliavtaylor.com



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What It Takes to Teach Online

While some instructors think online teaching will be a breeze, the truth is that the best teachers work very hard to connect with students. Here are seven tips from an online insider.

In recent intake interviews with new students of education at West Texas A&M University, I found that teaching online is the new Holy Grail for many young K-12 educators. They dream about how wonderful it would be to spend part of their day working from home in their bunny slippers and to conduct meaningful interactions with students via Skype while preparing dinner. To this group, teaching online means never having to be anywhere at any particular time, never having to wear uncomfortable “professional clothes,” and never being asked a question without having time to research the answer.

After two decades in online teaching in both the corporate world and higher education, I regret to report that the grass is not necessarily greener on the other side of the network connection. While online teaching offers many rewards for instructors, it takes a special set of skills and attitudes to excel at it. And these are emphatically not the same skills and attitudes that make an exceptional classroom teacher—or a classic Marine drill sergeant. Here’s the mindset it takes to be a successful online teacher:

1. Forget Constant Validation

While it may be heretical to say it, many teachers are attracted to the profession by all the ego-stroking they hope to receive. They remember the worshipful glances that they bestowed on their own favorite classroom teachers, and now they want their share. But there is a world of difference between a warm face-to-face encounter and an e-mail—no matter how appreciative it might be. While there has been much discussion about how e-mail or even video interaction might not meet students’ emotional and security needs, the emotional vacuum on the teacher’s side has gone largely unnoticed.

Online teaching actually requires a much higher level of emotional security and confidence in one’s own professional competence. This is especially true at the middle-school and high-school levels. These students are socialized to think of computer technology as a reliable appliance, like a refrigerator. Online teachers must work hard to humanize their approach and not be turned into robotic extensions of such an appliance by their students.

2. Know Thy Students

It’s hardly news that a great deal of human communication is nonverbal—anyone who’s sat through a long phone conference can tell you that. Now remove the verbal component from the equation and the chances of misunderstanding increase exponentially. It takes a great deal of time and effort on the part of online teachers to make sure they are really clear in their own communications, as well as to understand who they are teaching, what students are trying to tell them, and how well their students are succeeding in each of their courses.

In my online classes, I find myself constantly at risk of wildly misjudging both people and their situations. I have had students whom I have mentally pigeonholed as headed for the dustbin—lacking both ability and enthusiasm—only to discover that they are top-notch performers who simply took a while to get the hang of the online process before they got up to full speed.



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Several semesters ago, I was strongly tempted to ease one particular student out of the program. Her native language was Chinese, and I had concluded from her written work that she did not understand English well enough to pass. She soon taught me that reading comprehension and writing skill grow at dramatically different rates. Today, she is a stay-at-home mother making a good living by remotely providing webmaster services to three small colleges.

3. Lose Complete Control

Many classroom teachers thrive in the emotional sphere I call “command mentality.” Like an orchestra conductor, they love the sense of control that comes with being in charge. They take this responsibility very seriously, and work like demons to get it right. They make sure all students are crystal clear on what is expected of them and the consequences of failing to meet those expectations. These are the instructors who adore the grading rubrics that have become so much a part of classroom teaching in the age of accountability.

For better or worse, fully online instruction can never provide the level of control they crave. To a great extent, online education operates on the honor system. You never know who is really doing the work on the other end of the wire. There is no combination of tightly timed tests, double-password protection systems, or retina-scanning identification gizmos that can change this reality.

The knee-jerk reaction to this observation is to point out that students cheat in regular classroom courses, too. That’s true, but not nearly as easily and, quite possibly, not nearly as frequently. College students may understand the importance of acquiring marketable skills in their classes, as well as good grades. K-12 students are far more likely to just be searching for the shortest path to a grade by any means handy.

If you are confident that you can make a compelling case to your students about the satisfaction and benefits that derive from completing their courses legitimately, you have a future in online education. If you are comfortable only with more coercive

methods of extracting effort from students, you need to rethink your game.

4. Collaboration Resistance

The dominant educational approach of the last several decades has been constructivism, which puts a high value on collaboration. Many teachers new to online see its vast potential as a vehicle for group work, but my graduate students loathe it. They want to do their own assignments in their own way and don’t appreciate collective responsibility for anyone else’s limitations. All K-12 teachers know how group work can go wrong—the wallflowers, the “alpha dog” dominators, and all the rest. This can happen even when collaboration is attempted in the conventional classroom setting. The challenges of collaboration are multiplied in the less controllable environment of online.

5. Get to Work...Really

Quality classroom teachers succeed by absorbing oral and visual feedback from each class session as it unfolds, and making moment-to-moment adjustments in response. Except for a small minority of instructors working with expensive synchronous learning systems that provide continuous 1-to-1 visual and auditory communication, online teachers don’t have the luxury of making real-time modifications to their instructional strategies. Their teaching must be accurate, complete, and spot-on right out of the chute.

Most of my graduate courses require that I make about 16 hours of technology-demonstration movies. Because I know my students so well, I never settle for the often-perfunctory movies that come with the textbooks. Instead, I tailor my movies to the specific interests of my students and to my ever-emerging understanding of where they are likely to stumble and fall. To do so involves a lot of work: It takes me at least 20 to 30 hours of effort to create one hour of video.

And most of this work has to be done before the course even gets under way. Some of my students live in towns so small that they might have just a couple of traffic lights. They have dicey internet service and

personal hardware, which make downloading hourlong movies problematic.

To overcome this, I mail each student a DVD a week before school starts, which means that I have to complete my preparations for the entire semester before it even begins. Between preparation, correspondence, and time-consuming troubleshooting of student problems, I estimate that I put in 50 percent more effort in teaching technical courses online than I would teaching the same material in person.

6. It’s Not Just a Day Job

Teaching online is less a job than a lifestyle. Committed online instructors find it hard to set reasonable boundaries on the workday. When students run into trouble, the instinct is to help them as soon as you can. This tends to happen between 10 p.m. and midnight.

7. Don’t Be an Island

Since many—if not most—K-12 online teachers also interact with students in the classroom at least part of the time, maintaining the kind of peer relationships most teachers have is not much of an issue. But, as online learning becomes more ubiquitous, it is something to think about.

The feeling that you are somehow losing touch with colleagues back on campus should not be considered a personal failing: It comes with the territory. My colleagues who teach in person spend time in the department and in contact with each other. My students, on the other hand, are scattered all over the state of Texas.

The good news is that online teachers remain blissfully unaware of water-cooler politics. The bad news is that, if they’re not careful, they can become seriously out of touch with the ethos of their district and even their building workplace.

So, if you do spend the bulk of your teaching time online, make an effort to stay in touch with your colleagues, either by phone or e-mail, and certainly build routine visits to school into your schedule. [the](#)

Richard Rose is the program chairman for instructional technology and design at West Texas A&M University.

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Creating Connections

School districts all over the country are taking advantage of technology to better communicate, not only with parents and students, but with members of their communities not directly involved with schools.

THESE DAYS YOU'D be hard-pressed to find a public school district anywhere in America that hasn't made technology an integral part of its strategy for enhancing classroom learning. But when it comes to harnessing the power of technology to communicate with constituents—not just parents and students, but all members of a community—many are lacking.

That is beginning to change, as more districts realize that in an era of constrained budgets, communicating in a clear and engaging way with stakeholders about everything from the district's overall education vision to scholastic and extracurricular success stories can go a long way toward enlisting broad community support, financial and otherwise. And although face-to-face communications are as important as ever, technology provides a vehicle for reaching more people, more often.

"Districts should be using technology for communications much like they want schools to be using technology for instruction—as a seamless part of their approach to doing business in their school district," says Ann Flynn, director of education technology and state

association services for the National School Boards Association.

"If local districts and school boards don't tell their story, someone else will—and it might not be the story they'd want to be told," says Mark Willis, assistant executive director for the Georgia School Boards Association, a leader in promoting web- and cloud-based technology tools to help local school boards make their work more transparent and easier for the public to engage. Initially developed by and for the GSBA, eBOARDsolutions is now a private company that offers products used by more than 180 local and state boards of education, state agencies, and other associations in 15 states.

Unfortunately, Flynn says, even when it comes to the most basic technology communications strategy—district and school websites—the approach is often antiquated. In some cases, districts will invest in a website solutions provider but not in the human infrastructure to develop a strategy tailored to the district's goals, or to regularly update the site.

"A lot of these templates have a place for a superintendent's message, and when you go to the site and click on that section, it will say 'under construction,'" says Flynn. Others make it difficult to communicate with board members, administrators, and even teachers by not enabling users to search for staff, or not listing e-mail addresses.

But that is not the case everywhere.

At **Klein Independent School District** in Klein, TX, for instance, the district website prominently displays a rotating series of photos that link to news releases. The photos are changed multiple times each week, providing readers with incentive to return to the site on a regular basis. A smaller image, which changes each time the page refreshes, showcases school activities such as student artwork and service projects. The site's menu is divided into three sections—Parents, Students, and Community—to facilitate easy navigation.

In the **Peoria Public Schools District** (IL), there were concerns about making the website the linchpin of the communications effort, given that the community it serves is

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highly mobile and mostly low income. Two years ago, the district's website had sparse information and few updates. Working with Schoolwires, a company that offers web design, hosting, and consultation, the district began a concerted effort to draw people to the site, populating it with everything from board meeting minutes, policies, and calendars of events to surveys and news of achievements.

The results have been dramatic: an average of 80,000 visits a month, from a district with an enrollment of only 14,000 students. "Now we get calls from parents when information *isn't* on the site," says Chris Coplan, the district's director of public relations. The consistency of the look and feel of each school's site within the district helps to ease the transition for students and parents changing schools.

In **Carrollton-Farmers Branch (TX) ISD**, the district targets members of the real estate community, in part by directing them to a section of the district site called Why C-FB? "We know that, for prospective families moving into the area, their real estate agent is often the first contact for information about the schools, so we want to make sure they are informed about our programs and the high achievement of our students," says Angela Shelley, the district's director of strategic communication services.

Flynn makes the point that the district web site must go beyond providing information to facilitating interaction. "The web is no longer a flat piece of brochureware," Flynn says. "You can't just post your school lunch menu and think you've done your duty." At a minimum, she says, districts must make it easy to electronically contact staff. But many are choosing to go much further—posting surveys, encouraging a dialogue by leaving space for comments, and venturing into social media.

The Social Approach

In Geneseo, IL, Superintendent Scott Kuffel of **Geneseo Schools** uses his own blog and the district's Facebook page and Twitter feed to share news, showcase pro-

grams, and invite a dialogue with members of the community. "We realized about five years ago that we needed to ramp up our web presence and be more proactive in meeting people where they now want to communicate," Kuffel says.

Now, Kuffel posts surveys and raises provocative topics in search of feedback—and the traffic that comes from keeping things interesting. "People like to know you really care about what they think," he says.

Klein ISD has recently stepped up its social media presence, posting "good news" stories on Facebook and inviting public comments. In the first year, the posts drew more than 3,000 "likes." At least one tweet a day is posted on Twitter, ranging from the cafeteria menu to news on a spelling bee or history-day event. The district recently hired a videographer and has begun posting to YouTube. Parents and other community members can subscribe to a daily e-mail update that highlights events and programs.

The best district sites go beyond standard announcements and calendars of events. "Celebrate the achievements," Flynn asserts. "Make sure the community knows about the good things you're doing."

Increasingly, districts are using video to tell their story, including having a humanizing welcome message from the superintendent outlining the district's goals and vision. As smartphones continue to surge in popularity, Flynn notes, districts also need to start thinking about optimizing their web pages for mobile devices and creating apps to enable users to access the most salient information on their phones.

Too often, Flynn says, districts confine their communications to people with children in the schools—and then wonder why they lose votes on bond and tax measures. "With the vast majority of districts that are successful in getting funding from their community," Flynn contends, "it's because those districts have done their homework far in advance to build a connection."

In Carrollton, TX, the communications effort focuses heavily on building support with the 70 percent of community residents

who don't have children in school. That includes the large population of seniors, many of whom have signed up to receive a weekly one-minute recorded phone call with updates on district-related news tailored to their interests.

And the latest target: parents of young children not yet in school. "We know they have a choice, and we hope they choose our school district," says Shelley. In addition to letting these parents know what Carrollton-Farmers Branch offers, the district is striving to become a valuable resource for parenting and other tips. A new section called Future C-FB offers such information, and the district has also begun targeting young mothers through the social photo-sharing website Pinterest. As part of its social media strategy, Carrollton-Farmers Branch also targets alumni and local businesses through Facebook and Twitter.

Geneseo's Kuffel suspects the digital strategy has contributed to support for some of the enhancements his district has sought, including successful drives to raise private funds for a softball complex and a trailer for the high school marching band. Moreover, he notes, "When we keep people aware of important programs, it means that if we ever need financial support through something like a tax referendum, the case we're making is not new to people." 

Dan Gordon is a technology writer based in Agoura Hills, CA.

LINKS

- **Carrollton-Farmers Branch ISD**
cfbisd.edu
- **eBOARDsolutions**
eboardsolutions.com
- **Klein Independent School District**
kleinisd.net
- **Peoria Public Schools District**
psd150.org
- **Schoolwires**
schoolwires.com
- **Superintendent Scott Kuffel's blog**
gcsdblogs.org/kuffel

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Making the Case for Online Education: Eighth-Grade Algebra

A better question than “Does online learning work?” might be “Under what circumstances and conditions does it have a positive impact on educational outcomes?”

S**CHOOLS AND DISTRICTS** are increasingly turning to online courses to expand learning opportunities for students, even though the research base supporting their effectiveness has been lacking. A 2009 US Department of Education review found only five studies in K-12 settings with research designs that provided enough evidence to suggest that online instruction yields positive effects. Meanwhile, a number of recent news stories have raised concerns about whether online learning—particularly full-time virtual schools—is fulfilling promises to support students’ academic achievement. As a result, many are still asking whether online learning works.

Because we have conducted one of the first rigorous research studies of K-12 online learning, we think a better question than “Does online learning work?” is “What are the circumstances and conditions under which online learning can have a positive impact on educational outcomes?”

With our colleagues at the American Institutes for Research and Education Development Center, we recently published results of a study examining whether an online course is an effective way to expand eighth-graders’ access to Algebra I. The study, *Access to Algebra I: The Effects of Online Mathematics for Grade 8 Students*, focused on mostly rural middle schools that did not offer Algebra I.

From the beginning, we knew that all of the schools provided algebraic content to students as part of their eighth-grade mathematics curriculum, and that a few of the schools offered a full Algebra I course to some of their “algebra-ready” students. The issue across the board was that none of the schools offered full access to Algebra I to all of their algebra-ready students. To evaluate the effects of using an online course, half of the schools (by random assignment) offered an online Algebra I course to their eligible students, while the other half offered their usual curriculum.

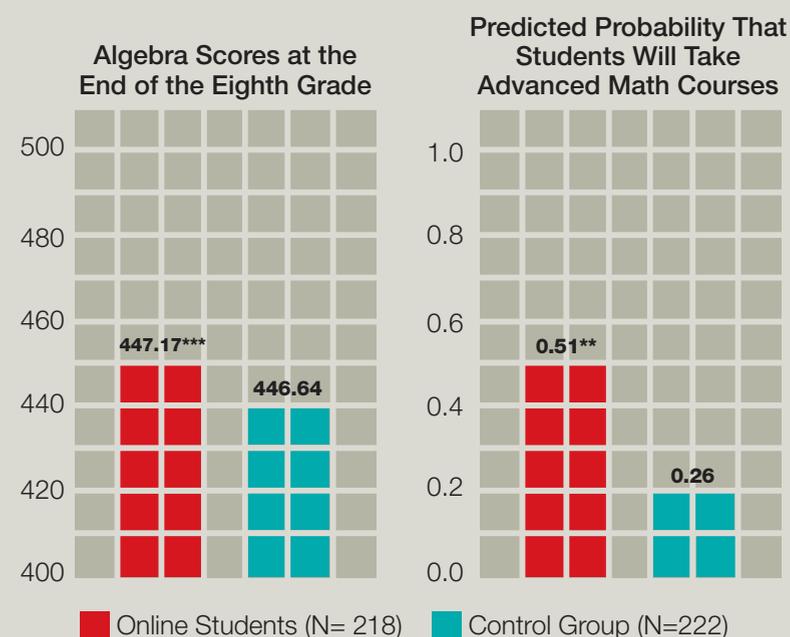
What we didn’t know at the outset of the study was how—or even whether—schools

chosen to implement the online course (which we call treatment schools) would do so over an entire academic year. Nor did we know whether students would stick with the course and how much they would learn.

We found that the schools could and did implement the online course as intended and that student persistence rates were high: 96 percent of them stayed in the course the entire year. We also found that students who took the online course *knew more algebra at the end of eighth grade* than did students who took the usual curriculum (in what we call control schools), with an effect roughly equivalent to moving from the 50th to the 66th percentile in algebra achievement.

They also were almost *twice as likely to participate in advanced math courses in high school*. Specifically, algebra-ready students from treatment schools had a 51-percent chance of participating in an advanced course sequence, compared with a 26-percent chance for students from the control schools that participated.

Impact of Online Learning on Math Scores



Note: ***score is statistically higher at the .001 level; **predicted probability is significantly higher at the .01 level.

In considering these findings, it's important to understand how the online course was implemented in this study. Students in the online course had access to an online teacher and an on-site proctor. The course was asynchronous, meaning teachers and students were not online at the same time, and all communication between them took place through messages within the learning management system.

The online course provider hired, trained, and supervised the online teachers, all of whom were experienced algebra teachers but new to online teaching. The primary information online teachers had about students' progress and performance was limited to the units students were working on and the percentage of correct answers on quizzes and exams.

Each participating school identified a school staff member to serve as the on-site proctor and assigned students to a regularly scheduled class period. The proctor did not have to be a math teacher and was not expected to provide instruction.

We wanted the context for the study to be a "real-world" setting, so we left it up to schools to determine how to assign students to class periods and proctors. In 80 percent of the schools, the eighth-grade math teacher served as the proctor and, in most of these schools, students taking the online course sat in the general eighth-grade math class while they accessed the online course.

Interactions between students and their online teachers and proctors didn't match what we expected to see. Online teachers spent less time communicating with students about course content than we expected. Proctors provided more content support than we anticipated—on average, they reported spending 50 minutes per week answering students' questions about algebra. Nonetheless, under these circumstances we found that for students considered ready for Algebra I, offering it online was an effective way to broaden access.

Based on what we learned, here are some recommendations we have come up with for your school or district as you consider

providing students with access to online learning opportunities.

Be clear about your goals for online courses. In our study, the percentage of students who completed the online course across the schools varied. While there are likely many reasons for why these rates varied dramatically across schools, our conversations with teachers suggested that having students finish the course wasn't a top priority for everyone.

Therefore, we recommend clarifying the reasons for offering the online course and the associated goals so that teachers, online course providers, students, and parents are on the same page.

Think about the type and frequency of communication and direct instruction you expect from online teachers. Our study can't determine whether more frequent communications with the online teacher would have resulted in more students finishing the online course or learning more algebra, but the fact that on-site proctors report spending an average of 50 minutes per week answering students' questions about algebra suggests that some students needed—or at least wanted—either more instruction or a different kind of instruction.

Schools should consider what type of instructional support they anticipate students will need to be successful, and should investigate whether and how this support will be available. Schools should ensure that online courses they use are taught by teachers who have been trained to be attuned to signs that a student needs help. In our study, more than half of the online algebra students went on to take more advanced courses in high school, but it's possible this percentage would have been higher had students had more instructional support.

Clarify the role of the on-site proctor. The proctor played an important role in many of the schools. Most schools placed the online Algebra I students with the math teacher as proctor, so it's not surprising that students turned to their proctors for help. Students are socialized to ask their teachers questions, and teachers typically want to help.

If the goal is for the online teacher to be the instructor to whom students turn with course content questions, students will need support to make this transition. This may begin with helping students learn how to identify when they need help, as it can be more difficult for an online teacher to see when a student is struggling.

Given that many students already communicate effectively online with people they don't know very well, making this transition in their educational life may require only a shift in the focus and tone of their online communications.

Our study showed that the online course effectively expanded eighth-graders' access to Algebra I, albeit in a context in which online teachers and students interacted less than anticipated and proctors provided more content support than expected. We don't know whether or how these factors made a difference. The best ways to implement online courses in secondary schools are still emerging, but these are the types of questions that further the research. [the](#)

Peggy Clements, research scientist at Education Development Center, and **Jessica Heppen**, principal research analyst at the American Institutes for Research, were coprincipal investigators of the study *Access to Algebra I: The Effects of Online Mathematics for Grade 8 Students*, published by the US Department of Education in December 2011.

LINKS

- **Understanding the Implications of Online Learning for Educational Productivity**
ed.gov/about/offices/list/os/technology/implications-online-learning.pdf
- **Transforming American Learning: Learning Powered by Technology**
ed.gov/technology/netp-2010
- **Distance Education Courses for Public Elementary and Secondary School Students: 2009-10**
nces.ed.gov/pubs2012/2012008.pdf



Five Easy Pieces

Today, around 50 higher education institutions provide online graduate programs in educational technology. How can you decide which one is right for you? Experts identify five elements for an online master's in ed tech program.

TWENTY-FOUR YEARS AGO, at a time when many would have struggled to describe the internet in even the most conceptual terms, George Washington University (DC) launched its online Educational Technology Leadership Program, one of the first of its kind. Today, the online directory GetEducated.com lists nearly 50 online graduate programs in educational technology.

Their popularity continues to grow along with the demand for educators who are prepared to use new technologies in teaching and administration. At the same time, a number of issues animate the discussion around educational technology that were not even a consideration a quarter of a century ago. What makes for an effective online master's program in ed tech has clearly evolved over the years.

T.H.E. Journal Contributing Editor Jan Fletcher spoke with instructors and administrators in online ed tech programs and identified five critical elements of any online master's programs in education technology that you should look for when evaluating which program might be the right one for you.

1) The Right Focus

Master's programs in educational technology vary in their academic focus from institution to institution. Make sure the program you're investigating covers what you want to learn. "Some [programs] will lead you toward designing learning technology or designing instruction," says Cindy Pancer, an instructor for Jones International University, in Centennial, CO. "Yet, teachers may be more interested in promoting the integration of technology in classroom instruction, or providing alternatives for K-12 students to enhance their learning using technology."

Regardless of the specific focus, Pancer advises that the program should at the very least address in its curriculum the International Society for Technology in Education's (ISTE) national standards for teachers, which describe "the fundamental concept, knowledge, skills, and attitude for applying technology in educational settings" (available online at iste.org/standards.aspx).

2) Strong Onboarding Process

Onboarding, a term often used to describe the process of shepherding a new employee into an organization or school, also could be used to encapsulate the entire process of acclimating a new student to an online program's social structure. There should be "something intentional about the way you get onboarded," says Sue Talley, an associate dean in the School of Undergraduate Studies at Capella University, an online institution based in Minneapolis.

Talley adds that research has shown that creating a sense of engagement for students in the first few weeks is very important. For example, a program might bring new students together for an initial in-person meet-up, or invite everyone to join a special LinkedIn group that can be used to make introductions and network with one another.

Students who are new to online learning may have a preconceived notion that it is a very asocial experience, Talley says, "but the actual experience is much richer, because we're bringing people together."

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Additionally, if the new-student orientation does include an in-person orientation, that opportunity for creating a sense of camaraderie should not be squandered on imparting core knowledge more readily available by disseminating a PDF, book, or video, says Mark Stevens of the National Education Association and general manager of the NEA Academy in Washington, DC, which has recently conducted research on online ed tech programs (see “Elements of an Effective Ed-Tech Program” below). “That isn’t the best use of your time in a face-to-face environment,” he says.

3) Community Engagement

Those looking for a quality graduate educational technology program might consider it an honor to be accepted at a high-profile institution like the Massachusetts Institute of Technology or Stanford University (CA), but they shouldn’t automatically assume

those are the places that will best support you as a learner. “Those are not necessarily the best programs for people to go into, because the people there are often more interested in their own research, or doing their own thing, than really helping students to develop,” Talley says.

What’s more important is to find the learning community that matches up well with your learning needs—and will grow with you. “It’s more about whether or not that group of faculty, and the people they attract to their program, are really able to pull together as a community and learn together about whatever is coming up,” she says.

4) Collaborative Infrastructure

Beyond finding a solid community of like-minded educators to join, prospective students should also identify a program with a robust, user-friendly platform for sharing ideas that matches the way the

student prefers to communicate. As part of the NEA’s research into effective programs, Stevens says the organization looked into what he calls “the social media aspect,” which included elements such as threaded discussions and work groups, and examined whether those were embedded in the actual courses themselves. It also asked if there was any place in which students could share information from a research perspective, rather than e-mail or a threaded discussion.

The NEA study looked closely at which institutions were actually offering varying levels of collaboration. While the study ultimately concluded each program has a collaborative model, Stevens says “no two institutions do it the same way.”

5) Flexible Curriculum

Since technology is almost always in a state of flux, a program’s curriculum should be as well. Talley says it’s important for an educational technology program to be flexible—not just because of the changeable nature of the field—but because it also prepares teachers to respond to change.

In particular, students should look at exactly how the program adapts when new technology, like Twitter or cloud computing, takes hold, as well as how instructors and learners integrate new technology as it is emerging. Another way to gauge flexibility is to explore how many of the instructors personally use emerging technologies.

“In other words,” Talley says, “if a program and the faculty aren’t flexible enough to adapt to new things as they appear, the program will soon stagnate and you’ll be learning about last decade’s concepts for educational technology.”

Pancer advises teachers to look for programs whose faculty members have previously helped schools through technological transitions—and then seek those faculty members out as mentors. “If the faculty has done something that promotes change, then in that case I’d say they would be a good role model for people that are going for an ed-tech degree,” she says. 

Jan Fletcher is a freelance writer based in Spokane, WA.

ELEMENTS OF AN EFFECTIVE ED-TECH PROGRAM

THE NEA ACADEMY IN Washington, DC, recently conducted extensive research on what makes for an effective online educational technology program. The research has not yet been made available to the public but, according to a report summarizing the research, the NEA’s criteria, divided into four categories, “comprise a quality rubric that serves as a guideline for assessing online degree programs.” Principally, these criteria include:

Institutional quality and engagement: “The quality of a higher education institution is measured in many ways,” reads the report. “As its foundation, the institution must adhere to ethical business practices.” Prospective students should be easily able to verify not only tuition and fees, but other relevant financial information as well, including disclosure of student loan default rates and the percentage of its budget spent on marketing. Students should have convenient access to statistics on program completion rates, diversity, and leadership structure, including the ratio of administrators to faculty.

Content and program quality: Prospective students should look for programs that align with current research in professional development and online education. These programs should also have a process for quality review. There should be options for addressing variations in student learning styles and transparency regarding evaluation and assessment procedures, including an adequate dispute resolution process for students and faculty.

Accreditation: Most students will want to ensure that their degree program is accredited by regional agencies and the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, the NEA’s standard for accreditation. Schools must also provide clear descriptions of all the licensure and certificates they offer, if any, and support students who are seeking them.

Student services: Online programs should provide all the support services expected of brick-and-mortar universities, such as assistance with enrollment, financial aid, and career planning, as well as access to school counselors. In addition, online programs are responsible for support in relation to their unique environment, providing students with resources for online learning readiness, technical support via computer and telephone, and access to online and print media necessary for course completion.

For more information on the criteria, visit nea.org.

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YOUR OWN ERENCE'

Four days after Apple introduced iBooks Author to the world, it was the topic of a session at an EdCamp. How were organizers able to respond so quickly? **By Jennifer Demski**

EDCAMP IS A GRASSROOTS MOVEMENT

of do-it-yourself professional development “un-conferences” that originated in Philadelphia in November 2010. In just a little over a year and a half the phenomenon has gained serious momentum across the country and now around the globe.

This teacher-driven, bottom-up approach to professional development has reinvigorated educators’ passions for learning by creating an environment that, according to participants, rewards their curiosity, allows them to explore their passions, and values their knowledge and experience in the classroom.

T.H.E. Journal Contributing Editor Jennifer Demski recently talked with four EdCamp participants to find out how social media and web 2.0 tools have fanned the flames of this movement and why teachers are so eager for a professional development experience that they themselves create. Kristen Swanson is an adjunct professor at DeSales University and was the technology director of **Springfield Township School District** in Oreland, PA, when she cofounded the first EdCamp in Philadelphia in November 2010 with Dan Callahan, K-5 technology specialist at **Burlington Public Schools** in Burlington, MA. Callahan also is the organizer of EdCamp Boston and president of the EdCamp Foundation. Bill Selak, organizer of EdCamp OCLA (Orange and Los Angeles counties, CA), teaches music to elementary school students in the **Covina-Valley Unified School District** in Covina, CA, and educational technology to college students at Azusa Pacific University. Finally, Karen Blumberg, organizer of EdCamp NYC, is the technology specialist at **The School at Columbia University**, an independent K-8 school associated with the university in New York City.

First of all, what exactly is an “un-conference?”

KRISTEN SWANSON: Michelle Boule wrote a really cool book called *Mob Rule Learning* in which she covered a bunch of DIY learning methods that are sprawling across the country. She describes an un-conference as a conference that operates under the open-space tenet of learning, which means that whichever people come are the people who are supposed to come.

Whatever happens is what’s supposed to happen. The place it happens in is the place it’s supposed to happen in. It’s all in the moment. It’s a very free-form professional learning experience. Everything is built the morning of the event based on what the attendees decide they want to learn and share and discuss.

That doesn’t sound like most professional development that’s offered to educators. The un-conference format did not originate in education, right? Had you attended an un-conference before starting EdCamp?

DAN CALLAHAN: Yeah. I met Kristen and a whole bunch of other teachers at BarCamp in Philadelphia in 2009.

SWANSON: BarCamp is an un-conference for computer programming.

CALLAHAN: It was an interesting day. That was really the first time that most of us had met in person. We’d known each other online through our professional learning networks and Twitter, and we decided that morning to put together a session on social media in schools. We actually met some other educators that day who came to our session. It was a really positive experience for us, and we knew coming out of BarCamp that we wanted to offer this type of experience to educators.

What was it that you saw at BarCamp that made you think

the format would work well for educators as well?

CALLAHAN: The first thing that stuck out from our experience at BarCamp was how empowering this was. The traditional conference is entirely based around the idea that some group somewhere is going to decide who you’re going to listen to and when. And, let’s face it—most professional development is terrible. It’s unfortunate but I’m afraid it’s true.

It’s very heavy on school districts or schools paying for some outside expert to come in and give you the

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one right answer to solve a problem, never taking into consideration the knowledge and expertise of the people in the building—many of whom could run a similar session, but with the actual knowledge of what’s going on at that school.

SWANSON: One of the tenets of EdCamp that we emphasize is the fact that it’s made by teachers, for teachers. Your voice as a teacher is important, and I want to hear what you have to say. That’s often how the most meaningful learning occurs, learning that actually does follow teachers back to the classroom to make an impact on their students.

How does it work?

SWANSON: At EdCamp, all of the topics that are going to be covered that day are crowdsourced. The participants come in the morning, we give them breakfast and coffee to perk them up a little bit, and during that time we go around from table to table and encourage people to put topics up on the session board—they build the schedule themselves. The session board is essentially just a big poster board with sticky notes on it, and people go up and post something to the board that they’d like to share, or a topic they’d like to learn more about. After about an hour, the day is planned, and everybody heads off to the sessions that they are interested in.

I can see how some people might think this is a little unconventional. How do you initially get people to come?

CALLAHAN: Twitter has worked very well. We’ve spent years building up networks on there and, for many teachers who are online, Twitter is their primary networking tool.

BILL SELAK: I found out about EdCamp on Twitter, and I think most of the people who’ve joined the EdCamp movement in California have come directly through Twitter. I was just an attendee of the first EdCamp in California—EdCamp San Francisco—and now I organize EdCamp for the Los Angeles and Orange County regions.

I’ve created a Twitter handle for EdCamp OCLA, and I’ve been tweeting announcements and reminding people about upcoming events. Then those involved would retweet, so it’s become almost like an RSS feed through Twitter. And anybody who isn’t on Twitter has found out about it from friends who are.

CALLAHAN: Many EdCamps have built their own Facebook pages or their own websites. Some EdCamps will send out e-mails or letters to local school districts to try to reach them. It depends on the region and how many people they think they’ll have attend their conference. I’m now organizing EdCamp Boston, and we sold out all of the tickets in two weeks without having to do anything other than putting up a post on our blog and getting the word out on Twitter.

The speed at which this movement has grown seems to indicate there is an unfulfilled need in professional development, but the format does require teachers to take a little bit of a risk. How exactly does a session that will be meaningful to everyone come together in less than an hour?

KAREN BLUMBERG: I actually attended that first EdCamp Philly in 2010. I heard about it through Twitter, and I drove down to Philly from New York City with two faculty members from my school who'd never been to an un-conference.

I'd been participating in various un-conferences for a few years—I'd already been indoctrinated into the idea that you can have a blank schedule and you can decide that day what you want to have a session about, so I was super-excited to have a space where teachers could go that was specifically designed for them to learn what they wanted to learn.

When we got there that morning, I saw two people I recognized from Twitter, and they were both holding iPads. I had brought my iPad too. It was late 2010 and schools had just recently started buying them, so I decided to put a session up on the board about how we were using iPads in the classroom—it was so obvious.

What about your colleagues who'd never attended an un-conference before? Did they lead any sessions, or were they more passive that first time?

BLUMBERG: Well, I said to them, "Okay, what do you guys want to talk about?" They said, "What do you mean? We don't know how to do this! We can't lead a session!" I said, "Of course you can!"

I explained to them that you're not lecturing. You're not in charge of talking and presenting for an hour. You're just facilitating a conversation. One of them ended up doing a session on Google Apps for Education.

The other one had built a really great network on Twitter and had gathered all of these great ideas from other educators that she'd tried out in her classroom, so she did a session on all of the cool tools that she uses in her fifth-grade classroom that she picked up from her network, and then opened up the discussion to the other educators in the room to learn about the tools that they use.

That was one of the first times either of them had presented at any type of conference, and now they're like seasoned pros.

CALLAHAN: One of the keys to EdCamp is that we recognize the expertise of all of the people in the room, all of the time. I don't know what's going on inside everyone's classroom back at their schools, so I'm not going to say, "Here's the right answer. Go do this." Instead I'm going to say, "Here's

some strategies that I've tried. Some of them have worked, and some of them haven't." At its core, a really good EdCamp session should be based around an open and honest dialogue.

SELAK: There's so much emphasis these days on personalized learning, collaborative learning, and student-centered learning, yet most professional development does not reflect that in the way that it's ad-

STAGE YOUR OWN EDCAMP

The best way to learn how an EdCamp works is to attend one. Check out edcamp.wikispaces.org for a list of upcoming EdCamps across the country.

In the meantime, here's a simple step-by-step how-to guide for planning and putting on your own EdCamp in your area:

1. Reach out to your Professional Learning Networks with a note that you'd like to host an EdCamp in your region. Even with its loose structure, hosting an EdCamp event is not a one-person job but, with a strong team of like-minded educators at the helm, your EdCamp will be a success.
2. Find a location for your EdCamp—a school works great. The location should have a strong wireless network, a large room for the day's opening and closing events, and plenty of rooms for breakout sessions. Also, white boards and projectors are key.
3. Even if you find a free space to hold your event, it's likely you'll need funding for things like insurance, web hosting, and breakfast for your attendees. Check in with EdCampFoundation.org to see if any funding can be directed toward your event, and for advice on how to reach out to sponsors. Decide if you want to charge your attendees a nominal fee (doing so often insures people will attend) or keep it free of charge.
4. Once the location is locked down, find a date that works and spread the word! Set up a Twitter account for your EdCamp, create a Facebook page, and put together e-mails and fliers to advertise the event. You should also create a blog, website, or wiki for your EdCamp where attendees can register and get more information as the day approaches.

Now that you've successfully completed the planning stages for your first EdCamp, here's what to do the day of the event:

1. Most EdCamps begin with breakfast. That's the time to encourage your attendees to write potential session topics on index cards and post them to the schedule board—a piece of poster board at the front of the room.
2. Sessions can be practical or theoretical; they can cover technology or have nothing to do with technology at all. Encourage your attendees to share their talents and knowledge, and to speak up about topics they've always wanted to learn more about.
3. Let the learning begin! Be sure to post the session schedule online (remember, you've already created a Facebook page, blog, website, and a wiki—keep on using them!) and keep it updated throughout the day. Encourage your attendees to live tweet their experiences using a hashtag dedicated to your event and to post updates to your EdCamp's wiki. Also, make sure all attendees know they can leave any session at any time, for any reason. In EdCamp it's called "Voting With Your Feet"—this day is about individual learning, and if someone feels like they're not getting what they need from a session, they're encouraged to move on to the next session.
4. At the end of the day, bring everybody together for closing remarks, and thank them for making the day a success. Encourage attendees to write up reflections from their experiences throughout the day and post them to their personal blogs and to your EdCamp's website. Create an archive of the day's tweets, posts, and session notes.

For more information on EdCamp, check out:
EdCamp.wikispaces.com
edcampfoundation.org

ministered. With EdCamp, you don't have to spend months preparing an hourlong keynote presentation. You can just lead or participate in an hourlong discussion on something that you're interested in.

The EdCamp format also gives you the benefit of immediacy and timeliness. Four days before EdCamp OCLA in January 2012, Apple's iBooks Author was announced, which gives classroom teachers the ability to author their own books. So, four days after that announcement I was able to lead a session on iBooks Author. That would just be impossible to do with a traditional conference, where you'd have to submit proposals ahead of time. EdCamp lets you respond in almost real time.

What do you do about quality control with this format? How do you know the information being shared really represents best practices?

SWANSON: That's one of the most common criticisms we see. In some ways we can't know, because the sessions are crowdsourced and happen organically. We do know, though, that the type of people who've been attracted to EdCamp are top-quality award-winning educators. That certainly helps.

BLUMBERG: Through my experiences at EdCamp—even at that first EdCamp Philly—I've learned more than I ever did at grad school, because I've gotten just-in-time learning on so many different subjects, and I was able to move from session to session. You have to be motivated. You're responsible for your own learning so, if you're not being stimulated by the session that's happening in one room, you just move to another room and nobody takes it personally.

SWANSON: We call it the "Rule of Two Feet." At any given point, at any time, it is acceptable in the culture of EdCamp to get up and walk out of a session for whatever the reason. We've found that by giving

people the empowerment to self-police the sessions, it does quite a good job of self-maintaining the quality of the sessions that are occurring. If there's a session in which the methods being discussed aren't student-centered or are questionable, that session will empty out pretty quickly.

BLUMBERG: It's funny, though. You don't really know if a session on the board will garner any interest at all until that session starts and the room for that session remains empty. There have been times at EdCamp NYC where that's happened. On the other hand, at the first EdCamp NYC, people gathered for a session that was on the board, and the person who submitted the idea for that session wasn't there.

I happened to be in the room, and Mee-noo Rami, who does Engchat on Twitter, stepped up and started to show the group some of the blogging exercises she does with her high school English students. People were just chitchatting, she took over, and, the next thing you knew, everybody in that room ended up sharing projects that they did using blogging in the classroom. They ended up having an awesome discussion. I saw a ton of tweets about it.

That brings up a point about the role of technology in EdCamp. Are people live-tweeting the sessions? Is there any archive of the day's events?

SELAKE: One of my favorite parts from EdCamp OCLA in January was that a handful of colleagues who couldn't make it in person were following along through a Google Plus hangout, a live stream feed, or just communicating via Twitter. One person was on Twitter nonstop throughout the event, participating in various discussions to the point that people thought she was actually at EdCamp.

We had planned on having one room at the venue be a dedicated streaming room through Ustream, but what ended up happening was that people were streaming video from their phones and laptops in a

Google Plus hangout for their friends who couldn't make it.

SWANSON: It's really amazing during an EdCamp to see how many people from other states are following along in the conversation via Twitter even though they're not physically present at the event. Almost all EdCamps have a very vibrant back channel so people are often sending tweets with hashtags related to different lists.

BLUMBERG: Another component of EdCamp is the gathering of archival information. We encourage people to write blog posts reflecting on their sessions, or summarize their notes and put them up in a collaborative space like the EdCamp wiki [EdCamp.wikispaces.com].

SWANSON: The number of reflective blog posts you'll find after an EdCamp has always astounded me. Not only are people coming and learning during the day, but they are also trying to follow up on that learning and making sure that it really does continue into their classrooms.

The speed with which the EdCamp movement has spread has been meteoric. I've been told 21 EdCamps had been held throughout the globe, and by May of 2012 that number is estimated to go up to 92, including EdCamps in Chile, Hong Kong, and Sweden. Would this have been possible before the advent of tools like Twitter?

SWANSON: Educators have always been hungry for sharing and learning, but I don't know if we've necessarily had the tools to get together and connect. So, while I certainly don't think that the rise of social media was the only cause of the movement, I certainly do think that social media enabled it. [the](#)

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Jennifer Demski is a freelance writer based in Brooklyn, NY.

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THE SEVEN HABITS

of Highly Effective Tech-leading Principals



Patrick Larkin, principal of Burlington High School in Burlington, MA, started a 1-to-1 iPad initiative in the fall of 2012. Now every student has 24/7 access to a portable web-enabled device.



Unwrapping the key attributes that transform principals into effective technology leaders in their schools and in their districts.

By Jennifer Demski

THE CONVENTIONAL wisdom in education is that any school reform — be it curriculum, instruction, assessment, or teacher professionalism — is most likely to take hold in schools that have strong leadership. The same holds true for technology. Any educator will tell you the most successful implementation of technology programs takes place in schools where the principal sees him or herself as a technology leader.

“The role of the principal is one of facilitation and modeling behavior,” remarks Robert Farrace, senior director of communications and development with the National Association of Secondary School Principals. “The principal who models these behaviors is going to be able to inspire innovation in their school much more effectively than a principal who simply requires that teachers use technology, or collaborate, or take risks.”

Photo by Webb Chappell

T.H.E. Journal recently surveyed principals from across the country to identify the attributes they think a principal who wants to be an effective technology leader should demonstrate. The consensus settled on the seven attributes most frequently mentioned. They constitute our list of “Seven Habits.” At the same time, we solicited Farrace’s expert insight into why each of these habits is important.

We then spoke with three highly effective technology leaders among the ranks of principals to see how these habits have led to the successful implementation of educational technology in their schools. Patrick Larkin, of **Burlington High School** in Burlington, MA, and Eric Sheninger, of **New Milford High School** in New Milford, NJ, were recently recognized as NASSP Digital Principals. Lyn Hilt is both the principal and technology integrator at **Brecknock Elementary School** in Denver, PA. She and Larkin will speak on the topic of 21st century leadership at ISTE 2012.

1. Create an Atmosphere That Inspires Innovation

The Expert’s Perspective:

ROBERT FARRACE: “Guiding the culture of the school is one of the most important things that a principal has to do. Unfortunately, it’s also the most difficult. A lot of principals are stuck by the question, ‘How do I get from where I am to where I want the school to be?’

“How do you go about moving a collective set of values and beliefs that a faculty has built up in a school over years, perhaps even generations? What steps do you need to take to move that toward the kind of culture that allows for innovation?”

The Habit in Action:

“Our mission statement clearly says that we teach responsible citizenship and lifelong learning,” explains Patrick Larkin. “I don’t think that you can teach responsible citizenship in the year 2012 if you’re ignoring digital citizenship and the use of technology.” Yet, as recently as 2007, Larkin’s Burlington High School in

Burlington, MA, didn’t allow students to access web-enabled mobile devices during the school day.

“I had teachers coming to me and saying they’d like to use student-owned mobile devices in the classroom, but right now it’s against our school policy, and they didn’t want to break that policy,” recalls Larkin. “I don’t think it was a conscious decision by school administrators to say, ‘I don’t trust my teachers,’ but that’s what you’re saying when you restrict technology.”

He knew, as principal of the school, he had to do something. “Our job as administrators is to provide the resources that will help our teachers do their job,” Larkin says.

He adjusted school policy, allowing students to access mobile devices at their teachers’ discretion, and began offering his staff ongoing professional development and conversations on best practices for using these tools in the classroom. That was a precursor to the implementation of a 1-to-1 iPad 2 initiative at the start of the 2012 school year. Now every student at Burlington has 24/7 access to a portable web-enabled device.

“I don’t think my job is that complicated,” remarks Larkin. “My job is to provide resources for teachers and to listen to teachers. Hire good teachers, see what they need, and then get it into their classrooms. When you have people saying that something would be a really great opportunity for us, but right now the policy says otherwise, why should we block that opportunity?”

Eric Sheninger, of New Milford High School in New Milford, NJ, says of his school, “If we’re not trying new things, we’re not learning. And if we’re trying new things, then we’re going to fail sometimes. It’s creating an environment where my teachers are afforded a certain level of autonomy, but in turn, I need to be more flexible.”

2. Foster Collaboration

The Expert’s Perspective:

FARRACE: “Teaching is no longer an isolated profession. When I go into schools today,

I’m continually struck by how different they are in one regard in particular from the way they were many years ago: Teachers are consistently working more collaboratively than we did when I was teaching.

“Teaching was a very isolated thing. You would close your door and do your own thing. If you happened to speak with another teacher during the course of the day, it was a bonus. What we have today are schools that are far more collaborative. We can attribute that in large part to all of the principals who are leading that collaboration in their schools.

“We’re seeing some pretty good things happen as a result. Teachers need to be continually learning, and they are not going to learn if they remain in a bubble all day. So, they are constantly sharing with one another. That kind of professional learning really begins with the principal.”

The Habit in Action:

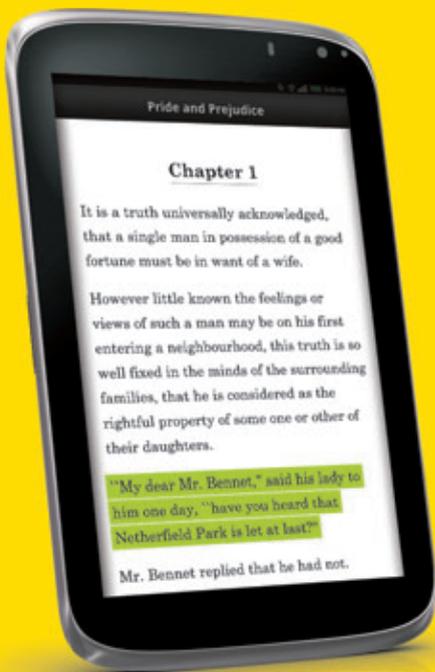
“One of the things we have to teach our students is how to be collaborative, not just with each other, but on a large scale using digital tools,” remarks Larkin. “If the adults in the building aren’t collaborating with each other and having these open conversations using tools like Twitter, then it’s not going to translate down to our students.”

After successfully building his own professional learning network through Twitter and discovering education-focused Twitter communities like #EdChat, Larkin wanted to share the potential of Twitter as a collaborative networking tool with his teachers. Two years ago he had his teachers create Twitter handles and post updates and follow along during Burlington’s professional development days using the hashtag #BHSCat, in the hopes that they would see Twitter’s potential for sharing and collaborating beyond the walls of their school.

Many of Larkin’s teachers have since built up robust professional learning networks on Twitter, and Larkin, his teachers, and his students are using the #BHSCat hashtag to share resources.

“It’s already a step forward to have our own teachers share their best practices

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within our building,” remarks Larkin, “but then when you open the door to tools like Twitter, they can share best practices and learn from teachers all over the world. I think a lot of times for teachers that have lived a solitary existence, unfortunately, in the vacuum of their school, they just want to see that something can work in the classroom before they try it for themselves. Then they see the excitement from kids, and from there it just builds and it’s contagious.”

3. Be Open to New Ideas

The Expert’s Perspective

FARRACE: “This is really tied in to the collaboration piece. The job of running a school is too big for any one person. It has to be distributed. Be open to the notion that good ideas can come from anywhere,

that not all of the good ideas can come from the principal.

“It’s the principal’s job to get everybody in the school involved and invested in a new vision for the school and to demonstrate to them that their input is valued. The two of those feed off of one another. More collaboration contributes to a more solid culture that allows the kind of innovation and vision that all of us are really aspiring to. Great ideas are going to bubble up and sometimes the smartest thing a principal can do is provide support for a teacher with a good idea and then get out of their way and let them do it.”

The Habit in Action:

In her second year at Brecknock Elementary School in Denver, PA, Lynn Hilt

created a districtwide elementary technology cohort group that meets regularly after school hours to learn more about integrating technology into their curricula, discover new tools, and share new ideas on using technology in the classroom. “I think these tech trainings have helped shape a really strong team of technology integrators in our school,” remarks Hilt.

Hilt says she routinely has been surprised by the way her elementary school teachers use technology both in their classrooms and as a tool to support collaboration with their fellow teachers. “They’re finding a lot of unique ways to find the tools that I’ve introduced,” she remarks. “They run with it. They know their curriculum, they know their kids, and they’re doing really great things.”

She says one of her kindergarten students recently went on an extended trip to Peru with his family. His teacher arranged for him to keep in touch with his classmates via Skype. “That’s something I didn’t think of,” Hilt says, “but I think it’s a fantastic use of that tool.”

She has reading groups throughout the school in which teachers are using Google Docs to organize their entire reading blocks. “That really impressed me, because I never asked them to do that,” Hilt says. “I never gave them any templates for doing that. They just did it organically once they became comfortable with the tool.”

4. Be a Connected Learner Yourself

The Expert’s Perspective:

FARRACE: “For many principals, their biggest fear is of not knowing something or of appearing ignorant. Nothing inspires that fear more than technology. The irony is they have a long history of leading all kinds of initiatives where they don’t have the technical knowledge: ELL, special ed, schoolwide literacy programs.

“Principals by and large don’t have the specific technical knowledge to be leading those, but they’ve been successfully leading them for generations. What we need for principals to understand is, first, it’s okay

NASSP’S 10 STEPS TO USING TECHNOLOGY SUCCESSFULLY

ON BEHALF OF the National Association of Secondary School Principals, Chris Toy, a former Maine principal, current educational consultant, and one of the moderators of the Association for Middle Level Education’s MiddleTalk listserv, prepared the following 10 guidelines to help principals and other school leaders succeed in integrating 21st century learning technology in their schools. This list is derived from conversations with teachers, students and parents from around the country.

1. Principals must effectively and consistently model the use of the same technology tools they expect teachers to use in their classrooms with the students.
2. Principals must be consistent in their decisions and expectations about integrating learning technology in the school.
3. The principal’s communication about the pace and process of integrating learning technology needs to be clear and reasonable.
4. The principal must provide appropriate professional development time and resources to support effective classroom implementation of technology.
5. The principal must support early adopters and risk takers.
6. The principal must do whatever it takes to ensure that all staff has early access to the very same digital tools that students will be using in their classrooms.
7. As the educational leader, the principal must make it clear to the technology leader that all decisions relating to learning technology will be made by the educational leaders with input from the technology leaders, not the other way around.
8. The principal must set and support the expectation that student work will be done and stored using technology.
9. Principals must ensure that families and the public are kept informed about the school’s goals and progress relating to its use of technology as a learning resource.
10. The principal must be an active and public champion for all students, staff members, and the school in moving the vision of fully integrating learning technology for the second decade of the 21st century.

to admit that they don't know everything. What's important is that they commit to the learning of technology, and the sharing of that learning as widely as they can.

"That kind of commitment to being a connected learner is one of the consistent traits that you'll see in principals who are doing a good job of leading technology in their schools. In fact, those principals will probably admit that they don't consider themselves to be techies. Their commitment remains to the learning of the students in their school, and this technology stuff is a big contributor to that. They're committed to learning everything that they can about the ways that technology can contribute to their students' learning."

The Habit in Action:

"If I can pinpoint the catalyst for all of the change and transformation that's taken place in my school, none of it happened until I became a connected learner," remarks Sheninger. "I had no idea what the term web 2.0 was. I had no idea that social media could be harnessed for learning. I was ignorant because I was not educated. Once I started learning from other educators who were doing other things with technology, I quickly learned how much I didn't know."

When Sheninger joined Twitter in early 2009, there were no how-to manuals or best practices to guide him. "I lurked and learned," he explains. "I followed a handful of educators who I'd vetted and identified as thought leaders in the fields of education and technology."

Sheninger looked at who these leaders were following to further expand his network—"If Diane Ravitch or Will Richardson is following somebody, then that person is probably a good person to follow," he remarks—and used third-party applications like TweetDeck to manage his Twitter feed by categorizing the people he was following. He watched how they used Twitter—how they shared resources, how they retweeted or replied to other people's posts, how they used hashtags to assign a tweet to a specific topic—and eventually applied what he had learned by posting his

own tweets and jumping into conversations on Twitter. Today, he can count more than 21,000 followers and growing.

Sheninger started to model not just his expectations for his teachers, but also practical methods of integrating digital tools to enhance and support curriculum. "I found that if I was not up there front and center, working with my teachers, showing them that I truly had a vested interest in the utilization of these tools to engage students, to increase achievement, to make learning more relevant and meaningful, the initiatives would not take hold or be embraced," explains Sheninger.

"As a leader I should not have to sell my staff on ways to improve and get better," he adds. "I want them to truly see the value in these shifts. I'm now sitting back with a smile on my face, watching my teachers take the lead and move us forward. But it wasn't until I actually started meeting with teachers, taking a hands-on approach, and showing them simply that if I can do this, and if I can give them some simple ideas on how to incorporate technology, then you can go from that starting point and really think of more practical ways to integrate these tools into your lessons."

5. Locate and Provide Adequate Resources

The Expert's Perspective:

FARRACE: "Nobody should be going to the board of ed saying we're going to get iPads for every student. That's not the headline. The headline is that we are committing ourselves to preparing students for the world into which they are entering, and that involves getting students more involved in using social

technologies in education, using networking technologies in education.

"That has to include 1-to-1, and that has to include connective technologies, the ability to collaborate with people across time and space. Unfortunately, all that people tend to see is that they're going to get a whole bunch of really cool flashy high-res iPad 3's in the school. Yes, these devices are really cool, but that's not the headline.

"It really is about the learning. When you speak with tech-leading principals, they will echo that. It's not fundamentally about the technology. It's about the technology supporting what these learning goals are. As Patrick Larkin is fond of saying: You look at the mission statement of the school, and you want to create learners for this age and you want to create citizens who are ready to be contributors in this world. If you're doing this for the 21st century, it really does have to include this stuff.

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“Unfortunately, finding the funding for these initiatives is really, really hard. Principals have to become experts at doing more with less. I wish there were a formula and I’m always looking for a way to share with principals where resources might be. These are difficult budget times. I don’t have a formula except to say that principals have gotten very creative about where they find the money.”

The Habit in Action:

Funding Burlington High’s iPad initiative required that Larkin “think different.” For him, that meant combing through past budgets to find areas that no longer needed to be funded once the iPads were in students’ hands. “We decided that we were buying no new sets of textbooks,” explains Larkin. “Instead of paying for a new history textbook for 250 10th-graders at \$100 apiece, we’re providing teachers a lot of support and training to find online resources to supplement their curriculum.”

He decided that he no longer needed to worry about maintaining computer labs for word processing and research because students would be able to do that anywhere in the building with their iPads. Plans were

in place to install a new \$100,000 foreign languages lab—until Larkin learned AP students could use iPads to record the oral segments of their College Board exams. “We realized once we had the iPads, we’d have a foreign language lab in every classroom,” he says.

Sheninger’s Personal Learning Network has been key to providing his teachers with adequate resources. For example, after a colleague he met through his PLN put him in touch with a representative at AVerMedia, he was able to negotiate a deal for AVerMedia to provide free document

cameras and digital response pens to his school, along with professional development on how to integrate the equipment into the classroom. His teachers now use the cameras to record mini-lessons, which they upload via YouTube to their personal Google sites so students can review the day’s material outside of class.

“If I have these lofty expectations of how I want teachers to incorporate technology, I need to make sure that I support them with the appropriate hardware, software, and professional development to make that happen,” remarks Sheninger. “My rule of thumb is I will give my teachers whatever they want. No request is too lofty. It’s my job to try to accommodate that request so that they can do their job, which is combining sound pedagogy with the integration of technology.”

But locating and providing adequate resources goes beyond hardware and software procurement. In response to what he felt was a weak professional development landscape for web 2.0 integration, Sheninger created the Edscape Conference, now in its third year. The one-day conference is free for every teacher in Sheninger’s district, and educators from other districts can attend for a small fee. He reaches out to innovative educators in both his PLN and his own school to run sessions.

“We have seen a dramatic shift in pedagogy and technology integration since starting this conference, because teachers

are realizing that it’s not that hard to integrate a lot of these web 2.0 tools, and they’re also being provided with the foundation they need to get started with what they want to do,” explains Sheninger.

6. Take Risks

The Expert’s Perspective:

FARRACE: “There really has to be a concerted effort on the part of the principal to allow the faculty to believe that risk-taking is okay. Taking it a step further, the principal really has to go out of his or her way to build the capacity of teachers to think more broadly and to take a chance. Of course, the question is always what could possibly go wrong?”

“The fact is, what could go wrong? What is the worst-case scenario in this risk that you’re taking, and do you have the capacity to absorb whatever could possibly go wrong? Think it through: Where could this initiative take a bad turn? How could we anticipate that? How are we prepared to deal with it if it does?”

“All of these things aren’t deal killers, they’re just obstacles. They’re considerations. If the principal is in place to help teachers take those risks, you’re going to see a lot more risk-taking going on in the school. Risks are really just opportunities. When you frame a risk as an opportunity, then, yeah, of course you want to be taking advantage of it.”

The Habit in Action:

Is there anything educators see as more risky than allowing students to access their mobile devices during the school day? Sheninger’s high school is in a blue-collar community; the district couldn’t afford to implement a 1-to-1 initiative. Still, many students had personal mobile devices that remained in their pockets all day, and access to portable computing devices, such as tablets or laptops, that remained at home during school hours.

“As I started to learn from other educators in my PLN, I became much more sensitive to the fact that student-owned

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(A Principal’s Perspective)

devices could be a powerful tool for learning,” explains Sheninger. Through Twitter, Sheninger consulted with educators who had implemented student-owned technology initiatives and identified areas of opportunity and areas of difficulty for this type of initiative. One challenge recognized by those in his PLN was equity: Ensuring that all students had access to technology when they didn’t all have their own technology to bring to school.

“Our challenge was to figure out ways to make sure this was as equitable as possible,” explains Sheninger, “because we knew that we were never going to allow that to be an excuse for why we would not be able to move forward.”

Sheninger worked with teachers on how to create an equitable BYOT environment through cooperative grouping, and through anonymously surveying students on which devices they’d bring to class if they could, so they could prepare lessons that took advantage of the technology that students would bring. Sheninger’s school officially launched its BYOT program for ninth- through 12th-graders in September 2011.

“We’re now doing unannounced observations and walk-throughs, and teachers are routinely integrating student-owned technology into their curriculum,” explains Sheninger. “It’s fantastic.”

7. Have a Visionary Focus

The Expert’s Perspective:

FARRACE: “Allow the work to be focused by your vision, because there are a million different things that are crossing the principal’s desk every day. What is the stuff that matters? The stuff that matters is the stuff that’s really going to contribute to your students’ learning.

“You see where your school is. Those things that you focus your time on, that you encourage your teachers to focus their time on, and that you are modeling are really those things that are contributing to the fundamental vision of what you want student learning to look like in your school. What is it that you want your students to know, and to be able to

do, and to be thinking when they leave your school? That is the vision, and that vision dictates the culture you create in your school.”

The Habit in Action:

When Hilt became the principal at Brec-knock Elementary School four years ago, she inherited a school where educational technology was an afterthought. “There were interactive whiteboards in every classroom,” she notes by way of example, “but very few of them were being used interactively throughout the day.” Noting that whiteboards can perpetuate a teacher-centric approach to learning, she believes that “we need to get the resources into kids’ hands.”

Hilt’s vision transformed the elementary school into a student-centered learning environment. Every initiative that’s been implemented since Hilt took the reins, from the creation of a districtwide elementary technology cohort group to the acquisition of mobile learning carts, has been geared toward the goal of creating an environment where students are empowered in their learning with hands-on technology.

“I think teachers see a lot of positive rewards out of the projects that their students are creating or the research that they’re doing,” she says. “They see the ‘aha’ moments in the writing that they’re doing on their blogs, and they’ve been encouraged to then find more ways to use technology to support their curriculum.”

Hilt’s vision for her school reflects the growing ubiquity of technology in students’ lives. “In most cases, our students are exposed to technology before

they get to us,” explains Hilt. “I hate to think of school of being a step backward, of being a place where we’re asking kids to power down as opposed to using these tools for their learning. We have the luxury now of having the tools in our building. To not use them in a meaningful way is a disservice to the kids.

“We have to model how to appropriately use these tools, how to have a positive digital footprint, and this is all part of the new literacy. If we’re asking our kids to be literate as far as reading and writing, we need to consider other types of literacy. They need to know how to communicate with other people in the world. As part of that communication piece, technology is essential. If we’re not encouraging that, then we’re failing them.” [the](#)

Jennifer Demski is a freelance writer based in Brooklyn, NY.

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PROFILE

JILL HOBSON DIRECTOR OF INSTRUCTIONAL TECHNOLOGY,
FORSYTH COUNTY SCHOOLS, GA

>>> A HIGH-PERFORMING DISTRICT

Forsyth County Schools in suburban Atlanta currently serves about 38,000 students in 35 schools. We are the ninth-largest school system in Georgia, and very high-performing. My position did not exist when I began at the central office in 2001; we just had instructional technology specialists out at schools. But the district saw a need for someone to coordinate that work.

>>> ON-SITE SUPPORT

The reason Forsyth has enjoyed the success we have around technology is the investment in school-based staff to support teachers and students in using it. In 1995, a little before I got here, Forsyth County Schools had a community-involved strategic planning process with more than 300 stakeholders. Out of that plan came the idea of having an instructional technology specialist (ITS) in every school.

My goal was to develop some consistency in what our ITSs were given in terms of support. We provide a mentor for every one of our new ITSs, orientation services, and online help. Three years ago we added media specialists as the number of tools increased and the ways in which technology is employed at a school became more than any one person could manage. The ITS staff are on site full time at the schools.

>>> BYOD

As far back as 2001, we were looking to the future and sensing that it wasn't always go-

ing to be school systems providing devices; eventually, kids were going to have them and want to bring them in schools. In 2007, with the support of the community, we were able to pass a referendum that allowed us to place a robust WiFi network over the entire school system. At that point we realized we needed to address the reality that every school system is doing BYOD whether they like it or not. Kids are bringing devices, it's just a question of whether your school system is ready to support that and leverage it for learning purposes.

We created a task force that helped us identify 40 teachers who spent a spring semester exploring BYOD, with support from the school system at the district level. That became a launching point for us to expand, and we're

now at a point where 100 percent of our schools have some amount of BYOD.

We don't see this as a hardware initiative; this is an initiative to transform teaching and learning. From research as well as what we see in our own school system, kids who have devices get up earlier in the morning and get busy studying. Most of us are used to devices being for play, but when kids realize it can help their schoolwork, that changes how they use their device and removes a lot of the concerns parents have about BYOD. Also, kids who have a device are more likely to track their own performance, and knowing how you're doing makes you more likely to perform at higher levels than if you don't know how well you're doing.



MY TOP 3...

WAYS TO SYSTEMATICALLY TRANSFORM LEARNING WITH TECHNOLOGY

Develop a Common Language "Having an agreed-upon lexicon for describing what IT looks like when technology is used effectively in the classroom is a critical step toward changing the way people use IT."

Provide School-Based Instructional Technology Coaches "The best professional development is 'just in time' coaching and support when teachers are ready to infuse technology into their classrooms."

Create a Tight Partnership Between Technology Services and Curriculum and Instruction "It starts with the chief technology officer and the chief academic officer."

>>> IMMERSED IN A NEW WORLD

As one of our newest initiatives, we have licensed OpenSim, which is an open-ended virtual world software platform. In a fifth-grade class we were able to construct part of the Berlin Wall, and then kids were able to imagine how they might get across and build things, within a set budget, to see if they could make it over.

They researched what it was like for people who lived behind the wall and, of course, it's an immersive experience, so they're walking around and seeing it as if they are really there. There is no other way they could have had this learning experience.

>>> A TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACH

We want to use technology in ways that transform—to do things that weren't possible without the technology. We want kids to be information producers, not information consumers; for them to be able to engage in rigorous, higher-order thinking; to be inquisitive; and to drive their own learning. 

Daniel Hertzberg



Do you know a K-12 technology leader or tech-savvy administrator or teacher we should profile? Tell us! E-mail michaelhart@1105media.com.

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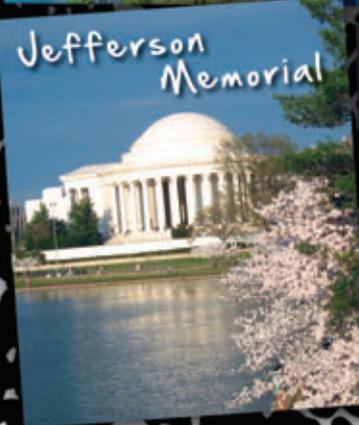


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