

Saturday, June 30, 2007

Open Source for Education

Teachers to IT Departments: You have Professional Development Homework

One of the reasons that the Technology Integration movement failed to provide a Return on Investment (ROI) commensurate with the huge amounts of money that was spent is that adequate professional development of the right kind was seldom funded or delivered. Many reasons contribute to this history of limited results from massive expenditures. Most educational technology advocates (Ed Techies) argue that not enough funds were devoted to technology. This is correct. However, the mistake was in allocation, and in failing to develop a viable funding model. Here is how the budget actually looked:

80% Boxes and Wires
15% Technical Staff
5% Training and Professional Development
Here is what the budget should have looked like:

30% Professional Development
10% Back End Processes
30% Technical Staff
30% Boxes and Wires
An even better budget model:

35% Professional Development
05% In Class Follow-Up Support
30% Technical Staff
10% Back End Processes
20%

Boxes and Wires
What we can see from this budget picture is that way too much equipment, software, wires and infrastructure was purchased before teachers and students were trained to use the equipment for instruction. Much more money needed to be spent on back end services and management support, and much more money needed to be spent on technical support (so that the equipment functioned properly).

Can't you hear the technology folks complain? "But, if we had spent the money on all these other things, we would have purchased only one quarter of the equipment that we purchased, teachers and kids wouldn't have had access to technology."

But if you have a car but no money for gas, and you can't buy new tires because you lack funds, do you have reliable transportation?

In the same way, if you have computers but fail to provide training and professional development on how to use the computers, fail to provide release time and compensation for after-hours sessions

Fail to ensure that there are enough technicians to ensure that the equipment is operational;

you retrieve only a fraction of your investment in the equipment.
Key Indicators for Professional Development Leadership

This leadership must cascade from the highest altitudes of the school district, in an unbroken chain, down to the lowly swamps and bogs where campus leadership resides

Leaders at all levels must take the "heat" and say just how much money "doing Technology Integration right" will cost
Funding

"Tremendous amounts of money will be required

The amounts of money are not for the "faint of heart"

The amounts of money are too large for the "mathematically challenged" to count to on their fingers

School leaders should adopt the motto of the slick, jewelry store sales person, "if you have to ask how much it costs, you can't afford it."

In answer to the politicians who gripe about the billions that were already wasted, a real leader says, "The billions that we spend already is 'chump change' compared to the amount that was needed. You received so little in return because you appropriated a miniscule amount of the required funding."

Resources: The resources needed also include people, teachers, trainers, substitutes

The "Train the Trainer," on-the-cheap model will never "cut it"

Time to implement: It takes three or more years before teacher can retool their patterns of instructional delivery

Practice Time: Needed for both teachers and students

Time to learn: release time and paid compensation for any after school training

Perhaps the technology integration movement will be the crucial political mistake that moves teachers to "non-exempt" overtime status. This means that teacher should collect overtime, and at some point in the future, teachers will demand that right

Equipment: Hardware and Software

Teachers who are not paid to stay after school, should expect that the school district provide equipment and software for their home use

Students should be provided software to take home, too

Training is for software, but training does not count as professional development

Teachers require focused professional development, targeting actual curriculum/ subject matter that they teach and conducted by trainers who have actually used those methods with real age-appropriate students

If the bean counters complain, "But, this will require an small army of training staff, and shoot our costs through the roof!"

Reply, absolutely.

Anything less than professional development by real teachers who actually applied what they present in the real-world arena of a classroom in front of students fails to rise to the level of "professional development"

Follow-Up:

Either follow-up personally, provide online interaction for follow-up, or watch your investment in training and professional development "wither on the vine"

"One off" training have little in common with professional development needs

Professional development without personalized follow-up fails to recoup any of the investment

"One Off" training is like giving folks a single golfing lesson, and expecting them to hit the links regularly, consistently improving their score. Comment: "Fat chance!"

Focus on Instruction

"Software only" training seldom generalizes to consistent application in classroom instruction

Software training may increase teachers' personal productivity, if, they have the software in their classrooms and they have the software at home. "If not, tough luck to whoever paid for the training," they've wasted their money!

Benefit to Students

With minimal access to equipment and teacher less than knowledgeable about how to use the equipment, student use withers and wilts. Why buy equipment until it can be used?

Equipment that is purchased with an "If we build it, they will come" attitude proves to be partially correct. We build the labs, but students will use them to play games, send personal E-mail, defeat the content filters and access pornography, and end up infecting the computers with "Spyware" and Trojan-type viruses

Virus makers and hackers love to infect school district computers because the computers run all night on high-speed networks with no one watching them. School districts that fail to hire appropriate (high-priced experts) security staff seem to be responsible for sending a major portion of the Spam that we all receive

Change of Teaching Style

The Integration of Technology requires a "whole 'nuther teaching style

Teachers know, but don't confront their supervisors with the truth that it takes time to build new habits of instructional delivery and new habits of classroom management

Teachers need practice time, and time to perfect new skills

Teachers need coaches who are master teachers, not techies who know how to use a computer, but who "washed out in the classroom"

Teachers can't just listen to some instructions, read a handout, and be expected to apply complex changes that require different attitudes, knowledge and skills

Trainers who have Applied what they Teach are next to useless

Inform school district decision-makers that they squandered district money on trainers that teachers easily "saw through"

Teachers may be too polite to tell trainers that they are "all wet" and don't know what they are talking about, or, maybe they had a difficult day and were forced to attend an after-school session, and they were less than polite

We've said it before…trainers only earn standing with teachers by delivering Integrated Lessons in front of students. "No real track record, no credibility with teachers"

Empowerment

Empowerment is mandatory for both teachers and studentsDiscussion on Professional DevelopmentI posted comments on a discussion page at the Classroom 2.0 site, asking for ideas.

My first reminder was that "top to bottom" school district leadership is crucial for any professional development initiative.

To look in on the rest of this discussion, follow this link…

Link to further professional development discussion on Classroom 2.0

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Open Source at 03:00