

The Superintendent as Chief Technology Modeler

BY KEITH KRUEGER

“How many of you IM?” Dennis Richards, the superintendent from Falmouth, Mass., asked a room full of educators at a statewide conference not long ago.

Few hands rose into the air.

Richards wasn't surprised. He believes superintendents, principals and teachers ought to become comfortable with new technologies, such as instant messaging, podcasting and particularly online learning.

“Students have the ability to comfortably participate in online environments. Unless educators experience it and reflect on it, they're never going to be able to use it with kids,” he says.

As the world becomes ever more technology intensive, superintendents should be expected to model innovative uses of technology and to empower educators, parents, students and the community with technology solutions.



“Superintendents need to be seen as the chief technology modeler in the school district ...”

A Credible Advocate

A quick question: Beyond your cell phone, is there a cutting-edge technology that you use routinely to accomplish your work? Do you use Ustream, Twitter, YouTube, Elluminate, Diigo, Mind42, Jing, SecondLife, Google Docs and TED in your work? What do they have to with learning and our own capacity to collaborate, to create, to invent?

For many superintendents, the answer is most likely no. But technology can help you stay on top of your game, both as a tool for personal productivity and as a means for professional learning, growth, collaboration and communications. You will be a much more informed, passionate and believable advocate of technology in your school district — and, when appropriate, with the state or federal legislators who determine technology funding — if you actually use it yourself.

Richards, who serves as Massachusetts affiliate president of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, experienced the power of online learning by participating in a free three-week conference titled K12OnlineConference.org. In October 2007, the online community attended more than 40 online presentations on podcasting, copyright, professional development, Web 2.0 and blogging. There were online chats with presenters and 24-hour chat rooms. At the conference, the technology setup created an online environment that allowed attendees to view and talk to presenters and see and hear their presentations as audio and video podcasts.

After that experience, Richards realized how professional learning communities, such as those promoted in the groundbreaking book *On Common Ground: The Power of Professional Learning Communities*, by Richard DuFour and two co-authors, could become reality online.

“During the course I volunteered to be a co-moderator

for one session. I stayed on for two hours talking to more than 20 educators all across the globe,” Richards says. “It was an incredibly rich, professional experience. We also used Twitter, a free social networking and micro-blogging service that allows users to send updates to colleagues in the online network I learned to develop with help from other educators more experienced with that learning space.”

Wider Vantages

Inspired by his online learning experience, Richards encouraged his school district staff to partner with the Woods Hole Research Center to help redesign learning experiences in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, today commonly referenced as STEM. “We created a project called the Kids Global Climate Change Institute (www.KidsGCCI.ning.com and www.KidsGCCI.pbwiki.com) as an attempt on the part of school district to shift our paradigm using technology,” he says. “With willing scientists at Woods Hole, we trained teachers utilizing content around global warming using an online environment.

“In addition, all our classrooms have blog sites to interview and post questions for scientists from anywhere in the world. We are building a forum for conversation and knowledge throughout the world for middle school students with scientists on climate change,” Richards adds.

Leading a school district and dealing with day-to-day responsibilities is demanding work that can leave superintendents isolated. Technology can help superintendents stay in touch with the wider world and gain important perspectives.

Online conferences and forums, such as blogs, chat programs and instant messaging, enable you to network with your peers, benchmark what other school systems in your state, the nation and abroad are doing, and be among the first to learn about research, best practices and technology innovation. Similarly, technology can be used to support new or veteran principals, teachers or other educators with coaching or mentoring.

Yet *Education Week* reported earlier this year that 88 percent of 125 superintendents surveyed in five Southern states had not attended a technology-training session in the previous three years.

Overcoming Resistance

Superintendents need to be seen as the chief technology modeler in the school district, showcasing innovative technology in their work with staff and community. “Walking the walk” using multimedia presentations for the school board or podcasts to the faculty or using a blog of your own can illustrate your commitment to changing the culture of education in your district. Demonstrating a willingness to put yourself on the line and take risks

Tech Leadership oversight

can alleviate some of the staff resistance and fear that are typical with new technologies.

To learn more about how technology is changing the role of superintendents, visit Empowering the 21st Century Superintendent, a new online toolkit created by the Consortium for School Networking, endorsed by AASA and many state superintendent associations, at www.superintendentempower.org.

Only through superintendents modeling technology leadership will we benefit the best investments made in infrastructure and professional development so that technology will systemically transform learning for educators and students in a way that is required for the challenges of the 21st century.

Superintendent Richards has it right when he says, “The goal of education hasn’t changed at all, it’s just become more enriched with these new technology tools.”

Keith Krueger is chief executive officer of the Consortium for School Networking in Washington, D.C. E-mail: keith@cosn.org

PAGE: 9
FULL
PAGE AD
ING