Planning for Technology

Local Technology Plan
Case Study

The University of Akron

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April 14, 2013
Introduction
As the new technology planning consultant for Perry Local Schools I was asked to review the current state of technology in the district by looking at their current technology plan. The previous plan was created using the eTech Ohio online Technology Planning Tool version 3.0 and very closely follows the Ohio’s State Educational Technology plan. I will identify areas of strengths and weaknesses and will provide recommendations based on the National Education Technology Plan as well as the Ohio’s State Educational Technology Plan.

Planning Team
The current planning team has a wide assortment of members. The members include: Assistive Technology/Special Needs Coordinator, Board Member, Business Manager, Community/Business Leader, Curriculum Coordinator, Instructional Integrationist, Library/Media Specialist, Parent, Principal, Superintendent, Student, Teacher, Technology Coordinator, Technology Support and Treasurer. This planning team design has many strengths. The current team includes a Parent and Community/Business Leader. This shows that the school district values the input of its community and it also follows the NETP in that it states, “To shorten our learning curve, we should look to other kinds of enterprises, such as business and entertainment, that have used technology to improve outcomes while increasing productivity.” (U.S. Department of Education, 2010, p. x). A Community/Business Leader could provide valuable insight into what works in industry. The planning team also includes a student which is a strength because a student can help to recommend technologies that their peers are familiar with and suggest learning tools. The remaining members of the team are also important because they will all be included in carrying the goals of the plan. A weakness in the planning team is that it does not state how members will be chosen to serve on the planning team.

Recommendations
Although I believe the current plan has a strong basis for the members who will serve on the planning team, I believe that some additions need to be made. It states that there is a teacher on the team. The current plan provides specific curriculum implementation in the following subject areas: English Language Arts, Fine Arts, Foreign Language, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, and Technology. A teacher from each of the preceding disciplines should be
included on the team. Also various grade levels need to be represented. What technology is appropriate for high school students may not be appropriate for primary students. The committee also includes a principal. It is recommended that a principal from each of the buildings be represented on the committee so that they can state their concerns for their particular building.

**Curriculum Alignment & Instructional Integration**

A goal of the current technology plan is to align current content standards with technology standards. A strength of the current plan is that professional development is outlined very clearly. The plan states exactly what professional development opportunities will be offered and when and who will provide these opportunities. A weakness is that the plan does not thoroughly detail what technologies will be used in the content areas to achieve the standards. The plan simply states that computers with internet access will be used to conduct research and access simulation software. It also states that multimedia presentation tools will be used for student projects but it does not state exactly which technology tools are to be used. This technology plan spans 3 school years. Technology changes so rapidly that not including specific technology tools could be considered a strength of this section as well.

**Recommendations**

This school district has recently adopted an Acceptable Use Policy that includes a “bring your own device” to school section. This policy should be included in the Technology plan outlining how the students will use their own technological devices to aid in their learning. I would also suggest that the plan include aspects of “connected teaching.” According to the NETP “In connected teaching, classroom educators are fully instrumented, with 24/7 access to data about student learning and analytic tools that help them act on the insights the data provide” (U.S. Department of Education, 2010, p. 40). This concept needs to be presented to the teachers in a professional development session. Lastly I would recommend that the professional development opportunities evolve each year as technology evolves. Center professional development sessions around what the teachers are interested in learning more about and provide teachers with mentors and online training to carry out the use of these tools in the classroom to enhance student learning.
Technology Policy, Leadership and Administration

This area of the plan appears to be weakest. The current plan has all areas in the Exploration or Transformation in regards to the technology policies. Technology policies need to be updated on a regular basis to keep up with changing times. A weakness of this area of the Technology plan is they do not state how often they plan to review and update the technology policies. The writers of this plan feel to maintain policy development the administration need be the ones generating changes. Administrators in this district fully embrace technology but their lack of time prohibits them from attending all the professional development opportunities they are given. A strength of the plan is that administrators are being evaluated twice a year on their technology advocacy and usage.

Recommendations

In order to maintain updated technology policies a timeline needs to be put in place stating when the technology policies will be evaluated. A technology committee should be formed that includes leaders in technology from each elementary building and in the middle school and high school each department. This committee will be responsible for promoting technology use and assisting teachers in using technology in their classrooms. This committee will then report to the technology director any concerns or changes that need to be implemented in the current technology policies.

Technology Infrastructure Management and Support

This section discusses the network/communications infrastructure that is necessary to support the technologies that teachers are using in the classroom. The current plan discusses weaknesses in the video streaming capabilities of the school and plans to subscribe to vendors who provide this service. Student access to technology is not quite where the district wishes for it to be. In the high school they wish to obtain a 1:1 ratio of students to computers. All schools have wireless access. Security is addressed in the current plan. The district feels they currently are fairly strong in the security of the network. A strong anti-virus plan and a second player of network security are in place for both the network and the user. A filtering system for the internet is in place and diligent efforts are being made weekly to make sure there are no new spyware and tricks students try to gain inappropriate use. A weakness of this plan is that it does
not address inappropriate use by students via their own devices. This plan is a little outdated and does not include the Acceptable Use Policy of the Bring Your Own Device that they have recently instituted.

**Recommendation**

Teachers need to be trained on all software that is available to them and shown how it could be used in their classroom to enhance student learning. Trial versions of new software should be obtained for technology leaders in the schools to experiment with. Using student data obtained after the use of the trial software, and discussing the pros and cons of the software with the experimental teacher, the technology coordinator will then determine if the software is one that the district should purchase. Lastly, the Acceptable Use Policy should be included and state that students using their own device to access the internet must log into the network server so that the filtering of websites is in place.

**Budget and Planning**

Budgeting for technology is one of 13 specific line item budgets addressed yearly by the Superintendent’s cabinet. A strength of this model is that it helps to ensure that all technology purchases are done from one source and there is no overlap. The technology budget is also a factor in the five-year forecast of the district so that future planning is done appropriately. Additional technology costs are covered by a mix of grants and monies from the general fund. The district takes advantage of such grants as e-Rate, eTech Ohio’s Schoolnet Plus and Professional development grants.

**Recommendations**

The district has been awarded several recurring grants that they need to continue to follow the requirements of to ensure they keep them. To continue moving forward with the technology initiatives the district has they must continue to apply for additional grants. Efforts need to be made to pursue other funding sources as well such as business partnerships and donations from alumni and the community.
References
