

The Importance of Modeling Tech Adoption

BY PEGGY S. BUFFINGTON

Our schools are surging with 21st-century learning, and our students are constantly “powered up” with interactive and social networking tools. Yet many of us in education leadership are not digital natives, and some educators are reluctant to embrace new technology applications.

In my experience, one of the best ways for superintendents to encourage the adoption and exercise of new tools is to model their use and show off the benefits.

I make regular use of blogs, podcasts and other technology applications to communicate with stakeholders in my K-12 school district of 3,900 children. For instance, our district is participating in the Be There campaign (<http://bethere.org>), a national research-based, multi-media campaign designed to get parents more involved in their children’s education. We have many website and in-school activities that support this initiative.

As part of that campaign, I created my own blog on our website (<http://hobart.schoolwires.com/bethereblog>) to promote two-way interaction with parents. I ask parents to post the particular ways they are “being there” for their children so that parents can learn from and interact with each other. Over time, I add a thought-provoking topic for parents to discuss, such as homework. The blog has been effective at getting parents to interact with the school district and each other.

I also created podcasts of “The 5 Conditions That Make a Difference” from the Quaglia Institute and posted them on our website (<http://hobart.schoolwires.com/8conditions>). Recording the information in a podcast enables parents to download it on their MP3 or MP4 players and listen to it at their convenience, or they can listen to it from the website.

By making these materials available on the district website, I increase the likelihood parents will see the information and perhaps incorporate positive communication into their family lives. The fact that I take the time to record and post the information highlights the importance of it.

We know from conversations at school events that parents are listening. Tools like the blog and podcasts create a stronger home-school connection, and they strengthen parent support for the goals we are trying to accomplish at school.

Filling Buckets

Our teachers and principals also actively use these technology tools. Some schools are using podcasts and blogs to engage their parents and children in a districtwide initiative focused on the book *How Full Is Your Bucket? For Kids* by Tom Rath. We posted podcast excerpts from the book along with activities that are happening at the

schools and things parents can try at home with “filling buckets.”

In addition, our principals are blogging with parents on how they “fill buckets” with positive comments and interactions rather than depleting buckets. This creates a powerful opportunity for parents to interact with each other and their children on subject matter that is being discussed in the classroom. The resulting synergy is awesome.

In addition, every teacher in the district has created a teacher web page, many with interactive tools for extending the learning experience outside the classroom. The performing arts teachers are posting homework in the form of podcasts. Students listen to the podcasts and then identify the artists and instruments being used. A science class created a rap on mitosis that they can listen to repeatedly on a podcast they created. Many of our teachers also blog.

By leveraging these technology tools, teachers are interacting with today’s digital learners in their zone of comfort and experience and adding excitement to their learning.

Of course, modeling alone will not foster teacher adoption of technology. First and foremost, you must select technology that is easy for teachers to learn and use. I can’t emphasize this point enough.

Our school district uses the Schoolwires Centricity solution that makes it simple for teachers to create their own websites. The tools are similar to those found in Microsoft Word. Teachers can easily create and post blogs and podcasts right onto their teacher web pages.

Equally important, a district needs to provide ample professional development and support for educators to learn new technology applications in a nonthreatening environment. A little hand holding also helps. If teachers or principals ask me how to create a podcast or blog, I always find time to teach them.

Active Engagement

Because we demonstrate the value of technology by using it, I believe the Hobart schools have successfully crossed the generational divide. For any school district initiative to be successful, an administrator must set high expectations, model the desired behavior and provide the right tools along with professional support and training.

Technology adoption is no different. By engaging with stakeholders, school leaders and staff members using Web 2.0 technology tools, I am demonstrating my high level of involvement in the district and my accessibility. As a result, our wide use of technology is connecting us with parents and community members more deeply than ever before — and that is giving students the support to be successful learners.

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