Chapter 13
Planning a Successful Staff Development Program

OVERVIEW

The implementation of an organized, well-funded staff development program is critical to the effective use of technology in a school. This chapter provides an overview of some common "best practice" concepts that have succeeded in school districts throughout the nation. Despite local differences in philosophy, budgets, and technology resources, teachers and administrators can implement some or all of these practices to promote the effective integration of technology and education.

When it comes to technology in education, you can create it, you can design it, you can produce it, you can integrate it, you can order it, restructure it, give it standards, and write outcomes for it. But the bottom line is, that if it is going to happen, teachers have to make it happen.
—Jacqueline Goodloe, Washington, D.C., teacher

Investing in Teachers: Why Staff Development?

Andrew Blau, director of communication policy at the Benton Foundation, has stated that a recent study by the foundation found that "the single most important variable for making the investment in educational technology pay off is teacher training." Unfortunately, professional development is often the first item eliminated when money is short. Since the results of staff development programs are hard to document, they are often the most difficult to "sell" to a school or district's constituents. The end result may be rooms full of shiny, unused machines, confused teachers and students, and a school board asking difficult questions about recent hardware expenditures.
How can you avoid this dangerous detour from your goal of a Connected Learning Community? Again, think of staff development in terms of a road trip across the country: Putting someone who has never used an automobile behind the wheel and asking that person to drive without any instruction may get you somewhere, but probably not to your desired destination! Almost everyone agrees that learning to use technology is a good idea. Unfortunately, not everyone agrees that the right training is worth the expense. Gaining credibility among your constituents depends upon having concrete goals for your learning program and having the flexibility to achieve those goals in a number of different ways.

Professional Development Guidelines

Professional development programs vary widely from state to state, district to district, and school to school. The guidelines governing these programs vary as well and will likely evolve over time. For example, until last year, Florida required every school district to devote one-third of its technology funding to teacher training; Nebraska and North Carolina are currently developing standards for technology and teacher competencies; and Texas lawmakers recently introduced an initiative that increases the number of contract days for teachers every two years, to allow time for technology-related training. In short, legislation will have an impact on some of the details of your program. So will the demands of your key constituents, and each will change over time.
Those details aside, there are key issues common to every staff development program that must be addressed to ensure the successful implementation of your school or district's technology plan:

- How will teachers' training needs be met?
- Will teachers have adequate professional development and time to learn how to integrate new tools into their instructional practices?
- Will teachers have access to ongoing technical support?
- Will staff development be updated regularly to deal with rapid changes in technology?
- How can everyone in the school or district be taught to use technology effectively?

Key Support Needs

The RAND Corporation's workshops on professional development and effective technology-assisted schooling provide valuable insights on the support teachers need to integrate technology and curricula effectively in the classroom. The workshops suggest three goals to support teachers:

1. *Adequate time to acquire technology-related skills and to plan technology-integrated curricula and activities.* Teachers need time away from their classroom responsibilities to attend training and workshops, experiment with hardware, and explore software. Teachers also need the opportunity to meet with other teachers to share successes and collaborate on new technology-related teaching strategies.
2. *Responsive assistance.* Teachers need assistance that is available based on their needs rather than on the convenience of support staff. Responsive assistance and "just in time" staff development provide ongoing help and support in a timely fashion—when teachers need it. On-site, trained coordinators can play a key role in providing this responsive assistance.
3. *Links between professional development and educational goals.* The professional development of teachers must have a clear sense of purpose linked directly to the school's educational vision and goals. As such, all professional development activities should be designed to produce positive, measurable results that support the vision and goals.

District Practices

School districts often have greater staff resources to implement professional development programs than individual schools have. Many districts have trained staff dedicated to providing professional development workshops to individual schools. If this is true for your district, ask for their assistance.

If the district does not have the staff resources to assist your school directly, find out what training strategies have been used in the past. Then leverage the district's expertise and experience to create a professional development program for your school. To build on your district's technology professional development expertise and experience, investigate the following:

- What has worked?
- What hasn't worked?
- Which district people might be tapped as facilitators and leaders?
- Which school-site people might be good trainers?
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Best Practices: Developing a Training Infrastructure

Time and/or budget constraints may prevent some schools or districts from introducing a formal curriculum and classroom approach to skill building. But staff development cannot be an isolated activity. A common trait of districts with strong technology integration is the development of a training infrastructure—a support system for the introduction and communication of technology skills. This support system can consist of a variety of tools, both formal and informal, used at both the district and school levels. No one of the following tools is effective as a delivery system for technical knowledge; however, a combination of these practices can enhance the effectiveness of your staff development program and help maintain enthusiasm for technology integration.

Train-the-trainer programs. Select teachers are given in-depth training and support. They, in turn, serve as resources and trainers for their peers. The trainers may forge their own set of goals, or they may follow the guidelines established by the district. In either situation, the trainers generally develop a hands-on program that includes applications training, information sharing, and integration of technology and Internet resources into the curriculum.

Model technology classrooms and schools. Technology-rich classrooms or schools are developed that showcase various applications of technology. Constituents see new teaching strategies modeled during routine school days, and visitor participants are able to interact with teachers and students engaged in making changes in their classrooms.

Expert resources. Experts representing various staff positions (such as librarians and technology coordinators) or volunteers from business, parent, and student groups serve as resources at school sites.

For a complete listing of references and self-paced training products for Microsoft applications, visit Microsoft Press on the Internet at http://mspress.microsoft.com/.
Vendor resources. A variety of commercial staff development resources exist, from self-study curricula to off-site instructor-led skills training. Although many of the instructor-led services are beyond the budget of smaller districts, self-paced training by paper and/or electronic media is a cost-effective addition to almost any size technology program.
The Global SchoolNet Foundation provides teacher activity guides, Encarta Schoolhouse and online software guides, Global SchoolNet projects, and Internet training solutions to teachers.
http://www.gsn.org/
Private industry companies such as Classroom Connect (http://www.classroom.net) and The Massachusetts Software Council (http://www.swcouncil.org) provide a wealth of information and products, ranging from primers on basic computing skills and Internet lesson plans to reviews of commercial software and online teacher development.
For a review of online resources, see "Untangling the Web of Online Curriculum Resources" in *Microsoft K–12 Connection.* http://www.microsoft.com/education/instruction/articles/currRes.asp
Gurus. Every teacher and staff member will find his or her own comfort level with one or more key technologies. As these interests evolve, other teachers will naturally seek out the individuals who are "experts" on a particular software or hardware tool. With encouragement and support, those individuals can develop into strong complements to your formal technology support infrastructure.
Online teacher support groups. Teachers can draw pedagogical, curricular, and emotional support from colleagues. Face-to-face support isn't always possible given the constraints of the teaching environment. However, some can be facilitated by technology itself: Teachers can create, share, and evaluate materials online; mentor one another or engage in discussion groups from afar (using distance technologies like CU-See Me); and observe on video or CD-ROM other teachers at work in classrooms.
Other online resources. The Internet is a rich resource for technology-related professional development, lesson plans, technology integration tips, and even technical content for skills-development classes. See the sidebar for sample sites.
Administrative commitment. Any armed forces commander can tell you that the leader of inspired troops leads from the front. In education, administrators can lead by attending training sessions with teacher teams and providing extra time and resources for teachers to work together, reflect on what they are learning and doing, and assist their colleagues in technology activities.

Putting the Pieces Together

Just as there is no one correct route to most destinations on a cross-country trip, there are no formula answers to the "best" staff development program. An effective professional development program must be tailored to fit your school or district's unique constraints and technology environment, and must be, at the least, acceptable to all those constituents affected by the funding or implementation of the program. Many combinations of the "best practice" tools cited may be effective at your school or district.
Technology implementation is exciting, and you may well be tempted to try everything at once, with the enthusiastic support of your teaching staff. Keep in mind that the end goal of the journey is arriving at the Connected Learning Community — the environment in which exciting and innovative technologies open new worlds of learning *for your students*. Choose your route carefully to avoid detours into Hi-Tech Teacherville and other technology tourist traps.
Finally, when setting staff development goals, be sure to recall lessons learned from the more "tangible" aspects of your technology plan. Marketing, budgeting, and leadership are just as important to realizing the vision of empowered teachers as they are to achieving the overall Connected Learning Community at your school.