

STORIES FOR ADVOCACY

New Educator Finds Passion for Teaching

As told by Kecia Ray, Anne Noonan, Connie Louie, Neal Strudler, Betsy Goeltz, Shirley Crehan
- Nashville, TN to Suzie Boss

During her first year in the classroom, Jan Dickens was feeling disenchanting and discouraged. She had started her second career full of hope, but now she was second guessing her decision. In her previous career, she had regularly used technology, and she recognized how it could be useful in the classroom. But her suburban high school had limited resources and offered little in the way of staff development in technology. Jan nearly became a statistic—one of the 30 percent of new teachers who leave the field within their first three years.

It isn't the technology that has made such a difference, but the resources that this new teacher and her students have discovered at the other end of the technology.

That was five years ago. Today, Jan leads an innovative health studies program that brings her Tennessee students into direct contact with doctors, researchers, and other medical experts. She's energized about teaching, and her students are getting the chance to engage with health professionals in the real world.

What's made the difference?

Jan developed a partnership with Vanderbilt University. Working with Dr. Kecia Ray, Metro Nashville (TN) Public Schools, Jan has set up regular videoconferences between her health students and medical experts from Vanderbilt University Center for Science Outreach. Students can ask questions, learn about research, and gain a real window into the world of medicine and health. It isn't the technology that has made such a difference, but the resources that Jan and her students have discovered at the other end of the technology.

The success of this effort has generated other changes. Today, a full time technology coach, Diane Bennett, coordinates the high school's instructional technology efforts—another symptom of change in the way this school thinks about using technology to forge new connections and expand learning opportunities.

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