

STORIES FOR ADVOCACY

Technology Tools Improve Learning

As told by Annette Smith, Wisconsin Educational Media Association, Milton, WI to Suzie Boss

As technology coordinator for a 3,000-student district in Wisconsin, I was recently reminded of the importance of “walking our talk” when it comes to meeting the needs of both teachers and learners. Here’s what happened:

The district recently redesigned its Web site. That means each teacher now has a template to create a Web page. We provide a brief, one-to-one training to ensure that teachers understand how to post files. Most teachers need only about five minutes to learn how to get their Web pages started. Students can access the Web pages from home computers, and from the school and public libraries that are kept open in the evening to ensure access.

Within only a month, this teacher had discovered the district Web site to be a powerful tool to help his students succeed

All went well at first. After running smoothly for about a month, the new Web site crashed. Busy with other projects, I did not make it a priority to get the site back up. As a result, it was down for about a week.

While the site was still down, I happened to run into a middle school social studies teacher. I know from experience that he has been reluctant to use technology. He’s certainly not an innovator. So I was surprised when he insisted that I get the Web site fixed “by tomorrow.” Within only a month, he had discovered the site to be a powerful tool to help his students succeed. In fact, he now considered it essential.

How had this happened? At the middle school, the principal decided to require all teachers to use the new Web resource to enhance communications. All middle school teachers are expected to post their assignments, along with a weekly class calendar. This social studies teacher had reluctantly complied, only to watch his students’ performance soar when the Web site went live. He was using his Web page to post all his classroom test review materials and students were going to the site to review materials and prepare for tests. When the Web site crashed, so did his students’ performance. He wanted that Web site back, and so did his students.

Focus on Funding

A consortium grant supported these efforts, and another grant was used to hire a technology integration consultant to conduct initial training. The next year, the Library Media Specialist took on the role of training new staff.

Of course, I made it a priority to get the site fixed. I also learned an important lesson about remembering the needs of all users. This was not a teacher who had become a technology innovator or an expert at technology integration. He was simply dragging files to a folder and posting content to the Web. But in doing so, he had found an excellent tool to improve learning for his students. And he was not about to let it go.

To learn more about the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE), and to view other stories and resources in the Advocacy Toolkit, please visit www.iste.org/advocacy/toolkit/.

ISTE provides leadership and service to improve teaching and learning by advancing the effective use of technology in education.