

Leadership in Technology Integration

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FOLLOW THE LEADER

We have all heard the saying, “Follow the Leader,” but what if there is none? When humans learn a new skill or idea, the tendency is to look to others to see how they are implementing or embracing the new methods, as well as look to see what the expectation is in its adoption. The integration of technology in the learning process is no different. Leadership, or lack thereof, can make the difference between the technology becoming a formidable tool that causes a change in the teaching and learning within the classroom, or just being a very expensive writing implement, or even worse, an electronic tool that provides busy seatwork.

When technology was first introduced into schools, it was basically a “bottom-up” implementation, with those teachers who expressed interest being the ones who led the way. Today, with the amount of money and effort that has been invested in the infrastructure, it cannot sustain any measure of success to reform and transform education without committed leadership providing both vision and support for that vision. I do not think it is an exaggeration to say that the success or failure of the integration process is dependent on the role of those who guide the process.

The leadership role is important at every level: federal, state, district, and school. When one of those levels fails, the chances of success are decreased substantially at each of the lower levels. Previous experience has shown that some individuals will succeed despite the lack of support, but for systemic change to take place, the role of the leader as a model is critical.

When addressing the integration of technology at the classroom level, we must first look at the leadership at the federal level. The current administration has outlined a plan to consolidate the e-Rate program with other technology programs and distribute the monies to each state in the form of a block grant. States would be expected to set performance goals to measure how federal technology funds are being used to improve student achievement. Failure to meet the

goals would cause states and districts to lose federal funds. Basically, the bureaucracy of disbursement of funds moves from the federal level to the state level. The amount of funding for education, including technology, will most likely decrease during this term of this presidency as well. Leadership? Do not look to the federal level for it.

Passing the responsibility onto the states means that there will be a wide variety of performance expectations among the states. These expectations are totally dependent on the technology leaders within the state’s education department. Some states have been recognized as leaders in the area of innovative use of technology, while others have little, if any, statewide plans for creating an information technologies system. As a district person involved in promoting and encouraging the integration of technology, I find that our state needs to take more of a leadership role. When meeting and conferring with colleagues, we find that we are often duplicating processes that could often have been directed and/or assisted by those at the state level. Support should be given to all districts, with the type of assistance dependent on where the districts are, relative to their level of implementation. A commitment and vision by the state is needed for all districts to move forward in the integration process. There needs to be statewide technology competencies for educational staff. Technology should be acknowledged in the credentialing process, for both teachers and administrators. This requires the state to take a stand in stating that technology integration is a priority and needs to be supported fully with funding for training and equipment. Leadership? Given the current state administration and its view that the educational system is a “black hole” for state money, the outlook is not bright.

At the district level, it comes as no surprise that most superintendents view technology as a challenge. Management issues come to the forefront. There are extra budget issues in technology that deal with equipment, maintenance, and training. There is no doubt that at the district level, the superintendent has

the often difficult position of recognizing what the need for technology is, and trying to meet that need by juggling all the competing priorities.

Experts say that there is a link between administrators' ability to make informed technology decisions and their personal use of technology. I can support that statement, as I am fortunate to be in a school district with a technology-fluent superintendent. He understands the potential of technology in the classroom and has continued to support its use throughout the district, both administratively and educationally. However, depending on the state support, he may very well have a more difficult time juggling district priorities during this next biennium. Hopefully, the technology "ball" does not get dropped. The superintendent is indeed a powerful leader in the district, and how technology integration is supported tends to vary from district to district. Leadership? It depends on the priority that is placed on technology by the "administrator in charge."

When a district has technology integration as a priority, the building administrators need to carry the message to their staff. When the administrator is a

strong advocate and user of computer technology, technological innovation can become a reality for that school. As a role model, the principal must understand how to operate and manage the new technology. The principal needs to understand how technology has the potential to improve student outcomes when used appropriately. The principal needs to demonstrate the value he/she places on technology integration by creating opportunities for staff to become technology literate and by understanding the change process that the staff needs to undergo for successful implementation to take place. Since I work directly with schools in my district, it is immediately apparent to me which principals have played a leadership role in technology integration in their building. Leadership? It depends on whether or not the principal values and understands the role that technology can play in the classroom.

As one can see, the leadership roles at the different levels are interdependent. Without all the pieces in place, technology integration in the classroom is not just around the corner, it is out of sight. Where *are* the leaders to follow?

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