

Tech Coordinators' Forum Held in Grand Island February 20, 2008

Submitted by Gary Needham, Kearney Public Schools

NOTE: These minutes will be posted to the NETA web site also.
<http://netasite.org/conf2008/TechCoordinators.shtml>

In attendance:

Gary Needham, Kearney; Vicki Jones, Wahoo; Alton Archibald, Gordon-Rushville; Kristi Jergensen, Lexington; Peggy Medema, Valentine; Judi Carter, Renee Kopf, Falls City; Anthony Nabower, Plattsmouth; Chuck Wergin, Milford; Leonard Kwapnioski, Columbus; Wayne Wiens, Adams Central; Danny Tesar, Tri-County/Thayer Central; Rich Molettiere, Omaha; Pam Krambeck, ESU 3; Bob Goeman, UNO College of Ed; Cindy Husted, Maurice Shellhaas, Sue Burch, Grand Island; Brad Larson, Kathy Vetter, Holdrege; Tom McConnell, Pat Wolff, Norfolk; Steve Stortz, Norfolk Lutheran; Timothy Dodd, York; David Koch, Beatrice; John Mason, Cozad; Gary Stearley, Syracuse; Larry Hoback, Crete; Trent Kelly, Hastings.

NETA

Discussed tech coordinator time at NETA. 5-6 p.m Thursday, downstairs this year. The tech strand was discussed as a valuable piece of the conference. Future years will require earlier organization of the strand to better match presentation submission times with the rest of the conference.

A tech coordinator's group web page has been created on the NETA web site. It will contain minutes, proposed agendas, and other documents related to discussion issues as the group activities grow.

The future of these TC forum meetings was discussed in detail. The group wants to leave it as a statewide group rather than regionalizing to increase numbers. Much of the group comes specifically for the networking/contact with other attendees. With attendees from all both southeast and northwest Nebraska attending, Grand Island remains the obvious meeting location. There was positive feedback related to having topical 1-2 hour skypecasts/webinars, so we may try that in the future.

Technology Support

Staffing for Technology

Significant discussion regarding network documentation needs. Districts rarely have enough staff (or enough of a priority) on making sure adequate documentation is kept. When staff turn over, the difficulty is noticed. Several districts were willing to share both policy and documentation templates and they will be placed on the group page of the NETA web site.

One district in the state recently had a tragedy that left them without a technology coordinator. Even with plenty of warning, districts have trouble replacing technology staff; what resources are available to find someone on short notice? No one provided an answer, but there was some interest in determining a "best practice." That will be difficult because many tech coordinators are the first in their district and have defined much of their own positions. Pam Krambeck volunteered to take this to the ESU TAG group. Some districts also volunteered to share policies and procedures for placement on the NETA TC group web site.

We discussed whether school networks can handle the video programs being purchased right now by

many booster clubs. Some networks can handle it, others struggle. The best practice stated by the group is to strongly advise that trading of video via the network occur outside school hours.

Network

Malware

Discussion of a type of virus shipping directly on peripheral devices (http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/business/351670_picframevirus18.html) led to a general discussion of how to appropriately communicate malware and scam notices to users. Some wait until they have collected a minimum of questions, then e-mail all staff. Demonstrating an understanding of hoaxes is at least as important as broadcasting the threats.

E-mail archiving

The discussion about e-mail archiving continued from previous meetings. In addition to the federal ruling fueling the discussion, the state document retention schedule (http://www.sos.ne.gov/records-management/pdf/10_website.pdf) should be considered. It is important to have a board policy, and equally important to follow it. Lack of either of these will cause trouble in the case of a lawsuit. One district expressed a willingness to share their retention policy via the NETA web site.

Distance Learning

With Network Nebraska initiatives, upgrades are occurring in various parts of the state. Equipment at the network edge was part of the focus, as were portable carts designed for distance learning.

Westridge MS Tour

After a break for lunch, a facilities tour of the new middle school revealed a commitment to collaborative learning and teaching environments and attention to making the building adaptable in power, network, sound, and video capabilities.

Data Management & Security

System Interoperability

No one present was using Pearson Inform, Just5Clicks, or similar systems to act as a reporting engine for various school data. Some districts have investigated them and may have something in place by next year. SIF Integration servers were discussed too, as integration pieces between SIS, emergency calling systems, authentication/file servers, and others. Again, no one present had specific knowledge of the systems.

Emergency Calling Systems

Calling systems are in place in a significant number of districts. There was not enough knowledge of systems for a comparison, but the following systems are in place: Alert Now, Connect-ED, School Messenger, SchoolReach

Laptop/Portable Device Management

We discussed policies and procedures in place related to personal use of school equipment. Learning the technology in a meaningful way is part of the importance, but teachers are also responsible for obeying policies and laws in place. Many districts have forms requiring the repair to be done by the authorized district repair provider and reimbursement for repair due to negligence. Other discussion

surrounded use of personal computers on the school network. All tech coordinators should be aware of what is and is not covered by the district insurance policy and computer warranties to properly advise employees in any circumstance.

Student data on portable devices also was discussed. The plethora of ways the data can leave the district in stored form (backup tape, laptop, flash drive, others) brought up topics of encryption, requirement of the data to be stored only on servers (by policy), and how urgent the matter is for school information.

Students are also carrying portable devices of their own. Many districts have restrictions on the use of flash drives due to the susceptibility of the network to any malware that can come in that way.

Curriculum Integration

Widespread topics related to curriculum integration were briefly discussed. Most districts use spreadsheets to track staff development in technology. Some districts are beginning staff implementation of Google tools, ranging from document sharing to school e-mail accounts via educator edition services. Other Web 2.0-style tools like del.icio.us and Microsoft Share Point services are also in beginning use. Computerized assessment services (TerraNova, NWEA MAPS, etc.) are being introduced in districts.

E-rate application to technology use by students affects districts in a couple ways. Student use of laptops when off district property is not using e-rate-able services. However, that does not address the school responsibility related to CIPA. Some schools with 1:1 initiatives have policies related to home use and restrictions on file access such as browser history. The district is responsible for the wireless services on district property. Districts should make reasonable efforts to prevent unauthorized wireless access from being used for non-educational purposes, such as user access from a parking lot or across the street.

Facilities

In addition to the Westridge tour, standards and costs of network and projector cabling were brought up. Many districts are now considering cabling for DVD/VCR, speakers, and other issues in addition to the video cabling related to the projector itself. Costs were ambiguous because it has become typical to bid all low-voltage cabling together in building projects, so individual types of cabling could not be separated.

Other

On-going costs of grant-funded equipment were expressed as a concern. The consensus was that districts will always have this to deal with, but the discussions are much less tense when they happen as part of the application process for the grant (as in-kind expenses) rather than by finding out the actual costs after the grant is awarded.