

School Library Media Specialists and School Administrators as Allies”

If you investigate why technology is working in a particular school district, you will usually find that the way the principals, superintendent, or other school administrators are functioning has a lot to do with the success. And if things are not going well, the performance of school administrators often emerges as an important factor. Perhaps most distressing are those situations where the administrators are stumbling blocks for teachers who would otherwise be able to make much better use of technology.

The Critical Necessities

What is required for technology to benefit our schools? Of course, the first critical necessity is hardware, and enough of it to be consequential. Fortunately, we are past the days when the deployment of computers involved putting a computer or two in the library or media center or on a cart that was moved from classroom to classroom.

Districts throughout the U.S. have enacted bonds. State legislatures have appropriate funds. These and the existence of the E-Rate have enabled schools to purchase needed hardware. There may not be many schools in the U.S. that have all of the needed hardware, but there is now a substantial number that have enough.

The second element needed in order for technology to be used effectively in classrooms is applications. The software or access to the Internet is required so that students and teachers have something to do with the hardware. While this may seem obvious, I have actually been in schools that bought hardware but did not buy application software or network connectivity for it.

The third element is the capability of teachers to use the technology. We all recognize now that even the best hardware and applications are of little value if teachers are ill-prepared to make use of them. And preparedness goes beyond knowing which key to press! Teachers need to know how to harness the instructional resources that the technology provides to really add value to teaching and learning in their classrooms.

The fourth critical element-the capability of administrators as it pertains to the effective use of technology work in schools and school districts-has only recently begun to be recognized. The importance of the role of school administrators in efforts to derive benefits from technology in schools should come as no great revelation to readers of MultiMedia Schools, but it remains the least obvious of critical elements.

A Short History of the TSSA Project

The Technology Standards for School Administrators Project is the result of conversations begun almost 3 years ago among several of us who are now members of the leadership group for the TSSA Project. We recognized that teacher capability to make effective use of technology as an instructional resource was absolutely essential. Yet there seemed to be less recognition of the importance of the role administrators play in this regard than was warranted. As the teacher standards developed by the ISTE Nets Project had been valuable in helping to define exactly what skills and knowledge teachers needed, we believed it was time for a parallel project focused on school administrators.

We recognized, of course, that the development of standards for school administrators should be a broadly participatory process involving major stakeholder organizations. So in February 2000, the TSSA Collaborative was officially formed (see the box below <#box>).

In the fall of 2000, we convened two expert forums to generate potential items for the standards. In January, an intensive writing session was held involving a select number of people who had applied to participate. This group produced the first draft, which was circulated widely and used to elicit a large volume of suggested additions, deletions, and modifications. These reactions are being used to create the final document, which will be published in the fall. [For more, see <http://cnets.iste.org/tssa/>.]

How Can Library Media Specialists Help?

The standards that emerge from TSSA will define what school administrators should know and be able to do in order to contribute to the effective use of technology in schools. This of course is not an attempt to turn administrators into techies but to define capabilities appropriate and necessary to their role as administrators.

We recognize that documents do not make schools better. But what happens because of documents can make schools better. This is where I think school library media specialists and technology directors enter the picture.

There is little doubt that many school administrators in the U.S. aren't where they need to be with regard to their role vis-à-vis technology. Technology has exploded into our lives in general and into our schools in particular. All of us-and school administrators in a very important way-face the task of acquiring the new skills and understanding which make us successful in the face of the vast information and technology resources that have emerged in the past few decades. And so we all need to be developing resources to assist school administrators. All of the members of the collaborative, as well as participating member organizations and numerous other regional, state, and local agencies and organizations, will be involved in this process.

Specifically, library media specialists and technology coordinators can help in these ways:

- * Help make your school administrators aware of the standards. I wouldn't suggest using them as a bludgeon to beat upon recalcitrant administrators, but the administrators in your district or school may be unaware of the TSSA standards and you can provide a service by making them visible.
- * Along the same lines, many school library media specialists and technology coordinators are involved in technology planning committees or other technology committees in their school districts or states. The TSSA standards could play a vital role in such planning processes in the same way that the NETS standards for teachers have been used.
- * The standards will generate a need for professional staff development. Media and technology directors can play a vital role in implementing such staff development, focusing on the kind of staff development appropriate for school administrators. The staff development in technology for administrators needs to be linked closely to the job demands of school administration, and the TSSA standards will provide a useful template for the various aspects of training. In some cases, the media director may be able to provide the staff development him- or herself. In other cases, the media director may be a resource in helping to identify others who can provide the training.

- * One of the major categories of the standards is focused on "Productivity and Professional Practice." Media and technology directors can be proactive in suggesting to the administrator ways in which they can make use of technology. Library media specialists routinely take a proactive stance in dealing with teachers, but too often they don't see school administrators as people they can support and encourage as they do teachers. For example, a technology director may know that the superintendent needs to make a presentation to a community group. The media director could offer to help the administrator develop a PowerPoint presentation that the administrator can use.
- * More administrators feel information overload than information deprivation, so dumping lots of journal articles, documents, forwarded e-mail messages, etc., may not be terribly productive. However, library media specialists can be a front-end filter and pass along information useful to the administrator.

The above suggestions are only intended to help you begin to think about your own situation. The needs, problems, opportunities, and personalities vary considerably from situation to situation. All of this boils down to two rather simple but important points: First, we will never really achieve the promise of technology in our schools without more and better involvement of school administrators. Second, the media or technology director can be an extremely valuable ally for the school administrator in achieving the level of professional capability defined by the standards.

The TSSA Collaborative

The collaborative consists of the following members:

- * American Association of School Administrators
- * National Association of Elementary School Principals
- * National Association of Secondary School Principals
- * Association of Service Agencies
- * National School Boards Association
- * International Society for Technology in Education
- * North Central Regional Technology in Education Consortium
- * North Central Regional Educational Laboratory
- * Southern Regional Education Board, Consortium for School Networking
- * Kentucky Department of Education

- * Mississippi Department of Education
- * Principals' Executive Program-University of North Carolina
- * Western Michigan University-College of Education

In addition to the organizations in the collaborative, the TSSA project is being supported by a number of other participating organizations that are listed on the TSSA Web site at <http://cnets.iste.org/tssa/>.

Given the expertise of ISTE in developing standards, the consortium asked that organization to serve as the operations manager for the project. Don Knezek is the project director and Heidi Rogers is the co-director. Support has been provided by Apple, Chancery Software, LTD, Microsoft, NetSchools, NSBA-ITTE Network, Teacher Universe, and the U.S. Department of Education's Preparing Tomorrow's Teachers to Use Technology Program.